

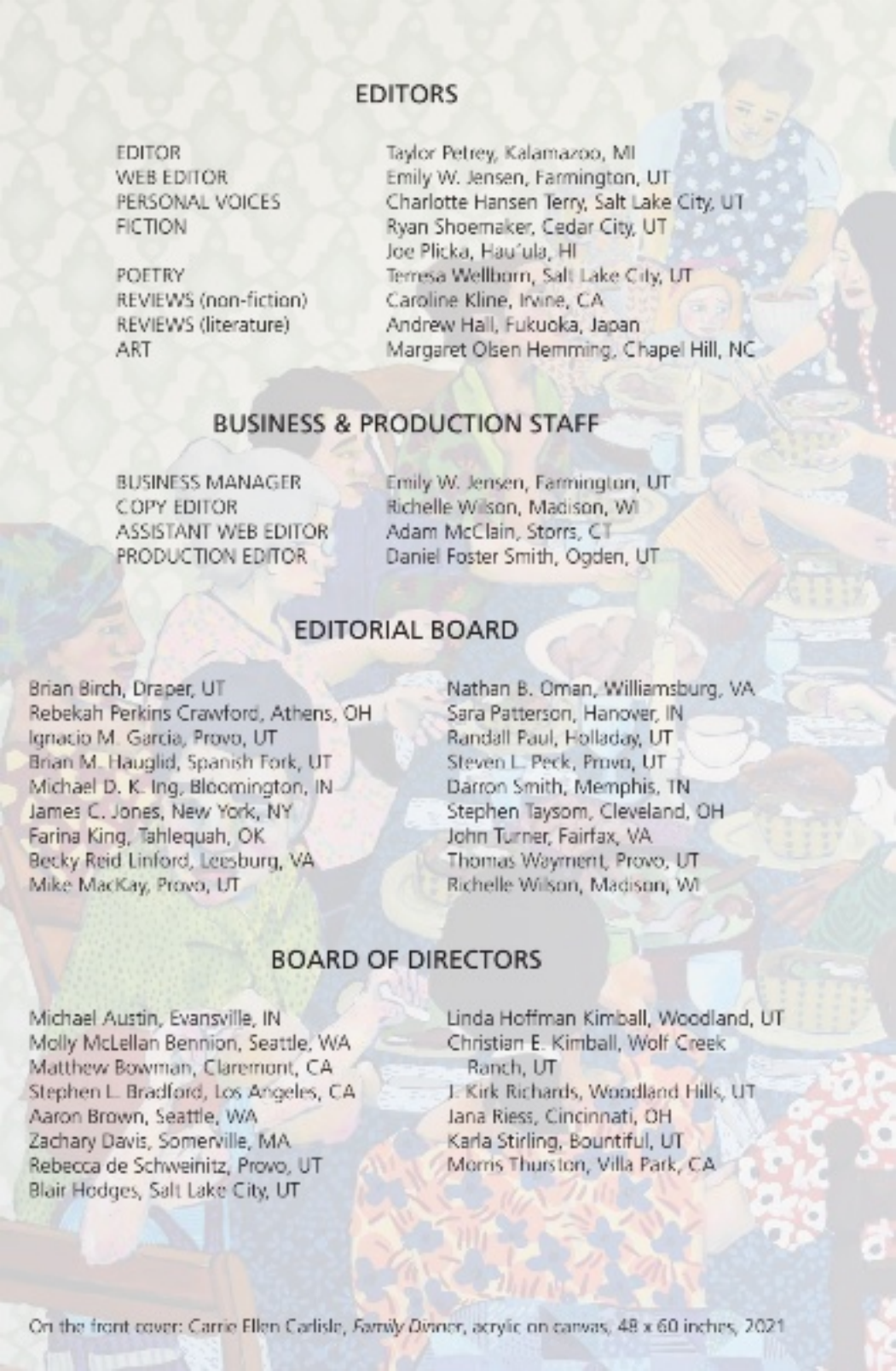
DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

DIALOGUE

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a journal of mormon thought

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ON A PHILOSOPHY OF MARRIAGE

James E. Faulconer

Many have seen one or another movie or television version of the Frankenstein story. The first was made in 1910 and there have been many since. The Boris Karloff version of the Frankenstein monster has become iconic. Probably some have also read Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley's 1818 novel, *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, from which those films are adapted. In the book, an Arctic explorer, Robert Walton, while stuck in the ice finds Victor Frankenstein traveling by sledge and takes him aboard ship. There Frankenstein tells his story: as a student overcome with a passion to know the secret of life, Frankenstein created a human body from various unrelated body parts and ultimately brought it to life with electricity, the modern, scientific fire. In horror, Frankenstein fled what he had done.

As those familiar with the story already know and even the first reader could probably have guessed, things do not go well afterward. The monster murders Victor's younger brother in a fit of rage at having been created as a lone being, a new but monstrous Adam for whom there is no Eve. He persuades Frankenstein to create a bride to repair his loneliness, but midway through the project Frankenstein again becomes horrified at what he is doing and destroys the potential second creation. In revenge, the monster kills one of Frankenstein's friends and, on Frankenstein's wedding night, kills Elizabeth, his bride and childhood friend. When the explorer, Walton, discovers the monster's creator, he has been searching for his monster in order to destroy him, but Frankenstein dies shortly after being found. After Frankenstein's death, Walton discovers the monster weeping over his creator's body. Then he wanders off into the ice of the Arctic to die.

The film versions of Shelley's novel are proof of the emotional and intellectual draw of this story. It isn't just a horror story. It is a story about us and our relationships, a story about humanity gone wrong that we find compelling. In the novel, the Frankenstein story is like a photographic negative. It is the reversed image of the story of human creation in Genesis. In it, Shelley shows us what modern individualism means. In Genesis, God, unlike Frankenstein, saw Man in the garden and recognized that it was not good—absolutely not good, the Hebrew tells us—for man to be alone.¹ As merely an individual and merely male, the being created was not yet fully human. So God created woman. The narrator of the Genesis story emphasizes that as a couple these two were not merely individuals. They were to be “one flesh.”² In the Bible, human being is multiple rather than individual. To be human is to be in relationship. As a Latter-day Saint, thinking through the nature of human relationships seems particularly pressing given the eternal status we see in them.

In this essay, I want to do two things. First, I want to show how modern, Western culture is like Victor Frankenstein. Though not exclusively so, it is overwhelmingly individualistic and atomistic, believing that society and life are matters of bits and pieces put together. But Frankenstein discovered that he was wrong. Bits and pieces don't make a real human being, which brings me to my second point: a real human being is necessarily in relation to others. I will use several contemporary thinkers to show how relation with others can be conceived, though I will use them to argue that we are who we are only in relationship with other people and that the marriage relationship is the paradigm for all human relationships.

1. Genesis 2:18. For a discussion of the negative prefix *lō'* (לֹא), see Harris R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1999), 463 (entry 1064).

2. Genesis 2:24.

The Modern Individual

A sea change in Western culture happened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—modernism began. That has been a very good thing. It has given us science and technology. Without them, many of us would not be here, having died young of disease. We are certainly more comfortable and able to do more things more efficiently because of what modernism has bequeathed us. But modernism has not been an unalloyed good. With the good it also brought difficulties, most of which we don't recognize because they have become so seemingly natural to us. We breathe modernism's air without knowing it, so we do not notice that some of what it contains is not good for us. But for the last thirty years or more, philosophers have thought about the problems of modernism, and one of those problems is that in modern culture it is difficult for us to give a rational account of marriage.

That wasn't true prior to modernism. Ancient and medieval thinkers had philosophical resources for understanding marriage. To say that is not to approve of ancient and medieval views of marriage. After all, perhaps all of them dealt with marriage at least in part by refusing women the status of full persons. Instead, it is to say since ancient and medieval thinking about the metaphysics of persons was primarily relational,³ in principle it could have accounted for marriage had those at the time recognized women as individual persons. On the other hand, though modernism—eventually—came to that recognition, it remained without the conceptual tools for understanding how genuine relationships between persons is possible. The further we come into the modern period, the more the philosophical norm is an atomistic individualism, and that individualism has made it difficult for marriage to be philosophically intelligible.

3. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is an important source for much of this thinking.

If we think of individuals as the building blocks from which relationships of any kind are formed, we can ask what it means that some individuals came together in marriage and then created a family. What are the ties that bind marriages and families? Since modernism assumes that individuals are the atoms from which any social order is created, our answer would ultimately have to be given in terms only of individuals. But that means that marriage would be a relationship constructed between individuals more or less by accident with no real being of its own except the kind of being that a contract has, a mutual agreement by which two parties bring something into being.⁴ But it takes little reflection to recognize that marriage is more than a contract. It isn't just my wife, Janice, and I who make our marriage by our decision to be together. Being married has also made me. The same more obviously goes for the family. It cannot be reduced to decisions made by individuals. Marital and family ties are real, and they have real effects. So how do we account for marriage intellectually? My argument is that several thinkers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have provided alternatives that make a philosophy of marriage conceivable.

Seeing how recent philosophy understands relations between persons differently than modernism will require that we do a little history of philosophy. However, the limitations of a journal essay mean that I will have to ignore the nuances and exceptions that make history complicated (and interesting).

As always in Western philosophy, we begin with the Greeks. We can reasonably say that beginning with them and continuing through the late medieval period, the dominant way of thinking about persons was to see the individual as an aspect of an ordered cosmos. That didn't just mean seeing them as one entity surrounded by others in a universe of

4. Nathan B. Oman and Jonathan A. Stapley have written cogently about the difference between covenant and contract: Nathan B. Oman and Jonathan A. Stapley, "Covenant without Contract," in Nathan Oman, Rosalynde Welch, and Joseph Spencer, *Restoration Theology* (forthcoming).

things. It meant seeing them as part of a unity that is inherently ordered and beautiful at every level, social and physical.⁵ In a mosaic, the whole is beautiful because each of the parts is in the right place, and each of the individual tiles has its significance in the mosaic because it occupies the place that it does. Ancient Greeks and others thought of the universe like that: each thing, including each person, had a place. To the degree that any particular thing or person lived up to what it was, it fit in the universe like a tile in a beautiful mosaic. Thus, the person's project as a human being was one of accommodating herself to the cosmic order, fitting herself into the beautiful whole. Since that cosmic order manifested itself in not only the physical but the social world, ethics meant understanding how to fit in with one's community and family.

In Aristotle, for example, the highest being is what he calls the *theos*. We translate that as "God," but he certainly didn't have in mind anything like what we would think of as God. For Aristotle, the *theos* was the purely intellectual being toward which all thought and action is directed in the long run. Ultimately, everything in the cosmos needed to be understood in terms of its relationship to the *theos*. Within that way of thinking, the person was understood in terms of his or her relationship to other persons, first the family, then the larger community, and finally the *theos*. Not everyone was an Aristotelian, but Aristotle's view is a good example of what an ancient ethical view looked like, and those ancient ways of understanding held sway for almost two thousand years.

However, the ancient understanding of ethics was among the things that changed rapidly and dramatically around the sixteenth century. As modernism developed, Western thinkers began to surrender the earlier view of the cosmos as an ordered whole—and with it the notion that

5. Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), offers an important exposition of the ancient notion of the cosmos and some of the implications of having lost that notion.

individual people were defined primarily in relationship to the whole of which they were part. Modernism, however, reversed the earlier way of understanding the world: instead of seeing the individual in light of the whole, modernism understood the whole atomistically. The individual is a part from which something else can be constructed. Persons are the basic social atoms, and the whole results from those being put together.

This reversal turned out to be monstrous, as it was for Victor Frankenstein. Prometheus stole fire from the gods as a gift to humans, a gift to make human life fully possible. But by starting with only bits and pieces and no attention to the whole of which they are a part, Frankenstein used the modern fire of electricity to give only regret, menace, and death rather than the gift of life.

We will see that as a result of the shift in understanding that came with modernism it became philosophically impossible to give an adequate account of how relationships between human beings themselves, as well as relations between human beings and the world, are possible. Having broken the connections between persons, philosophy had no conceptual tools by which it could reestablish them.

For almost one hundred years, the seventeenth-century French thinker René Descartes has been the whipping boy when discussing this and other problems of modern thought. I recognize that Descartes's work is more nuanced than those discussions usually portray it. Nevertheless, he so well characterizes the issues I will deal with that I too will use him as a whipping boy. We can see many of the problems of modernism by thinking about issues in Descartes's philosophy.

The reasonably well-founded cliché is that every college freshman knows Descartes's proposition *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." You find it on mugs and T-shirts. It is one of the things that beginning philosophy students like to argue about. Descartes was an important mathematician and scientist as well as a philosopher. He developed the first analytic geometry, making calculus possible, and he believed that all true knowledge could be tested using the method of geometric

proof. Proofs were part of Descartes's overall method, the "method of doubt." That doesn't mean that he genuinely doubted everything. Rather, Descartes used doubt as a way to find truth: doubt everything and then use geometric-style proofs to see what can withstand your doubts. What cannot be doubted because it can be proven is knowledge. Everything else is mere custom or opinion. And how does one prove what cannot be doubted? By beginning with an indubitable axiom—a basic, undeniable proposition—and building on that in steps that are also undeniable.⁶

For Descartes, the proposition "I think, therefore I am" was the axiom on which he could base all other knowledge. His point was that the proposition is axiomatic because I know I exist simply by the fact that I am thinking. I cannot think that I do not exist without contradicting myself. Thus, my certainty of self is fundamental, and the next question is "What else do I know certainly based on that axiom?" The answer is unclear because the rest of Descartes's proof that we can know the world depends on his proof that God exists. But few believe that proof works, meaning that the project to establish knowledge on an irrefutable ground fails. If we follow Descartes, I know that I exist, but I do not know about anything outside my own mind.

That philosophical problem has a variety of answers, perhaps most notably that of the German thinker Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. But those answers don't concern us directly. I am more interested in the problems that Descartes's understanding of the self has created. Until relatively recently, few have thought about how, in spite of the problems with Descartes's project, the Cartesian ego, sure of itself and nothing else, has insinuated itself into so many nooks and crannies of Western thought. We very often think about the person as a Cartesian ego without knowing that we do or thinking about the consequences of doing so. With regard to marriage, however, that insinuation should be

6. I ignore the fact that mathematicians no longer believe that geometry is necessarily Euclidean geometry nor that the latter's axioms are indubitable.

obvious: how can a Cartesian ego be related to another Cartesian ego at all, much less be part of a human family except, perhaps, by an act of will?

The first problem with the ego is its solitude. If we begin with a Cartesian ego, then we cannot explain how it is possible to recognize the existence of another person with a mind like mine, an ego that also says “I think, therefore I am.” We can know our mental representations of other persons. I am having the experience here and now of seeing and hearing someone in front of me, so I know that I am having that experience. But that says something only about my mental experience, not about whether there really is a person in front of me. Obviously, I know that there are other people. But *how* do I know that?

Perhaps we know other minds by analogy: I am a person and this thing that appears in my representation of the world has many of the characteristics that I have, so I assume it is also a person. But if I understand the other person by analogy, then I am still talking about knowing my mental representations of them and not about knowing the persons themselves. It seems that we cannot know *them*. Kant later argued convincingly that Cartesian metaphysics and its heirs don’t allow us to know *any* things in themselves, neither mere objects nor other persons (nor, it turns out, even ourselves). My argument is that Kant was right about Cartesianism, but it is nevertheless possible to know both others and objects as they are.

A second problem for the Cartesian ego is that Descartes relates the solitary ego to the world through the passions. He has separated the mind (or soul, which are synonyms for him) from the body. Mind and body, he says, are radically distinct. The difficulty of knowing the world arises from this radical distinction. Since the world and the body are material but the mind, or soul, is not, the connection of mind and the world is tenuous at best, for the mind can know itself but it is not clear how it can know something as radically different from it as the material world. As a result, Descartes understands the passions solely in terms

of mind. They are a kind of thought (though confused thought). The passions are mental representations, even if they arise from the influence of external events.⁷

This problem, namely Descartes's identification of the passions with the mind, means that—whether we are talking about erotic, family, or friendly love—all love is a form of self-love. For Descartes, self-love is the foundation for all emotions.⁸ Even something like anger, Descartes tells us, is desire in combination with self-love.⁹ This claim that all our passions are manifestations of self-love is relatively novel in the history of thought up to that time, but it has become a common assumption. It is not difficult to see the origins of much contemporary pop psychology in this Cartesian assumption. In any case, by looking at Descartes, we can see that in modernism the atomistic individual is at the center of not only the physical world but the social and emotional one as well.

If Descartes is right that love is a matter of will and representation, then the Cartesian ego wills to love its beloved, but what it loves is merely a representation of the beloved rather than the beloved itself because that is all the ego knows.¹⁰ For Descartes and other early modern philosophers, “good” means “what I want,” and he is willing to recognize the extreme to which that takes us. At best, human love relations amount to only self-gratification, my involvement with images in my mind. At worst, they amount to rape, my control and domination over that which I claim to love. Given this understanding of love, marital relations and the family can be no more than one more sphere in which the ego wreaks its will on what it represents.

7. Rene Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, para. 17.

8. Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 133.

9. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, para. 199.

10. Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 132.

This claim—that love is a matter of will and that the beloved is necessarily no more than an object of representation—is the most shocking. Without taking the time for the whys and wherefores, I note that Descartes explicitly says this understanding of love means that vainglory, greed, wine bibbing, rape, marital love, and parental love are all, essentially, the same!¹¹ Presumably all that separates these forms of love from one another are the norms of society, in other words, convention.

It is no exaggeration to say that something like this Cartesian view of ethics and marriage invisibly undergirds most modern attempts to understand ourselves. But the relative invisibility of the Cartesian view does not mean that it is not there or that it does not have real effects. The common attempts to reduce our understanding of relations of married persons to the personal satisfaction of each party is but one of such attempts. The overall effect is that from a modern point of view, marriage is a sphere of will enacted on our representations and nothing more.

To recapitulate: In Descartes, the atomistic individualism of modernism makes itself apparent, separating the person from the world and from all others. Since Descartes's proof of God's existence fails, the Cartesian individual is even separated from God. In that separation of the self from everything else, the earlier notion of the person who is part of the whole becomes the modern notion of the independent individual, that which exists on its own. The person is sundered from the whole, from its place in an ordered cosmos. Indeed, the cosmos is no longer ordered. All is primal chaos, and the Spirit of God no longer hovers over it. Adrift in an ethically chaotic universe, the good can be no more than "the object of any man's appetite or desire,"¹² as the

11. Cited in Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 134. Marion is referring to Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, sec. 82.

12. Hobbes, *Leviathan I*, 6. Cited in Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 143. Dupré's discussion of the shift from medieval to modern thought is excellent.

seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes describes it. If the ego, the I, is the foundation for our understanding of ourselves and the world, then in principle that ego is cut off from every other person as such. The only possible relationship of the individual ego to another person is representation. But that means that any relationship with another person is only a relation between the ego and itself (its representations) rather than a relationship with the other person herself. The solitary ego makes real love of someone other than oneself impossible.¹³

Of course, Descartes was not the only philosopher of modernism, and there has been additional thought about these issues in the last four hundred years. But as true as that is, it is also true that Descartes shows us the outlines and strong tendencies of modern thought, and those outlines and tendencies continue to haunt the ways in which we

13. Descartes suggests two ways of understanding the other person that might make human relation possible without making it merely a matter of will: (1) He sometimes speaks of the *alter ego* as a “free cause” (Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 137). If the other person is, indeed, a free cause rather than something merely represented, then it might be possible to know such a free cause by analogy rather than representation, something I mentioned earlier. Perhaps a philosophy of love could be created on such a possibility, but it is not clear what an analogy not founded on representation would be. (2) When he speaks of charity, Descartes says that it is not a direct relation with another person but imitating the Augustinian epistemological tradition; he says that it is a relation mediated through God: “The other can be loved only if the *ego* gives up trying to represent it directly and accepts aiming for it indirectly through the unobjectifiable *par excellence*—that is, God” (Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 138). In either case, however, though love is not reduced to a matter of representation (and, therefore, the beloved is not reduced to an object), we do not have a direct, concrete relation with the other person. In fact, in both cases representation still seems to be unavoidably foundational. But let us grant that perhaps one of these possibilities will escape my criticism. In that case, what we have is a merely spiritual love. So, for Descartes, in its worst case, love is rape and in its best case it is merely spiritual. Concrete, enfleshed love is impossible for the *ego cogito*.

experience and understand the world, often in spite of ourselves, usually without us knowing. We cannot escape the spectral presence of the individualism so clearly modeled in Descartes's thinking or the effects of that individualism, even though they are often all but invisible.

One of those effects is in the ways we think about our relationships with other people. For about two hundred years, the most influential version of ethics has probably been utilitarianism, in which "good" is defined as doing whatever will maximize my—or our—desires and pleasures as much as reasonably possible.¹⁴ Given the individualistic metaphysics of modernism, perhaps no better ethics is possible, as unsatisfactory as that view of the world founded on self-love may be because it has little or no room for things such as oath, covenant, and obligation.

A Contemporary Alternative

My argument is that we find an answer to the problem of human relationships by rethinking ethics. We saw earlier that a version of my answer has been with us for millennia. Prior to modernism, ethics had been part of the larger project of ontology: the ultimate good was the attainment of completeness within and with the whole. The Greek word *ēthos* means "what is customary,"¹⁵ and what is customary is determined by the place one holds in a culture and people. Based on that understanding of ethics as how one relates to the context one finds oneself in, we can construe the question of ethics for premoderns to have

14. Whether the pleasures are considered base or high differs from one person or group to another, but as Socrates argues in *Phaedo*, if the good is measured by pleasure, then in the end there is no difference between the most vulgar glutton and the most refined and spiritual saint, except that the saint can see further down the road than can the glutton. In that case, sin is only ignorance about what ultimately will give pleasure (Plato, *Phaedo* 69c–d).

15. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s.v. ἔθος.

been “What is our place in the cosmos (the ordered whole) and what does that require of us?” “Ethics” meant more than “morality,” though morality was included. With the rise of modernism and the atomistic individual, as we have seen, it became impossible to find a place for individuals in the cosmos.

Just after the middle of the twentieth century, a French-Lithuanian philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, responded to the morally rudderless universe I have described by approaching it in a manner that reflected but did not duplicate the ancient approach to the question of human relationships. Levinas was hardly the first to do so, but he took a radically different approach than others by arguing that the basic assumptions of modern thought concerning the relationships between people are mistaken.¹⁶ Levinas argued that in a world in which human beings are essentially independent from one another, meaning is impossible.¹⁷ Even Frankenstein’s monster is in relation with someone else, at least Victor Frankenstein, and his life is defined by that relationship. Levinas says that if an individual, a being more monstrous than that created by Frankenstein, were in principle independent of *all* other people, “thought would strike nothing substantial.”¹⁸ In other words, if I am truly completely independent, then there is nothing for me to think about because there is nothing to bridge the gap between me and other things. My mind cannot reach them. But we are not monsters cut off from all else. We have meaning, so there must be things other than

16. Levinas’s criticisms of modernism make him one of the first so-called postmodern thinkers, as his influence on other late twentieth-century thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, demonstrates. But Levinas did not use the label “postmodern” nor did he think of himself as part of a movement. The term “postmodern” is used in so many ways as to be almost useless.

17. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 55 and 93–94.

18. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 91.

myself and there must be that which makes relationship with them possible.

The last point is important, for it means that not only must there be something “out there” about which I can think, there must also be someone to whom I can communicate and a language through which the things that surround me in the world acquire being, in other words stability as a *this* or a *that*.¹⁹ We can deal with the various things in the world, distinguishing one from the other and manipulating them as we do, because we have language that names them and allows us to put them in relation to other things. Language in its broadest and deepest sense gathers the world into a whole and allows us to live comfortably in that world. And we have language because we are in expressive relationships with other persons. The monster knew the world because he had language, and he had language because, presumably, Frankenstein taught him.

But language is neither mine nor yours. It is necessarily *ours*, and it comes before any one of us, always given to us by someone else. The idea of a fundamentally acosmic individual having meaning and thoughts is incoherent: for there to be meaning “it is necessary *already* to be for the other person . . . for the phenomenon of meaning . . . to arise.”²⁰ The meanings I have, including the meaning of myself, presuppose that I am already in relationship with someone else, someone who has made those meanings possible.

19. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 139.

20. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 261; translation revised, italics added. Without another there would be no reason to represent. According to Levinas, Descartes has already made this point in the fourth meditation of *Meditations on First Philosophy* by arguing that the ego cogito only has knowledge of things external to it if there is a God (*Totality and Infinity*, 48–50). Levinas is arguing that the other person need not be God, but Descartes was right that another person—in whom a trace of God, the Being who is irreducibly independent from me though also in relation to me, shows itself—is necessary. “Irreducibly independent” is my way of reading Levinas’s phrase “absolutely other.”

In spite of that, given the powerful and pervasive role of language in knowledge and meaning, at first glance it seems that language traps us in our own representations and symbol systems and that we have no way out of them. I can know what I think. I can reflect on what I know, but it appears that I cannot get beyond my language and ideas to anything outside of my own mind. I can agree that the other person comes before me, but it seems that I cannot connect my mind to the other person herself. To quote Jacques Derrida's much misinterpreted and often abused phrase, it appears that "there is nothing outside the text."²¹ I seem to be trapped in representation and language.

But that problem of being trapped in language, a variation on the problem of Cartesianism, is only apparent (both for Levinas and for Derrida). That is because, says Levinas, "society with the other person . . . is not constituted as the work of an I giving meaning."²² Modern individualism assumes that I am the one who gives meaning in my relationships with others. But that assumption is false. *My relationship with the other person comes from that other person, not from me.* The language I have was given to me by another. I did not invent it. I must already be in contact with the other person if I can receive the language that she offers me.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 168. This is the book in which Derrida recognizes the debt of his thought to Levinas, a debt often unrecognized, especially by his early readers in the United States (47).

The point of Derrida's claim, by the way, is not that there are only texts, but that, though we can deal with only texts and text analogues—so that there seems to be nothing outside them—there is necessarily something more than any text, at least the event of referring itself, above and beyond the referent. For an excellent discussion of the point, see John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1993), in particular 76–77.

22. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 261.

Stop for a moment to step back and think about the implications of this point that relationship, language, and meaning come from the other person rather than from me. Notice that in this view passivity—receptivity, being affected—rather than will or representation is at the heart of the human relation to the other person and the world. This is perhaps the most decisive difference between much of contemporary thought and thinkers like Hobbes and Descartes. For most modern thinkers, the fundamental characteristic of human being is will. But Levinas and others argue that it is receptivity, which necessarily implies relationship. Of course, human beings can will and act, but we do not understand the possibility of meaning if we reduce our relation to the world to that ability, ignoring our capacity to be acted upon, to receive. I do not know the world only because I have touched it in some way. I am not related to other persons because I create those relationships. I know the world and other people because they *first* touch me.²³ There is no question that the things I encounter in the world are only what they are—particular things like a podium or rather uncomfortable chairs in a lecture hall rather than an amorphous haze of raw sense experience—if they are ordered by the categories and relations of thought and language. But I have those categories and relations of thought and language only because I have been touched, as it were, by another person. The meaning of the world—its very being, in other words stability—is given to me by others.

We can say then that experience is a double passivity, a doubled receptivity: first, in that I am touched by the world in sensation and, second, in that I am touched by the other person in thought and

23. For an early and excellent discussion of this theme and particularly the theme as it relates to the touch of the other person, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 86, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). However, as the latter reference shows (187), Merleau-Ponty understands the touch-touching relationship asexually.

language. That double passivity is the first fact for understanding my being-in-the-world. Relationships with other persons come before meaning, and they are made possible by the touch of the world and the touch of the other person. Touch happens prior to the work of the ego's will and the mind's representations. I am not trapped inside my language or my mental representations because both are the result of relationships with other humans and relations with things.²⁴ Rather than what keep me locked inside myself, language and thought are what connect me to the world.

My argument, though abbreviated, will be that this priority of ethics, in other words of human relationships, and the double passivity of touch means that human relationships of every kind can best be understood from the paradigm of marriage and that marriage cannot be understood apart from oath.²⁵

Against the background of this understanding of passivity and human being-in-the-world, Levinas's startling claim is that the erotic relation, which is the fundamental form of human relationship, gives rise to meaning.²⁶ For Levinas, the fundamental relationship with other people is erotic, but he is not using that term in the narrow sense of only sexual desire. Instead, like Plato, he uses the term to mean desire for what is beautiful and good as it shows itself in another person.²⁷ When

24. We see an early intimation of this idea in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh and revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 68–70, 133–135.

25. For a brilliant discussion of this claim, see Jean-Luc Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007). As will be obvious, my analysis depends heavily on that book.

26. Apropos of Levinas's discussion of eros, a great deal has been written about his understanding of the feminine, pro and con. I ignore that discussion here since I am interested in thinking about eros rather than in explicating Levinas. But critics have raised important questions about what Levinas's portrayal of the feminine implies for his ethical thinking as a whole.

27. See Plato, *Symposium*.

I am in a relationship with another person and I am attracted to beauty and goodness in her, I am in an erotic relationship, whether or not the relationship is sexual.

As with all relationships, in eros we find ourselves beyond ourselves in a relationship that comes *before* meaning rather than being reducible to representation (as it is in pornography) or being beyond meaning (where, as in naive Romanticism, love is reduced to mere mystery). Both the world and other persons are necessary to our experience, and we have experience because both are outside our minds. But our relationship with other persons is not like our relation to things. A loving caress is different than other kinds of touch and radically different than any grasp or attempt to gain possession or control.

For more than seventy years, philosophers have been writing about the caress. (Readers will probably not be surprised that most of those doing so have been French.) Perhaps one of the first was Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist thinker, who said, “Caresses are an appropriation of the other person. . . . The caress is not a simple touch, it is a shaping. In caressing the other person, I make her flesh come to life under my fingers.”²⁸ For Sartre, the caress in any form is ultimately indistinguishable from the grooming of the pedophile. But Sartre is wrong, for he fails to recognize that a caress is not a directed act in which we take up an object in order to perform some task. It involves neither object nor task. I reach out for a hammer in order to pound a nail. I want to build something, to reach a goal. But when I caress my beloved, I am not achieving a purpose. In the caress neither my hand nor the caress is a tool. It is not part of a structure of ends and means. Neither is it an act of cognition: the I who caresses the beloved is not cognizing something. The lover is neither a Cartesian thinking thing nor a Sartrean sadomasochist. Touched by the beauty

28. Jean Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le neant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 440–441.

and goodness of the other person, the lover responds with the touch of a caress.

Strictly speaking, the caress itself is not meaningful because it does not represent anything. The caress comes before meaning in the relationship. But it *is* a response of one person to another. In the erotic touch, a lover addresses himself or herself directly to the other person rather than to the idea of the other person or to the feelings that one has about the other. If I strike my thumb with a hammer, I cry out. But that cry is not yet *about* anything. I am not yet making a statement, not even the statement “That hurt!” The cry is a response to one’s relationship with things in the world, a precognitive expression of that relationship.

Similarly, the cries and caresses of love are not *about* anything. They are the acts of love rather than its content. Though without content, they address the loved one. It is significant that we say one *makes* rather than that one *means* love. Though caresses have no conceptual or linguistic content, they are expressive in that they, like the cry of pain, speak something. Namely, they speak the effect of the beloved on the lover, the precognitive relationship between the two. As an expression of relationship with another person, the caress shows the basis for the possibility of meaning: direct expressive contact with someone other than oneself is the ground from which meaning grows.

In contrast, because Descartes’s atomistic I insists on beginning with self-certainty, knowledge of itself, it can find nothing—neither a person nor a thing—outside of or prior to itself. The only meaning it has is the empty “I think.” Yet even Frankenstein’s monster could do more than that. Analysis of the caress shows that meaning is possible because two things *are* prior to the individual ego: First, there is the caressing person, the acted-upon and acting me rather than the cogitizing I. The caressing person is not related to his *idea* of the beloved by the caress, but to the beloved herself. The relation of the caress is a relation of embodied touch, not thought, and it makes cognition possible. (I will use the word “flesh” to speak of this body so as to differentiate it from

the body as a merely material object, and by “flesh” I mean that which experiences, suffers, and enjoys.²⁹) Flesh is necessarily material, but it is not reducible to its materiality.³⁰ In the caress we see that flesh and its life in the world among things and with others comes before reflective thought. The second thing that comes before the individual ego and makes meaning possible is the beloved with whom the caressing person is in a precognitive relationship.

Together, this touched and touching flesh and the other person in the relationship give me a self—a me—and an identity: I am the one in this relationship. But the me in this relationship is more than the Cartesian I that knows itself. I am not only a mind related to the world and others. In that I am affected by another whose beauty and goodness I desire and whom I caress, I am a body of flesh. The I that cognizes has come about as an aspect of my flesh and its being affected. The Cartesian ego is not as fundamental to my being as modernism would have us believe, but the living body is.

The fact that cognition is founded on our being affected, on ethical relationship, means that my experience of the other person as person is always what the contemporary thinker Jean-Luc Marion calls a “saturated phenomenon.” That term isn’t as mysterious as it might at first seem, for it means a phenomenon that is not reducible to its representational or conceptual content.³¹ Examples are easy to come by. I stand

29. Cf. Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une Philosophie de la Chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 27.

30. Cf. Henry, *Incarnation*.

31. Marion uses the term “saturated phenomenon” in contrast to Kant’s notion of phenomena, which Marion describes as intuitionally poor: besides the intuitionally impoverished phenomena of the categories, there are some phenomena that are saturated, overflowing with intuition. Marion insists, in fact, that though we seldom recognize the saturated phenomenon, it is banal, commonplace. (See Jean-Luc Marion, “The Banality of Saturation,” translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky, in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* [Notre

at the top of Kyhv Peak³² looking out over Utah Valley and am in awe. I turn the corner in the Museum of Art and am overcome by a painting that I've never seen before. Sitting by Janice, she touches my hand, and I am suddenly overcome by emotion, a feeling of gratitude for grace as much as anything else. These are all experiences of saturated phenomena, experiences in which there is more in what I am experiencing than can be contained by any concept I might form in response to the event.

Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007], 383–418.) The encounter with the other person as other person is not the only instance of saturated phenomena.

Saturated phenomena fall into four categories: (1) the historical event (Marion sees the work of Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer [Chicago: U of Chicago, 1988] as explicating this kind of saturated phenomenon; see Jean-Luc Marion, *Given Being: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Koskey [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002], 229n84); (2) things such as paintings (see Jean-Luc Marion, *De Surcroît* [Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 2001], especially chapters 3 and 5; see also Marion, *Given Being* 231n85—Derrida, he says, has explicated this kind of saturated phenomenon); (3) bodily affectivity (here the connection between Marion and Michel Henry is explicit; Marion, *Given Being*, 231n86); and (4) the look of the other person (Marion, *Given Being*, 228–234). See also Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” in *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion*, edited by James E. Faulconer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 87–105. Notice that Marion uses the word “event” to describe the first kind of saturated phenomenon, though he also understands each of these categories to be categories of events, happenings rather than atemporal things. As the name of the first category, the word “event” has its more ordinary signification, “that about which we can give a narrative.”

Especially in works after *Being Given*, Marion sometimes adds a fifth category of saturated phenomena, God. I leave that out here since I am focusing on the banal instances of saturated phenomena. However, for more discussion of that possibility, see Brock Mason, unpublished honors thesis, Brigham Young University, April 2014, and James E. Faulconer, “The Transcendence of Flesh, Divine and Human,” in *“To Seek the Law of the Lord”: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch* (Provo: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 113–134.

32. Until September 2022, Kyhv Peak was called “Squaw Peak.” The name was changed to remove the ethnic slur “squaw.”

The phenomenon of the other person whom I desire is such an experience. It overflows any concept I can have of her because there is more intuition in the experience than can be brought into that concept. Before going on, though, notice that “intuition” is a word that philosophers use differently than everyone else. As used here, intuition is the immediate apprehension of something by the senses. It is the experience of what William James described as the “great blooming, buzzing confusion”³³ of sense perception by itself, without the ordering provided by cognition. An intuition doesn’t necessarily cause someone to have a thought, but it does give that person an experience. As a product of being affected by things other than oneself rather than a product of cognition, the intuition of the other person saturates my experience of her such that I cannot have an adequate concept of her. But not only is the other person whom I encounter more than I can think, I—myself as a living whole rather than a cogitizing ego—am more than I can think. I, too, am a saturated phenomenon because I too am largely the product of being affected, being created. There are saturated phenomena because I am not trapped inside my Cartesian “I think” and its language.

It would seem that this makes objectivity impossible, or at least not particularly important. It is tempting to think about saturated phenomena and wish that life were a never-ending experience of them. But like Alma, when we wish to escape from the ordinariness of life, we sin in our wish.³⁴ Though objective certainty requires “impoverished” rather than saturated intuition, it does not follow that objectivity is a bad thing. Indeed, it is essential. Without ordinary life and the objectivity that it requires, we would not be able to deal with our world effectively. Objective knowledge and certainty are tools we use to deal with James’s “blooming, buzzing” world as we impose order on the world of

33. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890; repr. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 462.

34. Alma 29:1–3.

preconceptual experience. Nevertheless, what I can be objectively certain of when it comes to either myself or the other person is exactly the same as what I can be objectively certain of when it comes to any object: a representation. Certainty is a function of objectivity, and objectivity is possible only where we do not have a saturated intuition, but one in which the concept is adequate to the intuition, good enough for our needs. But we live in a world that exists prior to our conceptual organization of it, and we have experiences of that blooming and buzzing.³⁵ We can talk about our experience of things in themselves—experiences that occur in saturated phenomena—or we can talk about our experience of cognition and representation. And we must notice that the two are inseparably linked. In spite of that link, however, we make a category mistake if we use the methods and terms appropriate to one kind of experience to talk about the other. Looking for objective certainty regarding saturated phenomena would be such a mistake. The terms “certain” and “uncertain” simply don’t apply, and this is true whether we are talking about loving relationships or about religious or aesthetic experience.

As I have already pointed out, experiences of saturated phenomena are not unusual. To say that a phenomenon is saturated is to imply that objective knowledge is not adequate to it, but this doesn’t mean that it is not a genuine phenomenon or that the thing that we encounter in the phenomenon isn’t real. The experience of a saturated phenomenon isn’t merely subjective. These experiences fall outside the subjective-objective dichotomy. It is also important to remember that being *more* than can be represented is not the same as being nonphenomenal, utterly unknowable, or not representable at all. Not all knowledge is certain knowledge, as biblical writers—who can, without euphemism,

35. I disagree with James, however, in that *confusion* is not always and perhaps even seldom the right word for what exceeds our conceptual grasp. To call the preconceptual “confusion” is to privilege conceptual order: it is only confusion from the point of view of a mind that organizes it.

speak of conjugal relations as knowledge³⁶—have understood for millennia. What we learn in the experience of saturated phenomena is knowledge of what actually is. It is another kind of genuine knowledge.

Since the real, embodied, and living self is a saturated phenomenon, Descartes's mistake was to reduce self-knowledge to self-certainty. He confused the part of the self that says "I know" with the saturated self, which exceeds the conceptual grasp of that knowing ego. That reduction of the person to the ego is philosophically debilitating. As a Cartesian ego, I can have certainty that "I am" insofar as, and in the instant when, I think I am. I may always be implicitly thinking it in some sense. Thinking anything at all may carry with it the implicit thought "I am the one thinking this." But be that as it may, self-certainty is always only a matter of the present instant. "I am" means "I am right now." It carries no future guarantee. As a Cartesian ego, I can be certain of my present: I know I am right now. But I cannot know my future. I cannot know that I will continue to be after this instant.

The problem is that I want to have a future. In fact, I not only desire to continue to exist in the future, but (even more) I desire to have value. I want to know that that my continued existence is worth something. I want an answer to the question "Is my existence in vain?" In Marion's terms, "A quoi bon?" "What's the point?"³⁷ The merely Cartesian ego cannot but suspect that the answer to his question is "nothing." Frankenstein's individualistic monster can say "I am," but he cannot say "there is a reason for my continued existence." In fact, the tragedy of his creation is that there is no such reason.

If we understand a person to be an isolated, atomic Cartesian ego looking for certainty, then it seems that nothing can resist vanity.³⁸ Even what I know with certainty exists may exist in vain. So, to the

36. For one example, see Genesis 4:1.

37. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 16.

38. Or "in-vain-ness," the negative answer to the foregoing questions.

question “What’s the point?” implicitly Descartes and his heirs, like the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, answer “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”³⁹ There is certainty only within the horizon of my present consciousness. I can always doubt the past or the future because they cannot be certain. So, as an “I think,” I am only too aware of my humanity and its finitude; I am always capable of doubting the value and meaning of that humanity. Assurance that my life is not in vain requires an assurance that I can have value and meaning. For me to have value requires that that I can be other than I am. If my beloved cannot but love me and I her, then it makes little sense to say that I am loved and love. To desire a future—value and meaning—is therefore to live in a world of possibility, but a world of possibility is incompatible with certainty. How, then, is assurance of future value possible?

Ultimately whether I can be freed from vanity comes down to the question of whether anyone loves me, a question about physical and social relations as much or more than about psychological states. That is because though I can determine, on my own, the answer to the question “Do I exist?,” I cannot answer the question “What’s the point?” by myself.⁴⁰ Only another person can answer the question of whether my life is in vain, and the other person answers that question by loving me. But the person revealed in eros is not the Cartesian I, for that is an ego that masters, and the person in an erotic relation is, as it were, mastered. The me of eros is revealed—“opened”⁴¹—by someone other

39. Ecclesiastes 1:2. See also Ecclesiastes 8 and 9 where the point is made forcefully: nothing but the present is sure. The preacher was modern before his time.

40. A self-generated idea that I really do have a future, meaning, and value, that I can be otherwise, is impossible because if it comes from me, then it will be as fleeting and uncertain in every instant as the knowledge that “I am.” For this reason, the assurance that things do matter, that there is an answer to the question “What good is it?” must come from outside me, outside my own consciousness.

41. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 25.

than myself.⁴² The Cartesian I wants to create knowledge and certainty, but a person doesn't create his or her own value. We *receive* our value from others. First comes love, the relation of love, not necessarily a particular emotion. That gives me value and knowledge of that value, though not certainty of it. Only on that foundation is certainty possible, a foundation in which I am touched by things and given language by others. Certainty is made possible by love, not the reverse.

Since the phenomenon of love is relational, it has two aspects, the lover and the beloved; I cannot, of myself, make it happen. A love relationship cannot be counted simply as one of *my* acts, nor is it merely something that happens to me. Love defies the simple categories of passive and active. Yet it is something real that occurs between persons. We can use Cartesian terms to describe an ordinary phenomenon: the person says "I am" and then "I have a mental representation of an object before me." But the lover does not say "I am" at all. If we speak of the caress in terms of language, we must say that instead of "I am," the lover, like the biblical prophets responding to God, says to the beloved "here I am," "behold me here." Obviously "here I am" signifies more than the spatial situation of the lover in the world. Such an announcement is a welcome; it says "please be my guest" (the literal meaning of the word *welcome*) or the even more prosaic "at your service."

However prosaic our welcome circumstances, and it must often be prosaic, "here I am" is also an oath, an oath to continue to be in this relationship. The prophet swears fealty with "here I am," and so does the lover. In a relation of faithfulness, the acts of love "do not say what they describe, they *make* what they say."⁴³ The acts of love make the oath of love, and they do so above and beyond the psychological state of the individuals who love. Without contradicting myself, I cannot say "I

42. It might be said here that one is revealed as oneself and to oneself in the act of being loved. Mattering to another assures me that I matter, that there is a point beyond me and things of my own making.

43. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 147; italics added.

love you now but not later.” To say “I love you” is to say “I love you now and in the future.”⁴⁴ If I am in a relationship of love with another, then I have made an oath to continue in that relationship. I have promised to continue to say “here I am.” My assurance of the future is found in that oath. The guarantee that the erotic phenomenon can continue comes in my faithfulness to the oath of love.⁴⁵ That faithfulness overcomes vanity by extending love into the future, beyond the ken of any mere Cartesian “I,” who can say only “I am.” What is the temporality of the erotic phenomenon? It is the extension into the future of faithfulness and its possibility rather than the moment in time of certainty. And the figure of that erotic temporality is eternity rather than mere time since the oath of love cannot envision an end.

As those in loving relationships discover, the intimacy of love is not something created by a single consciousness. More than once as a young man I fell in love—supposedly. I was enchanted by a young woman. It seemed that I thought about her all the time. I was flummoxed and my heart beat faster in her presence. I wanted to write poetry and, I’m embarrassed to say, I once or twice tried quite unsuccessfully. But merely having that emotional experience didn’t mean that I was in love. I couldn’t create love merely by feeling it or representing it to myself. I couldn’t be in love merely by making her the object of my affection. Because in most cases, my interest in that person was probably not even known, much less returned, so the relationship wasn’t love. If I was in love at all, it was with a representation of a woman, not the woman herself. Love requires two beings of living flesh, not just one mind.

That the event of love requires two persons means that the oath and future that the intimacy of love creates cannot be destroyed by the act of a single consciousness. The oath came about in a relationship to

44. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 185.

45. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 184.

another, not merely as something done by oneself. So if a lover denies his love and ceases to be faithful, it does not follow that the oath has been erased. To deny or try to destroy one's oath as an act of individual will is to be violent. It is to violate the person of the one to whom one has made the oath, as well as one's own person. That is because the value of the violator's future came about in the relationship created by the oath.

But, someone may object, what are we to make of the uncertainty of love? It takes very little reflection to remember that I cannot guarantee the faithfulness of my beloved. I cannot be certain that someone will continue to love me. Though love occurs only in a relationship, ultimately *I* must be the one who responds to the question "Does anyone love me?" Faced with uncertainty, I gain the assurance I sought by continuing to be faithful to the oath that I made in our relationship. Though the other person has made the oath possible by loving me, ultimately my value comes not from her but from the oath and the possibility of being faithful to it. Faithfulness opens the future that makes value possible.

The I seeks assurance that not everything is vanity. That assurance comes neither in certainty nor in the continued love of my beloved. It comes in my faithfulness to the oath I have made rather than in the beloved's faithfulness to me. I am a lover only to the degree that I make my oath and expose myself to the other person and the uncertainty explicit in that exposure. Rather than certainty, the assurance of love is that bequeathed by faithfulness to uncertainty, in other words by faithfulness to the future. For if the future were certain, it would not be a true future. Instead, it would be a not-yet-revealed present. It would be the way things necessarily are, already woven into the fabric of the present.

To a Christian, faithfulness to an oath in the face of uncertainty means hope. What is at stake in my resolve to keep this oath is not my self, not a Cartesian ego,⁴⁶ but my responsibility to my

46. Though, to repeat, in breaking an oath I put myself at risk since doing so is the negation of what guarantees my futurity.

beloved,⁴⁷ my responsibility to the oath I have made to the other person. At stake is my hope for our future. And I find surety—the answer to the question “What’s the point?”—in that responsibility. I have loved and been loved, and I continue to love in faith and hope. The responsibility of being faithful, of continuing to love, has no end. Our erotic relationships must continually be remade. We must “carry the weight of the oath” of fidelity.⁴⁸ Love may be perfect—whole—but it is never finished.

It goes without saying that sexual love is not the only kind of love. Love relationships can take many forms: friend and friend, teacher and student, neighbor and neighbor, parent and child, husband and wife. Nevertheless, we can use marriage as a paradigm of all forms of love. Conjugal love gives life to flesh in two ways. The most obvious, perhaps, is that new life is produced through it, though the production of children is not the only goal of conjugal love; offspring are not the only possible way to make life abundant. Just as important, conjugal love gives me life as a human being. It gives me living flesh, making me a human being in relation with another human being.⁴⁹ Though Victor Frankenstein could give his creature a body, he could not put him into a human relationship. He could not give his creature human flesh, so he remained a monster who never had more than a representation of human life. Like Man alone in the Garden, the creature had a body that breathed and moved, but his condition was, as God but

47. This is Marion's account of the origin of ethics, for ethical obligation requires that I resist vanity, that I deny that human existence is useless (Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 26–27). I perform that resistance in my resolve to be faithful. It is also important to note that, according to Marion, the resolve for the responsibility to a beloved does not anticipate death as its end: “The future of the oath is not limited by death” (Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 192). Our rites for the dead, Latter-day Saint and otherwise, make this manifest. For Catholics and others, burying the dead is the seventh of the seven works of corporal mercy, another recognition that love does not anticipate death as its end.

48. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 196.

49. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 28.

not Frankenstein saw, not good. Adam's relationship to Eve gives him his flesh. Other forms of love also enliven my flesh. They too give me life as a human being. They too are a matter of oath. Ultimately, we understand love well with marriage as its model: people in an erotic and fecund relationship in which each is faithful to his or her oath.

Frankenstein's monster could not find love because he was merely an individual. He wanted to love Frankenstein but could not. He wanted a helper to stand before him⁵⁰ but could not find one. "The fallen angel becomes a malignant devil," he says, "yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone."⁵¹ Though the creature seems to have felt something like the emotion that we identify with love, he did not have a love relationship. His monstrosity was a function of his individualistic existence. The result was tragedy, destruction for Frankenstein's friends and family, for his bride, and ultimately for both himself and his creature.

For Adam and Eve, however, the story is different. Adam's exclamation, "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh"⁵² is presumably also Eve's. I read it also as an oath to continue to be with her, and I assume that she made the same oath, for "Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and replenish the earth."⁵³ Marriage, embodied and erotic, makes us human and is a paradigm for human sociality.

50. "A helper standing before, or opposite, him" is what Genesis 2:18 says literally.

51. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, chapter 24.

52. Genesis 2:23.

53. Moses 5:2.

Author's Note

This is a somewhat revised version of an oral presentation for the 2014 Neal A. Maxwell Lecture (Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; November 18, 2014). Some of the internal rhetorical gestures are artifacts of that presentation.

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Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *Winter Pies*
digital painting, 2020

RULE OF LAWYERS: LATTER-DAY SAINT ENTANGLEMENT IN EASTERN EUROPEAN ANTI-LGBTQI+ LEGISLATION

Kate Mower

In August 2017, I had just returned home from a Fulbright year in Bulgaria and Romania to an email from a Romanian friend I had met in the small congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Constanta, Romania. They wrote to say: “Early this morning, I was going through Facebook and there was this article”—I could sense a fear and frustration in the message—“they were presenting a few facts about what it was like to be gay in Romania. . . . There is this whole movement by several associations and organizations who want to redefine family . . . in the Romanian Constitution and they want a referendum.”¹ This was the first time the Romanian Referendum was brought to my attention. They continued, “My heart was heavy. And then there are these people whom I admire and love who fully support *Coaliția pentru Familie*.” *Coaliția pentru Familie* (Coalition for the Family) was the Romanian organization leading the charge for the referendum, designed to erect further barriers to same-sex marriage in that country. My correspondent was speaking about both Romanian and non-Romanian members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints supporting the cause. Same-sex marriage was not permitted in Romania, despite Romania’s European Union (EU) membership, so

1. Name withheld. Private email sent to author on Aug. 17, 2017.

the referendum on its face might seem preemptive, but to the legal strategists, it was a layering of defenses. Article 48 of the Romanian Constitution reads that family is based upon spouses freely agreeing to marry.² The 2018 referendum sought to change the language of the constitution to say that marriage is between a man and a woman.³ As a closeted queer person, the referendum caught my attention for its hostility toward queer people.⁴ As a Latter-day Saint, it caught my attention because it felt much too familiar.

2. The Romanian word *soți* is default masculine gendered and therefore translates to “spouses.” “Familia se întemeiază pe căsătoria liber consimțită între soți.” “Constituția României: Titlul II: Drepturile, Libertățile Și Îndatoririle Fundamentale,” n.d., <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=371&parl=2&idl=1>.

3. As of this writing, the European Union is applying pressures on Romania and other EU countries who have not adopted measures to protect same-sex couples. Starting Jan. 1, 2024, EU officials will either sanction Romania for being noncompliant with EU law or it will prompt protests on behalf of LGBTQI+ groups. News Wires, “Romania Must Recognise Same-Sex Civil Unions, EU Top Rights Court Rules,” *France 24*, May 23, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230523-romania-must-recognise-same-sex-civil-unions-eu-top-court-rules>.

4. Since 2018, scholars have dedicated much time and energy to uncovering the history and processes of the Romanian Referendum on the Family. Though not an exhaustive list, the following details the extent to which the Romanian Referendum has been covered so far. Oana Băluță, “Egalitatea de Gen. Politici Publice Sau Un Câmp de Luptă Discursiv Și Politico-Religios?,” *Transilvania*, December 15, 2020, 18–33, <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2020.12.03>; Radu Cinpoș, “The Christian Orthodox Church and Illiberal Politics in Romania,” in *Illiberal Politics and Religion in Europe and Beyond*, edited by Anja Hennig and Mirjam Weiberg-Salzmann (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2021), 407–431; Georgeta Ghebrea, “Non-Voting as a Political Action: The Behaviour of Political Science Students Regarding the Referendum for the ‘Traditional Family’ in Romania, 2018,” *Annals of the “Ovidius” University of Constanta, Political Science Series* 8 (2019): 75–91; Sergiu Gherghina, Alexandru Racu, Aurelian Giugal, Alexandru Garvis, Nanuli Silagadze, and Ron Johnston, “Non-Voting in the 2018 Romanian Referendum: The Importance of Initiators, Campaigning and Issue Saliency,” *Political Science* 71, no. 3 (Sept. 2, 2019): 193–213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00323187.2020.1781541>; Sergiu Gherghina, “Hijacked

The end of the Cold War led to power struggles in Eastern Europe that American conservatives and Latter-day Saints saw as an opportunity to intervene in the creation of a new world order. Mormon history scholars K. Mohrman and Taylor Petrey have both described a new global order at the end of World War II, which brought with it globalized racialized imperialist politics disguised as American exceptionalism where Latter-day Saints epitomized that racialized exceptionalism in

Direct Democracy: The Instrumental Use of Referendums in Romania,” *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 33, no. 3 (Aug. 2019): 778–797, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418800553>; Sergiu Gherghina and Nanuli Silă agadze, “Selective Equality: Social Democratic Parties and the Referendums on Same-Sex Marriage in Eastern Europe,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3539054>; A. Maftai and A-C. Holman, “Predictors of Homophobia in a Sample of Romanian Young Adults: Age, Gender, Spirituality, Attachment Styles, and Moral Disengagement,” *Psychology & Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (Oct. 2, 2021): 305–316, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2020.1726435>; Diana Margarit, “LGBTQ Rights, Conservative Backlash and the Constitutional Definition of Marriage in Romania,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 26, no. 11 (Nov. 2, 2019): 1570–1587, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1567472>; Martijn Mos, “The Anticipatory Politics of Homophobia: Explaining Constitutional Bans on Same-Sex Marriage in Post-Communist Europe,” *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 395–416, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2020.1733983>; Ov Cristian Norocel and Ionela Băluță, “Retrospective Mobilization in the 2018 ‘Referendum for Family’ in Romania,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 70, no. 2 (Mar. 4, 2023): 153–162, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2021.1987270>; Sorina Soare and Claudiu D. Tufis, “Phoenix Populism: Radical Right Parties’ Mobilization in Romania after 2015,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 1 (Jan. 2, 2019): 8–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2018.1460158>; Sorina Soare and Claudiu D. Tufis, “No Populism’s Land? Religion and Gender in Romanian Politics,” *Identities* 30, no. 1 (Jan. 2, 2023): 112–130, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2021.1953784>; Iulian Stănescu, “The Curious Story of the 2018 Romanian Traditional Family Referendum: Buck-Passing and the Failure to Mobilise Voters,” *Sociologie Romaneasca* 18, no. 2 (Nov. 11, 2020): 74–111, <https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.18.2.3>; Sorina Voiculescu and Octavian Groza, “Legislating Political Space for LGBT Families: The 2018 Referendum on the Definition of Family in Romania,” *Area* 53, no. 4 (Dec. 2021): 679–690, <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12729>.

popular media.⁵ These imperialist political machinations intertwined with sexual politics as part of an anticommunist religious revival. They challenged and were challenged by USSR critiques of race and religion in the United States. With the demise of the USSR, that new global order no longer had competition. American organizations, individuals, and religions capitalized on a defeated foe by spreading American religious and imperialist agendas without impediment and with the help of Eastern European ideologues who had been suppressed in and by the former Soviet Union.

This post-Soviet floodgate opening a new global far-right religious movement has been recounted by scholars; however, few have focused on the influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in that process. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints took advantage of the expansionist global atmosphere in two important ways. First, lawyers from the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University (BYU) and former Utah Supreme Court Justice Dallin Oaks worked to create legal, legislative, and constitutional changes in Eastern Europe toward “religious freedom.”⁶ Second, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Latter-day Saint political think tanks, academic organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and top Church leadership, including Dallin Oaks here as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, worked to fund and campaign for anti-LGBTQI+ legislation in the United States and Eastern Europe simultaneously at the end of

5. Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 58; K. Mohrman, *Exceptionally Queer: Mormon Peculiarity and U.S. Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 214.

6. This article expands on K. Mohrman’s astute argument that “legal claims to sexual and religious freedom in the United States inevitably require a willful erasure of the nation’s racial-colonial legacy and any acknowledgment of its racial-colonial present” and that “Mormonism remains a vital assemblage justifying U.S. colonialism and imperialism.” Mohrman, *Exceptionally Queer*, 274.

the Cold War.⁷ This article argues that Latter-day Saint leaders, representatives, and lawyers helped to shape a global order at the end of the Cold War and at the same time were active participants in and perpetrators of a climate of legislative violence against people belonging to the LGBTQI+ community in Eastern Europe (including Russia) and the United States.

Over the past decade, a growing and exciting body of scholarship in Mormon studies has applied critical theory to Mormon history, specifically queer and race critical theory. This is leading to important critiques of US nationalism and imperialism and thoughtful analyses of the social constructions of gender, sexuality, race, and assimilation. This work, however, centers Mormonism in the United States and neglects the global impacts of a proselytizing religion. Conversely, Eastern European historians, sociologists, and political scientists have been writing extensively on gender and anti-LGBTQI+ legislation and organizations in Eastern Europe. Because Mormon studies scholarship overemphasizes the United States—with good reason since Church authorities consistently reiterate that it is an American religion—the international networks of power are overlooked.⁸ And because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accounts for such a small percentage of the global population, and an especially small percentage in Eastern Europe, the Church goes unnoticed in the extensive Eastern European scholarship on gender and anti-LGBTQI+ organizations and legislation. This article seeks to highlight the widespread political and

7. The official abbreviation for the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association is LGBTI. Many European organizations have chosen to use the abbreviation LGBTQI+ with acknowledgment of the “Q” for “queer,” though this is an English-centered term. I use LGBTQI+ in recognition of “queer” and of nonnative English-speaking Eastern European organizations here.

8. Mohrman does incorporate US imperialism in her analysis as a framework but focuses on the push for imperialism domestically through racialized politics. Mohrman, *Exceptionally Queer*.

legal entanglements the Church has quietly inserted itself in throughout Eastern Europe.

Latter-day Saint representatives, like other religious groups and networks, shaped their political motivations around “religious liberty.” However, this religious liberty has been constructed around orthodox visions of established religions, not individual liberty to pursue individual faith in whatever form, inclusive of atheism. This construction of “religious liberty” consistently does not include the religious freedom of gender and sexual minorities. Second, they rely on undefined language like “pro-family” and, more specifically, “pro-traditional family” and assume a strict orthodox religious definition, one that does not exist across all historical time and space. They restrict the definition of family to only include constructions that are patriarchal and nuclear.⁹

While Latter-day Saint members and representatives have influenced right-wing politics for much of the twentieth century, this article

9. Proponents of the religious right “pro-family” movement purposefully disparage feminist scholarship around patriarchy and family without engaging with it more than that. Extensive work has been done, particularly by feminist historians, to disrupt the notion that “traditional family” is a term that crosses all spatial and time boundaries. That scholarship is too extensive to list here, but I include some of the works on the construction of “traditional family” in Romania and Romanian Orthodoxy. See note 48 also. Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, eds., *Patriarhat Și Emancipare În Istoria Gândirii Politice Românești*, Studii de Gen (Iași, Romania: Polirom, 2002); Maria Bucur, “An Archipelago of Stories: Gender History in Eastern Europe,” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (Dec. 2008): 1375–1389, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.113.5.1375>; Maria Bucur, “Gender and Religiosity in Communist Romania: Continuity and Change, 1945–1989,” in *Women and Religiosity in Orthodox Christianity*, edited by Ina Meerdjanova (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 155–175; Maria Bucur, “Gender and Religiosity among the Orthodox Christians in Romania: Continuity and Change, 1945–1989,” *Aspasia* 5, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2011.050104>; Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, *Birth of Democratic Citizenship: Women and Power in Modern Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018); Maria Bucur, “Gender Analysis and Gender Ideology: Gender Studies in Romania,” *Studia Politica* XXI, no. 2 (2021): 385–408.

focuses on the international projects and collaborations between Latter-day Saint representatives and political, religious, and wealthy leaders in the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries after the fall of communism in joint efforts to squash LGBTQI+ movements in the region through the subtle and inexact language of “religious freedom” and “pro-family.” Much scholarship has been and is currently being produced concerning right-wing international networks organizing and funding the anti-LGBTQI+ legislation in Eastern Europe and especially in Russia, but so far none of that scholarship has incorporated how influential the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its representatives and law school have been on these movements.¹⁰

10. I include a handful of those works published since 2021 concerning Eastern Europe more broadly. See note 48 below for Russia specifically. Aswin A. Azis and Alifia N. Azarine, “Future and Challenges of LGBT in Eastern Europe: The Rise of Populism and Political Movement Analysis in Poland,” *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (Mar. 10, 2023): 21–30, <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejsocial.2023.3.2.399>; Barbara Grabowska-Moroz and Anna Wójcik, “Reframing LGBT Rights Advocacy in the Context of the Rule of Law Backsliding: The Case of Poland,” *Intersections* 7, no. 4 (2021): 85–103, <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v7i4.852>; Petra Guasti and Lenka Bustikova, “In Europe’s Closet: The Rights of Sexual Minorities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia,” in *The (Not So) Surprising Longevity of Identity Politics: Contemporary Challenges of the State-Society Compact in Central Eastern Europe*, edited by Timofey Agarin (London: Routledge, 2022), 226–246; Eszter Neumann and Paweł Rudnicki, “Populist Radical-Right Governments in Central-Eastern Europe and Education Policy-Making: A Comparison of Hungary and Poland,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, May 10, 2023, 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2211935>; Michal Pitoňák, “LGBT+ Activism and Morality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Understanding the Dynamic Equilibrium in Czechia from a Broader Transnational Perspective,” in *Activist Feminist Geographies*, edited by Kate Boyer, LaToya E. Eaves, and Jennifer Fluri (Bristol, England: Bristol University Press, 2023), 94–119, <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529225129.ch005>; K Slootmaeckers, “The Europeanization and Politicisation of LGBT Rights in Serbia,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, edited by K. Fabian and J. E. Lazada (London: Routledge, 2021), 387–394.

Latter-day Saint representatives collaborated, wrote, and designed constitutions in nations where constitutions were rewritten after 1991 to reflect neoliberal language. Through this process, Latter-day Saint legal experts designed constitutions where adherents could develop legal arguments similar to those they were utilizing in United States' law, including—and especially—laws concerning “religious freedom” to include legal discrimination against same-sex marriage and gender and sexual minorities. While legal experts worked in the United States and Eastern Europe to develop religion-favorable constitutions, Latter-day Saint members and representatives helped to create and sustain organizations such as the World Congress of Families (WCF), which actively funds and campaigns on anti-LGBTQI+ platforms throughout the world. In some cases, the law professors at BYU created and otherwise supported these anti-LGBTQI+ organizations, such as the World Family Policy Center (WFPC). These organizations supported and networked with Russian neo-imperialist politicians and oligarchs to create a web of international actors who worked to create a global anti-LGBTQI+ climate in attempts to legalize discrimination against LGBTQI+ people in countries throughout the world.

Anticommunism, Mormon Paleoconservatives, and Russian Neo-Imperialists

In 1995, Allan Carlson, the president of the American paleoconservative think tank the Rockford Institute, visited Moscow on a mission to meet Russian right-wing academics interested in “reviving” traditionalist politics in Russia. Carlson has many ties with Latter-day Saints (though not a Latter-day Saint himself) and would eventually cofound the World Congress of Families (WCF) through the help and support of Latter-day Saints and Russian neo-imperialists alike. His initial point of contact in Moscow was Anatoly Antonov, the other cofounder of the WCF and a professor of family sociology and demography at Moscow State University. Antonov introduced Carlson to many Russian

“academics, intellectuals, and politicians,”¹¹ and the trip resulted in the creation of the WCF by Antonov and Carlson.

The post-Soviet anti-LGBTQI+ political and legislative targeting began with sociologists at Moscow State University and within the Russian Academy of Sciences. Historian Kevin Moss shows that “one of the key producers of anti-LGBTQI+ ideology in Russia is Moscow State University,” and particularly the faculty of sociology.¹² This was largely due to the work of early twentieth-century Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin. In fact, Antonov and Carlson connected over Sorokin, and the late sociologist is now often deployed to rally the Christian right.¹³ Sorokin was responsible for introducing sociology to Russian academic institutions and then only afterward did sociology take hold in the United States.

During the 1920s, Sorokin was outwardly anticommunist, for which he was sentenced to death, then pardoned by Lenin. Soon after, he escaped to Czechoslovakia where he taught at the University of Prague. Then he emigrated to the United States where he ultimately founded the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. In opposition to the Bolshevik policies and theories, Sorokin theorized that emphasis needed to be placed on the rural perspective and agricultural way of life. He believed that the “traditional” model of the family, focusing on manual labor and home-based business, was “sociologically, demographically and economically sustainable.”¹⁴ Clearly, Sorokin saw the failure of the Bolsheviks as a failure in maintaining the family as well as overestimating urban production and underestimating rural

11. Kristina Stoeckl, “The Rise of the Russian Christian Right: The Case of the World Congress of Families,” *Religion, State and Society* 48, no. 4 (2020): 225.

12. Kevin Moss, “Russia’s Queer Science, or How Anti-LGBT Scholarship Is Made,” *The Russian Review* 80, no. 1 (2021): 18, 27.

13. Dmitry Uzlaner and Kristina Stoeckl, “The Legacy of Pitirim Sorokin in the Transnational Alliances of Moral Conservatives,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 18, no. 2 (2018): 133–153.

14. Uzlaner and Stoeckl, “Legacy of Pitirim Sorokin,” 136.

production. Russian scholars after 1990, then, had a better grasp of the historical context that Sorokin referenced in his works than their American counterparts did. The turn by Russian scholars and sociologists toward Sorokin was a deliberate move away from Soviet policies in post-Soviet Russia, and it included a specific concept of the family, an emphasis on rural populations and life, and faith in a God as the only universal force to stop the “age of chaos.”¹⁵ Even though Sorokin’s works were banned during the Soviet period, Russian intellectuals, including those at Moscow State University, read them. Kristina Stoeckl wrote that “Sorokin’s ideas were largely unknown in the Soviet Union, but Antonov recalls clandestinely reading his works during Soviet times.”¹⁶

Russian and American sociologists, lawyers, and religious and policy leaders have revived Sorokin as an opposition figure to the failed Soviet family policies. While Russian and American scholars speak directly against Soviet family policies, more often they speak to the benevolent patriarchal family model constructed by Sorokin, and it is implied that these views are antithetical to Lenin’s policies. Lenin’s treatment of Sorokin also lends well to a mythmaking of Sorokin in both post-Soviet Russia and the United States, where his oppression parallels the oppression of the “traditional” family in Russia. Where Lenin failed, Sorokin triumphed, twenty-first-century “pro-family” scholars say. Christian right leaders, including Latter-day Saints, turned to Sorokin and dialogues about civilization decline being tied to declines in sexual morality and traditional family and turned to what they saw as the cure, Christian nationalism.¹⁷ Carlson and Antonov, therefore, found the basis of their new anti-LGBTQI+ political work through Russian sociology, and particularly the work of Sorokin, and a continued anticommunism push.

15. Uzlaner and Stoeckl, “Legacy of Pitirim Sorokin.”

16. Stoeckl, “Rise of the Russian Christian Right,” 227.

17. Taylor Petrey lists Sorokin specifically as one of the influences within twentieth-century Latter-day Saint dialogues concerning the decline of civilization. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 58–59.

Latter-day Saint leaders and academics took a hard anticommunist stance during the twentieth century. Particularly, Latter-day Saint President Ezra Taft Benson, former secretary of agriculture under President Eisenhower, was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President George H. W. Bush in 1989 for his fiery anticommunist dogma.¹⁸ The collapse of the Soviet Union, then, fit well in the Latter-day Saint millenarian worldview. The United States, through the eyes of Latter-day Saints and their leaders, won the Cold War not simply because of neoliberalism, but because of a divine trajectory toward a global Christian millennium. Atheist communism offered Latter-day Saints a foe in the divine battle toward a Second Coming. Though, this view was not restricted to Latter-day Saints. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan delivered his now famous “Evil Empire Speech” given at the National Association of Evangelicals in which he repeated again and again the anticommunist propaganda that the godless Soviet Union could only bow to a nation and people led by God.¹⁹ The slaying of the Soviet Union by the Divine, therefore, offered insight into the failures of the Marxist millenarian ideology.²⁰

18. Matthew L. Harris, ed., *Thunder from the Right: Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 1; Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 29–30.

19. Ronald Reagan, “Evil Empire Speech,” *Voices of Democracy*, March 8, 1983, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>.

20. Angela Lahr shows that Mormonism was part of a larger Evangelical millenarian movement and the ways in which millenarian religious ideology intertwined with political ideology. The official Church biography of Dallin Oaks by Richard Turley also highlights the ways in which the fall of the Soviet Union was seen as a divine act (Oaks “rejoiced with other leaders and saw the hand of God at work”) toward the millennium. Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Richard E. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord: The Life of Dallin H. Oaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 252.

These ideas continued to influence Latter-day Saint intellectuals and activists. BYU law professor Lynn Wardle concluded in his 2004 article for the *Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy* concerning the Bolshevik family law reforms of Russia between 1917–1926 that “American lawmakers would be wise to consider carefully the Russian experience. If they will learn the lessons of history, of the Russian Bolshevik family law reforms, they will seek to avoid the terrible human and social tragedies that resulted from that failed experiment, and they will avoid and eliminate family laws and policies that directly or indirectly promote the ‘withering away’ of marriage.”²¹ Wardle fueled the anticommunist fears of Latter-day Saints that Marxist ideology destroyed the family and marriage and warned that Americans needed to protect “traditional marriage” or otherwise succumb to the same tragedies of the Soviet Union.

One Latter-day Saint leader and scholar, Dallin Oaks, was particularly persuaded by Sorokin’s ideology. Oaks is currently the next in line to lead the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He also was a justice for the Utah Supreme Court and president of BYU. Much like Benson, his political, social, religious, and professional convictions overlapped in ways that influenced the future of Church doctrine. As recently as 2014 in a speech delivered at Utah Valley University, Oaks was asked to address the audience in his capacity as a prominent legal expert, not only as one of the foremost authorities in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²² He invoked Sorokin in that speech, one that focused on religious freedom and specifically the religious freedom to discriminate against same-sex marriage. In the speech, he focused on

21. Lynn D. Wardle, “The Withering Away of Marriage: Some Lessons from the Bolshevik Family Law Reforms in Russia, 1917–1926,” *Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy* 2 (2004): 521.

22. Dallin H. Oaks, “Transcript: Hope for the Years Ahead,” *Church Newsroom*, Apr. 16, 2014, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/transcript-elder-dallin-oaks-constitutional-symposium-religious-freedom>.

only this one solitary “religious freedom” impediment, arguing for free speech, saying, “I could comment further on these attempted incursions on religious freedom, but for the reasons stated at the outset I believe I should forgo comment on all such arguments except one. As it happens, the argument I have chosen for comment has figured in various recent court decisions on same-sex marriage . . .”²³ In this same speech, Oaks then calls upon another BYU professor, W. Cole Durham, specifically for his work with the “EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion.” Immediately following that, Oaks offers two Sorokin quotes. Oaks summons Sorokin’s prediction that the world will turn toward religion and spirituality as a result of great catastrophes, calamities that “can strengthen instead of destroy.”²⁴

Sorokin’s ideas acted as the link between American paleo-conservatives, including Latter-day Saints and Oaks, and Russian neo-imperialists. Sorokin’s work buttressed the Cold War anticommunism of American Latter-day Saints and the repressed anticommunism of Russian academic outsiders who gained academic clout and power with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The failure of the Soviet experiment married those anticommunist forces who mourned the loss of religious liberty and traditional marriage in the United States and in Russia, and ultimately political and academic actors in other Soviet satellite countries.

The interest in postsocialist Eastern European constitutions by Oaks and other Latter-day Saints did not always include interest in same-sex marriage law and legislation. Initially, Latter-day Saints were merely invested in missionary work being open in those countries, since under the Soviet arm they were not. However, the fall of the Soviet Union did coincide with Latter-day Saint legal battles against same-sex marriage in the United States, as will be discussed in the following section. The

23. Oaks, “Transcript.”

24. Oaks, “Transcript.”

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was set to send its first missionaries to Russia in 1989. Church leadership tasked Oaks with hosting the delegations from Soviet Russia that year to make amendments to the Soviet Constitution.²⁵ Later that year, he met with Mikhail Gorbachev, whom he called a “very impressive man.”²⁶ At the time, Russell Nelson was overseeing the Church’s expansion into Eastern Europe. He also met with delegations from the Soviet Union, including vice president of the Republic of Russia, Alexander Rutskoy, and Gorbachev. He met with ministers in Hungary, Romania, and Czechoslovakia.²⁷ The intentions of these meetings, no doubt, were to open missionary work in these countries.

The Family: A Proclamation to the World

In 1991, as the Church of Latter-day Saints was entering into the global battle for power in Eastern Europe, Church leaders were simultaneously beginning legal work in the United States against same-sex marriage. On May 1 of that year, six plaintiffs filed a complaint in Hawai‘i Circuit Court. They challenged the state’s marriage statute that said that marriage was between “man and woman.”²⁸ The trial court ruled in favor of the state. The plaintiffs appealed to the Hawai‘i Supreme Court, saying that denying same-sex marriage violated the right to privacy. The court ruled, using *Loving v. Virginia* as a legal precedent, that denial of marriage between same-sex partners was a matter of determining and discriminating based on sex. In May 1993, the Hawai‘i Supreme Court

25. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 252.

26. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 253.

27. Aubrey Eyre, “President Nelson’s 36 Years of Influencing World Leaders and Sharing the Gospel throughout the Globe,” *Deseret News*, Sept. 9, 2019, sec. Church News.

28. Jonathan Deitrich, “The Lessons of the Law: Same-Sex Marriage and *Baehr v. Lewin*,” *Marquette Law Review* 78, no. 1 (1994): 141.

sent the matter back to the lower court. At that point, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Catholic Church took notice and became increasingly involved in the matter.²⁹

The Church was ready to use its legal might to crush the Hawai'i issue. In September and October 1993, the Hawai'i legislature held public hearings about the case. The legislature then passed Act 217. This act did a number of things, one of which was to create a Commission on Sexual Orientation and the Law. The Commission was comprised of eleven members. In December 1994, a federal lawsuit was issued against the governor regarding certain members who were appointed to the Act 217 Commission, saying there was a violation of church and state. A judge sided with the plaintiffs and removed four members of the commission who represented the Catholic Diocese and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the commission was left with seven members.³⁰

On February 1, 1994, the Church's highest authoritative body, the First Presidency, issued a public statement: "The principles of the gospel and the sacred responsibilities given us require that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints oppose any efforts to give legal authorization to marriages between persons of the same gender," concluding that "we encourage members to appeal to legislators, judges and other government officials to preserve the purposes and sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman and to reject all efforts to give legal authorization or other official approval or support to marriages between

29. Petrey also details the Hawai'i events. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 146–151.

30. Thomas Gill, "Report of the Commission on Sexual Orientation and the Law," State of Hawaii, Dec. 8, 1995, https://lrb.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/1995_ReportOfTheCommissionOnSexualOrientationAndTheLaw.pdf; Gregory A. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church: Intended Actions, Unintended Consequences* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 44–57.

persons of the same gender.”³¹ *Deseret News*, owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, reported on the matter on March 4, 1995, saying that “under Hawaii law, an entity may intervene in a legal action by proving that it has substantial interests in the outcome of the case,” which was to say that the Church was putting together a legal argument to say that it had “substantial interests” in the matter.³² A month later, the publication reported on the Hawai‘i trial again, saying, “In its original petition filed in February, the LDS Church said it could offer Attorney General Margery Bronster additional legal manpower, expert witnesses and research results as she prepares the case, which goes to trial Sept. 25.”³³ Just as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offered legal experts, including Oaks, to become involved in Eastern European legal and constitutional matters, they also offered legal experts domestically. These legal experts had a vested interest in the perpetuation of Church positions.

The highest Church authorities were creating their own religious committee prepared to combat the Hawai‘ian measure in 1994 and 1995. Oaks was dealing with “a property matter” in Hawai‘i when he wrote in his journal: “My legal skills and public policy (and Church communications) skills seem to be most in demand.”³⁴ He was asked by the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Boyd K. Packer, to help create a “scripture-based proclamation.”³⁵ The committee consisted of Oaks, Nelson—the person working in Eastern Europe to open missionary work there—and James E. Faust. It was not until the

31. The First Presidency, “First Presidency Statement Opposing Same Gender Marriages,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1, 1994 (Apr. 1994 edition).

32. “Church Opposes Same-Sex Marriages,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 4, 1995, sec. Church News.

33. Douglas Palmer, “3 LDS Officials Seek to Join Hawaii Suit,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 13, 1995.

34. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 219.

35. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 219.

publication of the 2021 biography of Oaks that it was made public that Nelson headed the committee.³⁶ Oaks's Church-sanctioned biographer, Richard Turley, admits—in rare transparency—that the proclamation was created in direct response to the Hawai'i legal matter.³⁷ A draft of the proclamation “was completed over the Christmas holidays” and “submitted to the First Presidency on January 9, 1995.”³⁸ “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” was presented at the Church's biannual General Conference during the Relief Society session on September 23, 1995.³⁹ It was a document celebrated among Latter-day Saints as supportive of “millennia of marriage law and tradition,” according to Oaks (despite the Church's own deviation from this “traditional” marriage that operated less than a century previous).⁴⁰

Homosexuality had been a major concern of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the second half of the twentieth century.⁴¹ During the Cold War, Latter-day Saints purged their institutions of

36. Oaks insisted on Turley to write his biography and oversaw the publication process. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*; Tad Walch, “New Biography of President Dallin H. Oaks Uses His Journals, Letters to Show Man behind the Talks,” *Deseret News*, 2021, sec. Faith, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/3/2/22310108/biography-of-president-dallin-oaks-provides-insight-into-latter-day-saints-leader-salt-lake-city>.

37. “Church leaders grew concerned about the efforts to legalize same-sex marriage in the state of Hawaii. As the movement gained momentum, a group of Church authorities and Latter-day Saint legal scholars, including Oaks, recommended that the Church oppose the Hawaii efforts.” Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 219.

38. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 219.

39. Petrey also details the relationship between this document and others created at the same time by the Religious Right. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 145–146.

40. Turley, *In the Hands of the Lord*, 220.

41. Prince links the Cold War Lavender Scare and Latter-day Saint anticommunist practices on the BYU campus. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church*, 15–17.

homosexuality during the US anticommunist Lavender Scare.⁴² Starting in 1967, seventy-two students were expelled, and security files were created for every student suspected of being gay.⁴³ BYU police also conducted secret surveillance of gay students, which received national condemnation.⁴⁴ In the 1970s and 1980s, a BYU psychology program administered aversion and electroshock therapy to homosexual men in the basement of the Smith Family Living Center.⁴⁵ Oaks, president of BYU from 1971–1980, came under scrutiny in November 2021 when he publicly denied that these practices took place under his tenure as president. However, though Oaks was not personally involved, the evidence is definitive that the aversion therapy research was conducted, and those involved published the results of its studies during those

42. While this is a nontraditional source, it is well researched with a complete bibliography. The work of queer BYU students to make transparent BYU's policies has been met with hostility. This work has been done at great risk to BYU students, and I thank them for their research and bravery in the face of expulsion and other religious, academic, and familial consequences. BYU USGA, "The History of BYU and LGBTQ Issues," 2020, <https://www.usgabyu.com/single-post/byuhistory>.

43. BYU USGA, "History of BYU and LGBTQ Issues"; Mohrman, *Exceptionally Queer*, 224–225.

44. "Brigham Young U. Admits Stake Outs on Homosexuals," *New York Times*, Sept. 27, 1979; "Homosexuals Level Charges at Mormon Church," *Kokomo Tribune*, Oct. 27, 1979; Robert McQueen, "BYU Inquisition," *Advocate*, Aug. 13, 1975; Ben Williams, "This Week in Lambda History: October 16–31," *Metro (QSalt Lake Magazine)*, Oct. 27, 2005; Erin Alberty, "Longtime Utah LGBT Advocates Recount Brutal History," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 7, 2014.

45. Psychology professor Allen Bergin, one researcher in the BYU field of change therapy, issued a public apology after activist Kyle Ashworth published a document called "On the Record" of the compiled instances of Church references to LGBTQ+ issues. An updated version of the document in 2020 included the public apology. Kyle Ashworth, "On the Record: A Chronology of LGBTQ+ Messaging Within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," *Latter Gay Stories*, 2019, updated 2022, 94, 95, <https://lattergaystories.org/record/>.

years.⁴⁶ Oaks from 1971 to today has been a leader in the legal and institutional charge in anti-LGBTQI+ Church, US, and global policies. He and other Church leaders gained their legal and political footing in Hawai‘i and found ways to export those lessons learned on a global scale.⁴⁷

The first instance for “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” to enter the global discussion was in 1996 when BYU law professor Richard G. Wilkins used it at the Habitat II United Nations (UN) conference in Istanbul when the conference organizers mistook Wilkins for a Harvard law professor and put his speech in a prominent spot. Wilkins used the time to talk about “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” In some instances, Wilkins and other Latter-day Saints have touted this as the “miracle at Istanbul.”⁴⁸ The conference talk and results gave BYU law professors influence on the UN. Wilkins shortly after created the NGO Family Voice to directly influence UN policy and law. Following the talk, Wilkins and the dean of BYU’s law school, H. Reese Hansen, spent ten days in 1997 “in Romania to meet with government officials about ways BYU can help families in Eastern Europe. Possibilities include scholarly exchanges, seminars and a family training and

46. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Dallin Oaks Says Shock Therapy of Gays Didn’t Happen at BYU While He Was President. Records Show Otherwise,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov. 16, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/11/16/dallin-oaks-says-shock/>; Gregory A. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church: Intended Actions, Unintended Consequences* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

47. The dictatorial methods of Oaks and the Church mirror those of the Soviet Union with regard to homosexuals and dissidents. These methods were more alike in this matter than different when it came to dealing with those considered “deviants.”

48. Richard G. Wilkins, “Defending the Family,” Brigham Young University, July 6, 1999, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/richard-g-wilkins/defending-family/>; Staff, “Pro-Family Movement Began with ‘Miracle at Istanbul,’” *Daily Universe*, Nov. 11, 1999, <https://universe.byu.edu/1999/11/11/profamily-movement-began-with-miracle-at-istanbul/>.

law center.”⁴⁹ Through these contacts with the UN and with other globally connected organizations, BYU law professors and Latter-day Saint leaders and representatives worked to export “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

World Congress of Families

Much scholarship has been devoted to the influence of the WCF on Eastern European politics, legislation, and LGBTQI+ lives. To date, no scholarship has focused on the widespread role Latter-day Saint representatives, leaders, and law professors played in organizing within the WCF and offering separate legal support to buttress the organization’s political and cultural agendas.⁵⁰ The WCF operates at the intersection

49. Edward L. Carter, “New Family Voice Pushes Old Values,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 30, 1997.

50. By no means an exhaustive list, this shows how much scholarship has been devoted to the WCF, especially in Eastern European and international gender studies, and to date no link to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has yet been explored. K. Bluhm and M. Brand, “‘Traditional Values’ Unleashed: The Ultraconservative Influence on Russian Family Policy,” in *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*, edited by K. Bluhm and M. Varga (London: Routledge, 2018), 223–244; Jennifer Butler, *Born Again: The Christian Right Globalized* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Bob Clifford, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Bob Clifford, “The Global Right Wing and Theories of Transnational Advocacy,” *International Spectator* 48, no. 4 (2013): 71–85; Sara Kalm and Anna Meeuwisse, “For Love and for Life: Emotional Dynamics at the World Congress of Families,” *Global Discourse* 10, no. 2 (2020): 303–320; Sara Kalm and Anna Meeuwisse, “Transcalar Activism Contesting the Liberal International Order: The Case of the World Congress of Families,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* (2023): 1–24; Andreas Kemper, *Foundation of the Nation: How Political Parties and Movements Are Radicalising Others in Favour of Conservative Family Values and Against Tolerance, Diversity, and Progressive Gender Politics in Europe* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung—Forum Politics and Society, 2016); Susanna Mancini and Kristina Stoeckl, “Transatlantic Conversations: The Emergence of

of Latter-day Saint interest in curbing same-sex marriage and in developing the Church's foothold in Eastern Europe. The WCF also operates at the intersection of Russian and Latter-day Saint interest in a post-Soviet global order that centers on a new twenty-first-century radical right traditionalism.

Russia had already begun its turn toward conservative neo-traditionalism by 1995. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, President Boris Yeltsin sought unsuccessfully to build a Russian liberal democracy on a capitalist foundation. Between 1992–1994, Russia underwent a massive privatization effort. According to Bernard Black, Reinier Kraakman, and Anna Tarassova, “The Russian government lacked the capacity to force privatization on unwilling managers. The political solution was to bribe them with cheap shares so they would pursue privatization voluntarily.”⁵¹ Rapid privatization of major Russian industries led to pyramid schemes and a lack of confidence and transparency in the privatization process through auctions of corporations and companies. Managers were able to obtain vast wealth through purchasing companies at much lower auction rates. The rigged auctions

Society-Protective Anti-Abortion Arguments in the United States, Europe and Russia,” in *The Conscience Wars: Rethinking the Balance Between Religion and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220–257; Moss, “Russia’s Queer Science”; Kevin Moss, “Russia as the Savior of European Civilization: Gender and the Geo-Politics of Traditional Values,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 195–214; Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaign in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017); Cole Parke, “Natural Deception: Conned by the World Congress of Families,” *Political Research Associates* no. 22 (Jan. 2015); Stoeckl, “Rise of the Russian Christian Right”; Uzlaner and Stoeckl, “Legacy of Pitirim Sorokin.”

51. Bernard Black, Reinier Kraakman, and Anna Tarassova, “Russian Privatization and Corporate Governance: What Went Wrong?,” *Stanford Law Review* 52, no. 6 (2000): 1740.

over the course of the 1990s in Russia created a group of Russian oligarchs who acquired massive wealth gains through this process.⁵²

This happened alongside a renewed interest in and power of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) after the notoriously atheist Soviet period. After the dismantling of Soviet power, the Orthodox Church began acquiring wealth and networks of power. This led to a fractioning of the ROC into member groups, some vying for liberal policies, some vying for anti-Western Russian culture and religion, and other groups aligning themselves with American conservatives on policy issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. This struggle within the ROC continued into Vladimir Putin's presidency after 2000 when Putin began to provide the conservative factions political support and Russian oligarchs began to work with clergy and fund conservative projects within the ROC.⁵³

This was the political milieu American paleoconservative Allan Carlson entered in 1995 when he visited Anatoly Antonov and the sociologists at Moscow State University. It was then that he introduced the idea of starting a so-called pro-family organization with Antonov. By the end of their meeting, the first WCF conference was scheduled for Prague in 1997.⁵⁴

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was well represented at the first WCF conference in Prague. In an article from February 15, 1997, the *Deseret News* reported that the Church had official delegates appointed to speak at the first congress, including Bruce Hafen and Lynn Wardle (who had critiqued Soviet marriage policies in the quote

52. Black, Kraakman, and Tarassova, "Russian Privatization and Corporate Governance," 1740–1750.

53. Stoeckl, "Rise of the Russian Christian Right," 228–229.

54. Stoeckl, "Rise of the Russian Christian Right," 225–226.

above), professors at BYU's J. Reuben Clark School of Law.⁵⁵ Hafen was a member of the original team to plan the event in Prague and said that he was invited to participate by Carlson because of his legal background. When he arrived to plan for the congress, he distributed copies of the proclamation on the family to the committee members. The *Deseret News* article additionally quoted Oaks saying, "The Church is anxious to have official representation to show support for an effort that is itself supportive of wholesome values."⁵⁶ The article stated that copies of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" "will be distributed in Prague in the official languages of the World Congress of Families: Czech, English, French, Spanish, German and Russian."⁵⁷

The following year in 1998, Carlson, in his role as president of the Howard Center for the Family, Religion and Society and as the founder of the first successful conference of the WCF, was invited to Salt Lake City to meet with several members of Latter-day Saint leadership: Boyd K. Packer, Oaks, Relief Society General President Mary Ellen Smoot, and BYU President Merrill J. Bateman. The *Deseret News* reported on the dinner event and included important information about the WCF: "BYU and the Howard Center are the sponsors and co-conveners of the congress, with support from NGO . . . Family Voice, a BYU group that participates in the formulation of United Nations policy."⁵⁸ Oaks was a member of the board for the Howard Center for twenty-five years

55. "LDS to Be at World Congress of Families," *Deseret News*, Feb. 15, 1997, sec. Church News, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/1997-02-15/lds-to-be-at-world-congress-of-families-131491>.

56. "LDS to Be at World Congress of Families."

57. "LDS to Be at World Congress of Families."

58. R. Scott Lloyd, "Looking Forward to Congress of Families," *Deseret News*, Nov. 27, 1998, <https://www.deseret.com/1998/11/28/20774111/looking-forward-to-congress-of-families>.

and is currently listed as one of fifteen honorary board members of the WCF.⁵⁹

After the success of the 1997 congress at Prague, organizers began planning a second congress. BYU and the Howard Center would together sponsor the second WCF.⁶⁰ In 1999, NGO Family Voice transformed from an NGO to a branch of the BYU law school and changed its title to the World Family Policy Center (WFPC). Wilkins was the WFPC's only director in its eight years of existence. BYU's website about the WFPC states that the "primary goals" of the center "were designed to strengthen the family as the basic unit of society and to guide the United Nations in moral lawmaking practices."⁶¹ Carlson would later note in Wilkins's obituary that Wilkins was "one of the greatest and most energetic advocates of the natural family. He was particularly effective on legal matters involving the family and the United Nations."⁶²

Through these pathways, professors at BYU's law school weighed in on major international negotiations concerning the family. In the same period, BYU law professors began to take notice concerning the antidemocratic situation developing in Eastern Europe more broadly.

59. "Exposed: The World Congress of Families an American Organization Exporting Hate," Human Rights Campaign, 2015, 9, <https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/WorldCongressOfFamilies.pdf>.

60. Wilkins, "Defending the Family."

61. "Brigham Young University. World Family Policy Center," Brigham Young University, n.d., https://byuorg.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Brigham_Young_University.World_Family_Policy_Center.

62. "Pro-Family Leader Richard Wilkins Passes Away," *Illinois Review*, Nov. 29, 2012, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.illinoisreview.com/illinoisreview/2012/11/pro-family-leader-richard-wilkins-passes-away.html>.

While they worked to undermine LGBTQI+ rights across the globe and namely in Eastern Europe, the professors were concerned with what they viewed as religious liberty being stifled in the same region. The situation in Russia grabbed the attention of BYU's law professors in 2000 when Vladimir Putin was elected. Putin caused concern from BYU law professors since he called for a "dictatorship of law." At the same time, he also leaned into traditionalism, a useful platform for Latter-day Saints in their global fight against LGBTQI+ rights.⁶³

BYU's law school founded their International Center for Law and Religion Studies in 2000. Delegations from the center contribute annually to UN side events in New York and Geneva, and the center "pursues law reform by . . . frequently providing expert review of draft legislation and constitutional proposals at the invitation of government and civil society leaders."⁶⁴ The center's director was W. Cole Durham, whom Oaks had praised in his speech in 2014 just before introducing the ideas of Sorokin. Durham, a Harvard law graduate, has taught courses across Europe. Since 1994, he has been a recurring visiting professor of law at Central European University in Budapest. He also has taught at Ovidius University in Constanta, Romania. His prominent role has been to draft constitutional law in Eastern Europe. The associate director of the new center was Elizabeth Clark. Clark is a particularly talented international law professor, fluent in Czech and Russian, and has working knowledge of German and French. She has published multiple books and articles

63. Richard Sakwa, "Putin's Leadership: Character and Consequences," in *Power and Policy in Putin's Russia*, edited by Richard Sakwa (London: Routledge, 2009), 14.

64. BYU Law: International Center for Law and Religion Studies, "Our Mission," n.d., <https://www.iclrs.org/our-mission/>

on law and religion in postcommunist Europe and participated in organizations in Ukraine and Slovakia.⁶⁵

In 2001, Clark addressed the US Senate—in her position as associate director of the center—concerning religious freedom in Europe. With her testimony, she provided a written statement that she and Durham drafted (she excused Durham for having conflicting obligations).⁶⁶ She raised concerns that fear and prejudice in Western Europe around small religious sects—which, she said, Europeans inaccurately called “cults”—was spreading dangerously into Eastern Europe, and she

65. A condensed list of the works by Elizabeth A. Clark: Elizabeth Clark and Dmytro Vovk, eds., *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2019); “Civil Religion and Religious Freedom in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” in *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2019); International and Comparative Law Protections of Collective Aspects of Religious Freedom, 75 S. Ct. L. Rev. (Canada, 2016); with W. Cole Durham Jr. and Silvio Ferrari, eds., *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2003); “Religious Exceptionalism,” in *SOVREMENNOM OBSHCHESTVE*, edited by Ekaterina Elbakian (Moscow: ATISO, 2009); “Conscientious Objection in the United States,” in *Vyhrada vo Svedomi: Conscientious Objection*, edited by Michaela Moravcikova (Bratislava, Slovakia: Ustavu pre vzťahy statu a cirkvi, 2006); “A Comparative Perspective on Secular Governments and Equality of Religious Organizations,” in *ПРЕДЕЛЫ СВЕТСКОСТИ. ОБЩЕСТВЕННАЯ ДИСКУССИЯ О ПРИНЦИПЕ СВЕТСКОСТИ ГОСУДАРСТВА И О ПУТЯХ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ СВОБОДЫ СОВЕСТИ*, edited by Alexander Verkhovsky (Moscow, 2005); “A Comparative Analysis of Religious Association Laws in Post-Communist Europe,” in *Religious Registration Laws in Post-Communist Europe*, edited by W. Cole Durham Jr. and Silvio Ferrari (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2004); “Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief Through NGOs,” in *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook*, edited by Tore Lindholm, W. Cole Durham, Bahia G. Tahzib-Lie, Elizabeth A. Sewell, and Lena Larsen (Leiden, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 2004); “Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights on Freedom of Religion and Belief,” in *Desyat' let Po Puti Svobody Sovesti* (Moscow: Institut religii i prava, 2002).

66. “Religious Freedom in Europe and Around the World,” US Government Printing Office, June 1, 2001, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg72558/html/CHRG-107shrg72558.htm>.

called on Congress to intervene.⁶⁷ In the written statement provided, Durham and Clark provide background to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, according to which religion was listed as a protected human right and sexual orientation was not. The statement also asked for NGOs to be established in Eastern and Central European countries especially to “make it easier for national centres to exchange information.”⁶⁸ She asked the US government to work with NGOs and said that “dialog can also be encouraged through existing multilateral organizations,” but she did not indicate what organizations she meant.⁶⁹

WCF had held its Third World Congress in Mexico City in 2004 which was coconvened by the WFPC through BYU’s law school.⁷⁰ By 2007, BYU law professor Hafen had advanced to a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ third-ranking leadership body, the Seventy, and was president of the Europe Central Area, highlighting how BYU law professors who fought against same-sex marriage were rewarded with positions of power in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While in that Church position, he oversaw the Fourth World Congress in 2007 in Warsaw. In his speech, he commented that “the current debate about same-gender marriage is potentially a good thing, because the debate will force us to clarify what marriage is, and should be.” This point would come to fruition in the United States the following year and throughout Eastern Europe over the course of the next decade and into the current one.⁷¹

67. “Religious Freedom in Europe and Around the World.”

68. “Religious Freedom in Europe and Around the World.”

69. “Religious Freedom in Europe and Around the World.”

70. Jordan Burke, “Congress of Families Lures Nearly 3,500,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 30, 2004.

71. Bruce Hafen, “World Congress of Families,” *Deseret News*, May 25, 2007, sec. The Church News.

2008: Russians go to the United States, Latter-day Saints go to California

Russian political interest in the WCF was bubbling up within institutions that had been shut out of political power during the Soviet period, namely the ROC, just as representatives of the ROC were coordinating with the Russian military. Several historians, including Kristina Stoeckl, have uncovered the points of introduction of the WCF into the orbit of the ROC by 2008.⁷² Through a series of connections starting with Antonov, the WCF began networking with people with close connections to both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Kremlin. Stoeckl and others show that through the network of connections starting with Moscow State University professor Antonov, Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov was introduced to the WCF team. He was able to develop the relationships between the WCF, the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Russian military. Stoeckl said that without Smirnov, the WCF “would not have become part of the ROC’s strategy on family.”⁷³ Smirnov introduced business consultant Alexei Komov to the WCF. Komov flew to Colorado Springs, Colorado, for a meeting with the WCF. Stoeckl reports that Komov said to the group in Colorado: “Hello, I’m Alexei Komov from Russia. I’m a business consultant and let us become friends and do a big World Congress of Families in the future in the Kremlin.”⁷⁴ Smirnov and Komov were the pieces of the puzzle linking Russian military efforts, the ROC, the WCF, and, ultimately, the American Christian right, including high-profile members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This created a bond moving all these political forces in the same direction at once, which created a strong alliance.

72. Stoeckl, “Rise of the Russian Christian Right”; Bluhm and Brand, “‘Traditional Values’ Unleashed”

73. Stoeckl, “The Rise of the Russian Christian Right,” 228.

74. Stoeckl, “The Rise of the Russian Christian Right,” 228.

Though others may have dismissed Smirnov's plans in Colorado in 2008, he was ultimately able to secure a WCF conference in Moscow set for 2014. He did so not only by recruiting support from the Moscow Patriarchate but also through support of Russian oligarchs. Vladimir Yakunin was the former head of the Russian railways and married to Natalia Yakunina, who founded the organization Sanctity of Motherhood in 2006. By 2014, Sanctity of Motherhood would sponsor the WCF conference. Smirnov also recruited Konstantin Malofeev, who founded the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation in 2007, which operated an Orthodox private school and TV station tsargrad.tv, "which promotes Russian Orthodox statehood."⁷⁵ In 2019, Malofeev became vice director of the World Russian People's Congress, which is directed by Patriarch Kirill himself.⁷⁶

While Komov was winning over WCF representatives in Colorado, Latter-day Saints ramped up political interference in same-sex marriage legislation. On June 20, 2008, all Latter-day Saint congregations in California began Sunday service by reading a statement by the First Presidency, the top three leaders of the Church, which urged: "We ask that you do all you can to support the proposed constitutional amendment by donating of your means and time to assure that marriage in California is legally defined as being between a man and a woman. Our best efforts are required to preserve the sacred institution of marriage."⁷⁷ The First Presidency was speaking about an initiative they quite literally helped to put on the California ballot. Proposition 8 (Prop 8) was a response to a Supreme Court ruling in California, *In re Marriage Cases*, which deemed discrimination against same-sex marriages to be unconstitutional. Prop 8 was a response that would change

75. Stoeckl, "The Rise of the Russian Christian Right," 229.

76. In Apr. 2022, Malofeev was sanctioned by the United States for his participation in the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 by Russia.

77. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church*, 131.

the constitutional definition of marriage in California as between a man and a woman, which was exactly what Hafen had called for in Warsaw. Discrimination against same-sex couples, proponents of Prop 8 said, would not apply to marriage if the legal definition of marriage included this stipulation.

Much research has gone into how much the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contributed financially and in volunteer hours to try to pass Prop 8. One investigation found that, while Latter-day Saints made up 2 percent of California's population, they amassed 48 percent of the total contributions for Prop 8.⁷⁸ A Church official also held a conference call for forty to sixty Latter-day Saint donors asking them to contribute \$25,000 each to fight for the California proposition.⁷⁹ On the podcast, *Called to Queer*, my cohost and I interviewed two queer Latter-day Saints who have spoken about their experience as BYU students during the 2007 and 2008 political movement for Prop 8.⁸⁰ These queer students were asked to join phone banks calling Californians initially asking them to sign to get Prop 8 on the ballot, and then, later, asking them to vote for the measure. BYU students who were California residents were asked to collect signatures.⁸¹ Historian Gregory Prince wrote that "there is no question that California members believed [voting 'yes' for Proposition 8] was a loyalty test. The prophet had spoken; if you didn't follow the counsel of the prophet, your loyalty was suspect."⁸²

78. Monica Youn, "Proposition 8 and the Mormon Church: A Case Study in Donor Disclosure," *George Washington Law Review* 81, no. 1 (2013): 2120–2121.

79. Youn, "Proposition 8 and the Mormon Church," 2121.

80. Colette Dalton and Kate Mower, *Called to Queer*, podcast, episode 2, "Colette Dalton (she/her)," n.d., <https://calledtoqueer.com/index.php/episodes/>; Colette Dalton and Kate Mower, *Called to Queer*, episode 22, "Chelsea Gibbs (she/her)," n.d., <https://calledtoqueer.com/index.php/episodes/>.

81. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church*, 127.

82. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church*, 131.

Though Prop 8 passed, it was later found to be unconstitutional and was not implemented.

In 2013, BYU law professors Clark and Durham submitted an *amicus curiae* brief to the Supreme Court of the United States trying to offer reasoning for why Prop 8 should stand in California.⁸³ The *curiae* consisted of a counsel of three—Clark, Durham, and Robert T. Smith—filed on behalf of the J. Reuben Clark Law School at BYU and sixteen other international scholars who focus on international and comparative law. Of these sixteen, three came from Slovakia, one from Bulgaria, one from Hungary, three from Italy, one from the Vatican, and one from the University of Notre Dame. Clark and Durham seemed to include many of their colleagues in the countries where they had influence and also with the Catholic Church whom the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had been partnering with on same-sex marriage legislation since 1991 in Hawai‘i.

The authors used international precedent to “protect the institution of heterosexual marriage” (worth noting here is that heterosexual marriage was not under threat anywhere in the world, including the United States, only same-sex marriage).⁸⁴ The BYU law professors argued that “international authorities confirm that there are rational, non-invidious reasons based in secular public policy considerations for the choice that the people of California made when enacting Proposition 8.”⁸⁵ Of the many examples the legal experts introduced in their *amicus curiae* of international precedent for stopping same-sex marriage in the United States was that of a 2011 civil code in Romania that included a “statutory interpretation of the relevant constitutional provision” that marriage is

83. W. Cole Durham Jr., *Amicus Curiae Brief of International Jurists and Academics in Support of Petitioner Hollingsworth and Respondent Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group Addressing the Merits and Supporting Reversal*, No. 12–144, 12–307, Supreme Court of the United States, Jan. 28, 2013.

84. Durham, *Amicus Curiae Brief*, 1.

85. Durham, *Amicus Curiae Brief*, 4.

a union between a man and a woman (not a constitutional amendment in Romania, but a civil code procedure).⁸⁶ The same year that Durham sent the brief to the US Supreme Court, the Theology Department at Ovidius University in Constanta, Romania, awarded him an honorary doctorate for his work teaching law at Ovidius and also for his work on international constitutions, including on Romania's constitution.⁸⁷ Eastern European and Latter-day Saint collaboration during the decade of the 2000s was therefore multifaceted, including through organizations like WCF, legal collaboration on Eastern European laws, and constitutions and United States' law, all of which placed anti-LGBTQI+ policies at the center of their attention.

From Moscow to Salt Lake City

In 2009, a year after Komov's arrival in Colorado Springs and Prop 8 was voted on in California, Amsterdam hosted the WCF. Latter-day Saints were well represented at the Fifth World Congress. At the time, a member of the second-ranking leadership body in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apostle Russell M. Nelson, spoke. Nelson had spent the 1990s opening up Russia and Eastern Europe to Latter-day Saint missionaries, headed the committee that wrote "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," and is the current president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His wife, Wendy Nelson, also spoke at the 2009 Congress. *Deseret News* reported that Elder Nelson "read extensive excerpts from 'The Family' and encouraged conference attendees to procure a complimentary copy of the

86. Durham, *Amicus Curiae* Brief, 9.

87. Sinziana Ionescu, "Americanul W. Cole Durham, Jr, Doctor Honoris Causa La Universitatea Ovidius," *Adevarul*, June 15, 2013, <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/constantia/americanul-w-cole-durham-jr-doctor-honoris-causa-1446544.html>.

document at the WCF” establishing a relationship between official Latter-day Saint legal and theological discourse and WCF.⁸⁸

Mary Ellen Smoot, former general president of the Relief Society who had initially met with Oaks and Carlson in Salt Lake City in 1998, spoke at the 2012 WCF held in Madrid.⁸⁹ Latter-day Saint missionaries were also in attendance and managed a booth operated with the help of local members.⁹⁰ In 2013, the WCF was held in Sydney, Australia. It was the first WCF where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints itself was listed as a sponsor.⁹¹ Between 2009 and 2014, WCF and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints concerned themselves with planning two major congresses to be held in 2014 and 2015, the first in Moscow and the second in Salt Lake City, the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The WCF was set to hold a conference in Moscow in 2014, but on February 27, 2014, Russia invaded the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. US President Barack Obama issued an executive order freezing the US assets of seven Russian government officials. According to a 2015 report by the Human Rights Campaign, the WCF had “deep ties to the Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin regime. It counts several members of the Russian government as allies, some of whom were sanctioned by the United States following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine [in 2014].”⁹² The White House press release stated that sanctions were issued “to

88. Jamshid Askar, “Families the Hope of Nations, Mormon Apostle Says,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 12, 2009, sec. Faith.

89. “Elder Erich W. Kopischke Speaks at the World Congress of Families,” *Church Newsroom*, May 12, 2012, <https://news-uk.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-kopischke-world-congress-of-families>.

90. “Elder Erich W. Kopischke Speaks at the World Congress of Families.”

91. “World Congress of Families Starts in Sydney: Why Society Needs Strong Families,” *Church Newsroom*, May 15, 2013, <https://news-au.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/world-congress-families-sydney-society-needs-strong-families>.

92. “Exposed,” 12.

impose costs on named individuals who wield influence in the Russian government and those responsible for the deteriorating situation in Ukraine.”⁹³ One of those officials was Russian parliament member Yelena Mizulina, a “staunch ally of WCF.”⁹⁴

At the time of the Crimean invasion, the WCF was associated with thirteen anti-LGBTQI+ laws in Russia.⁹⁵ Mizulina also introduced the so-called Gay Propaganda legislation, which outlawed LGBTQI+ public representation in Russia in 2012 and which continues to oppress and imprison LGBTQI+ Russian citizens and activists.⁹⁶

In 2013, when the Gay Propaganda Law was passed, there was a significant surge in violent attacks on LGBTQI+ people. It led to an “emboldened . . . right-wing vigilante group” called Occupy Pedophilia, which filmed members assaulting LGBTQI+ people.⁹⁷ This violence led to the anti-LGBTQI+ purges in the Russian republic of Chechnya starting in 2017. Chechen forces detained, tortured, and imprisoned gay men in concentration camps. Despite international attention, outrage, and Chechen forces facing human rights violations, the purges began again in 2019. Russian President Putin denied that gay people were being detained, tortured, and killed. LGBTQI+ activists cite the Gay Propaganda Law as the initial source to bolster violence in Russia against LGBTQI+ people.⁹⁸

Ahead of the Moscow conference, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Human Rights Campaign offered detailed accounts

93. Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet: Ukraine-Related Sanctions,” White House, Mar. 17, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/17/fact-sheet-ukraine-related-sanctions>.

94. “Exposed,” 13.

95. “Exposed,” 13.

96. “Exposed.”

97. Parke, “Natural Deception.”

98. Tom Batchelor, “Russian Police Round up LGBT Activists Demonstrating against Persecution of Gay Men in Chechnya,” *Independent*, May 1, 2017.

of the WCF's association with Russian politicians, oligarchs, and anti-LGBTQI+ legislation. They also exposed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' connections to the WCF and labeled the WCF as a hate group. This led to a 2014 op-ed piece published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* written by Latter-day Saint political operative Paul Mero. Mero wrote a manifesto on the "natural family" with Carlson and served as the vice president of the Howard Center, the supervisory organization for the WCF.⁹⁹ The op-ed was titled: "World Congress of Families Is Not a Hate Group."¹⁰⁰ As an appeal to the *Salt Lake Tribune's* dominant faith base, Mero mentions that the WCF has hosted leaders from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that it "is about one thing and one thing only: A celebration that family is the fundamental unit of society," while ignoring the ways in which LGBTQI+ families are not a part of that unit and the ways in which the WCF has organized anti-LGBTQI+ legislation across the globe, most especially in Russia.¹⁰¹

Due to economic pressures and sanctions from the United States, in July 2014, with the WCF Moscow conference set to begin just a few months later, the WCF "canceled" their conference, and in its place was a "Large Families" conference that included many of the participants and speakers from the WCF's conference list, taking place in the same location and on the same dates.¹⁰² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints made no public condemnation or statement on the invasion of Crimea. *Mother Jones* reported on those events just as the Large Families conference was getting underway in Moscow. The article

99. Allan C. Carlson and Paul T. Mero, *The Natural Family: A Manifesto* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2007).

100. Paul Mero, "Op-Ed: World Congress of Families Is Not a Hate Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 7, 2014, [https://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/sltrib/opinion/58156858-82/WCF; Carlson and Mero, *Natural Family*.](https://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/sltrib/opinion/58156858-82/WCF; Carlson and Mero, <i>Natural Family</i>)

101. Mero, "Op-Ed."

102. Hannah Levintova, "Did Anti-Gay Evangelicals Skirt US Sanctions on Russia?," *Mother Jones*, Sept. 8, 2014, sec. Politics.

ends with this: “Shortly after canceling its event in Moscow, [the WCF] announced that its 2015 international conference will be held in Salt Lake City.”¹⁰³

Despite the negative publicity, Salt Lake City hosted the conference in 2015. The Church-owned *Deseret News* offered a glimpse of what to expect from the conference and its speakers, including BYU professor Wardle.¹⁰⁴ In the article, the *Deseret News* celebrated the anti-LGBTQI+ work of Wardle, especially that he “was instrumental in passing a 1995 law in Utah that allowed the state to not recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states,” and noted that he is a “staunch opponent of legalizing same-sex marriage and has testified before congressional committees in support of Defense of Marriage Act.”¹⁰⁵ This was hardly, as Mero tried to argue in his op-ed, a stance that was only about celebrating the family. Elder M. Russell Ballard, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, addressed the conference as its keynote speaker. Ballard stated that Latter-day Saint theology is “completely linked” to the “traditional family” and that “society, law, and popular opinion may change, but we know that society’s version of the family cannot and will not substitute for God’s purpose and plan for his children.”¹⁰⁶

The Human Rights Campaign also gathered in Salt Lake City to hold their own event called the Inclusive Families Conference at the University of Utah. Ahead of the WCF conference, Dmitry Chizhevsky spoke about his experience being shot by an air rifle in St. Petersburg

103. Levintova, “Did Anti-Gay Evangelicals Skirt US Sanctions on Russia?”

104. Daphne Chen, “Whom to Watch at the World Congress of Families,” *Deseret News*, Oct. 25, 2015, <https://www.deseret.com/2015/10/26/20575228/whom-to-watch-at-the-world-congress-of-families>.

105. Chen, “Whom to Watch at the World Congress of Families.”

106. Jason Swensen, “Elder Ballard Defends Traditional Marriage at World Congress of Families,” *Deseret News*, Oct. 27, 2015, sec. Church News, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/elder-ballard-defends-traditional-marriage-at-world-congress-of-families-?lang=eng>.

in 2013, leaving him blind in his left eye. He was attacked for being gay. Reporter Hannah Levintova had asked Larry Jacobs, the director of the WCF, if the WCF played a role in the legislation and violence toward LGBTQI+ people in Russia. Levintova reports that Jacobs laughed before he said, “Yes, I think that is accurate.”¹⁰⁷ To date, the Salt Lake City WCF was the only one hosted in the United States. While the Howard Center in Illinois proudly boasts of its creation of the WCF, the 2015 conference location of Salt Lake City and its list of speakers show how deeply intertwined the WCF has been with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints over many decades.

Supreme Court’s Obergefell v. Hodges Decision

By 2015, though their efforts were thwarting same-sex marriage legislation internationally and their anti-LGBT organizations were thriving, Latter-day Saint leaders and BYU law professors were facing their biggest challenge. Just before the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage nationally, BYU law professors made one last attempt to squash it. Five law professors drafted an amicus brief for the US Supreme Court to hear before ruling on Obergefell v. Hodges in June 2015.¹⁰⁸ Although the Counsel of Record was listed as Wardle, the primary author of the brief was Clark with the help and support of Durham.

107. Hannah Levintova, “How US Evangelicals Helped Create Russia’s Anti-Gay Movement,” *Mother Jones*, Feb. 21, 2014, sec. Politics, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/02/world-congress-families-russia-gay-rights/>; “HRC Takes on The World Congress of Families in Salt Lake City,” *Human Rights Campaign*, June 27, 2015, sec. Press Releases, <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/hrc-takes-on-the-world-congress-of-families-in-salt-lake-city>.

108. Lynn D. Wardle, Elizabeth A. Clark, W. Cole Durham Jr., Robert Smith, and Donlu Thayer, Brief for 54 International and Comparative Law Experts from 27 Countries and the Marriage and Family Law Research Project as Amici Curiae in Support of the Respondent, No. Nos. 14–556, 14–562, 14–571 14–574, United States Supreme Court, March 30, 2015.

Given Clark's and Durham's backgrounds, the amicus brief had an international argument. The United States should not legalize same-sex marriage, the brief said, because only 6 percent of the world's countries did, and only one by means of the judicial system. There was an international precedent—an "emerging global consensus" even—to not legalize same-sex marriage. The argument was careful and deliberate: the conversation about legalizing same-sex marriage should continue in the legislative branch, and a decision should not be made by the judicial branch. Their argument was not surprising. Latter-day Saints had successfully won a legislative attack on same-sex marriage in California and elsewhere, but they had often failed in the court system.

When the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision was announced, *Deseret News* published an opinion piece by Michael Erickson beginning with: "In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, a bare majority of the Supreme Court upended the millennia-old meaning of marriage, invalidated the marriage laws of more than half the states, disenfranchised millions of American voters and sidestepped decades of constitutional law."¹⁰⁹ Then in an ironic statement given the evidence provided by this article, Erickson says, "Rule of law should not be 'rule of lawyers.'"¹¹⁰ A Utah attorney himself, Erickson claimed that same-sex marriage is merely an entitlement, not a "freedom from governmental action."¹¹¹

Whether Latter-day Saints agreed with it or not, the *Obergefell* decision became the law of the land. Now they would focus on two things: continued push for international anti-LGBTQI+ legislation and eradicating same-sex married couples and their families from Latter-day Saint congregations. Just a few months later, in November 2015, the

109. Michael Erickson, "Supreme Court's *Obergefell* Decision Threatens American Democracy," *Deseret News*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.deseret.com/2015/7/20/20568663/supreme-court-s-obergefell-decision-threatens-american-democracy>.

110. Erickson, "Supreme Court's *Obergefell* Decision Threatens."

111. Erickson, "Supreme Court's *Obergefell* Decision Threatens."

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints clarified that they would not allow children of same-sex couples to be a part of the Church and declared a doctrinal change that anyone within a same-sex marriage was an apostate, someone who God will declare their rath upon, and subject to excommunication.¹¹² With the matter cleared up within their own house, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its leaders, representatives, and law professors could once again turn their attention back to their international anti-LGBTQI+ fight.

The Romanian Case

LGBTQI+ organizations and activists strategized what to do about the 2018 Romanian Referendum well before it was voted on. Surprisingly, their strategy was not to direct voters to the polls to vote against the initiative. They simply told people to stay home. The referendum could not proceed if less than 25 percent of the voting population voted. While many factors, from the unpopularity of the party advocating for the referendum to pure indifference, kept people home, it is also true that activists were successful in keeping people from the polls and the initiative failed with only 21 percent of registered Romanian voters participating. The Romanian Constitution would not be changed to say that marriage was between a man and a woman. It would remain as it was, saying that marriage is between spouses. Romanian marriage would also continue to prohibit same-sex marriage, despite pressure from the European Union.

The question I wanted answered when I first heard of the referendum remains: Did the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints influence Romanian politics in terms of same-sex marriage? The answer

112. Laurie Goodstein, "New Policy on Gay Couples and Their Children Roils Mormon Church," *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/14/us/mormons-set-to-quit-church-over-policy-on-gay-couples-and-their-children.html>.

is, of course, yes through its influence in the WCF and the voices of prominent BYU legal scholars and other LDS activists. For years the Church had contributed to a global effort of religious paleoconservatives, especially in Russia and Eastern Europe, to make opposition to same-sex marriage one of their defining political goals. The alliances they had built were together decisive in bringing the referendum to a vote.

The referendum was not the first attempt by anti-LGBTQI+ activists to halt same-sex marriage in Romania. It had been a year's long struggle to get the initiative in front of voters by *Coaliția pentru Familie* (CpF). But CpF was not the WCF. Who were they? Although Romanian Orthodox observers were the majority of those supporting CpF, CpF, like the other anti-LGBTQI+ organizations in Eastern Europe, had its roots in the United States. The founder of CpF was Peter Costea, a Romanian American whose permanent residence was in Houston, Texas. The efforts to change article 48 of the Romanian Constitution from "spouses" to "man and woman" began in 2006.¹¹³ Costea found alliances in the United States and United Kingdom among religious institutions and organizations and modeled his crusade for the change in the Romanian Constitution off the lobbying and organizing efforts of American anti-LGBTQI+ organizations. His organization was called Alliance of Families in Romania and worked closely with the Alliance Defense Fund in the United States as well as other organizations.¹¹⁴

By 2008, the Alliance Defense Fund had its first success with support from the Romanian parliament to press the issue further. In 2009, discussions concerning the civil code were developing (as mentioned above in the US amicus brief submitted by Wardle, Durham, and Clark arguing for maintaining Prop 8). The civil code passed, and WCF

113. Vlad Levente Viski, "Istoria Coaliției Pentru Familie," *Adevărul*, June 14, 2018, <https://adevarul.ro/blogurile-adevarul/istoria-coalitiei-pentru-familie-1871243.html>.

114. Clifford, *Global Right Wing*.

co-ounder Carlson praised it: “Romania asserts itself through a strong position in favor of the natural family.”¹¹⁵ The efforts eventually led to the leaders of the Alliance of Families in Romania to reorganize into the CpF in 2011, pushing toward the constitutional referendum.

Southern Poverty Law Center reported on the history of the referendum just before the vote took place, claiming that it “would not have been possible without the heavy involvement of at least four wealthy American anti-LGBTQI+ groups—ADF International, Liberty Counsel, the World Congress of Families (WCF) and the European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ)—who filed legal briefs, lobbied or campaigned in favor of the change.”¹¹⁶ The Alliance for Families in Romania asked the WCF to “gather support from pro-family groups around the world,” which they did and they also created a petition in support of the Romanian Referendum.¹¹⁷ The petition was signed by 110 leaders who had founded their own organizations, including BYU law professor Wilkins and Latter-day Saint activist Sharon Slater, founder of Family Watch International.¹¹⁸ Slater, a prominent Arizonan Latter-day Saint, works primarily in Africa and the UN and fought for legislation

115. Viski, “Istoria Coaliției Pentru Familie.”

116. Hélène Barthélemy, “American Anti-LGBT Groups Battling Same-Sex Marriage in Romania,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, Sept. 18, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/09/27/american-anti-lgbt-groups-battling-same-sex-marriage-romania>.

117. Barthélemy, “American Anti-LGBT Groups Battling Same-Sex Marriage”; Don Feder and Larry Jacobs, “Over 100 Pro-Family Leaders from 22 Countries Sign Petition in Support of Romania’s Defense of Marriage,” *Christian News Wire*, Apr. 7, 2017, <https://archive.is/3uLdM>.

118. Barthélemy, “American Anti-LGBT Groups Battling Same-Sex Marriage”; World Congress of Families, “Petition in Support of Romania’s Defense of Marriage,” n.d., <http://web.archive.org/web/20120609010536/http://worldcongress.org/WCF/wcf.leadership.romania.0804.htm/>.

in Uganda known as the “Kill the Gays” bill and admits she was radicalized through attending the WCF conference in Geneva, Switzerland.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

In a series of hacked emails leaked from Russian hacker collective Shaltai Boltai (Humpty Dumpty), the WCF was exposed for their deep collaboration in Russian geopolitics, which gave Russian Orthodox oligarchs “access to the powerful American Christian evangelical political machine.”¹²⁰ The WCF, in fact, campaigned to keep Ukraine out of the EU.¹²¹ On February 24, 2022, after months of warnings, Russian military forces entered Ukraine. At the time of this writing, Russian forces remain in Ukraine, though they have fled the capital, Kyiv, with the Latter-day Saint temple still intact. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was nebulous about the invasion, to considerable dismay of Latter-day Saints in Eastern Europe.¹²² Latter-day Saint reporter and researcher Jana Riess wrote on February 28, 2022 that the statement the Church released on February 25, 2022, was “anemic,” “vague,” and “generic” to the point that “it wasn’t entirely clear whether it

119. “Family Watch International,” Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d., <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/family-watch-international>.

120. Hélène Barthélemy, “How the World Congress of Families Serves Russian Orthodox Political Interests,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/16/how-world-congress-families-serves-russian-orthodox-political-interests>.

121. Barthélemy, “How the World Congress of Families Serves.”

122. At the time of the invasion and while writing this, I live in Constanta, Romania, approximately one hundred kilometers down the Black Sea coast from the Ukrainian border. Latter-day Saint missionaries were removed from Constanta shortly after the invasion, to the dismay of Romanian Latter-day Saints. Romanian Latter-day Saints wanted a swift and thorough dismissal of the invasion by leaders in Salt Lake City.

was supposed to be addressing Russia's invasion of Ukraine the day before."¹²³ In fact, the statement did not mention Ukraine or Russia and had seemingly deliberate obtuse writing: "We pray that this armed conflict will end quickly, that the controversies will end peacefully, and that peace will prevail among nations and within our own hearts."¹²⁴ By April 2022, WCF funder and organizer Malofeev was indicted by the US Justice Department for evading sanctions. He had been sanctioned by the United States and the EU for funding the occupying forces in Ukraine.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint representatives and leaders saw a potential to expand their global reach at the conclusion of the Cold War in Eastern Europe building off their previous anticommunist statements and rhetoric. Just as the international dynamics of the Cold War shaped Latter-day Saint leaders' domestic US strategies, their domestic US conflicts over same-sex marriage inspired legal and political interventions abroad, giving Latter-day Saints the opportunity to influence global politics in their favor. They saw potential in Russia and Eastern Europe to expand their religious and political influence. They sent missionaries and BYU law professors to the region while they concurrently worked domestically on a traditionalist and right-wing anti-LGBTQI+ movement. Eventually, Church leaders and BYU law professors overlapped their influence in US and international politics, legislative branches, and judiciaries with a push for anti-LGBTQI+ constitutions and legislation. These leaders and professors founded organizations such as the WFPC at BYU's law school and participated in support for interfaith organizations such as the WCF. This network of organizational and legal support helped to create a

123. Jana Riess, "Amid Russian Invasion, LDS Church Issues Generic Denunciation of 'Armed Conflict,'" *Religion News Service*, Feb. 28, 2022, <https://religionnews.com/2022/02/28/amid-russian-invasion-lds-church-issues-generic-denunciation-of-armed-conflict/>.

124. Riess, "Amid Russian Invasion."

global anti-LGBTQI+ legislative and cultural movement particularly impacting the United States, Russia, and Eastern Europe, leading to discrimination, and, both directly and indirectly, the deaths of LGBTQI+ people. Though their approaches and rhetoric have shifted since the *Obergefell v. Hodges* US Supreme Court decision in 2015 legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States, Latter-day Saint representatives and BYU lawyers have continued to perpetuate and ignite new anti-LGBTQI+ discriminatory legislation in Eastern Europe into the present.

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THE LEGACY OF THE 1960'S "NEW ERA" AND SINGING MOTHERS TOUR ON LATTER-DAY SAINT GENDER ROLES AND THE FAMILY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Elizabeth Mawlam

On February 27, 1961, two hundred British Singing Mothers, dressed in matching Utah-sewn white blouses and fashioning neat, short, curled hair, stood in tiers on the stage of London's most prominent music hall. From the Royal Box, President David O. McKay proudly watched as "the International Chorus of Singing Mothers won and warmed the hearts of the audience at the Royal Albert Hall."¹ The ensemble, made up of disparate British Relief Society members, had been selected to form a chorus combined with more than fifty American singers and professional musicians with the purpose of improving the Church's public image and promoting missionary success. Commencing a tour that would take the troupe throughout the British Isles and Northern Ireland, the amateur chorus was formed to help British society "[realize] the greatness of the Church with its Relief Society movement, which includes the Singing Mothers."²

1. From a bulletin given to choir members, in possession of author. T. Bowring Woodbury, *New Era News: Mother Months*, Feb. 27, 1961.

2. Woodbury, *New Era News*, Feb. 27, 1961.

Adopted by the Church in 1934, the Singing Mothers program became an “important sideline” to the primary focus of charity and welfare work.³ From “Britain to South Africa . . . Argentina to Australia. . . [Where in 1960,] 46,000 mothers performed in 3,126 separate choruses,” the Singing Mothers universally proliferated the Church’s theological and social framework of Mormon women’s identity, as defined within specific ecclesiastical and familial responsibilities.⁴ Within current global research trends that focus on the variation of Mormon experience within different locations, this article utilizes the 1961 British Singing Mothers Tour as a demonstration of how American Mormon ideas on gender and family, such as the restriction of women to domestic work and men to breadwinning and the bulk of Church ministry, when disseminated, often adapt to local circumstances, varying in application and meaning in the lives of the members. Within a British setting, the tour not only placed women in a conspicuous, public, celebrated, and influential position, its realization demanded the collaboration, overlapping, and merging of traditional familial roles. As part of a broader developing British Mormon culture, the 1960s saw the formation of idiosyncratic British Mormon gender ideals and familial patterns that prioritized collaboration and personal agency over rigid definitions.

Theoretical Framework

Over the last forty years, the history of Mormon women and the family have been particularly rich themes through which to observe the ebbs and flows of religious movement and organization. Existing on the fringes of conventional and official histories, women often reveal

3. “Mormon Women Fight Adversity Through Relief Society Organization,” *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 100.

4. “Mormon Singing Mothers: An International Sisterhood,” *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 98.

alternative discourse of the experiences and reality of institutional, as well as lived, religion, often reflecting points at which the boundaries of religious orthodoxy are contested and adapted.⁵ However, much of the work produced on Mormon women's history has aimed to calculate the measure of freedom women hold within the Church's patriarchy. In response, historians are evading the tendency to define and categorize female autonomy within patriarchal systems by exploring the multiplicity of ways women use their agency as a tool to shape their religious experience and culture.⁶ Scholars are also discovering further multilayered insight in studying the religion within different contexts, such as sociological, political, and personal factors as well as influences based along intersectional axes of race, nationality, class, and so forth.⁷ These creative new perspectives have contradicted the American consensus of the Mormon female as silent, passive "pawns of the patriarchy" to vigorous participants in the unfolding saga of their belief system.⁸

In line with these theories, this article promotes the study of British Mormonism as a relevant lens to examine the experiences, perspectives, and agency of Mormon women who lie along the intersectional axis of gender and nationality. It primarily looks at the programs of the 1960s to understand how British females understood their position

5. Matthew Bowman and Kate Holbrook, eds., *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), p. 4.

6. See Catherine Brekus, "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency," in *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Kate Holbrook and Matthew Bowman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

7. See Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey, "Introduction," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (London: Routledge, 2020).

8. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Mormon Gender in the Age of Polygamy," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (London: Routledge, 2020), 87.

in the Church as essential contributors that corresponded with patriarchal prerogatives in the Church and home. This example is a clear demonstration that hierarchal structures are not the only influential systems; rather, overlapping formal and informal networks within the Latter-day Saint congregation create multiple opportunities for women to occupy a central network position and influence the larger Latter-day Saint community.⁹ Consequently, as shown by the Singing Mothers Tour, Church service in Britain necessitated a male-female collaboration that blurred expectations of gender roles disseminating from the institutional center. To develop this argument, this article also examines several oral history interviews of female converts during the 1960s whose perspectives were shaped in this era. They demonstrate how women developed a profound sense of agency and self-importance that has since defined their roles within the Church and home.

Carine Decoo-Vanwelkenhuysen's research has similarly explored how the intersection of society, politics, and nationality have affected the nature of lived religion among European Mormon women. Interviews performed by Decoo-Vanwelkenhuysen revealed that societal values of gender equality have caused Belgian Mormon women to minimize the Church's edicts of patriarchal privilege. Their secular empowerment, and belief in both gender equality and women's contributions to the Church, place greater emphasis on male behavior than on authority.¹⁰ Furthermore, Belgian women minimize Mormon theological gender differences, seen as products of American conservative values, while expecting full participation in decision-making.

9. Melissa Inouye, "Women and Religious Organization: A Microbiological Approach to Influence," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (London: Routledge, 2020), 313.

10. Carine Decoo-Vanwelkenhuysen, "Mormon Women in Europe: A Look at Gender Norms," in *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Kate Holbrook and Matthew Bowman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 219–222.

Despite the connections of Euro-American pioneer heritage, these women demonstrate the differences produced by a shift of time and space.

Yet the difficulty with proposing British Mormonism as a locus of intersectionality is that it seems to be indistinguishable from its American counterpart. Claiming a legacy that places their early converts as essential to the survival of the nineteenth-century Church, British Mormons are intrinsically connected to pioneers and polygamy. Furthermore, being overwhelmingly white and relatively privileged, British Mormonism does not seem the obvious choice in comparison to other locations with more apparent variables. However, Alison Halford's sociological work on English Mormon women offers it as a useful alternative paradigm to study the religion. She argues that these women resist a perceived Utah gender culture to the extent that they frame themselves as the antithesis of American Mormon womanhood. Halford continues to argue that rejection of the Utah "Molly Mormon" as the female archetype is a demonstration of their sensitivity to and resistance of American exceptionalism. In response, English Mormon women use the domestic sphere as a third space that supports Mormon gender practices by combining them with secularized gender discourses, allowing them to claim authority, rather than permitting the structural Church to dictate gender roles.¹¹

This article responds to Halford's work on British Mormon women by incorporating historical methods. Rather than focusing on what women think now, it looks at the historical context and influences of those positions. The oral histories used for this article were conducted in 2023. I have known each woman personally for many years, at varying stages of my life. This allowed for a high degree of familiarity and ability to ask specific questions. However, as their children are my

11. Alison Halford, "Women's Gender Roles and Mormonism in England," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (London: Routledge, 2020), 393–395.

peers, none of the women talked in detail of their marriages. Intentionally, I chose women who were teenagers or young adults at varying locations in England and Scotland during the 1960s. Their perspectives, therefore, reflect decades of Church participation and the ability to critically analyze the past in connection to their current positionality. For example, although each woman expressed feelings of equality with men in the past, they are glad women have increasing visibility within the Church. Still, their experiences are useful as reflections of a specific time and location that is pertinent to the purposes of this article, meaning future research conducted with the next generation of British women would likely produce different summaries.

The New Era

British Mormon women framed their role within the Church in the 1960s around internal and external social, cultural, and ecclesiastical developments. Despite maintaining a continual presence since 1837, the Church had persisted within a society that had, for decades, maligned the “Mormon Menace” and its system of “white slavery,” namely, plural marriage.¹² Even with rooted British traditions of nonconformism and religious freedom, baptism into the Church was highly counter-cultural, with members risking loss of relationships, community, and employment. Facing immense opposition from her mother and priest, combined with insults and abuse from neighbors, Catholic schoolgirl Carol persisted, often in secret, to defy familial and social expectations by congregating with the Mormons.¹³ In 1961, fourteen-year-old Alice was warned of a Mormon tunnel smuggling girls to America and faced

12. See Malcolm Thorpe, “‘The Mormon Peril,’ The Crusade Against the Saints in Britain, 1910–1914,” *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 69–88.

13. Interview of “Carol,” conducted via Zoom by Elizabeth Mawlam, Mar. 15, 2023. I use pseudonyms for all women I interviewed for this article.

severing connections with her grandmother if she joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹⁴ Both girls converted anyway.

Despite these preexisting pressures, the general increase of social freedoms meant young single women responded to the Mormon message in droves.¹⁵ Sophie explained how by the 1960s, the need for young women to contribute to family support had decreased with each generation, allowing herself access to unprecedented options of leisure, employment, and education.¹⁶ According to the *Millennial Star* annual summary, in 1961 approximately half of baptisms were female, while 84 percent of these were not obviously affiliated with a man. Although the interviewees were aware of the novelty of young American male missionaries, a factor that probably influenced some women's decision to be baptized, they each asserted their conversion stemmed from an independent religious conviction. At seventeen, Sophie traveled alone across her town to inquire about the beliefs of a small Mormon congregation nearby. Similarly, Ruth contradicted her family's antireligion stance by investigating the Church. Warned of becoming a "religious fanatic" by her father, her decision to be baptized reveals the level of independence she exerted even at home.¹⁷ After a period of scrutinizing Mormon dogma, Sophie and Ruth began a lifelong commitment to Mormonism, placing individual agency at the experiential and theological core of their practice.

14. Interview of "Alice," conducted via Zoom by Elizabeth Mawlam, Mar. 11, 2023.

15. Membership increased to 66,371 in 1965 from 16,623 in 1960, an increase of 299 percent in five years. See Ben Bloxham, James R. Moss, and Larry C. Porter, eds., *Truth Will Prevail: The Rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the British Isles 1837–1987*, (Solihull, England: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 442.

16. Interview of "Sophie," conducted via Zoom by Elizabeth Mawlam, Mar. 13, 2023.

17. Interview of "Ruth," conducted via Zoom by Elizabeth Mawlam, Mar. 14, 2023.

The social circumstances of conversion are central to understanding the mindset of British Mormon women converts of the 1960s. The autonomy these young women demonstrated would be maintained as the hallmark of their religious practice and belief, rather than a surrendering of will and control to an autocratic, patriarchal religious system. These perspectives were cultivated further by the character and objectives of the British Church at the time. In 1958, the first Mormon temple in the British Isles was dedicated, the second in Europe after the Bern, Switzerland, temple was dedicated in 1955, essentially ending the persistent trickle of immigrants looking to America for prosperity and acceptance.¹⁸ After decades of slow missionary activity, the Church began a thoroughly organized promotional program coined “the New Era.” Conceived by Church headquarters, Britain would undergo a huge missionary and building construction campaign with the aim to expand membership and improve public image. The Church set goals for thousands of baptisms, plus the formidable task of erecting fifty chapels within five years.¹⁹ Significantly, although organized and influenced by American leaders and businessmen turned mission presidents, the task was mandated to all the British members. In May 1960, at the creation of Britain’s first stake in Manchester, Elder Harold B. Lee proclaimed, “Here, within the righteous heart of every member of the Church might be said to be the seed-corn of the growth of the Church. The pure in heart is the beginning of the growth of Zion.”²⁰ Every Saint was expected to completely dedicate themselves to the effort of building Zion in Britain.

18. See Anne S. Perry, “The Contemporary Church,” in *Truth Will Prevail: The Rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the British Isles 1837–1987*, edited by Ben Bloxham, James R. Moss, and Larry C. Porter (Solihull, England: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 424–441.

19. Michael Lyman Rasmussen, *Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 197.

20. *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, May 1960, p. 190.

How these female converts perceived their roles within a patriarchal church was informed by the belief that the New Era was a collective responsibility, one that identified itself as a community of cooperation as much as a gendered hierarchy. Claudia Bushman has explained, "Administration of the congregation is in the hands of the members. They are like shareholders in a large corporation with a stake in the company. They own it."²¹ Although the program was designed and disseminated by a clear patriarchal pyramid, its application on the ground level was less structural than collaborative. One woman explained, "It is great to associate with so many fine capable saints and to call them brother and sister. As a team we can build chapels, wards, stakes, branches, auxiliaries, quorums, etc. We can help bring peace back to the earth and prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour."²²

The emphasis on mutual effort meant that women felt the burden of Church growth was not gender specific, that, as Elder Duane Thomas wrote in the *Millennial Star*, "each saint must do his part and take a full share of the load."²³ Females were called to dedicate leisure time to proselytizing, following a long tradition since the First World War of the homegrown British "lady missionary."²⁴ One woman explained how she was caught up in the communal invitation to contribute to the missionary effort: "When the district missionary system was first introduced here into the British Mission, many people were going forward to do the work. But I held back because I felt so inadequate, and I felt that I had enough to do. Well, I know that this is very wrong, but I just sat back all the same. Then about nine months ago I had a very strong

21. Inouye, "Women and Religious Organization," 312.

22. *Millennial Star*, Feb. 1961, p. 62.

23. Duane Thomas, "The New Era," *Millennial Star*, Oct. 1960, p. 429.

24. As American missionaries left Britain during World War I, they were not replenished. Accordingly, more than four hundred British lady missionaries carried on the majority of missionary activity, actually increasing the annual baptism rates.

desire come within me to become a missionary. It was such a strong desire that I could not help but notice it. Now how grateful I am that I accepted the call.”²⁵

Although the bulk of foreign and home missionaries were indeed male, women were expected to contribute to the pressing targets of congregational growth and expansion. This assessment also applied to the building program. While many males were called as full-time labor missionaries, each member anticipated contributing time to the literal construction of the chapels, such as Sophie, who helped lay the chapel patio, and the Relief Society group, which scrubbed and painted walls.²⁶ Even when contribution was superficial, the principle was collective effort, as Alice recalls: “[Over] eighteen months we were all round about building the chapel. Every Saturday I went up, and well, all of us did. We always say we helped build the chapel.”²⁷ Construction aside, to achieve the chapel quota, the British Saints were expected to raise approximately 20 percent of the total cost of each building.²⁸ Fundraising consumed congregations as they painstakingly deposited pennies toward the project, the burden occasionally compelling families to leave the Church.²⁹ Both men and women accepted the responsibility, organizing bazaars and concerts and performing other paid construction and manual labor. Salvation appeared to rest on an individual’s contribution to the endeavor, as one woman explained: “Perhaps the greatest responsibility we have toward our Church is that of serving. Our Church not only permits but demands the participation of its people. Everyone who will participate is given the opportunity, and

25. *Millennial Star*, Aug. 1960, p. 363.

26. “Sophie” interview.

27. “Alice” interview.

28. James Perry, “Church Builder Program,” <https://uk.churchofjesuschrist.org/church-builder-intro>.

29. Rasmussen, *Mormonism*, 180.

everyone is encouraged to participate. The degree to which we take part in these spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social exercises will determine the degree to which we are eventually saved.”³⁰ To be a British Mormon meant contributing to programs that were frequently not gender specific, or, due to the high numbers of young single members, not necessarily family oriented, placing missionary work and ward strengthening as the imperative and definition of membership.

The New Era program directly affected how women perceived their function and status in the Church, namely a powerful influence within a benevolent patriarchal structure. In the minds of these women, this relationship inferred equality through cooperation and interdependence, rather than male dominion. However, this claim does not mean that women did not also uphold traditional gender roles typical of the 1960s. Each woman interviewed expressed their expectation of marriage and motherhood. Similarly, having mostly transferred from other Christian denominations, they assumed men would take the lead of priesthood jurisdiction and duties. However, these arrangements were viewed as natural and were not seen as prohibitive to other expressions of autonomy and influence. Furthermore, the British cooperative model of the 1960s blurred the boundaries of these expected Mormon gender roles, such as the confinement of women to service within the home and Church auxiliaries. To achieve the aims of the New Era, the British Church required an extensive use of imagination, skills, and labor, necessitating a fluidity between boundaries of all members and priesthood rank. For the 1960 Valentine Dance in the York and Scunthorpe Branches, Sister Anne Sneyd was master of ceremonies, while a Brother Cook took charge of the refreshments.³¹ Another anecdote recorded in the April 1963 edition of the *Millennial Star* demonstrated this reality: “The Branch President of the Lowestoft Branch was forced

30. *Millennial Star*, Aug. 1962, p. 187.

31. *Millennial Star*, May 1960, p. 222.

to vacate his office recently, *the branch members had decided* that it was the best room in their Chapel house to convert into a grocery shop. This was the first major venture of this kind by the Lowestoft Branch, although they had previously run a sweet kiosk in one of the school-rooms. . . . The shop has been such a success, in fact, that the profits keep five labour missionaries in food and clothing and no further call is made on the branch members.”³²

Of course, there are many possible factors that influenced people’s decisions to join the Church in the 1960s. This article does not consider the role of economics, class, or what attracted young males to join. Still, it elucidates the historical context of why and how women perceived their gender roles within the Church as fulfilling. The circumstances surrounding conversion and the intense scale of the New Era program granted women with a sense of purpose and responsibility within a linked community of Saints that emphasized cooperation as imperative as hierarchical status. The 1961 Singing Mothers Tour is a valuable example of how Britons crossed traditional Mormon gender roles to fulfill to the Church’s aims.

The Singing Mothers

As a prominent feature of the New Era strategy, the Singing Mothers Tour directly affected British members’ comprehension of women’s ecclesiastical role and how families functioned. The sisters selected for the grand choir had been given a holy appointment, elevating their level of significance and contribution. One commented, “It was as though the sisters had been transformed from ordinary wives and mothers and given the voices of angels.”³³ In a religious culture that revered busyness, being selected to join the tour increased the women’s self-perception of utility and value within the Church. One local choir director’s comment

32. *Millennial Star*, Apr. 1963, p. 118 (emphasis added).

33. *Millennial Star*, Apr. 1961, p. 148.

reveals the exceptionalism that was associated with adding the choir to one's list of service: "All the sisters held more than one position in the Church, some holding eight and nine; most of them were district missionaries; five out of the 18 were Relief Society presidents; most were visiting teachers, Sunday School teachers, MIA presidents, genealogical chairmen and secretaries. As usual, those with the most to do were prepared to do more."³⁴ Furthermore, many of the women could not read music, meaning participation in the choir was an unparalleled opportunity to develop musical ability and gain a highly visible, powerful skill for church service. Respected across the Church, the women viewed themselves as central players with an exceptional command of influence within the British Church.

Although it would seem the Singing Mothers program would confine the roles of Mormon women to musical and familial responsibilities, it was in fact celebrated as the epitome of female power, authority, and responsibility. The project directly shaped the perception of gender equality among Mormon women of the 1960s by giving them prominence and status, suggesting that "gender tensions in Mormonism are [not] due to inequality in the religion, but due to invisibility of that equality."³⁵ For Britons, the tour was not just an ancillary program within the Church, but a God-inspired mission, central to the New Era initiative, through which women represented and promoted the whole Church within British society. One writer claimed the choir superseded similar efforts made by the American Church, that "J. Walter Thompson, Ltd., the advertising company working for the church, has estimated that the Singing Mothers alone received four times the public

34. *Millennial Star*, Jan. 1961, p. 33.

35. Neylan McBaine, "To Do the Business of the Church: A Cooperative Paradigm for Examining Gendered Participation Within Church Organizational Structure," in *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*, edited by Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, and Hannah Wheelwright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 262.

comment that the Tabernacle Choir did when it was in Britain six years ago.”³⁶ Endowed with purpose and evangelical authority, one woman asserted, “The song of the Singing Mothers will never end, for they will touch the souls of many who have never before opened their hearts to the message of truth. They will open the way for another New Era in the history of Great Britain.”³⁷

Given its effect on perceptions of female influence within the Church, the Singing Mothers program likewise helped form the idiosyncratic nature of British Mormon familial ideals and patterns. It demonstrated how even though the women relished the traditional roles of wife and mother, they felt that in a church setting, the demands of membership required an overlapping and merging of gender roles in church and family. At the heart of this understanding was a belief that the interdependence of men and women was necessary for the tour to succeed, that both exert influence within complex organizations at grassroot levels.³⁸ Instead of upholding delineated gender expectations, the Singing Mothers Tour was celebrated by the women because it disrupted traditional gender roles, relying on the cooperation women had come to assume was at the heart of church organization. Therefore, their idea of equality was not primarily based on what women were permitted to do, but what men and women could achieve together. One woman even framed cooperation as a theological mandate: “It is not the Lord’s plan that she should do this all on her own, and she will be far more willing to help you go out on your Church duties if you will help her.”³⁹

The Singing Mothers Tour disrupted traditional gender roles out of necessity because it required enormous sacrifice of time, money, and

36. *Millennial Star*, May 1961, p. 170.

37. *Millennial Star*, Feb. 1961, p. 79C.

38. Inouye, “Women and Religious Organization,” 313.

39. *Millennial Star*, Jan. 1963, p. 17.

domestic labor, demanding the collaboration and assistance of male members. Compared to the stereotypical Utah congregation, British Mormonism was highly distributed and sparse, meaning many members did not easily have the local support network of other Mormon women to ease their load. One woman explained the difficult logistics that were common among the singers: "It has not been an easy task. . . . Many have travelled by train or bus a distance of 50 miles or more on cold, foggy days, leaving their families until 11 or 12 p.m. Many are taking private voice lessons weekly, some twice a week, to condition their voices in mastering these difficult numbers. A few sisters have sought part-time jobs to help pay the expenses entailed from travelling long distances once or twice a week for district rehearsals."⁴⁰ Another described the level of organization needed for her to attend an impromptu rehearsal:

It seemed a physical impossibility for me to go. My husband could not get time off that day, and we have no near relatives. . . . Our dear Relief Society president . . . called a special meeting of all the sisters to see what could be done. . . . Eventually four different brothers and sisters became involved in taking the child[ren]. So complex were the arrangements . . . Peter, aged one year, was taken to Sister Ashmole on Monday night, then promptly at 7.30 a.m. the following morning Brother Malyon arrived with his minibus to convey Simon, aged two, and Kay, aged four, to Sister Humphries' house. . . . Sister Sands, looked after Timothy, aged six, until school time. . . . He was again looked after in the evening by Sister Sands until my husband came home from work at night. . . . My heart is full of gratitude when I think of my wonderful husband at home who has sacrificed two weeks of his three weeks' summer holiday to completely run the home and care for the children.⁴¹

Many men stepped in to fill childcare and domestic duties while women fulfilled their musical calling. Male support of the Singing

40. *Millennial Star*, Feb. 1961, p. 77.

41. *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 167.

Mothers was often crucial, as evidenced in the case of one woman, who could not find anyone “to take care of her children after only a few days and . . . was forced to return home.”⁴² One woman described the marital cooperation that was essential and common among the participants:

I was so thrilled when I was chosen to join the Singing Mothers. . . . I am afraid that I had not given a thought as to what would happen to my family if I did go. But my husband said not to worry about that and to just get down to the business of learning the songs. Twice a week I made the journey, which took me an hour and a half each way. . . . My husband and I seemed to pass each other on the stairs, but we both felt that this calling was important.⁴³

Another article described the reality for the men as they supported the program, stating, “[The] president of the Leicester Stake, had his own problems to cope with whilst his wife was away. He had taken two weeks of his holiday so that he could look after their six children, but one day he had to go to the office to attend to some urgent business. The older children were at school, but what could be done with the youngest? There was only one solution, and that was to take him to the office, and two-year-old Jonathan thoroughly enjoyed his day at work.”⁴⁴

Despite the interference of family life caused by the tour, members relished the novel spotlight it created, with one family featuring in a *Nottingham Post* article titled “Dad Runs Family While Mum Sings.”⁴⁵ Rather than hiding the struggles, families were commended for facing them, justified by the belief “that the Lord would bless their families and watch over them until their return.”⁴⁶ Validated by divine sanction,

42. *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 159.

43. *Millennial Star*, Apr. 1961, pp. 201–202.

44. *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 161.

45. *Millennial Star*, May 1961, p. 248.

46. *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 163.

the tour fit neatly within the framework of the New Era, an assignment given to women yet made achievable by the culture of cooperation within local congregations.

The 1961 Singing Mothers Tour achieved its purpose, with many local newspapers praising the quality and artistry of the performance. Yet it also demonstrated how American Mormon ideas, when disseminated, must adapt to local circumstances, varying in application and meaning in the lives of the members and their families, often creating unintended outcomes. Translated in the lives of the British members, the tour was a formidable task. It placed untrained, inexperienced women in a position that did not automatically match their abilities, while requiring them to dramatically reorganize their lives and families so they could fulfill the calling. Yet it also instilled an exceptionalism within British Mormon women that influenced their perception of gender and family throughout the following years.

The Ideal and the Real

The hype surrounding the Singing Mothers Tour inspired women to assert that “no other Church would afford such an opportunity to its members.”⁴⁷ However, the novelty of leaving families in the care of the husband for a few weeks does not mean gender roles were completely dissolved—far from it. Despite the high level of cooperation and shared responsibilities, British Church units reflected the traditional Mormon gender divisions of female-led Relief Society, Young Women’s, and Primary organizations, leaving the all-male priesthood the bulk of religious ministry, preaching, and bureaucracy. Motherhood, marriage, and support of the priesthood were revered and promoted as central components of Mormon theology and female responsibility. However, as demonstrated by the Singing Mothers Tour, British women believed the pressures of membership on individuals and the family

47. *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1961, p. 165.

were significantly greater in Britain than in America. Consequently, American Mormon definitions of womanhood were viewed as unrealistic cultural exports of perfectionism, causing women to prioritize their agency over Church teachings when making crucial decisions. Women also expected collaboration over deference to gender roles.

British Mormon women of the 1960s valued their lives as wives, mothers, and teachers. Gender divisions were compounded by social and Church assumptions that a woman would marry young and enjoy caring for her husband and children. Many women happily embraced these roles, such as Carol, who described family life fulfilling her dreams: “[It was] marvelous, absolutely wonderful. I can remember before getting married the things that I really wanted to do. I wanted us to be able to have family prayer. I want us to have a store cupboard. I wanted us to be able to go to church . . . and it was just bliss, absolute bliss.”⁴⁸ Sophie similarly reflected, “I can remember standing doing the washing up, looking out into the garden in our first little home, and there was a robin on the coal bunker and . . . my heart was just full.”⁴⁹

For its British readership, the *Millennial Star* idealized the female roles of wife, mother, ward chorister, and teacher, encouraging women to happily accept being the invisible supporter of male duties. One article noted, “It is not easy for a young woman to be left alone taking care of the children, night after night, while the husband is out doing church work, but I do not think that this life was intended to be easy. It is such a short time in eternity and yet so much depends on our meeting its test. So much is at stake.”⁵⁰ Other stories described women who learned to

48. “Carol” interview, 2023.

49. “Sophie” interview, 2023.

50. *Millennial Star*, Jan. 1963, p. 17.

reconcile the strains, often through a process of self-effacement. One related,

Gradually through prayer, determination, and discussions with other sisters in the same position she began to adjust her attitude and help Brother Storer with his studies, his talks, waiting up if he was late with a hot meal and a soothing word. When he had a problem, she would fast with him. He progressed through various positions in the branch and then became Branch President and later District President of the former Nottingham District. Looking back . . . Sister Storer says that what troubled her most was being left alone; and her neighbours didn't help by their remarks about his absences. [But] she was quick to reply, 'At least I know where he is and what he is doing.' When they were silent, she realised what a great blessing this was, for some of them did not know where their husbands were. From then on, she resolved that she would help him all she could.⁵¹

Although members understood and supported the Church's teachings on ecclesiastical and familial gender roles, their perceptions evolved with circumstances. Being a British Mormon in the later twentieth century was often characterized by a tremendous sacrifice of resources and time required to sustain small church units. Women frequently endured lonely evenings while their husbands visited other families and attended endless meetings. Carol described the situation that was common among families: "At one point, [my husband] was the stake's Young Men's president. He was the stake seminary and institute coordinator. He taught in Sunday school, and he had two other callings. He had five callings altogether, as well as having a family, and as well as having a full-time job."⁵² Rebecca recalled feeling abandoned when her twenty-three-year-old husband was called as bishop, leaving her every evening to manage their small children.⁵³ Sophie similarly

51. *Millennial Star*, Sept. 1963, p. 281.

52. "Carol" interview, 2023.

53. "Rebecca" interview, 2023.

recalled, “There was a point where it became really overwhelming, . . . the demands of the callings we had, which we faithfully accepted, and much of the time, I’m sure, didn’t do justice to, because we were spreading ourselves very thinly with multiple callings. . . . And we just sucked it up, which is we did it without stopping to say, how is this really impacting our family?”⁵⁴

Tensions appeared when families felt the strain of performing Church callings they felt were unsustainable within smaller, weaker church units compared to Utah congregations. Carol recalled, “Millions of meetings, millions of meetings. . . . Busy, busy, busy, busy, too demanding, I would say, too demanding I wouldn’t stand for it now. . . . I wonder how much of it was a reflection of the Utah Church. . . . How on earth did we put up with it? . . . To me it was just priesthood leaders, feeling that they had to staff their unit . . . and as long as they had a full staff, well then . . . the people could go hang.”⁵⁵ Sophie similarly asserted, “I think there was a bit of simmering resentment, which I didn’t really recognize, but felt nonetheless . . . in fact, on one or two occasions I can remember sort of just asserting, but we’re British! We don’t have to think like that, you know. . . . I felt somehow . . . that the Church was transplanting cultural expectations on us which were neither needed nor necessary. So, I did push back against that.”⁵⁶

Despite the common resentment felt by women being left at home while their husbands fulfilled Church callings, their discontent was not based on feelings of gender inequality or female invisibility. Rather, the dissonance between the ideal and the real was caused by attempting to replicate the Utah Church model in locations with fewer members and resources. British women responded to the situation by reconfiguring their expectations of what Mormon women should look like and how

54. “Sophie” interview, 2023.

55. “Carol” interview, 2023.

56. “Sophie” interview, 2023.

families should function. They used their agency as the ultimate guide of navigating their relationships at church and home.

Collaboration and Agency as the Expected Standard

Reacting to the perceived performative demands that emanated from the central Church, British Mormon women viewed teachings of gender roles as an ideal that reflected traditional conservative American Mormonism, one that was suited to more affluent families carrying less demands of Church service. For these women, the incongruency of American Mormon policies and ideals in the lives of British members meant agency developed as the central component of navigating Church membership and family life. They claimed absolute orthodoxy by asserting their agency to decipher what general, gendered, and familial Church edicts were relevant to their situation. Learning over time to “pick and choose” between relevant expectations was fundamental to their religious stability, especially when such edicts directly impacted the family.

The women interviewed for this essay projected a self-assurance that has clearly developed over time. Alice described how she first exercised her agency to set aside Church teachings concerning birth control:

It was like this big burden on your back that you were disobeying the prophet, you just had to let the children come, and it was awful! . . . And I thought, I can't, I can't have another baby so soon. . . . [Well] I remember once I was hanging clothes on the line and I prayed, Heavenly Father . . . I can't remember the answer, but it was something along the line that it's acceptable, what you're doing. I don't care what anybody says, I feel Heavenly Father understands me. He loves me. He knows I'm trying to do my best, and I'll just plow on and just ignore all the rest.⁵⁷

57. “Alice” interview, 2023.

She also described how she came to dismiss prophetic counsel to garden. Relating to Spencer W. Kimball's instruction to grow vegetables, she said,

People would say, you've got this huge back garden for growing vegetables! Well, we did have a go at it, and it cost us a fortune in time and in money, and you could buy carrots around the corner for pennies. And I'm thinking this isn't sensible. . . . But a lot of it was coming down from President Kimball, you must plant a garden! . . . You did feel the guilt. . . . I think that was when [my husband] was bishop. . . . Four children to look after while [he] was devoted to the youth in the ward. We didn't have time to do a garden. And I'm thinking, we're doing so much Heavenly Father, do we have to have this garden that's costing us a fortune? You know, it just wasn't sensible.⁵⁸

The autonomy these women developed also extended to how they interacted with priesthood leadership. When asked to be Primary president in her ward while simultaneously holding multiple positions, Carol resisted. Apprehensive of how this call would affect her young family, she responded, "No, I can't do it. Sorry." She explained, "There was an expectation, and to me it was it was wrong. . . . They were quite shocked. I may have been a diminutive five feet, but I was so forceful. I really feel that with some families there was some suffering because of it, and to me it was just [wrong]."⁵⁹ As these women negotiated the realistic application of Mormon ideals, they continued to expect a high level of male-female cooperation as crucial in the Church's operation. Instances of male domination were seen as byproducts of personality and male weakness, rather than the status quo. Each woman recalled "a couple of times" when they were surprised by male attitudes that contradicted the assumed model of respect and collaboration. Sophie recounted, "I'd asked what I thought was [a] perfectly valid suggestion. . . . And I was cut short, we didn't even have a discussion. . . . I felt it was like

58. "Alice" interview, 2023.

59. "Carol" interview, 2023.

well, unrighteous dominion.”⁶⁰ Rebecca similarly recalled, “I was stake young women’s president and I felt they were running over me . . . and that I had received revelation, and they were ignoring me. . . . I was so frustrated, it was dreadful. My immediate leader . . . he just ran over everything I said. I was so, so upset about it. About six months later, we discovered he got excommunicated. He’d been having an affair with a woman, and the first thing I said was, it *was* me getting revelation, and he didn’t get it!”⁶¹ In both instances, the women blamed male spiritual weakness for disrupting their expectations of cooperation rather than an imbalance of positional power.

As they navigated discrepancies, British Mormon women identities became centered on a direct connection with God and a belief of female autonomy, one endowed with the agency to classify their orthodoxy. Their understanding of faithfulness has evolved, now believing extensive hours of Church involvement is unsustainable for families and even damaging to their children. Ruth explained how her son left the Church because he felt he “couldn’t give [the church] what they wanted.”⁶² Sophie related that as a new convert “when the Church said ‘Jump!’, We’d say, ‘How high?!’” Now she feels she is allowed to decide her level of participation in programs other than Sunday attendance.⁶³ They further explained how they have not imposed traditional Mormon gender expectations on their daughters but have promoted higher education as an equal priority to motherhood. They also expressed relief that the Church has become more relaxed, as Alice explained, “Church leaders now seem a lot more understanding. There’s less what I’d called hardliners in the Church now, and there’s more emphasis on just do your best.”⁶⁴

60. “Sophie” interview, 2023.

61. “Rebecca” interview, 2023.

62. “Ruth” interview, 2023.

63. “Sophie” interview, 2023.

64. “Alice” interview, 2023.

Conclusion

As British Mormonism entered its “New Era” phase in 1959, existing and new members joined a visionary collaboration that focused on communal growth and strength. Men, women, and families shared the burden of progress, claiming a self-importance that superseded leadership hierarchies. On their tour, the Singing Mothers elevated their position as the most prominent and valuable missionaries of the time. Consequently, British Mormon women originating from the 1960s believe patriarchy in the home and Church does not equate to gender inequality. This understanding has been perpetuated by years of asserted independence, initially through conversion and continued by an assumed culture of cooperation. When the expectations placed on families have been overwhelming, rather than condemning unequal structures of power, they have considered the associated problems as the effects of unrealistic American demands. The women have constructed a Mormon identity rooted in a perception of self-sacrifice and exceptionalism, one they see as equally, or arguably, more valid than American standards. They feel free to contest local and general patriarchal authority because they ground religiosity in personal revelation, justified by a lifetime of personal sacrifice.

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THE SHAPE OF MY FAMILY

Tammy Grounsell

A family is a thing with edges. The edges can grow, shrink, smooth off, and get spikey and sharp. The changes that happen can be full of joy, sadness, loss, trauma, comfort, or strength. None of those are mutually exclusive.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a salvific core based entirely around eternally binding family links. While in recent years the less-than-ideal family circumstances are acknowledged, and even embraced, depending on the character of the ward or branch you are in, the 1980s and 1990s were a time that being married in the temple and having children were perceived as success, which meant that, of course, circumstances other than that were then understood to be failure. The only possible consequence of living within this paradigm was that shame and secrecy would shadow all mistakes, and repentance would be perceived as a herculean task to be embarked upon alone.

In my twenties, I found myself single and pregnant. My biggest thought was that I would need to tell my parents—they were good people, but they would be hurt. I wished that I could have contemplated abortion but at the same time knew that I could not do that, even though I longed to be able to not have to think about the situation. Marriage, or even partnership, was out of the question. I could be a parent but did not understand how I would financially support myself and another person. I was filled with feelings of terror and failure in equal quantities. Humiliation haunted me as I threw up, fainted, and wept my way through my early pregnancy.

Due to a move, my ward changed. I was five months pregnant and showing. After a couple of weeks, my new bishop called me in for a chat. He was gentle but straight-talking and wanted to know what my plans

were. The conversation emphasised the spiritual advantages and protection that being sealed to a family would give my child and pointed out that I was not in a position to provide that. The impression that I was left with was that deciding to keep my baby would be a selfish choice, as it would leave the child more vulnerable and exposed. I left with a leaflet about adoption.

My experience up to this point was that either marriage or adoption were the righteous choices if you were to find yourself in this situation. Single parenthood was seen as not a sensible decision, and I did not see young single parents at church. They seemed to vanish from view once their pregnancy was public knowledge. One girl was very rapidly married and, even more rapidly it seemed, moved to Canada. Abortion was not even discussed; it felt as though the discussion had already been made and that there was no need for further thoughts. The sacrifice of adoption and putting the child's eternal needs ahead of my own grief were perceived as the only real way to put right what I had done wrong. Sexual sin was still being taught as being second only to murder, and, as practically a murderer, I probably needed to be focussed on working on my own spiritual salvation rather than raising a child. And a child would be safer spiritually if they had parents they were sealed to. No mention was made of the child's possible feelings of rejection, self-worth, and confusion or how it might affect their mental and spiritual health. I do wonder whether those things were talked about with the adoptive family.

It took some time to feel resolved on a course of action. I lived alone in the house that my grandparents had lived in when they were alive. I was a distance away from family and friends, and I sank thankfully into the solitude that created. I knew that whatever decision I made, it was important for me to know that I had made the decision without their influence. I wrote lists of pros and cons, prayed, walked, rewrote, prayed, walked, scribbled out, prayed, and of course, cried. It is difficult to explain how I came to the decision that I did, but I do know that I worked hard to get there. One night, while I was praying, I just realised that I knew that this baby was not really mine. It seems counterintuitive,

but it was from that moment I developed a strong sense of the baby being with me. I felt certain he was a boy and felt his companionship and a sense of being together. When I first held him and looked into his face I felt, “So that’s what you look like!” rather than “Hello!”

We were together for three days. The nurses were kind to me and did most of the changing and feeding; one reminded me that legally I still had three months to make a decision and that I could change my mind and take him home. But I didn’t feel like a mother—the mother, a nurturer, the nurturer—I felt that I had done my bit. That is not to say my heart did not break. Oh, it broke. It still does each time I picture us sitting on the edge of the hospital bed, me in a too-thin National Health Service issue dressing gown and him tightly swaddled as I had learned he liked to be. I came to the point that I realised that the pleasant, inconsequential chatter of the LDS Family Services social worker was no longer necessary and that it was time to hand him over. I gazed at him, and he became still. I scoured his eyes for judgment, or accusation, or hate but saw wisdom, patience, and an eagerness for things to begin. We read each other in those moments, and I imprinted him onto my soul. I wanted to be sure that I would know him if I bumped into him in the street. Then I gave him to the social worker and got into bed. She left. I was still bleeding.

My mum took me back to my grandparents’ house, stayed a few days, and then went home. I didn’t manage well at first, but she and a couple of good friends checked on me by phone. Between them all, I got through those first grief-maddened weeks. I don’t remember those days individually, but I know that time passed and eventually I could put his photograph into a pocket, rather than need to keep it in my hand. My social worker from LDS Family Services helped me understand how to move on in little steps without having to leave him behind.

There were moments when I felt comforted and held by each of my grandparents, and I was glad that I was in their house, with some of their things that had been part of my childhood. It felt like a safe haven. One day, I walked to the cemetery to say hello. It was a bright

early spring morning, one of the first of the year that had tempted me out, and the gardener had hung his coat on my grandad's headstone. He was embarrassed when he realised that it was Cyril I was there to see. He apologised and said that he had thought that Cyril wouldn't have minded. I agreed and asked him to keep his coat there. My grandad hadn't met and married Nana until my mother was sixteen and had left home, but he enjoyed the surprising number of grandchildren—by birth and through fostering—she supplied. He was a quiet man, full of acceptance and love and his friend, the gardener, summed him up. Nana was trickier when alive, but I felt her strength when I needed her that winter. A couple of years later, it suddenly felt urgent to go to her grave to say thank you. A kind friend asked no questions and drove me a hundred miles so that I could do that. It felt good to acknowledge the part she had played—her house, her village, her friends, and herself.

Since 2014, LDS Family Services has evolved into a largely counselling service and is no longer run as an adoption agency. Its focus is helping those who need help whatever the circumstances. This feels like a move away from deeming people and their families as successes or failures, and that can only be a good thing. It needs to be made clear that my local leaders were full of love and that I do not feel that I was forced, coerced, or manipulated by them into handing over my beautiful baby boy to the LDS Family Services, though I still cannot believe that I did it. I can play the last moments that I had with him over in my mind, and it feels as though we are both there, in the moment. That would be heaven.

But that cannot be. Eighteen years later, he killed himself. Overdose. It is not known whether it was accidental or not, but he had been struggling with his mental health. A telephone conversation he had with his adoptive mum a few days before suggests that possibly something had been a last straw for him.

When it happened, I was living overseas with my family—my married-in-the-temple husband and born-under-the-covenant children. A week before we were due to return home, the phone rang. My

daughter had messaged a few minutes before the call to ask if I could take some books to school that she had forgotten to put into her bag that morning, and as I was walking past the landline gathering her things, it rang. My baby's mother introduced herself, and I told her that I needed to finish what I was doing and would call her back. Not daring to think, I drove to school, dropped off the books, drove back, and called her. She said that a couple of days earlier our son had been found on the floor of his university accommodation and that it had been too late for anyone to help him. We cried together and talked. I missed him all over again. I was also blindsided and angry. Angry that I had to grieve twice, angry that I had to comfort his mother, angry that she wanted a copy of the photograph I had from those too few days at the hospital, angry that I had been so sure that I had made a decision guided by the Spirit and that this was the result. I was angry with my husband for being so kind and sad with me. I was suddenly angry that my baby's family knew him as a baby, boy, and man, and I only knew his newness. I was angry that his newness was gone when that was all I had of him.

Not many years later in the run up to that anniversary, there was a message from my youngest brother telling us all that he had done a DNA test and found that we had another brother! The new half-brother is older than me (I was the eldest up until this point), and he had been adopted. He had also done a DNA test at around the same time, and my brothers found each other. As siblings we rallied around our dad. We knew that he needed to know that he was loved by us, and so we hugged him and told him how excited we were to meet our new brother. My dad aged visibly and could barely meet our eyes. It has taken him more than two years to feel anything other than shame. What a shame! For I have found the new formation of our family life-affirming. After a while our new brother came to meet us, and it was wonderful. He looked like us and laughed at the same things as us, and our family has changed shape making room for him, his wife, and daughters. One of them is getting married this summer, and our shape will change again.

We are becoming more supple, leaning out and pulling in, rather than haughtily peering over defensive crenellations at intruders.

I am now friends with my baby's mother and his sister. His sister has children, more than half of whom are adopted. His mother is married for the second time. My youngest brother and sister-in-law adopted their youngest child, and I held him during their sealing.

My family is bendy and that has been our salvation. Our soft edges are our strength. I do not understand why the family is the sacred thing that it is, and I do not fully understand the essential nature of the sealing power of temple covenants. I do know that a sealing does have both the power to save and to destroy, depending on how we use it. If we embrace with love the changes that we and others choose to make, either wisely or not, as well as those that are imposed upon us and our families, it is then that it has the power to save. It is sharp, unyielding edges that create tension and discord, feelings of rejection, and confusion about belonging. My family is not even distinctly shaped enough to be the square peg trying to fit into the round hole of the traditional nuclear family, but as we grow in all sorts of directions, and are willing to share family space with all, I find we have the possibility of a life abounding in love. To misquote Wendy Cope and her lovely poem "The Orange":

I love you. I'm glad we exist.¹

1. Wendy Cope, "The Orange" in *The Orange and Other Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2023).

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BRINGING THE YANKEE HOME: A GAY MORMON, THREE DECADES ON

Oliver Alden¹

Since joining the Church, I have been blessed with a number of revelations relating to my life as a gay Mormon. Perhaps more remarkable may be how few of these I actually understood correctly when I first received them. Time has provided them clarity.

Three of these I described in an essay published under the same pseudonym in *Sunstone* nearly thirty years ago.² Of these, the first was a private but crystal-clear spiritual prompting, as I first began to wrestle with my sexual orientation, that I had agreed in the preexistence to take this on. No elucidation as to *why* I would ever have done this having been provided (although I now know exactly why), I swiftly jumped to the conclusion that it was because I would, somehow, heroically triumph over it, perhaps (I flattered myself) becoming an exemplar

1. I've chosen to continue to use a pseudonym, after all these years, out of respect for the mother of the man about whom much of this essay revolves, who is still alive and may be hurt by the publication of details about him that might cause her pain or embarrassment. I have also altered small bits of my description of him to mask his identity. I have not altered any details about myself other than my name, and my identity will probably be easily ascertainable. I would ask, out of consideration for her feelings and her privacy, that those who do know it not post it on the internet.

2. "My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?" Meditations of a Gay Mormon on the 22nd Psalm," *Sunstone*, August 1995, 44–55, reprinted in Terryl L. Givens and Reid L. Neilson, eds., *The Columbia Sourcebook of Mormons in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

of how this could be done. The reality proved almost catastrophically the opposite. None of prayer, serving a mission, attending the temple frequently, or professional counseling yielded the triumph over my orientation that I had believed would follow, and within a decade I was so sorely tempted and so dismally defeated in my aim that a caring bishop had to spend many months counseling and urging me not to go through with the suicide that I had already mapped out (revolver, late evening at the office), at first convincing me to remain alive for just one week, and then a second, and then yet another. Ultimately, I went back to the Lord, laid out in prayer that I couldn't defeat this, couldn't overcome this, couldn't go on, and was given the second of the revelations: that if I lived my life with a man, with chastity before lifetime commitment and fidelity within it, I would not lose my salvation. It was hardly the answer, or the transformative miracle, for which I had hoped.

The third of those revelations becomes the focus of this essay. A year or two later, following an auto accident, I sought a blessing from my elder's quorum president, a rather unbending, gay-unfriendly, "hold to the iron rod" type. To his profound shock and dismay, he blessed me not only that my physical injuries would heal but also that I would "meet the man who is to be your companion in this life." He was visibly appalled, and speechless, following the blessing he had pronounced, but he was right. My injuries healed, and shortly after that, I met that man, although it took me nearly twenty years to figure out that I had.

It was in a doctor's office waiting room. I'd finished my appointment and returned to the waiting room while the office personnel processed my paperwork and filled my prescription. His was the second appointment following mine, and he was early. I can still recall vividly, thirty years later, opening the waiting room door and seeing him, his lanky form sprawled across one of the chairs. He was breathtakingly handsome. Somehow, as I sat waiting to be called up to the payment desk, I mustered the courage to chat with him, my inveterate icy formality undermined by his Southern charm. Then I was summoned to

the front, made my payment, and, still far too intimidated by him to be able to manage anything remotely more appropriate, turned to him with something like “it was very nice speaking with you,” and walked out the door.

A long hallway led to the parking lot. Halfway down it, I ducked into a restroom to regroup and to try to steel my nerve to go back. After ascertaining that no one else was there, I practiced aloud in front of the mirror, repeatedly, until I could muster the courage to walk back into the waiting room and proffer him my business card, but when I reentered the waiting room, he was gone. Downcast, cursing the shyness I felt around him but expecting that there was now no way I would ever see him again (I could hardly ask the women at the front desk to give him my phone number), I turned to trudge disconsolately down the hallway to the parking lot. Then I looked up. He was coming down the hallway toward me. He had tried to chase me out to the parking lot before I drove off but hadn’t seen me duck into the restroom.

He called me at the office later that day, eschewing the normal gay dating admonition to wait three days so that you don’t seem too interested, beginning, quite superfluously, by reminding me, in his Southern drawl, who he was (“Hah there, Aah’m that guy . . .”), as if there were a chance in the world I would have forgotten him in the intervening hours. “How often,” I wondered, “does he think this happens to me?”

We spoke on the phone several times, and our first date followed, although its beginning proved very rocky. My LDS moral standards for dating behavior (the gender of my date aside) were not exactly widely shared in our urban gay community, so I made it a point to make clear beforehand my no-sex-before-marriage rule so that there would be no awkward misunderstandings or disappointed expectations. It thus came as an unpleasant surprise when he arrived with a mattress tossed in the back of his pickup truck, suggesting that we drive up and park in the isolated hills far above our city’s gay ghetto. I was incensed. “Exactly which part of what I explained on the phone was not clear to you?” He

raised both palms and said, "Aah promise." It was probably unwise of me to rely on his promise, as he was a full six inches taller than I and powerfully built, but I flattered myself that I had excellent instincts for character (I was also a gym rat back then and quickly calculated that I could do serious damage if he tried anything), so I got into the pickup and off we went. He never broke that promise, not that evening, not ever. I don't recall if we even held hands, but I do recall lying in the back of that pickup truck next to him, staring at the stars above the hills, speaking quietly with one another until an owl hooted, and he shushed me and said, "That's Bob." After a pause, I began to talk again until the owl's mate hooted in response from the opposite direction, and I got shushed again. "That's Bobette." And I realized that this displaced Mississippi country boy had not brought me up into the hills hoping for sex. He wanted me to see with him the world he cared about, one so unlike the Wall Street and Mercedes life I led. I fell in love with him that evening, and I have never ceased to be deeply in love with him, even though as I write this he has been dead almost twenty-seven years.

I knew he would die from the day I met him. I was at that doctor's office for some minor medical ailment. He was there, he told me upfront, because he had AIDS, which back then was a death sentence. He was completely asymptomatic outwardly but had fewer T cells left than I had fingers and toes. I calculated that he would live two years, based on what then was the typical trajectory. Peculiarly, it emerged, as we grew to be an item, that despite having so very little left of his own life, what he wanted to do with what he did have left of it was to be my protector, to spend his life making sure that I was OK. "Would it help," he offered one evening as I complained about some nasty political problem at work, "if your six-foot-seven boyfriend showed up at the office?" I insisted that I was perfectly capable of handling it myself. Only later did I realize that the proper response to his offer really should have been "I love you too." Fortunately, he was very patient with me.

It would have been hard to imagine a more outwardly mismatched couple, even aside from our divergent HIV statuses. A chasm gaped

between our educational attainments, my Ivy League degrees (four of them) against his high school GED (he'd had to drop out of high school in his little town after confessing his gay inclinations to a counselor at his fundamentalist church, mistakenly thinking it would be kept private). To my friends, he looked like the closest thing they'd ever seen in the flesh to a character from *The Dukes of Hazzard*. My shocked best friend grasped valiantly for words following the double date at which I introduced Beau Duke³ to him and his live-in girlfriend (now wife), eventually settling, with studied diplomacy, on "he's too tall for you." Few would spend enough time around him to see that, whatever Beau lacked in formal education, his IQ was actually far higher than mine. Only one Ivy League friend, with whom we had also double dated, afterward wrote me a gracious note—one I still have—telling me "it was nice to meet [Beau] and to see how happy you are to be with him." I was. I've never been more happy in my life than when I was with him. I did, however, demur when he wanted to take me back to visit his small hometown in Mississippi. A gay couple in Mississippi in the 1990s? "They'll burn a cross on the lawn," I insisted. "Yeah," he deadpanned, "what wouldn't they do if Aah ever came home with a Yankee?" He won these verbal sparring matches every time, somehow managing to do so without me ever feeling like I'd lost. We had only one fight ever. It was, ironically as it turned out, about buying a car.

Sex was a difference too, at least on paper. Beau had been very sexually active (a gross understatement); I never had been. His then-untreatable disease terrified me, although we could in theory have limited our sexual activities to the narrower menu of safer ones. However, it seemed crystal clear to me that he could not possibly be the man who was supposed to be my "companion in this life" from that blessing. After all, he was going to be dead in two years, so he couldn't be "the one," couldn't be the man the Spirit had in mind when it prompted

3. When I pass through the veil and see him again, I am going to be in big trouble for this one.

that horrified elder's quorum president's blessing, right? *Right?* Beau was just a random guy along the way whom I had somehow managed to love more deeply than I'd ever thought possible. Should I get myself excommunicated, booted from my community, for such a short-term (and potentially medically dangerous) relationship? Wall Street said no. Doesn't pencil out. But there was another factor of paramount importance to me as well: my testimony, and in particular my testimony of the temple. Beau was going to die. I wished I could die in his stead. I would have done anything in the world to save him, but there was nothing I or anyone else could do—except, I grasped for straws, his temple work. No one else would ever do it. I doubted that I technically fell within the eligibility guidelines to submit his name, but, I thought, “I *dare* them to try to tell me he is not my family.” So I strove to keep myself from breaching the law of chastity so I could still go to the temple and surreptitiously recorded his personal information, and even committed his genealogy to memory as if I were some sort of Celtic bard, and wondered how on earth I was ever going to explain to Mr. Companion-in-This-Life, should he happen along inconveniently during the required one-year waiting period following Beau's death, that he was just going to have to sit back and wait for a year until I could do the temple work for Beau. It was the only thing I could do to save him, all I could do to help him. And I never again regretted the choice to be gay I'd been told I made in the preexistence, the choice I'd fought against and revolted against with everything I had for all those years in the past, because if it was what put me in the position where I could help Beau in any way at all, I would choose the same again in a New York minute.

Beau never protested the lack of sex. He did make jokes about it. Seeing my stare of disbelief once when he ordered an enormous volume of food (in a restaurant in a straight part of town), he loudly remonstrated, “But honey, you know I'm eating for two,” and then, as the waitress walked away and I tried to calculate whether I could render myself invisible by simply sliding under the table, added sarcastically,

“That would be an immaculate conception, now wouldn’t it?” He had other sexual outlets, with my knowledge. Very early in the relationship, I received, in error, a message from him trying to set up an anonymous sexual encounter with a man whose name he obviously didn’t even know. I couldn’t tell whether he was more surprised when I was the one who responded or that I quietly made it clear I did not care if he had anonymous sex. Had *we* been having sex, I would probably have cared a whole lot, but we weren’t, so to me this was, simply, the deal. It remained the deal. Later in the relationship, the only thing he ever said once, in a quiet moment together, was “This is different. Platonic.” He never once broke the promise he made to me on our first date, at the beginning of that evening up in the hills above the city with that mattress in the back of his pickup truck. In fact, the only one who ever started to break it was me, once, in a weak moment. He wordlessly declined to cooperate, just staring fixedly at me until I realized what this would mean and stopped in time, this man who saw himself as my protector, even from himself, even from myself, who was incapable of doing anything that he thought might hurt me. He never thereafter tried to coax or cajole or push me into sex, none of the usual “you know you really want to” (even though I had provided ample evidence that I really did). He never even mentioned it. Ever. He’s the closest I can come to understanding how a God who is omniscient can nonetheless promise to forget completely those sins I cannot help but recall in excruciating detail.

And then he died. It was actually closer to three years since the day we met, since the evening I fell deeply in love with him talking on a mattress in the back of his pickup truck, listening to the owls and gazing at the stars.

Grief proffers few comforts, but one is that it eventually leaves the bereaved person so emotionally seared that a strange kind of quiet sets in. One night following Beau’s death, as I left the office for home, bereft, alone, I vividly recall driving around a corner that I had otherwise

turned thousands of times over the years in my daily commute, and thinking, in that strange, almost detached, quiet: “Now I understand the Taj Mahal. Now I understand how a man can spend the whole rest of his life building a monument to his grief.”

One year on, I did his temple work. I recall next to nothing of his baptism itself, only, oddly, noticing the sign in the men’s changing room afterward, admonishing me, ungrammatically, to “dry off good.” His initiatory work I recall more vividly. The aged temple worker, noting how very young he died and focusing on the similarity in our ages rather than the difference in our surnames, asked if this was my brother. Guessing that “no, he was my boyfriend” would likely get me tossed out of the temple, I went with a laconic “no.” There was only one other patron in the initiatory booth at the time, a Cambodian brother doing the work for members of his family slaughtered in the killing fields. I reminded myself “you have not been singled out for tragedy.” I maintained my composure through his initiatory and then through his endowment until the veil, where I lost it completely, racked by sobs so severe that I was nearly doubled over and almost howling, as the stunned temple workers stood by, frozen. By the time my long paroxysm of grief subsided, the veil worker had completely lost track of where we were, so I asked myself the next question and answered it, and he resumed and let me pass through the veil.

That was supposed to be the end. Certainly, Beau wasn’t supposed to be my eternal companion. I assumed that the mention in that blessing of a companion “in this life” was because I would be resurrected out of being gay and would be straight in the next life. He wasn’t even supposed to be my companion in *this* one. Just a random meeting that somehow resulted in a love that a straight friend once told me was of a depth many people never get to experience in their lives. Just an accident.

Still, I couldn’t help building that monument to my grief. Once it was no longer too painful, Beau’s photograph appeared on my desk at work, where it sat for decades, forever twenty-nine as I careened

through—and beyond—middle age. (“Pretty soon people are going to stop asking if that’s your partner and start asking if it’s your son,” a colleague close enough to me personally to get away with saying that once joked.) At the peak of my career, when the annual bonus checks were enormous, I’d open them, look at Beau’s picture, and announce “we are in *high* cotton,” a Southernism he had favored. I left instructions that, when I died, his picture was to be placed in the coffin with me. (It was not clear how anyone was going to explain that to Mr. Companion-in-This-Life, assuming he outlived me, but I wouldn’t have to be the one to do the explaining, as I’d be dead.) I refused to get rid of my car (it’s a 1990; I still drive it) because I had squired Beau around in it. (“Park it in the driveway,” another colleague hissed through clenched teeth once it achieved a visibly embarrassing age, “and get another car.”) Passengers were not even allowed to touch Beau’s seat adjustments, which made things a bit uncomfortable for those not six foot seven (and even more so for anyone in the back seat), until I realized that my mechanic had been moving the seats regularly for years every time he serviced the car, which had grown to be quite frequently. No one was allowed to play “our song” in my presence. Indeed, no one was even allowed to play anything in my presence sung by our song’s *artist* (who obligingly soon fell out of fashion). When people asked how long I had been a widower, for that is how I described myself, I had an unnerving habit of answering with excessive precision how long it had been since I lost him (“thirteen years, three months, and twenty-seven days”) until I realized that, important as I thought this running count, others found it a little creepy. Once cell phones appeared, his picture went onto mine, and I began showing it to all and sundry, like some new grandparent indiscriminately imposing pictures of the grandchildren on reluctant audiences. (“You’ve shown us before,” people say, as they exchange embarrassed glances.) Having seen *Man’s Search for Happiness* too many times on my mission, I hoped, when I died, that it would be Beau who would come to take me home.

Notwithstanding all this, for some years I dated on and off, looking to find that companion in this life who was, after all, supposed to be showing up somewhere along the line. It was not half-hearted either, although Beau posed a pretty high bar. I got my heart broken once, and broke one once, and once was even engaged briefly, but none of the relationships ever went anywhere. "I'm not [Beau]," one of the more insightful ones told me. Meanwhile, the Lord kept dropping hints. I kept missing them.

The first came at perhaps the two-year mark after Beau's death. I went to stake conference one Saturday night, exceptionally, as I usually regarded the Sunday morning portion as plenty. As I sat there, quietly and almost alone in our stake center's beautifully historic chapel before the meeting began, a thought that felt remarkably like the Spirit passed through my mind: "He's your guardian angel now." Nothing further. "That's not us. That's the Catholics," I helpfully corrected the Spirit, batting this away. Apparently the Spirit deals poorly with attempts to correct it, as I don't recall receiving any significant revelations, on the gay subject or any other, for some time after that. Note to self.

Around year eleven after Beau's death, I grew extremely angry with him for dying on me, as if his death had been intentional, as if he hadn't warned me from day one. My life had begun to have bumps other than the gay issue, which had really been my lone albatross up until that time. "Life," I told him angrily in my head, "this business of *living*, this is actually really *hard*. How can you have left me to do this alone?" That guardian angel prompting should have clued me in, but I'd dismissed that as just some stray thought, maybe something too good to be actually real, so I still refused to grasp what was going on. A psychologist once observed trenchantly, in an unrelated context, that I stubbornly refuse to accept anything that might provide comfort as I consider that a sign of weakness, of needing a crutch, whereas suffering to me evidences strength and character. It was a hard habit to get over.

Then, in what may have been year sixteen, I was walking home one beautiful, sunny Saturday afternoon from my home teacher's house.

(Visiting his home was easier than cleaning up mine, and I was on foot because the grief-mobile was in the shop yet again.) Suddenly, unexpectedly, I felt, with an extremely strong assurance, that Beau was walking behind me. The impression was so strong that I actually turned around to look, as if it had somehow slipped my mind that he was gone. I saw nothing, and heard nothing, but the feeling would not go away. That may not have surprised me so much in the temple, where we believe such things occur on occasion (although I was stunned and frankly rather frightened the first time it actually happened to me there, as I'd previously dismissed Church leaders' remarks about the veil being very thin as just so much Church talk, sort of an LDS "stitch in time saves nine"). But this was on some sidewalk in broad daylight. I wasn't even tired. I discussed the incident with that psychologist who, happening to be a Latter-day Saint, did not conclude that I was suddenly becoming psychotic but rather speculated that Beau was letting me know he's got my back. I went home and played our song for the first time in sixteen years, over and over and over, had a very good long cry and got it out of my system, and finally admitted to myself that the Spirit might just have been right about this guardian angel business after all. It certainly was right about it a year later, the night my mother said goodbye to me (prematurely, it turned out; the doctors had underestimated how long she would survive), and I stood out in the cul-de-sac in front of the house staring at the sky above the prairies in order to process her words and compose myself. If I didn't know better, I'd have sworn that I felt Beau put his hand on my shoulder. But again, I could see no one standing there.

Up until perhaps six months before that latter incident, I'd still stubbornly refused to draw any relationship significance from the "guardian angel" prompting (which by now I finally acknowledged as a revelation) other than that Beau was apparently not only not gone forever but was not even completely gone. Somehow, I still came up with a way to dismiss this as impersonal, hypothesizing that Beau was somehow stuck with being my guardian angel because I had done his temple work for

him. Not that that made much sense. I've done the temple work for a lot of my ancestors, so if that was how it worked, I would be passing through life trailing a lengthy entourage of dead forbears. But it allowed me still to continue to feel very tragic about my life, so I went with it until one morning the Lord, interrupting my highly repetitious prayers in order to get a word in edgewise, decided I clearly wasn't going to get it on my own. "He chose this," He said gently. "He loves you." This was really starting to undermine that tragic-hero-Taj Mahal-monument-to-my-grief project.

That project came crashing down, suddenly and completely, through another revelation that followed not very long afterward. Mom's most dramatic downturn, which initially made any recovery appear nearly hopeless, prompted me to seek a spiritual confirmation that I would be able to be with my parents again after death. Clearly, that is one of the fundamental tenets of our faith, but I had never actually prayed about it nor sought any confirmation. I'd joined the Church decades before because I'd prayed about the Book of Mormon and received an unmistakable spiritual confirmation of its truth, and everything else just sort of came with the package. Now, I felt that I really needed to know *this*. So I got on my knees and for the first time presented the Lord with a fervent prayer on this issue.

I was so surprised by His answer that I did something I had never done before: I asked Him to hold it right there while I got a pen and paper to write this one down word for word: "Oh yes, you can go see them. Primarily, you'll be with [Beau], but"—and here, it sounded very much like He was smiling—"you can go visit." This threw me for a loop. Aside from the fact that I was initially somewhat offended that He was being so ebulliently cheerful about this when the whole point of my prayer was that my mother was dying (or so I thought; she lasted several more years—it was a roller coaster), this didn't make any sense from my worldview. As I mentioned, until this time, I'd assumed being gay was like a birth defect and that, in the resurrection, I'd be straight.

Awkwardly, I'd even sort of lined up a female friend, a devout Church member who'd never married, as kind of my eternity fallback. Now I was being told that Beau was not only that promised companion in this life, in the guardian angel sort of way, but that I was going to spend eternity with him. I hadn't even asked about Beau in that prayer, although the Lord had spoken of him to me in prayer a few days before. My world, or at least my understanding of the next one, tilted. However, having learned the hard way through that guardian angel revelation that telling a member of the Godhead that it had got it wrong didn't really pan out well, I decided to take Him at His word, to trust that He knew what He was doing, and finally to allow myself to feel joy in the fact that the man I had loved more than anything would not be lost to me forever. I would, one day, get him back. It was growing ever harder to cast myself as a tragic hero.

Beau kept showing up, usually in the temple. In fact, the first time I returned to do an endowment after a long hiatus (I had gone inactive for several years in protest of Proposition 8 but eventually came back), he stood there next to me and went through the endowment session with me. Despite all else that had occurred, I somehow was still reluctant to believe this was actually happening, so rather than either enjoying his presence or paying attention to the ceremony, I spent the whole time trying to figure out whether this time I was really having a psychotic break. "OK, it was a bad day at the office, but it wasn't this bad," I thought. By the time we entered the celestial room, however, his presence had become so unmistakable that I turned and spoke aloud to where I knew he stood. But I did later check with a physician to make sure I hadn't indeed had a psychotic break. You're a little old for that, he told me, a bit undiplomatically.

Beau continued to make appearances at intervals that were irregular but frequent enough that, when a temple worker once asked me in the changing room "Is your spouse with you in the temple today?" (obviously fishing for a witness couple), I was flummoxed and stammered

"I'm a widower, so I don't actually know the answer to that question." Another time, a night very near the end of December, when I'd arrived exhausted and sleep deprived from closing multiple complicated year-end deals (I tried to make sure I got to the temple each month at least once, and time was running out), I sat back in the endowment pretty much blissed out listening to the almost painfully beautiful trumpet concerto that in those days was the background music to the creation scenes—all the while feeling pretty amazingly holy just for being there at all—when Beau showed up and remonstrated: "You need to pay better attention. You're supposed to be learning how to do this." "Nagged from beyond the grave," I retorted, but he was already gone. I did pay better attention after that, however, and was surprised to see what I learned. I now try to practice for the future by reminding myself that Beau was right more often than I was when he was alive and that he knows a lot more now. Little is so humbling as realizing that you will be spending eternity as the dumb one.

I finally internalized what all those revelations added up to. Eventually, for lack of any other ceremony, I stood in the office one day, alone, the door shut, figuring that if Beau was doing guardian angel duty he must be in earshot someplace (do they get breaks?) and solemnly promised him eternity. I'd never promised him that in life, as I'd thought he was just an accident, a mistake, a detour on the path to my companion in this life and then the woman with whom I'd spend eternity. I could sense that he was there and was moved by my promise, perhaps because I had finally made him a commitment. Few antidotes to commitment phobia are more powerful than missing someone fiercely, aching, for twenty-five years. Beau also knew that, for all my myriad weaknesses and flaws, I never broke promises. We had shared that trait.

There was one more surprise in store. Beau wasn't exactly omnipresent or available on call, so life could still become lonely, trial filled, and depressing. It was easy at times to wallow in my sorrows rather than steadfastly looking toward my more joyful (I now finally acknowledged)

post-death future. One such morning, kneeling in a dowdy motel near the facility where my mother lay ill, I was saying my prayers, not about anything in particular that was wrong so much as juxtaposed against an extremely well-honed backdrop of self-pity because Beau was dead, Mom was dying, I'd be alone, blah blah blah. The Lord had had enough, evidently. In the closest tone to exasperation that I've ever heard in a revelatory experience, He interrupted my whining with a quiet but firm "Both of you wanted to rescue each other." Just those eight words. Fleeting, with my usual pedantry, I thought this couldn't actually be a divine revelation because the grammar was off (shouldn't it be "*each* of you wanted to rescue *the* other"? Surely God can speak English correctly), although upon a little reflection, I concluded that the grammar might actually be correct if what had happened was that Beau and I couldn't agree on which of us got to rescue the other so told the Lord we both requested mutuality.⁴ Given our personalities, this was actually not improbable. As the revelation sank in, though, I realized, shocked, that it meant we had *asked* for this. Well, maybe not exactly for *this*, which has proven very painful for both of us, but apparently the big picture here is what we *chose*. Only then did the revelation sink in further, and I finally saw, as my jaw hit the floor, that this also meant that I had known Beau, and that we'd apparently cared deeply about each other in some fashion, before. Back there. Back before we were born. Not once in the many years since I met Beau had it occurred to me, not a single time had it so much as crossed my mind, that this relationship began other than at the moment I walked into that doctor's waiting room and saw him sprawled across that chair. Afterward, I finally switched from thanking the Lord in my daily prayers for sending me such a competent guardian angel—a portion of my prayer that somehow always felt

4. Beau of course won this one too, as I only had to go to the temple for him once (although that was the single most important thing I've done in my life), whereas he's had to do guardian angel duty for decades already.

like it bounced back off a leaden dome blocking heaven—and instead thanked Him one morning for putting Beau and me, like broken pieces, back together. And the Spirit just flowed.

It's hard to feel self-pity when you know your situation is what you asked God for. It also gave form to the story of my life—the arc, as the screenwriters would call it. I had first tried to write it as a hero's tale, with me as the hero, of course, showing the world how homosexuality could be overcome, lighting the way. When that failed miserably and then Beau died, I tried for years, for decades, to cast my life as high tragedy, with the pain, the sadness, the irretrievable loss, and me as the tragic hero. The Lord nixed that one. It turns out that it's actually a love story, like those sappy romantic comedies in which impediments more apparent than real are overcome and the protagonists get to live (or in our case die) happily ever after. The difference is that ours plays out over sixty years (or very much longer indeed) instead of one hundred minutes. Just a love story. I don't even get to be a hero. Well, except maybe to one man who somehow managed to believe that I was the greatest despite actually knowing me. It also explained a peculiar feature of my patriarchal blessing. Unusually from what my friends tell me of theirs, it admonishes me—repeatedly—that my life is “but a small moment” in light of what the Lord has in store. A blip. When the patriarch gave that blessing to me at nineteen, did he foresee that I would be a widower for forty or fifty or sixty years before I could be reunited with the love of my life? Of my eternity? The Lord obviously did. He plays a long game, but I've learned, belatedly, to repose trust in His plans and His revelations. He's got this.

My newfound confidence regarding the future (and the blurring of the line between the living and the dead) has profoundly changed my approach to my own ultimate death. A good friend told me I am less afraid of dying than anyone he's ever seen. He's probably right. On a plane flight, when an engine exploded into flames and the other passengers degenerated into various species of panic, I said a quick prayer,

gave Beau a heads up with a casual “Honey, it looks like I’m going to be home early tonight,” and sat there quietly reading. My concern now is more with not messing up before I die so that I can count on what has been promised.

After the events described in this piece, Beau started to make fewer and fewer appearances, in the temple or out. Perhaps I require less guarding now (or less prodding to pay attention in the temple), perhaps in the economy of heaven, as we call it, he’s taken on other tasks. Tempted by how much I miss him still, I’ve tried at times to force or conjure up his presence, but it never works, and I know when I’m cheating. But the Lord has stood ready to remind me of what I’ve been told, ready to provide comfort when the going gets rough, even if I myself am the one making it rough. Some months back, they changed the endowment ceremony, something I didn’t learn until, early that Tuesday morning, I was already seated, and it was almost ready to start. After decades as a gay man in the Church experiencing wounding statements—some perhaps imagined, many all too real—I panicked. What if there were some barbs in the new text? What if I couldn’t endure this? I was completely wound up when the endowment began, waiting for some blow to fall, sure one was coming, when words were spoken as part of the metaphor we use to describe our potential heavenly future, words that I interpreted as limited to straight people (although in fact they were really fairly vague). “Aha,” I thought, “*there* it is.” And then the Spirit intervened, quietly but with unmistakable firmness and clarity telling me “you can rule and reign with [Beau].”

So, the next question: is any of this real? For those who do not share LDS beliefs on the veil or how eternity works (and perhaps even some who do), the answer is obviously no. Here we have a man who, after over a quarter of a century, *still* is unable to deal with the death of his beloved. Someone who to this day drives a car barely a notch above having a wire hanger for an antenna (it’s so old you can no longer get parts) because of its connection to that man. Clearly, this is nothing

but pathetic wish fulfillment on the part of someone who might even be borderline psychotic. They could be right, I suppose, although no one who knows me appears to think I'm psychotic, and people with major disconnects to reality typically are not highly respected and fairly prominent in their professional fields, financially successful, and (I wish Mom had lived to see this) listed in a national directory of prominent Americans. The wish fulfillment is harder to answer, and I can respect those who reject my experiences on that ground. I would wonder more often myself were it not for a dear friend in my ward, a "calling widow" with whom I typically sit in the balcony at church (her husband is in the stake presidency so is usually off somewhere else) and who has the gift of discerning spirits, as St. Paul called it,⁵ in greater measure than I do. One week, the Lord had told me, unprompted as so often, during morning prayers that I could go out again rather than, as I was doing, basically just waiting to die so I could be back with Beau. I frankly had no desire whatsoever to do anything other than wait to be with Beau, so I told Him that was all very well and good but I wouldn't even consider it unless I knew that Beau would be OK with it. I thought I had boxed the Lord in on that one. So come Sunday, sitting in the balcony, Beau showed up, leaving me perplexed because this was neither the temple nor a situation in which I was likely to need a guardian angel. (We're in church. What could happen?) As I sat there, wondering what on earth he was doing there, my friend leaned over and asked, "Was your partner sarcastic?" My mind shot back to that immaculate conception remark. Big time, why? He just came up to me and told me "I have a life." Later, after my mother died (this loyal friend served as the proxy for her temple work), my friend and I were speaking between meetings and, as I chattered on, she suddenly interrupted me with a firm "Pause." I did, and thus sensed the presence of both Mom and Beau. "They're here," I said. "He's teaching her the Gospel," she responded. Of

5. 1 Corinthians 12:7–11.

course, neither of these experiences would likely prove anything to the non-Saints, although the former one would need to posit some form of telepathy between my friend and me unless Beau in fact had actually been there. Anyway, for me personally, it's enough to show that this is not all just wish fulfillment.

What of those who do share LDS beliefs? Here, I would expect the pushback to be even more vigorous, as, although they will believe in the mechanism, they will disbelieve the content because the idea that God could have reunited two men so that they could spend eternity together does not comport with current doctrine. ("Current" because one of our articles of faith, distilled to its essence, is that there are an awful lot of important things we don't know but that will be revealed in the future. Plus, you can't sit through the endowment ceremony very many times before figuring out that "this is how we've done it before" sometimes doesn't jive with what God wants this time around. See, Beau? I'm paying attention.) At least one objection seems to be the assumption that spirit children are created via sexual reproduction, necessitating opposite sex partners for that portion of the plan of salvation to work, although that's a subject about which we actually know very little. I do recall that it used to come up in elders quorum every several years. (I wondered whether it came up as much in Relief Society, where the prospect of being pregnant billions of times might seem less appealing.) However, all this involves projecting our human condition onto heaven's, where a whole lot of things have not yet been revealed to us and where ancient and modern prophets are reduced to metaphors for something whose reality is apparently far beyond human ability to grasp or describe—angels with wings on fire and streets paved with gold and precious stones and (the LDS one) kings and queens, priests and priestesses, to the most high God. What's coming we see almost only through a glass, darkly. Joseph F. Smith did see the hosts of the dead but mostly described things of religious significance—the aching for resurrection, the task of preaching the Gospel—not what family

units the dead would be organized in or what would follow when the Lord delegated the creation of other worlds to them. So I have to content myself with my personal experiences, with what I know myself. What I know, since I am a convert to the Church, is that the nature of the revelatory experiences I described in this article is indistinguishable from the nature of the experiences that provided me a testimony of the Gospel in the first place and brought me into the Church and fortified my testimony of the temple. They're one and the same, so stand or fall together. If I cannot believe that these revelations are actually divine, there is no reason to believe that the earlier, so very similar, revelations were divine either, and I'm left back on my own to figure out whose teachings, if anyone's, are transcendently true. I choose to believe that the revelations are all true rather than that they are all false. I could be wrong, this all could have been wish fulfillment from inception, but I guess that is the role that faith plays.

I try to get to the temple twice a month now, wherever I am, so some weeks ago I stood in front of the temple in Manhattan—an unusual one in that it houses other Church functions on different floors. Its facade can thus have glass that is transparent, allowing one to see into at least several feet of the building, to the opaque bronze temple doors to the left and to the entry for other functions to the right. As I stood there, a woman in her early thirties, dressed less formally than most people attending the temple, stopped and stood in front of the building, gazing long and fixedly through the glass. I finally asked if she was looking for the Family History Center, which is hard to locate from outside. No, she hadn't been to the temple in a very long time and just wanted to look in, she told me, as she stared into the building. The ceremony was recently changed, I encouraged her. It's really quite beautiful now. She thought her temple recommend might no longer be good. How long ago did you get it? About ten years. Well, yes, you would have to get a new one then. She doubted she could. She was living now with her boyfriend and vouchsafed that, at the time she had served a mission

some years previously, she had presented as a man. I had not recognized that she was transgender but reassured her that I was a member of the LGBTQ community too and was not judgmental. How did I reconcile this, how did I make this work, she asked. I told her that my partner, my beloved, had been dead for almost twenty-seven years, so there was no subsisting same-sex marriage for them to be concerned about, and I obviously wasn't having sex with him, who was long dead, so there really wasn't anything they could do to keep me out of the temple. But I know I can be with him for eternity, I told her. She seemed quite moved, but the endowment session would start shortly, so I handed her my business card in case she wished to speak further and excused myself to go upstairs and change into my white clothing to take my place in the endowment room and do my work for the dead.

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OLIVER ALDEN is a pseudonym. The author, an active member of the LDS Church who identifies as a gay man, previously published, in the August 1995 issue of *Sunstone*, an essay about his experiences coming to terms with his sexual orientation and the expectations of the LDS Church.



Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *Story Time*
digital painting, 2020

MAGIC, MEMORY, AND MOTHER EARTH

Aubrey Johnson

From Matriarchs

I come from a multigenerational line of women who crave Mother Earth. My great-grandma worked in Yellowstone National Park every summer and married a Yellowstone architect. My grammie basically grew up there, as did my mother—alternating each childhood summer between a Yellowstone–Grand Tetons double feature and Yosemite National Park.

My siblings and I, growing up on the Washington side of the Columbia River, didn't spend quite so much time at those national parks as our mom did. Instead, my grammie (a passionate biologist) rounded up her descendants at every family gathering, and we traipsed through the closest forest or wetland boardwalk. If we couldn't organize that, she scattered us to the front yard where we climbed trees and played pretend under pine boughs that almost touched the ground. To this day, she likes to stop us in our tracks and exclaim over a great blue heron or hummingbird flying by. She has an iconic "animal spotted" cry we all joyfully imitate now as adults.

Rather than limiting our explorations to Wyoming and Montana, my mom put her geology degree to good use by taking us all over the country in a worn Kia Sedona to understand Mother Nature. We scattered native wildflower seeds; pulled over on dirt roads to moo at cow herds; brushed our fingers along igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary rocks; dug up fossils; and stayed up late with our eyes glued to telescopes in public observatories. Don't get me wrong, we were not

much of a “spend a week in a tent” kind of family. We go up gentle grades where we can stop and take pictures as much as we like, and preferably there’s a bed and shower waiting for us at the end of the day. Even so, after years of leaning against a wooden fence and straining my eyes for any sign of a whale spout, my heart sings in rhythm with Pacific Ocean waves crashing against a rocky shore. In the gentle slip of wind brushing past trees, I hear my own breath. When I close my eyes, I picture rain clattering against the roof.

I long for my rivers and waterfalls, my trees and mountains, with an ever-present ache. Going back feels like my chest releasing and being able to breathe again. In my family, each woman’s homeland is different. But we share our longing with centuries of women before us, which is how we ended up following some European pagan traditions like solstices, May Day, and Beltane. Each time we step outside and light candles or bonfires, we celebrate our family and its connection to Mother Earth and divine femininity.

Perhaps this deep feeling is why we have become people who avidly consume stories and tell our own stories in turn. We’re not necessarily good at it, but we love creating. My grammie painted landscapes; my mom acts in, directs, and produces theatre; and my siblings and I generally share passions for creating art by performing in various mediums, photographing people and places, playing Dungeons & Dragons, writing, and crafting poetry. And every single one of us reads. That can take many forms—story podcasts, audiobooks, ebooks, print—but we’re the sort of family who arrive at a motel and read until it’s time to sleep. On those long road trips across the country, if we weren’t feeling the audiobooks we’d brought, we’d select one of the many books on hand and pass it around to read out loud chapter by chapter.

All this to say that, having been immersed in stories and nature basically from birth, a part of me still believes in magic.

You see, during those drives and woods walks, my mom would point out a perfect circle of moss or a particularly ancient-looking

erratic glacial stone and say, “The fairies have been here!” It changed the way I see the world. If I look closely at the tiniest details, I see the magic. I see it in the way forests are reborn after a fire, in a butterfly’s epic migration, in the spiral of leaves on a flower, in the salmon’s fierce determination to return to where it was born to lay new eggs. I also see it when I hold hands with my dad in the grocery store or when one of my best friends invites me spontaneously to a movie after I’ve had a really hard week. These things may not have been caused by fae influence, but they hold a swelling of effervescent divinity. Divine magic doesn’t come in a flash of sparkles because it has always been here. It is the song of spiritual creation that came before the physical and bound all things irrevocably together. It is *life*! Everything breathing in and out as one.

Mind over Matter

My heart’s intuition feels these connections even if my brain’s logic cannot see them. For over a decade, I’ve hurled myself through life without pause to avoid true, consistent stillness. I don’t want to feel my brokenness. Instead, I’m busy perfecting an external image of intelligence, competence, and high-achieving practicality. Maybe if everyone else sees me that way, I’ll metamorphosize into that woman. It took going on a mission and being forced to sit in silence with myself an hour every day before I could even see the walls I’d built around myself.

In the past two years, however, it feels like my heart is its own sovereign fighting back against me—and it’s using my body to help it. I experienced this battle as symptoms of an illness: a month when I literally couldn’t go a day without a midday nap (which my doctor attributed to a classic Pacific Northwest Vitamin D deficiency), two semesters of frequently staying up until 4 or 6 a.m. because I didn’t want to face the responsibilities of tomorrow, two summers of significant financial insecurity that left me rationing everything in my life. Through all that, I felt a craving—a craving for rest, connection, and

nature. I have been looking through a glass darkly, and I'm finally letting it crack.

I experience this process day by day, with a walk by the river, weekly quadball practice in a grassy Bountiful park, breathing in summer thunderstorms from my balcony, and on family vacations that bring me back to rivers and trees. I felt it as my mom, sister, and I drove up the winding road to the top of Signal Mountain, following the same path we'd taken to scatter my bubba's ashes there that morning. On that warm night, we leaned against the car and looked up, and I glimpsed the Milky Way for the first time since I was a child. When I am old and forgetful, I probably won't remember the constellations we identified (or the ones we made up). But I hope I remember standing with the women of my family, surrounded by darkness and nevertheless lit from above, delighting in a shooting star and the steady beat of circling satellites.

Getting too caught up in my daily responsibilities or unrealistic expectations overwhelms me, and then I stop seeing the divinity in humankind. I can't appreciate the collective inspiration required to produce an art gallery or rejoice in the thousands of hours a group of people committed to create a Studio Ghibli movie. I visit the farmer's market intent on my items or a good deal instead of looking around and recognizing how wonderful it is to have a community gathering place where people can exclaim over the products of dedicated progression and labor. Listening to a live jazz band while sitting in a bar or dancing in a plaza will always be more meaningful than watching a recording of it by myself at 1 a.m. But while I know this intellectually, it doesn't stop my introverted, tired self from burying myself under blankets and retreating to the numb promised safety and escapism of consuming content.

So, having spent the summer reflecting, I have a goal now: to reconnect with and reclaim my "essential self"—the parts of me that want to play, experience magic, and explore without any pressure to produce. I'm tired of facing my limitless divine potential and dreading the

inevitable conclusion that I can never fulfill it entirely in this life. I want to focus on relationships: my relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, with others, and with myself. I want my body and my spirit to exist in harmony with each other. I want to embrace whimsical and nonconsequential creation without pressuring myself to actually be any good at those things. Because women are, that they might have joy, and the weight of trying to be 100 percent engaged in everything is crushing me, not lifting me. I have to let go and, honestly, just stop thinking so much. It's time for me to start feeling my way through life instead.

Meditating on the Gospel

This includes how I approach church. I love a deep dive into doctrine, but I commit myself to digging a well without checking maps of where the water runs, so I end up hitting rocks instead. Intellectually analyzing aspects of the gospel and scriptures—verbiage, history, context—are just tools to help us look at principles in a new way. There isn't an end-all-be-all correct way of interpreting or applying anything. Everything from tithing to Sunday worship has gray areas for people to make individual choices about how they apply these concepts in their lives. When do you pay tithing? How long do you fast? Do you fast from food and water or just food? Do you watch movies on the Sabbath? Do you see friends? Do you focus more on the alcohol, drugs, and coffee parts of the Word of Wisdom, or do you also prioritize eating fruits and vegetables in season and sleeping enough? During the twentieth-century, Church leadership and academics sought to intellectualize anything they could in order to justify it to the world. They wanted everything wrapped up in a neat narrative, like Book of Mormon geography, DNA, and Church history. But it's not always possible. Humans are messy. Humans have always been messy. The Church is messy now, it was messy 100–150 years ago, and it was messy 2,000 years ago. Even the Apostles weren't immediately jumping on board with some of Jesus's teachings. Peter protested teaching Gentiles, maybe because a lifetime

of cultural teachings doesn't just overturn during four-or-so years at Jesus's side. A community becoming more inclusive and open to others is a hard-fought process taught over generations.

I'm not saying we shouldn't ask questions to understand history and context. Far from it! Our past is what created our present and should therefore be included in the conversation. What I'm saying is that I'm tired of people inventing divine explanations for human mistakes or ill intent—like the priesthood ban or the “shielding” of Heavenly Mother. We don't like acknowledging our own mortal ignorance, let alone the ignorance of our leaders. But how many scriptures remind us that we are only getting a hundredth of the knowledge? How many talks has President Nelson given since becoming the prophet reminding us that we are part of an ongoing Restoration and we only have a thimble full of understanding? Why is it so hard for us to say, “Right now, I don't actually know.”

I used to think the priority was knowing. I needed to have answers to every question right now, with a scriptural reference to back it up. No one can needle me for not being able to explain away my faith. It feels uncomfortable, possibly even unsafe, to not have justifications I can express. We hear that word all the time in testimonies: I *know* the Church organization and principles are from God, I *know* Joseph Smith was a prophet. And if you know that, great. But to understand something in your mind doesn't automatically mean you know it in your heart. Overanalyzing means we're not *feeling* truth in our hearts and bodies, and therefore we're not using the full extent of the gifts God has given us. Our bodies aren't accessories we've draped our spirits in for the time being— they're essential. This entire physical world is essential. When I slow down, I can feel my body and my Mother Earth crying out, because I have so easily forgotten and neglected these gifts.

Feeling the Spirit looks different for everyone. Our bodies can become chronically disconnected by way of mental illness or condition,

substance use disorder, dysmorphia, or disability. But the scripture “ask and ye shall receive” is not a promise limited to able-bodied, neurotypical people. *All* people can receive direct and personal answers to their questions, worries, and dreams, and no one else gets to dictate what your personal direction should look like. If all things are a witness of God, all things are a channel through which God can speak to you. That might be the scriptures or going to the temple, or it might be going to the ocean, listening to music, looking at art, building relationships, taking care of an animal, sitting at home watching the rain fall, seeing a play, or dancing. We have a world full of examples of cultures and faiths that connect to divinity in a myriad of ways. We can learn from them. The most important element, in my opinion, is that you’re making time to purposefully connect and reflect without distraction. What communicating with the heavens looks like beyond that is up to you. I remind myself of this though: our heavenly parents want a relationship with me; they want me to understand, so they’ll use tools that make sense to me wherever I am in my life right now.

I’m surrounded by people inside and outside the Church who have opinions about my approach to the gospel. I was talking last week to a new friend who gently predicted that my perspective would eventually lead me to leaving the Church, and he reassured me that it would be okay “when” I did. At the same time, listening to General Conference or Sunday meetings I sometimes feel pressure that my connection to God isn’t legitimate, because it doesn’t sound similar to the experiences of those leaders and teachers. As a queer Latter-day Saint, people in the Church tell me directly that I don’t belong here. But Jesus went after the one sheep and met it where it was and carried it on his shoulders. He went to people’s homes and met them on the streets to teach and heal them. I don’t need to be in any other place other than exactly where I am now in order to reach God, *my* God: my Mother, my Father, my Brother.

Like Magic

As I danced around a Beltane bonfire with my mom and siblings, I felt the heat on my face and retreated to a safe distance. That power, I thought as a child, was some sort of magic we instigated. Fire transforms energy, using the potential of the wood to fuel an explosive release into the sky. When the song and scriptures tell us that the Spirit is like a fire burning, they're reminding us that listening to our divinely made bodies and hearts will transform us. Changing how we think and act to reclaim the lost, good parts of ourselves never feels easy or safe. But consider how empty the universe would be if the stars didn't burn.

Last summer, returning to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons with my family, I could feel the family ties that bound us there. The tree where we scattered my bubba's ashes is the same tree where his parents' ashes were scattered. When I felt that connection again, I remembered who I want to be and who I want to become: like my Heavenly Mother—made in her own image. Knowing that through Jesus Christ I have the power to change and make that happen, well, *that* is magic too.

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DON'T WORRY . . . BEE HAPPY

Kathryn Paul

Stonehenge was a disappointment. If we had shown up for the summer solstice, we could have touched the stones while watching the sun rise. However, that would have involved fighting our way through a crowd of twelve thousand neo-pagans. Instead, we were only permitted to circle the formation from a distant sidewalk. So I bought my son Dylan a lime green dragon for his collection on the way back to the bus—even though we hadn't the slightest idea what dragons had to do with Stonehenge. Fourteen months later, that was the stuffed dragon I placed in my son's coffin just before they shut the lid.

The idea for a mother-son trip to Europe originated with Dylan's question: "Mom, can I study Polish with you at that university this summer?" I had attended an intensive Polish language program in Poland the previous few summers, but I was surprised by Dylan's request and asked him why. He said, "I just want to see why you like it there so much." My husband and I were already going to China in May, so adding a summer trip to Europe seemed a bit much, but the Spirit told me I needed to take my son to Europe *that* summer.

Many members of my family suffer from chronic anxiety and depression—including cousins on both sides of my family. However, most of us find ways to manage the problem. Nothing we tried seemed to help Dylan, my youngest son. He still had debilitating anxiety and had been self-destructive for many years. I thought maybe if Dylan could see how amazing the world was, it would give him the motivation to not give up hope. So I planned the ultimate family history adventure for a twenty-year-old young man who loved Broadway shows and was obsessed with his Irish heritage. He got to kiss the Blarney Stone in

Ireland and sit in the front row for “We Will Rock You” in London. I took him to our ancestral villages in the beautiful mountains near Krakow, and after our classes at the university in Lublin, we’d walk to the mall and order fantasy sundaes with kiwi, passionfruit, and gelato, topped with a fluffy cloud of whipped cream. My son fell in love with Poland, and he even decided that Polish girls were the most beautiful girls in the world.

Shortly after Dylan died, I was told in a priesthood blessing that my son was amazed at the eternal impact I’d had on so many lives, and that because of my temple work, many mentors wanted to help him. I felt grateful my son had fallen in love with Poland the year before because most of my temple work has been done for our Polish ancestors.

As we participate in family history and temple work, we are promised healing blessings. According to Elder Dale G. Renlund, one of those blessings is the “increased influence of the Holy Ghost to feel strength and direction for our own lives.” I didn’t know that was the last summer I would spend with my son, but God knew and, through the influence of the Holy Ghost, impelled me to take Dylan to Europe *that* summer. Memories of our adventures help me feel God’s love and provide “increased assistance to mend troubled, broken, or anxious hearts and make the wounded whole.”¹ It makes me smile when I recall sensory details from that trip, like sitting in the front row of a loud and raucous rock musical that Dylan found divine, but during which I had to keep my ears plugged with my fingers. Savoring happy memories can provide a temporary island of positive emotions in a sea of sadness. Savoring the future is also a source of peace and hope. Sometimes when I’m feeling sad, I visualize the joyous reunion I will have someday with my son Dylan, my father, who died when I was eight, and my elder brother, the Master Healer, Jesus Christ.

1. Dale G. Renlund, “Family History and Temple Work: Sealing and Healing,” *Ensign*, May 2018.

On the eve of the fifth anniversary of my son's death, I returned to my hotel room, feeling sad and fragile, and pushed the television remote control button to break the lonely silence. I immediately heard and saw Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf saying: "My dear friends, the healing power of Jesus Christ is not absent in our day. The Savior's healing touch can transform lives in our day just as it did in His. If we will have faith, He can take our hands, fill our souls with heavenly light and healing, and speak to us the blessed words, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."² Elder Uchtdorf, speaking from a flat screen in Evanston, Illinois, didn't feel like some serendipitous "coincidence"—it felt like a miracle—a gentle hug from heaven.

My husband's job as a contractor required him to return to the East Coast a few days after my son's funeral, and I was left alone. A tsunami of sadness would hit me every night, and I'd curl up in a fetal position, imagining that I was a molecule of water in the ocean being tossed on the beach and then being swept back into the ocean with the rushing tide. I desperately wanted to fade into oblivion so that I wouldn't have to feel the intense pain of grief and loss anymore. Eventually, the Spirit would teach me to imagine myself as a fragile lamb in the Savior's arms, and immediately I'd feel a gentle blanket of peace and love surround me as the sadness melted away for the night.

One evening, feeling alone and on the verge of an emotional breakdown, I asked my best friend if her husband could give me a priesthood blessing. In the blessing I was told: "You are not alone; you are surrounded by people who love and care for you on both sides of the veil. You have many ancestors who are watching over you, and as you continue to serve your ancestors by doing their temple work, they will be close by, and will bear you up and give you comfort and strength. They will be on your right side and on your left." Juxtapose those words with another of Elder Renlund's promised healing blessings: "Increased love

2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Bearers of Heavenly Light," *Ensign*, November 2017.

and appreciation for ancestors and living relatives, so we no longer feel alone.”³

In 1976, I was told in my patriarchal blessing that I would enjoy an unusual portion of the Spirit of Elijah as I turned my heart to my ancestors who had heard the testimony of Isaiah and other ancient prophets in the spirit world, accepted that witness with all their hearts, and set their hearts and hopes upon me to do their temple work. My mother was the only member of the Church in her family, and her mother was the youngest child of Polish immigrants, but Poland was behind the Iron Curtain, as were my paternal grandfather’s ancestral lands of ancient Bohemia, so finding records for Eastern European ancestors seemed impossible. Poland led the way in revolting against the Soviet Union, and soon after the Iron Curtain fell there in 1989, the Church had photographers in the archives of Poland.

Back when the eighteenth-century superpowers of Russia, Prussia, and Austria divided Poland into three partitions, my ancestors lived in tiny villages in the Austrian partition, where the empire required the Catholic priests to keep meticulous vital records to facilitate the administration of their onerous military conscriptions—which was definitely a curse for my male ancestors at the time—but a tremendous blessing for twenty-first-century family history researchers. On my first trip to the family history library in Salt Lake City, I found microfilm with the vital records for our Polish ancestors, and for the next six years, my extended family helped me complete their temple work.

However, after the devastating death of my son, while I did find solace in attending the temple, I stopped doing family history research. I was nearly catatonic from grief; furthermore, we had completed the temple work for thousands of ancestors. That seemed quite sufficient. Now I just wanted to go home and be with my son again.

3. Renlund, “Family History and Temple Work.”

About a year after my son's death, I flew to Utah to catch up with friends, do some family sealings, and maybe dabble in a little family history research. During the sealing session, I was told that there was still lots of temple work for me to do. In Salt Lake City, I ended up doing eighteen hours of research. I had forgotten how I loved to scan microfilm for hours, totally in the flow, immersed in the Spirit of Elijah, oblivious to the passing of time. I returned home and told my husband that I apparently had traveled to Utah to rediscover the passionate family history diva who had crawled under a rock after her son's death.

I once again had a purpose for living, and when I felt sad or anxious, I would open my laptop, start doing research, and almost instantly feel the Spirit calm my soul.

In 2019, I got the strong spiritual impression that I should return to Poland and study Polish in Lublin one more time. I flew into Krakow, where I planned to recover from jet lag while enjoying my favorite city in Poland. It felt like Dylan was with me as I attended the same chamber orchestra concert we had enjoyed eight years earlier in the Peter Paul Cathedral. Dylan had played the cello, and I wept when the concert commenced with a solitary cellist playing the famous Bach cello solo used as the background music for the video montage at Dylan's funeral. After the concert ended, I stopped to listen to a gifted cellist street performer. It felt like God had given me the tender mercy of one more magical evening in Krakow with Dylan.

As I roamed the cobblestone streets, I almost walked by "just another boring gift shop filled with touristy junk"—but something stopped me. Four years before my son's death, on my first trip to Poland, I won a whimsical glass bee figurine in a Polish tongue twister contest. The Polish word for bee is *pszczola*—a tongue twister packed into one solitary word! The glass bee was a precious memento of a magical summer, so I displayed it proudly in our living room. As the mother of sons, I should have known better. When Dylan accidentally knocked the bee out of the display cabinet and it shattered, he felt terrible that he

had caused the demise of my precious, irreplaceable bee. I soon forgot my sad loss, but my tender-hearted son didn't forget.

As I entered the shop, I was drawn to a small case of glass figurines, and as I casually scanned the case, my eyes settled on a whimsical glass bumblebee—the same size as the one I had won in the tongue twister contest. I didn't hear Dylan's voice, but I was told that Dylan wanted me to buy this bee to replace the one he had broken. Dylan hadn't forgotten, and while only Jesus Christ could mend his mother's broken heart after his death, perhaps that same Savior also helped a young man who deeply loved his mother find a miraculous way to restore his mother's precious *pszczółka*.

I know that my kind and compassionate son is deeply concerned about family members who are still battling anxiety and depression, because later that same year, I was alone wrapping stocking stuffers on Christmas Eve when Dylan communicated with me. He told me that Christmas was the toughest time for him because he missed all our fun family traditions, like opening elaborate and bounteous stocking stuffers on Christmas morning. I thought about Dylan's love of eggnog and our family's yummy nutmeg cookies. Dylan also told me that "while it is absolutely true that God is merciful, and everyone here has been kind and loving, I feel sad sometimes. My cousins are all married and having babies and I envy their joy. I know I would have loved being an uncle. I can visit my nieces, but they can't see me, and I can't play with them or make them laugh." Doctrine and Covenants 138:50 came to my mind: "For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage."

My son Dylan wants his extended family, especially those who are chronically depressed or anxious, to savor the present, to savor the precious gift of having a body, to savor the scent of a stargazer lily and the taste of a raspberry picked from our garden. He wants us to laugh, dance, sing, play, and love life. Dylan fervently wants his entire family to complete their assigned missions here on earth.

When our ward transitioned to remote Sunday devotionals during the 2020 pandemic, assigned speakers would prerecord their talks and post them on the ward's YouTube site. When I was asked to prepare a talk on the blessings of temple work, I shared the healing blessings I had received from temple work after the trauma of my son's suicide. As I prayerfully wrote and rewrote my talk, I felt impressed to include my son's message of regret and his hope that others would choose a different path. After the devotional, I felt impressed to share the YouTube link of my talk with our extended family, and sometimes I feel impressed to share the link with friends who are worried about family members and want my advice. I don't have any advice to give them—but Dylan does.

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Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *Sewing Group*
36 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas, 2022

PANINI AND PSILOCYBIN

Bridget Verhaaren

“Pretty girls don’t buy cocaine,” Greta¹ says and laughs as she walks out the front door.

My hands and face sting as I stand frozen in the entryway and hear her start the car. I’d asked my twenty-two-year-old daughter where she got the money to feed the addictions she was battling.

Over the past three years, she’d chosen a few subpar boyfriends who introduced her to substances, which helped set her on a devastating trajectory. One I’d never suspected.

As a young mother, I worked hard to protect her from the dragons who dared approach.

As a middle-aged mother, I lay awake in bed, tormented by the realization that she’d lowered the drawbridge and invited them into the castle.

I lie on the family room floor, chest constricting.

How are we here?

In the last year . . .

I ruptured my plantar fascia and wore a walking boot for four months. Our nephew committed suicide. My husband, Gary, and I coordinated the aftermath; the funeral and then the sorting, donating, cleaning, and selling of the house—that no one, but us, would reenter. Greta checked herself into rehab after receiving a Christmas Day DUI. Karl, our youngest in his senior year of high school, a favored national ski team athlete, suffered an early season-ending concussion. Our mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. Before my plantar fascia ligament healed completely, I broke the same foot and wore a boot cast for another two months.

1. Pseudonym.

A property flooded three separate times, necessitating three separate repairs and remodels. Greta tore *both* ACLs and tendons in her ankle as well as had a tibial plateau fracture—all at the same time. The orthopedist, Dr. Eric Heiden, of speed-skating fame, had never seen this in his career. Our other mother had a shoulder replacement. We committed to visit her twice a day at the rehab facility for the duration, which was seven weeks long. Another child's five-year relationship ended, and the battle to kick a decade-long struggle with alcohol ensued. My foot still didn't heal. Our mother, who had the shoulder replacement, fell and broke her hand, femur, and hip. More surgeries, and she was in a rehab facility again. This time for fourteen weeks. Her hand had to be rebroken and cast because it wasn't healing right. Greta, who was already going to physical therapy for her ACL replacements, was a passenger in her friend's SUV when they were rear-ended at a stoplight by a tow truck going 50 miles per hour. Her head shattered the windshield before the seatbelt caught her or the airbag deployed. More therapy. Physical therapy. Concussion therapy. Neuro-ophthalmologist therapy. The dissolution of my parents' 55-year marriage. And after six months of a broken foot and a year of intermittent walking boot casts, I finally had surgery on my injured foot.

This is not my favorite year.

Gary and I have five aging parents, eight children between the ages of eighteen and thirty, three daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren.

We are facing caring for aging parents while raising children in a day of “extended childhood.”

This year has been a period of increased pressure on our “sandwich” season of life, and we're getting “panini'd.” According to one report, “62% of panini generation caregivers feel they have to choose between being a good parent or being a good daughter or son. . . . And the majority (59%) don't know where to turn for support.”²

2. Home Instead, “The Panini Generation: Today's Sandwich Generation Faces Increased Pressure,” PR Newswire, Sept. 8, 2022, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/the-panini-generation-todays-sandwich-generation-faces-increased-pressure-301620094.html>.

It feels like we are failing on *all* fronts.

We are each well acquainted with grief.

Gary is a palliative care physician who walks his patients to the end of their lives. He deals with death and dying daily. He knows loss. He knows grief. He knows hard.

I've experienced grief after the stillbirth of my daughter, Ava, and after the sudden, unexpected death of my first husband, Rob. My griefs were community griefs. This type of grief is awful and beautiful all at once. Everyone knows of your loss. They are watching you, praying for you, and mourning with you. And I got to see people's most beautiful sides that I didn't know existed.

Silent grief is different than community grief. One is all alone.

After Greta disclosed her sexual assaults to us, both Gary and I were catapulted to a place void of light. We circled each other morning and night for months, alternating roles of rage and anguish.

I thought I knew deep sorrow and grief.

I did.

I do.

And now, I know silent grief. And it is shattering.

Throughout my life, I've mitigated seasons of darkness with adrenaline, a byproduct of running, cycling, or other physical outdoor activities that I love. For an entire year, I've been limited by pain and patience to let my foot heal. I could not get the adrenaline needed to ward off the enveloping murkiness.

Gary and I were both in survival mode, retracting. We resisted spending time with extended family and friends. Our emotions were too close to the surface.

At my annual gynecologist well-woman visit, I filled out a mental health survey, a reckoning of sorts, and realized I'd been in this inky pit for more than six months, and I was no closer to climbing out. I sat on the exam table, unable to stop crying. I needed help. My physician prescribed the antidepressant Wellbutrin, which worked well, but what was the endpoint? How long do I use the crutch?

Long term, I needed a perspective change, not an antidepressant. And my environment didn't look like it would change anytime soon.

I researched ketamine clinics, which possess excellent qualities for treating PTSD and depression, but this did not feel right for me.

I knew my husband had recommended psilocybin treatments for some of his terminal cancer patients dealing with existential grief. I wanted to know more. I wanted to know if psilocybin “magic mushrooms” could help me.

A search on clinicaltrials.gov revealed 189 trials using psilocybin. I discovered that multiple universities were conducting psilocybin studies, including the University of Utah Huntsman Cancer Institute, which was conducting a study of psilocybin in patients with cancer, and John Hopkins University, which was conducting a study of psilocybin treatment for major depression. Legal in Oregon, Colorado, parts of California, Massachusetts, Michigan, Washington State, and Washington, DC, and now approved in Utah for “doctors at Utah’s two biggest health care systems,” psilocybin is an option to treat patients.³

I’m active in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

The Word of Wisdom is just that—wise words to live healthier spiritually and physically.

I don’t drink coffee, tea, or alcohol. However, I’ve been inadvertently subjected to alcohol twice in my life. Once through an uncooked pasta sauce and a second time during a six-month culinary program while tasting a poached pear. I didn’t realize it was poached in Grand Marnier.

I avoid using anything that can be addictive.

I read. I studied. And I prayed to know if psilocybin therapy was right for me.

I read in Doctrine and Covenants 89:10–11: “And again, verily I say unto you, all *wholesome herbs* God hath ordained for the constitution,

3. Paighen Harkins, “Utah Quietly Legalizes Psilocybin, MDMA for Mental Health Treatment at these Hospitals,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 21, 2024, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2024/03/21/psilocybin-mdma-treatments-could/>.

nature, and use of man—Every *herb* in the season thereof; and every fruit in the season thereof; all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.”

I wondered, are mushrooms herbs?

According to research in the journal *Molecules*, mushrooms are considered herbs.⁴

In Alma 46:40–41, I read: “And there were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of the year were very frequent in the land—but *not so much so with fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases to which men were subject by the nature of the climate*—But there were many who died with old age; and those who died in the faith of Christ are happy in him, as we must needs suppose” (emphasis added).

It seemed to me that herbs, plants, and roots, under the correct circumstances, could be helpful.

Fiona Givens said, “Woundedness *is* the universal human condition.”⁵

I prayed to know if psilocybin treatment was right for me to help heal my woundedness. I want to live a healthier life, dying in old age, dying in the faith of Christ. In Moroni 10:5, we’re taught, “By the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things.” After I put forth the effort, I received the personal revelation I sought to know—how to best heal during my mortal journey.



4. Grace Gar-Lee Yue, Clara Bik-San Lau, and Ping-Chung Leung, “Medicinal Plants and Mushrooms with Immunomodulatory and Anticancer Properties—A Review on Hong Kong’s Experience,” *Molecules* 26(8), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8068888/>.

5. Fiona Givens, “The God Who Weeps,” Faith Matters Restore Conference, October 2023.

In August 2023, Gary drove me to meet with my guide, Bertie.⁶ I'd met with her a few times while building our relationship of trust. I'd read that the "set and setting" were imperative to a positive experience.

"You're giddy," Gary said as we approached her door. He was right. I was looking forward to what I envisioned would be a meditative experience. I'd set an intention of wanting to embrace an abundance mentality. I was weary of my scarcity default. I was impulsive, too much reacting to reactivity.

Gary kissed me goodbye as Bertie invited me inside. She asked if I wanted to begin outside or inside. Bertie had created a hygge space (Danish cozy), and I thought it would be the perfect place to begin.

I sat down on the rug and leaned against the turquoise-colored couch. Dried mushrooms sat in ziplock bags on the coffee table. I poked the mushroom through the plastic, and it felt like an ordinary shriveled-up mushroom—not a mind-altering mushroom.

Bertie used a moderate dose of two grams. She asked if we could begin with a prayer. I listened as she asked God to help me work through the things I needed to in my brain.

Bertie worked the mortar and pestle to grind the gumby-like dried mushrooms that resisted being ground down to a fine powder. I watched as she put the pieces into a cup and added water and a fruit flavor to mix the unmixable. She handed the glass to me. I choked down the muddy drink with tones of citrus.

I asked how long it would be until I began to feel the effects. "Twenty minutes," she said.

I reclined on the floor next to the coffee table. Bertie dimmed the lights and played some instrumental music on her phone. At first, I embraced my body relaxing. I began to feel too relaxed. I couldn't feel myself breathing. I focused on my breath and thought if I stopped paying attention, my breath would leave me. Fear consumed me as my fingers, toes, and face tingled.

6. Pseudonym.

Bertie dialed Gary and said, “We need you now.”

I hunched forward on the couch, saying, “Please, please, Gary, don’t be late. Please hurry.” My lips felt numb.

Bertie called Gary again and asked where he was. I could tell she was stressed because her voice was monotone. There was an albuterol inhaler on the table in front of me. Could it save me? Then she told him she had an EpiPen, and I thought—“this is it.”

I finally heard the door open. Gary! He used his calm doctor voice to distract me as he checked my pulse. He reassured me my breathing was normal and asked if I wanted to lie on his lap. I clung to him, wrapping my arms around his thigh. Classic panic attack.

He draped his arm around me, and I loosened my grip. I trusted Bertie. And I needed Gary, too.

I closed my eyes and saw a purple balloon that had lost most of its air.

I began to cry. I didn’t want to, and I didn’t know why I was crying. No. No. No. This was ruining everything. I’d come for an abundance mentality. I was tired of too many tears. They wouldn’t stop. They kept coming. I sat up, hoping to quell their flow. No go—more tears followed by copious amounts of snot. Now, I really couldn’t breathe. I sat up to blow my nose. Embarrassed, I rested my head on Gary’s lap again and closed my eyes. I saw the purplish balloon still floating above me.

Then, I saw a faint white hue before me, like a dissipating mist. As I continued to cry, dark blue-black shapes emerged at the bottom and became like oil in water, floating higher and higher, becoming lighter in color as they rose. Black turned to navy, then to cobalt, and finally purple.

I realized I was underwater.

It occurred to me that I could describe what I was seeing aloud to Bertie and Gary.

The tears became sobs, and I had to sit up many times to blow my nose to breathe. Each time I lay back down, more layers of dark blue shapes emerged from a deep, bubbling spring.

I didn't know how much sadness was inside of me.

For the most part, the sorrow wasn't correlated to specific events; it was a purging of sheer emotion until I finally wept that I wasn't fully present at my children's births. I'd missed out on the most beautiful experience with each of them, welcoming them to the world. I'd been less excited about their arrival and more relieved to end my intense illness—hyperemesis gravidarum, which is the fancy way of saying I vomited all day, every day during every pregnancy.

I closed my eyes again, and deeper layers of blue bubbled to the surface. I cried until there were no more tears. Releasing sorrow was exhausting. Ironically, I had to get closer to sadness to let it go.

Finally, I felt a deep sigh within my body. I lay on the couch, wholly relaxed. Then, my body began to tingle, including my nethers. But not in a sexual way. I opened my eyes and erupted with a laughter I had not known in years.

The colors of everything surrounding me were vibrant. The inanimate blue coffee table was dynamic, alive with color. The hummingbirds drinking sugar water from the feeder flapped their wings in slow motion. I could see and hear their flutters.

If I closed my eyes, I was in one world. When I opened them, I was in another, and neither was my world. The edges of my vision were fuzzy, like developing film.

More laughter. When I closed my eyes this time, the right side of my vision was brilliant red with fuchsia polka dots. I told Gary and Bertie I don't usually like that color combination, but it was so beautiful! The left side was an intense kelly green, also with fuchsia polka dots, and in the center, they merged into a giant constant firework of bright light.

"They're talking to each other! Your right and left brain are communicating," Bertie said.

The corpus callosum of our brain is a wall separating the right and left brain that prevents accessible communication between the two sides.

Functional MRI studies show that on psilocybin, the left and right brain communicate freely. “A brain region called the claustrum may be at the center of all of this,” Fred Barrett, a neuroscientist at Johns Hopkins University, said. The claustrum is a set of two slight strips of gray matter—one tucked deep inside each brain hemisphere—that are connected to almost every other region of the brain. Francis Crick (of DNA fame) and neuroscientist Christof Koch suggested in 2005 that the claustrum’s position and connectedness made it a likely “conductor of consciousness.” Barrett compared it to a switchboard that tells other brain regions to turn on and off in response to changing stimuli. He said, “Different regions of the brain can interact in radically different ways. Networks that normally don’t turn on at the same time may turn on and stay on, and they begin to fight for control. And other brain networks that would normally be involved in emotions or memories are firing on and off in an unpredictable fashion.”⁷

I felt my logical left brain had finished sorting through the highly charged negative emotions in my right brain and discarded those that no longer served me.

Bertie suggested I walk out onto the grass barefoot. I don’t do that. I was raised in Arizona and feared stepping on a scorpion. I relented. Weak and devoid of energy, Gary walked me to the lawn. I knelt on the verdant green grass where I saw the tiniest little white mushroom and burst into laughter.

The flowers in the garden seemed to shout “Look at me!” with their hot pink and bright orange petals. The cauliflower bushes near the deck appeared to shapeshift, moving back and forth from big bunches to little bunches.

Gary lay down on the grass. I crawled over to him, rested my head on his stomach, and curled my body into a fetal position right up next

7. Alissa Greenberg, “How Do Psychedelics Work? This Brain Region May Explain Their Effects,” *Nova*, Oct. 19, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/psychedelic-brain-effects-claustrum/>.

to his. He put his fingers together behind his head so we could see one another.

The setting sun shone through the shimmery green leaves of the cottonwood tree until it slipped behind the glowing red barn. The brilliant blue sky was painted with wisps of cirrus clouds.

Gary looked older, maybe thirty years older. His hair was all white. His skin was mottled with sunspots. I asked if I could put my hand on his heart. I snaked my hand through his shirt onto his skin and felt his heartbeat. We were one. This felt primordial.

Connection. One I'd felt before. The fleeting moment when my children were infants lying on my chest, craning their necks, eyes peeping up at me to follow the sound of my familiar voice.

I didn't want our joyful soul-seeing moment to end. I willed myself to keep my swollen eyes open. I count this as one of the most sacred experiences of my life.

Dr. Bessel A. van der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, wrote, "Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to a meaningful and satisfying life."⁸

Psilocybin therapy felt like a decade of cognitive behavioral therapy in four hours. The beauty of psilocybin therapy is that it allowed my undiluted emotions to flow freely without being correlated to specific traumatic events I had to relive. I didn't have to put forth the effort of finding and using words to describe my emotions and experiences from multiple vantage points—as my older, wiser self, the voice of experience reflecting on my younger self, and the voice of innocence, who she was, and what she thought then.

8. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015). Quoted on <https://www.besselvanderkolk.com/resources/the-body-keeps-the-score>.

My logical brain looked at emotional situations and saw them without emotionality. After my treatment, I could step outside my looping thoughts, sidestepping landmines, to see which thoughts were serving me and which were not. I was able to discard much of the detritus of pathological grief. I can now look back at my younger self with more love and empathy.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl wrote, "Between the stimulus and response, there is a space. And in that space lies our freedom and power to choose our responses. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."⁹

For me, psilocybin therapy increased the space between stimulus and response. I regained that space, allowing me to be more thoughtful in determining how I will respond to events and emotions.

When faced with the ripple effects of agency wielded by others, "Now what?" has been my default response for far too long. I'm now closer to replacing it with "And here we are." I am present and more capable of loving people where they are—and it's still hard.

9. Attributed to Frankl by Sharon Ravitch, "Space between Stimulus and Response: Creating Critical Research Paradises," Sage Research Methods Community, Mar. 11, 2020, <https://researchmethodscommunity.sagepub.com/blog/space-between-stimulus-and-response-creating-critical-research-paradises>.

BRIDGET VERHAAREN {bridget.verhaaren@vcfa.edu} is married to Dr. Gary Garner. Together they have eight children. She has a BA in English from Brigham Young University and an MFA in creative nonfiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Ms. Verhaaren's essays have been published in the *Write Launch*, *Herstry*, *Exponent II*, *Streetlight Magazine*, *Solstice Magazine*, *Sonora Review*, the *Season* (Center for Latter-Day Saint Arts), and *Segullah*. She has a forthcoming essay in *Segullah*.



Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *Front Porch Music*
digital painting, 2022

Traveling the Interstate after My Little Brother's Funeral

Anita Tanner

We slow.

What is this? Why?

We ride along, our eyes,

weary and broken,

adhere to what is left

of a hayload—

two long trailers loaded

with stout, bulky bales

now blackened, smoldering

just off the road to somewhere.

Wet, red firetrucks and hoses

cross beside the load.

The trailers collapse onto darkened rims—

all tires have melted in the heat.

We roll the windows

for the acrid smell to verify

our eyes, craned at the violent

rupture in the path,

incredulity in eyes and voices

as we ask. By the look of things,

here's destitution.

For miles down we question

cause and effect but cannot

understand.

We imagine the driver's joy
when heading out that day
with a farmer's load—

The hope of recompense
for all expense and sweat
has come to this.

All along the miles now—we feel
the rapture of the driver and the farmer,
then the rupture of the load.

ANITA TANNER has been writing since 1978. She is the mother of six and the grandmother of seventeen. Reading and writing is akin to breathing for her. She's lived in four states: Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho and loves them all. Raised on a small dairy farm in Wyoming, she learned a love of the land, nature, and animals. New ideals and connections light a fire in her. She is passionate about life, working in her yard, reading poetry, and taking daily walks. Her book of poems, *Where Fields Have Been Planted*, was published in 1999.

Under an Illness of the Moon

Dixie Partridge

No words make a difference
against the child's cries and damp heat—
only the rocking, rocking,

like Grandmother in her metronome chair,
the low arthritic moans that assumed an order
aimed outward, under her control.

You rock together on some exquisite rim,
where cell walls seem shared between you.
Dreams may be dragged

into morning, held behind the tougher
faces of daylight, that ether of routine.
But for now, the only reality

is that you rock the child,
rock the child, not sure
the fevered nightmare will end.

DIXIE PARTRIDGE grew up in Wyoming and spent most of her adult life living along the Columbia River in Washington State. Her poetry has appeared in several anthologies and many journals in the United States and Canada. Her first book, *Deer in the Haystacks*, is part of the book series *Poetry of the West* from Ahsahta Press. Her second book, *Watermark*, won the national Eileen W. Barnes Award. Personal impact of landscape is most often at the root of her writing.

Night Lines

Dixie Partridge

It was the high Uintas,
evening of our first day-hike
with grandchildren . . . their lives until then
seeming distant, clustered and glowing
as the far Pleiades to our gazing.

In the darkening, away from city lights,
Orion's bright belt embedded itself
in the peak of Mt. Nebo, conch-shell galaxies
wheeling the high-altitude sky.

States away now, I've walked out
from a quiet house into the present darkness.
Sensed through soles of my feet:
a network of roots . . . trees we planted
decades ago curving yard's edge
with the faint scent of pale summer phlox
clustered like hazed moons under dogwoods.

Just evenings back, weren't there
young voices lasting each summer dusk . . .
their hidings, their countings:
red light green light . . . run sheep run;
a sound of crickets enlarging
night's deep lavender,
its slowed, expanding kingdoms?

Inside, with the switch of a desk lamp,
a sudden gloss of faces
beams from table top and walls:
the photo sheen of family
evolving . . . a faint and distant longevity
in the smiles of all our ages.

Allergies

for Janet

Kevin Klein

On Mother's Day it snows
in our backyard, the kind that grows
on cottonwoods and makes my nose
itch inside the nostrils, pinch half-closed
at the bridge but still drip; and as it blows
into the grass (the cotton, that is), I see your clothes
and the pet hair stuck in them—all those
rabbits, ducks, dogs, and cats that I suppose
you never thought about wanting, but chose
for your kids the way a tree knows
its seeds will fall, and makes pillows
for their landing when the wind throws
them beyond even your branches' shadows.

KEVIN KLEIN {kevinmklein575@gmail.com} has poems that have appeared in *Dialogue*, *BYU Studies*, *Mothering* magazine, and *Irreantum*. He also edited a recent special issue of *Irreantum* featuring poems about Jesus by LDS-affiliated writers.

Night Prayer at Binh DOUNG +

Simon Peter Eggertsen

Confirmed in the slim night shadows,
a four-toed blue and gold dragon ridges
the tiles of the moss-glazed roof, ascends
to the slivering waxed Têt moon, an off-center
crescent smile above the aging temple. I watch
in the shadows as muted *whonnnngs* from
a squat brass bowl, struck soft by a straight
teak wand, and a staccato of loose leather
whoomphs from an old drum announce
the smooth evening entrance of a mother,
a daughter, one in yellow, one in white,
two subdued daisies, two days before
Lord Buddha's birthday. Small hands lift,
quickly press smoldering, red-bundled incense
to straight, soft brows three times, forward,
then back. The glow puts a squinted tracery
in the air, like a child's sparkler does on
the Fourth of July at Wildwood, embers writing
in some unknown alphabet new text for the prayer rolls.
They stand still, close eyes, shut out the world,
focus on now and the after. Their soft lips move,
slow, shape a chant, praise first, then flatter.
They loft four deep wishes to Lord Buddha,
push luck to the souls of departed ancestors.
Three repetitions will be enough this evening:
May we be filled with loving kindness; may you be well.

May we be peaceful and at ease, may you be whole . . .
Their reverence made, each time the incense less,
they leave an open set of spring flowers at each
modest altar, the surprise of pink peach blossoms,
and two Vietnamese pears, their green shape bold
on the white of smooth porcelain. The light left over
ricochets off a brushed brass urn, marks the presence
of two suns, an earth and a moon in one place.
Finished, they drop their temple money
at Lord Buddha's feet, vanish through the door
like wisps of ash blown to the side by a shuffling
breeze. Taking with them a square of sticky rice
for their own good luck, they race home before
the twelve-toll bell strikes midnight, *donnnng*,
locks them out until the dawn. Safe inside at home,
they warm a pot of fragrant jasmine tea, wait for
tomorrow's first visitors, practice the ritual greeting,
ready the gifts, single sprigs of spring blossoms:
"Hai loc."
Tomorrow, the narcissus will bloom.

+This poem was recently named an honourable mention for the Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred.

SIMON PETER EGGERTSEN {speggertsen@yahoo.com} was born in Kansas, raised in Utah, schooled in Virginia and England, and came very late to poetry after a career in international health. He has degrees in literature, language, and law and now splits his time between Montreal and Cambridge, Massachusetts. A set of his poems won the Irreantum Poetry Prize (2012)—the last time it was given.

For My Husband, Who Doesn't Worry

Darlene Young

While you sleep with abandon, I quiver
beside you, *what ifs* crawling my skin.
You, warm beside me: liquid
stillness. You toil not, neither do you spin. I wish
I could ladle you over me, rub you
into the creases between my fingers,
behind my knees, dab you on my eyelids.
This is ancient, I believe.
Eve thrilled—and shuddered—
to the future just like this; even before
she had a secret to tell, she was craning her neck,
seeking horizons.
That was good. Adam
needed a tug sometimes. A fine pair,
those two. Still,
I'm sure there were nights, nights the boys
were out too late and the future
roiled like souring fruit in the belly,
when, watching him sleep, Eve wished
he would wake and wished
he wouldn't, so she could
crawl into the cave of him,
next to his heart,
under his arm.

DARLENE YOUNG's {youngbookshelf@gmail.com} third poetry collection, *Count Me In*, was published in April 2024 by Signature. She has also published *Here* (BCC Press, 2023) and *Homespun and Angel Feathers* (BCC Press, 2019). She teaches writing at Brigham Young University and has served as poetry editor for *Dialogue* and *Segullah* journals. Her work has been noted in *Best American Essays* and nominated for Pushcart Prizes.

SUBJUNCTIVE CASES

Karen Rosenbaum

Laurie zips up her red jacket and curses God and Dennis. Except God probably doesn't exist. Dennis exists. He is right in this moment existing in their bed while *she* is dragging the recycling and garbage cans out to the curb. It is dark. It is cold.

But Oakland isn't cold like Syracuse. Or Buffalo? Burlington? In the underground garage of his apartment building, Paul might be putting his laptop into the back seat of a black Volvo. His first patient will be in the office at nine. She is a profoundly troubled fourteen-year-old who grows her fingernails very long and scratches her breasts raw. Her mother sits in the waiting room, trying to concentrate on New Yorker cartoons.

In the refrigerator of Paul's kitchen are a dozen eggs minus three, a container of yogurt, two cartons of Indian takeout.

In the living room is a treadmill where Paul can walk and read Richard Dawkins at the same time.

On the way to work, Laurie worries about her father who has pancreatic cancer and her mother who has faith that prayers will heal him. And if the prayers don't heal him, her mother has faith that they will one day be reunited in a white frame house in heaven.

Laurie is glad that her mother's faith will see her through. Laurie herself has a hollow feeling whenever she thinks about her father dying. When did she last believe some force might intervene to expunge malignant tumors, not to mention the suffering from raw divorces and abuse and addiction? *And* famine and war and earthquakes and terrorist attacks? Some power that would ease the burden of one broken family and country, but maybe not another. In high school, she didn't

worry so much about the “anothers.” In college, she thought about them more.

Instead of prayers, she tries to recite things she is grateful for. She is grateful that while she is in the classroom, she can’t think about her father in Phoenix, his legs now paralyzed from the celiac plexus block. She can only think of Debbie and David and LeShaun and Carmelita. She loves the children. She is a good teacher.

So why not have children of your own, her mother demanded. You and Dennis are so selfish. It’s just so you can travel, take all those back-packing trips.

When Laurie turned forty, her mother stopped saying that. Aloud.

Paul is probably not selfish. He and—maybe her name is Marilyn—have released three children out into the world. Paul has always had answers. Questions too, but answers. For life. For patients. He and Marilyn might live in a two-story house in the suburbs and attend church and volunteer at the youth shelter. After Paul drives his dented gray Corolla over to the Baltimore clinic, Marilyn tells the cleaning lady what sheets to put on their bed, and then she takes the station wagon, which has car seats for the grandchildren, to the meeting of the compassionate service committee.

It’s four o’clock, and her classroom is empty—of children. Laurie straightens the book table and checks the computers to make sure they’re shut down. She sweeps up under the sand tray. Tomorrow’s word games are in a tidy stack on her desk. She slips the children’s paragraphs into her briefcase, sinks into her chair, and phones her mother.

“I wish you were here,” her mother says. “He is so weak. He’ll eat for you.”

“I’ll be there this weekend,” Laurie says. OAK to PHX, two hours. “But if he won’t eat what you cook, he’s not going to eat what I throw together. You know Dennis is the chef at our house.”

“Your brother’s organized a big fast for him,” says her mother. “Sunday. People from church, family, everyone. You’ll be here so you can fast with us.”

“Fasting so Dad’ll eat?”

“Fasting so he’ll get *well*.”

Laurie is walking to the back of the room, to the aquarium where the cardinal tetra dart from weed to ceramic toy. Their eyes, black circles in the neon blue streaks, seem soulless. Laurie can still eat fish. Until last year she could still eat chicken. Her self-imposed dietary restrictions are inconvenient because Dennis adores steak and chops. Fortunately, he has become a wizard with pasta and pizza.

“Must go, Mom,” she says. “Talk to you later.” She clicks off the overhead lights. Only the aquarium glows in the classroom.

It must already be dark in—where? Hartford? Trenton?—when Paul’s last patient leaves the office. He has to make sure Mrs. Goldtrump is long gone before he reaches the parking lot. He checks his email. His older daughter has left him a one-liner: “So this weekend I’m teaching you how to text.” That means she’ll show up at the apartment about ten on Sunday and drag him off to brunch at the Sunshine Cafe, where her fascinating work supervisor will just happen to drop by and join them.

Both his daughters seem untroubled by the divorce. The son, married and Mormon, exudes pain. Not just from his parents’ separation from each other. At their separation from all things safe and secure.

Laurie gets home before Dennis, so she pulls leftover bean stew out of the refrigerator and browses in the crisper drawer for salad makings. She’d open a can of tuna for the cat, but there is no cat.

Three years ago, her class had a guinea pig, and she brought it home on weekends.

“You don’t even have a dog,” her mom said once, or maybe seven times. Her mother has two whiny dachshunds.

A dog would be doable, Laurie thinks—if it were a shelter animal, so she wouldn't have to feel responsible for bringing it into the world. And she wouldn't have to worry about how to teach a dog to be altruistic, optimistic, and confident without the faith that protected her as a child. Suffocated sometimes, but sheltered—she had been a shelter animal. But to have kids, to raise kids—she and Dennis agreed on that the day they decided on the shape of the conference table. No kids.

Dogs—maybe. You could take a dog hiking and camping. But they never got around to a dog.

They have houseplants.

They also have two religions: opera on Sunday, and on Saturday, the outdoors. The two creeds are surprisingly compatible.

Or maybe it's like this: Donna is in the kitchen when Paul opens the door from the garage. "Meatloaf," he says, without either pleasure or disappointment.

"Meatloaf," she says. "How was your day?"

"Roads clear now. Had to follow the snowplow down this morning. There was an accident tonight on Lancaster. Ambulance just leaving, cars off to the side. Didn't look too bad."

They never discuss his patients.

She is chopping green onions and cucumbers on the cutting board. "You know the house I told you about over in Narberth? Where the family said they wouldn't go below a million?"

"Yeah?" He finds Gotterdamerung and pushes it into the CD slot. He closes his eyes at the first notes.

Donna scowls. "They went down to 950, and the podiatrist is going to take it."

"Good." He sinks onto a chair that creaks. "You have an open house Sunday?"

She scoots the vegetables into a wooden bowl. "Is that a problem?"

"You could drop by the church for an hour first."

"Could," she says.

"But won't." He stretches back and the chair shudders. "You won't."

"No," she says. "I won't."

When her phone rings, Laurie first reaches for the remote and turns down the volume on *Walkyrie*. No new trauma, she says to herself, and then, aloud, "Mom?"

"Hi, Puddin,'" says her mother.

"Nothing new then?" Laurie picks up the student paragraphs that had slid off her lap to the floor.

"He's sleeping."

"That's good. He can sleep well anyway." She smiles at Dennis, who has looked up from his laptop on the coffee table.

"And his color was better tonight. He ate some soup."

"Great." She leans back in the overstuffed chair.

"It was weird though. He said it was good to be warm, inside, out of the snow. I think he thought we were back in Logan."

"Maybe it's the pain meds," Laurie says. "They can do funny things to your mind."

"Maybe."

"And you *are* warm, right? And out of the snow."

"It was seventy-four today. And all that horrendous weather back east."

"It was about fifty here." Laurie stands up, draws open the drapes. "I can see the lights of the city," she says. "It's clear."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you whom I ran into yesterday. At Safeway. Your old clarinet teacher. Mrs. Johnson."

"Mrs. Johnson. She must be ancient."

"She dyes her hair this strange red-orange color. But I recognized her. They moved to Arizona twenty-five years ago."

"Mrs. Johnson!" Laurie harrumphs. "Did you tell her how Paul sat on my clarinet and the repairman said it would never be the same?"

"Nope." Her mother chuckles. "But I remembered. He was just home from his mission and was so awkward, and you'd left the clarinet on the couch. Got me to thinking about Paul." She pauses. "He cast such a spell on you. On the lot of you kids, but you especially. Your dad imagined we might one day see him speaking at General Conference." She stops, and Laurie hears her sigh.

"The Apostle Paul," says Laurie. She snorts. "I thought so too after he came back from that summer job in the Grand Canyon. Must have been speaking with God. Made it hard for him to speak with us ordinary mortals." She leans against the bookcase and stares at the dazzling city across the bay. "Once I heard he was a kid shrink in Pennsylvania or New York or someplace back east. Married, had a family. But that was so long ago I heard."

"It's sad to lose track of people," says her mom. "Paul. I wonder what's happened to him."

Laurie sits next to Dennis, puts her feet on the coffee table, wiggles her stockinged toes.

"Yeah," she says, "I've been wondering the same thing."

KAREN ROSENBAUM {karenmcrose@gmail.com} has been writing and publishing short fiction and personal essays for over half a century. Her collection *Mothers, Daughters, Sisters, Wives* (which includes a number of stories first published in *Dialogue*) won the Association for Mormon Letters' 2016 Best Short Story Collection Award. A retired community college English teacher, she lives with her husband in Kensington, California.

The September Six and the Soul of Modern Mormonism: A Review Essay

Sara M. Patterson. *The September Six and the Struggle for the Soul of Mormonism*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2023. 374 pp. Hardback: \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1560854661.

Reviewed by Robert A. Rees

In my estimation, Sara M. Patterson's *The September Six and the Struggle for the Soul of Mormonism* will be regarded as one of the most important works of Latter-day Saint/Mormon scholarship of the twenty-first century. It will be so, I believe, not only because it is a masterful work of scholarship but because it bridges the development of this uniquely American religion from the turbulent twentieth century, when Mormonism emerged from its pioneer past to become a modern global religion, to the twenty-first century, where it has the promise of becoming a world religion. I believe that what the Church, its leaders, and its members can learn from the September Six experience could help determine whether it will indeed fulfill that promise.

I don't think anyone could ask for a more thorough or responsible study of this important hinge in the Church's history than what Patterson gives us. Having lived through the cultural period Patterson explores and excavates; having wrestled with, studied, and written about most of the core doctrinal and social issues the September Six scholars got in trouble for addressing; having personally known and been friends with most of those who constitute this infamous half-dozen; and having faced similar challenges with regard to my devotion to the Church and allegiance to its doctrine and authority, I have a keen awareness of what these individuals went through and what it has taken for Patterson to capture this period so well, both intellectually and compassionately. Her book is a model of modern scholarship.

Patterson centers her discussion of the September Six on the exploration of what she identifies as the Latter-day Saint “purity system” and, in doing so, devotes an introductory chapter to four categories of purity: history telling, doctrinal purity, familial purity, and bodily purity. The narratives of the September Six fall within one or more of these categories and include the three pillars of purity: “orthodoxy, conformity, and hierarchy.”

The strong emphasis on purity within the Latter-day Saint tradition has its roots in America’s Puritan past. I first became aware of that past when I studied early American literature in graduate school and then taught courses on it as a member of the UCLA English faculty. Understanding the minds and spirits of such Puritan writers as Cotton Mather, Anne Bradstreet, and Jonathan Edwards helped me see the Puritan streams and strains in my own religious culture, just as studying and teaching writers such as Hawthorne, Emerson, and Whitman helped me see how there could be both a rejection of Puritan excesses and extremes on one hand and an acceptance of and accommodation to its virtues on the other. The tension between these poles of purity is what led to the disciplining of the September Six and, I believe, continues in Mormon culture today, although, thankfully, with fewer extremes and hopefully less drama than it did thirty years ago.

What I mean is that in a conservative religious culture like Mormonism, there is an inevitable pull to the inside, to a place that is safe, controlled, and consistent, a place governed by modern prophets who receive truth and direction from heaven and who can therefore state categorically what is right and what is wrong. But in a growing, changing, and increasingly evolving educated, diverse, and modern church, especially one that has sought acceptance by and accommodation to the outside world, there will always be an inevitable attraction and counter-pull, one that tends to be perceived by those on the inside as rejecting and dangerous and by those looking from the outside as necessary and correcting. As with most polar opposites, the most mature place might

be somewhere in between, the place the *New York Times*' columnist David Brooks identifies as "the edge of the inside." That is the place where many progressive Latter-day Saints find themselves, or at least hope eventually to be and to serve.

Nearly every member of the September Six (all except Avraham Gileadi and Lynne Kanavel Whitesides) is a friend of mine (including Lavina Fielding Anderson and Michael Quinn, who passed away last year). The excommunication of each was painful to them and to those of us who knew and suffered with them through their ordeals. Altogether, what happened to them seems tragic—especially since none wished to be separated from the Church, aware that such action results in the loss to the faith community of not only that person but also of his or her family and, often tragically, of succeeding generations.

When I served as a bishop, I decided that I wasn't going to excommunicate anyone. I know there are times when that action is appropriate, but I hoped to do everything I could not to take so draconian a step. One of the realizations that confirms that conclusion is the consensus among many that such excommunications would not likely happen today. As Jana Riess states, "In many ways, the unforgivable crime of the September Six was to be out of sync with their time—'getting in front of the brethren,' as the saying goes."¹ In hindsight, each of the Six might have felt, as did Hamlet, "The time is out of joint—O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!" (act 1, scene 5). From my understanding of what transpired, I don't believe that these Latter-day Saints were deliberately rebelling against or undercutting the Church but rather honestly searching for ways to expand and improve it.

The shadow that falls across the September Six—and the decades that preceded and followed it—is that of Apostle Boyd K. Packer. I speculate that without his zeal for purity, protecting, and punishing, and the disciplinary actions that ensued, this period would not have been

1. Jana Riess, "A Question of Authority," *Dialogue* 56, no. 3 (2023): 75.

as dark and dramatic as it turned out to be. Brother Packer reminds me of Nick Carraway, the narrator of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. After returning from what he experiences as the decadent world of New York to the safe haven of the Midwest, Carraway states, "When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever." Although I always sustained him, it was difficult not to conclude that Packer was on some kind of campaign to protect the Church from those he identified as a threat to it: "The dangers I speak of come from the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement . . . and the ever-present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals."²

As someone passionately involved in Mormon studies, I remember the interest with which I read Paul and Margaret Toscano's *Strangers in Paradox: Exploration in Mormon Theology* (Signature, 1990), Maxine Hanks's *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism* (Signature, 1992) and Michael Quinn's *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Signature, 1994). All explored aspects of Mormon history and theology that have been influential in broadening the scope of Mormon studies. The challenge scholars must continue to face is that there is little room for either speculative theology or scrupulous history in Mormon culture, although, as stated earlier, that is less so today than it was during the last decades of the twentieth century.

I have thought about my own experience with the Church's purity culture in light of the experience of the September Six and realize that at a different time and under different circumstances, I might well have experienced a similar fate to theirs. For example, as the editor of *Dialogue* in the early 1970s, I was warned by my former mentor and then vice president of BYU, Robert Thomas, that I would be disciplined ("face serious consequences") if I published Lester Bush's landmark article "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine." I told him that as an editorial

2. https://archive.org/details/coordinating_council_1993_boyd_k_packer/page/n3/mode/2up.

board we had prayed about what to do and felt publishing the article was the right decision but then decided to publish it with responses from three respected scholars (Hugh Nibley, Eugene England, and Gordon Thomasson) so as to give our readers as broad a context as possible to consider its implications for the Church.

I asked Thomas how he knew the brethren would disapprove of our publishing the article, and he responded, "From a source high up." I replied, "We are doing this in good faith. I assume if my decision proves to be wrong, they will forgive me." He replied, "They won't!" Later, I discovered from Bush that the likely person making the request was Elder Packer. According to Bush's record, he broached the possibility of withdrawing the article from *Dialogue*, but Packer, unaware of how seriously we wrestled with the dilemma, replied, "They would just publish it anyway." As I wrote later, "I was disturbed by the prospect that acting in what I considered a morally responsible way could cost me my membership, but I felt that it was a risk I would have to run."³ Fortunately, there were no adverse consequences from our decision and ultimately very positive results.⁴

Unrelated to this episode, several years later I was released as a member of the high council in the Los Angeles Stake for refusing to shave my moustache. (My reason was that I didn't want to validate a request that seemed to trivialize something as significant as obedience to authority, and, besides, my wife preferred that I not shave!) The stake president sent the regional representative to persuade me. We met in an office where I later served as bishop. On one wall was a picture of the Savior and on another paintings or photographs of all the prophets of the Restoration from Joseph Smith to Spencer W. Kimball. I asked the leader why it was necessary to shave my facial hair. He said, "To follow

3. Devery S. Anderson, "A History of Dialogue, Part Two: Struggle toward Maturity, 1971–1982," *Dialogue* 33, no. 2 (2000): 24n124.

4. See my article, "Blacks and the Priesthood: A Retrospective Perspective," forthcoming in *Dialogue*.

our leaders.” I pointed to the picture of Jesus who had a full beard and said, “That’s my leader.” He replied, “I mean modern prophets.” I pointed to the other wall and identified seven who had beards. He then said, “I mean the living prophet.” I then said, “When I was in the temple recently, not only were the Father and the Son shown as bearded, but the worker who helped me through the veil had a beard.” He replied, “Yeah, that really bothers me!” That ended the conversation and initiated my release.

Later, when serving as bishop of the Los Angeles First (singles) Ward in the late 1980s, I welcomed gays and lesbians into our fellowship and, with the support of the stake president (a different one from the moustache episode), held periodic meetings with lesbian and gay members to talk about their experiences in a supportive environment (“no church bashing and no gay bashing”). Later, I learned from a friend, a regional representative of the Church at that time, that he had been asked to end the meetings, which he refused to do. During this time, I had several conversations with Elder Marion D. Hanks of the Seventy about my work with LGBTQ people. Hanks, who was a friend, said, “Bob, on this issue I’m afraid you are ahead of the Church—and that’s a very uncomfortable place to be.” And so it has proven to be.

After serving a three-and-a-half-year mission in the Saint Petersburg Russia Mission and then the newly organized Baltic States Mission (1992–1996), my wife and I moved to the Santa Cruz, California, Stake where I was again called to the high council. It was during this time that the Church waged a vigorous campaign in support Proposition 8, which would have permanently forbidden same-sex marriage in California. Despite encouragement from ward and stake leaders that I campaign on behalf of the proposition, because of my ministry among LGBTQ Latter-day Saints, I felt I could not in good conscience support the proposition. I published an op-ed in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, not attacking the proposition or the Church’s position but rather emphasizing the Church’s long-held policy of leaving such matters up to the judgment of individual Saints. Because my stake president interpreted

this as “public and open opposition to the Church,” I was released from the high council, had my temple recommend rescinded, and was silenced for an entire year, which meant that I was forbidden from praying, speaking, teaching, or bearing my testimony.

I don’t recite this litany to claim any righteousness (or spirit of rebellion) but rather to emphasize that in each instance I was prayerfully and thoughtfully following my conscience. Each episode was painful because I didn’t want to be seen as being in opposition to the Church or its leaders. I have a deep and abiding testimony of the Restoration. I have gladly raised my hand to support the leaders of the Church for seventy-eight years since I joined the Church as a ten-year-old boy. I have tried, in the words of Robert Bolt’s Sir Thomas More (in *A Man for All Seasons*) to serve God “wittily [i.e., in the archaic meaning ‘intelligently’] in the tangle of [my] mind.” I admit that my mind is at times tangled as I go about trying to understand who I am as a latter-day disciple of Jesus Christ and how I can best serve God and others in such a tangled world, but nevertheless this is how I see my discipleship.

Latter-day Saint theology includes two central, fundamental, yet potentially conflicting principles that are at the heart of faithfulness: prophets are entrusted with the responsibility of receiving revelation for themselves and for the Church, and individuals are responsible for receiving revelation for themselves and for their spiritual jurisdictions (families and ecclesiastical callings). In the best circumstances, these two revelatory responsibilities are in harmony, but there are times when they are not, when individuals experience a tension between being obedient to ecclesiastical authority or their own inner spiritual conviction. Some prophets acknowledge this conflict. For example, Joseph Smith said the following in regard to a brother called in for discipline:

I never thought it was right to call up a man and try him because he erred in doctrine, it looks too much like Methodism and not like Latter day Saintism. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church. I want the liberty of believing as I please, it

feels so good not to be trammelled. It dont [sic] prove that a man is not a good man, because he errs in doctrine.⁵

And Brigham Young stated:

What a pity it would be, if we were led by one man to utter destruction! Are you afraid of this? I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually.⁶

In her conclusion, “Thirty Years Later,” Patterson speaks about the controversial subjects that surrounded the Latter-day Saint world in the early 1990s, including issues relating to race, feminism, history, sexual orientation and gender identity, and so forth. She also catalogues some examples of progress that have been made following that period, including the Church publishing the Gospel Topics essays, changing some policies relating to LGBTQ issues, and being more open and flexible regarding women’s issues. Nevertheless, she argues that the purity system is still very much alive in the Church, especially at BYU and other educational programs and institutions under the direction of the Church Educational System. It is also evident in congregations where the protectors of purity are seemingly ever vigilant.

Patterson does not acknowledge the fact that there are counter-vailing purity systems in our culture, including in Mormon culture.

5. Discourse, April 8, 1843, as reported by William Clayton—B, p. 2, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper>.

6. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:150.

That is, there are tests of loyalty and allegiance whether one moves toward or away from the center (i.e., moves closer to or away from orthodoxy). Each side tends to characterize and label (and have the impulse to disfellowship) those who do not adhere closely to what it sees as true and right. Thus, it is possible for those who see the world as complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical to be suspected and judged as wanting by both purity positions. That can be lonely territory!

Patterson ends her study on a positive note:

But at the local and communal level, the church is changing, prodded in part by online communities and connections. Some people are leaving the pews because of the church's policies about LGBTQ identity and gender expectations that are rooted in a patriarchal system. Others are staying in the pews but demanding a more inclusive vision of the Restoration. At that level of the laity, people are embracing their sense of personal revelation, driven by the Spirit toward a more egalitarian community. At that level, the September Six and their legacy continue on, shaping people's memory of individuals willing to stand up to the institution in the struggle for the soul of Mormonism.⁷

In spite of Patterson's optimism, there are signs that serious conflicts remain over issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and women's roles as well as potential divisions over some emotionally charged social and political issues. In spite of what Jana Riess lists as progress since the September Six excommunications, her observation that "the question of authority lies at the heart of all these conflicts, just as it did in 1993,"⁸ should be a flag of caution to those who write and speak about them.

7. Patterson, *September Six*, 314.

8. Riess, "A Question of Authority," 70.

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Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *Dinosaur Book*
digital painting, 2023

“Cheap Social Issue Novel Bullshit” versus the Power of the Personal Story

Karin Anderson. *What Falls Away*. Torrey House Press, 2023. 320 pp. Paper: \$18.76. ISBN: 978-1948814799.

Reviewed by Anne Papworth

“That’s just cheap social issue novel bullshit. . . . [It] makes people like us hope for a smaller, neater world where stories make sense and converge” (228). This is protagonist Cassandra Soelberg’s response when confronted by a man who was adopted as an infant and is seeking to learn more about his birth parents. Since Cassandra’s child was also adopted during the same time frame, the man wonders if she might be his mother. “Could it really be this ridiculously coincidental?” he asks the woman he met in a small-town grocery store (229). Although Cassandra scoffs at the belief that “stories make sense and converge,” throughout the novel *What Falls Away*, by Karin Anderson, she seemingly longs for such a result to make sense of her own story.

Switching between present and past, Anderson’s novel details Cassandra and the legacy of her early years in the fictional town of Big Horn, Utah. At sixteen years old, this paradoxically naive and pregnant young woman was abused and/or abandoned by the people who should have protected her: her father and mother, her brothers, her “lover,” and her religious leaders. Forty years later, she returns home to care for her mother, who is incapacitated by dementia.

Having avoided her hometown since moving away to college, Cassandra is conflicted about her return. The opening lines of the novel assure Cassandra and readers “that she’s come to terms with Clearlake Valley, even Big Horn itself” (5). However, the next sentence undermines this assurance with a hope that, after this visit, “she might be

able to frame it and walk away” (5). As a successful artist, Cassandra understands the power of a frame. A frame creates boundaries and confines a view; it highlights certain aspects and minimizes others. Perhaps her time in Big Horn as a rational adult, freed from the confusion and constraints of family and religion, will give Cassandra the perspective to understand and then walk away from her past.

Raised a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Cassandra was taught that chastity was the ultimate goal for young women. Ironically, she was also taught that the primary role for women was to entice men into marrying them.

No wonder teenaged Cassandra was ill prepared for her first date, the junior prom, with small-town hotshot Allan White. Anderson powerfully depicts Cassandra’s confusion and paralysis as Allan manipulates her throughout the evening. For example, when he grabs her wrist to prevent her from opening the car door (“Ladies wait for the gentleman to open the door”), she can’t interpret her feelings about Allan. This inability to comprehend what she feels follows her throughout the evening, magnified by an inexplicable fear that she will fail what she senses is some type of test of her womanhood and value to her family. As a result, Cassandra was “so encompassed by fear there was no contrasting sensation to distinguish it. . . . All of it added up to blank compliance” (117).

Two months later, Cassandra is pregnant. She is taken away, in the middle of the night, to a city far from home, where she gives birth, gives up her baby, and then returns to her life in Utah, where it is expected that she will repent and reclaim the future that had been planned for her.

Sadly, Cassandra’s fictional narrative matches story upon story of real teenage girls in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other predominantly Christian countries. These young girls were warehoused until their babies were born and denied the opportunity to even hold these newborns, let alone choose the fate of

these children. The frequency of these actions were so common that the decades of the 1950–1970s are now called the “Baby Scoop Era,” as four million unwed mothers “surrendered” their babies to adoption.¹

This is a story that needs to be told because the legacy of the Baby Scoop Era is still with us. In discussing this novel with family, my sister, similar in age to Cassandra, remembered watching the TV commercials that advertised “safe” homes for unwed mothers, places where they could hide the shame of their pregnancies and return home, unencumbered, because they had gifted their children to worthy, married couples. Forty years later, the children from these adoptions are still seeking answers about their birth parents. Some stories have been captured in historical works such as Rickie Solinger’s *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v Wade*. Others are told by those directly affected by this practice. For example, the Mothers Project was started by Celeste Billhartz, the child of a teenage mother, who believed her birth mother didn’t want her. Speaking of her purpose behind the Mothers Project, Billhartz states: “I have interviewed many mothers from the infamous BSE ‘baby scoop era’ (1950–1970’s) and they, like our girl/mothers of previous generations, never got over the loss of their babies. It is important that these stories be told so their children—now in their 30’s, 40’s and older—know they were not ‘gifts’ joyously, gratefully handed to strangers, and forgotten. We were loved and missed, all our lives.”²

Anderson paints a vision of this loss, as sixty-year-old Cassandra still struggles in the liminal space of being a mother who is not a mother. Other women in the novel who lost children to death are allowed to mourn their losses and anxiously await being reunited with their loved ones, while Cassandra can’t even speak of her child.

1. The Baby Scoop Era Research Initiative, “What Was the ‘Baby Scoop Era?’,” <https://babyscoopera.com/home/what-was-the-baby-scoop-era/>.

2. Celeste Billhartz, “About the Mothers Project,” Mothers Project, 2007, <http://themothersproject.com/about/aboutTMP.html>.

So this story needed to be told. I just wish it had been told in a different book. A more evenly written novel. Ironically, Cassandra explains why such a story is difficult to write. Telling stories such as this “makes us hope until we’re too hurt and tired to think in rational ways” (228). While Cassandra’s hurt and exhaustion is understandably justified, the novel succumbs to that hurt and irrationality so frequently that the power of this story dissipates with each caricature of religious fundamentalists, an oversexed patriarchy, and bejeweled-jean-wearing women who cannot think for themselves and fear anyone who might.

Cassandra’s family is dysfunctional, and her father is abusive. Her father, Hal Soelberg, warps his religious beliefs (and those of his family) to justify his selfish and destructive behaviors. Interestingly, Anderson makes Hal one of the few compelling figures in the novel. Cassandra was “direly afraid of him” although “he never hit her” (62). And although “he had hit her brothers plenty, . . . he laughed and chattered and romped among them too” (63). Hal’s mother tries to give her granddaughter, and the readers, some insight into Hal, as she explains, “Something’s awfully fragile in your father’s picture of himself. . . . He needs other men to approve. It’s just a thing to know about him, not a thing to try and fix” (64).

However, Anderson isn’t content just to show how a family can suffer because of the father’s flaws and complexities. Instead, every male Mormon in Big Horn is, at minimum, an oversexed purveyor of the patriarchy; according to Anderson, most are rapists and child molesters as well. Some are polygamists, and those who aren’t apparently dream of the day when their wives will accept polygamy so these men can give into their religiously sanctioned promiscuity.

Regrettably, this novel suffers from what novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls “the danger of the single story.” Adichie explains that a single story is one particular view of a person, a people, or a country. She states, “How to create a single story [is to] show a people as one

thing, as only one thing, over and over again.”³ This is what Anderson does in her depiction of Mormons living in Big Horn, Utah.

Anderson creates a few exceptional characters that are three dimensional and original. The Relief Society president Toni Fuller has both a genuine love for and humorous critique of the members in her ward. And Cassandra's brother Brian brilliantly transforms the image of fatherhood that he was given as a child. One of the best scenes in the novel occurs when Brian sees that a small child has peed his pants. As children, if Brian and his brothers had an accident, Hal Soelberg would strip his boys naked and shame them in the front yard as he hosed them down for all to see. In contrast, Brian lovingly strips the little boy to his underpants and invites all the grandchildren to do the same, turning what could have been a shameful memory into a joyous run through the sprinklers.

Unfortunately, the other characters in the novel are reduced to farce. Cassandra's brother James only speaks in pronouncements such as “I say in the name of the Lord that ye must not defile the faith of this religious family” and “If you intended to make contact with our descendants, I must ask you to go through the proper channels” (189–190). James's Stepford wife, Paige, leaves a note for Cassandra stating, “I'm sorry I can't be here to greet you but I took the opportunity to put dinner on our own table. For once” (15). Even Brian's wife, Elaine, preaches, “Brian is the head of this household. He holds the keys to our family salvation. I promised when I became his wife to honor and obey him. The prophets say that even if a priesthood holder directs his wife to do the wrong thing, she will be blessed for her obedience” (259).

Not only does this Mormon caricature undermine Anderson's skill as a writer, but it diminishes the power of Cassandra's story. In the middle of the novel, Anderson describes what is essentially a kidnapping. A pregnant Cassandra is spirited away to Washington state and

3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” TED-Global, July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en.

the Grunfeldts' home for fallen girls. However, the description of her time in Washington is created through clichés and tortured metaphors: "Brother Grunfeldt lived for his hour (plus) of glory—unhinged flights of fancy as he taught the Gospel Doctrine class. . . . 'Your residence here, sisters, is much like serving time in spirit prison.' . . . Brother Grunfeldt belched words like thesaurus confetti, enamored of his unctuous voice" (203–204). Anderson's forced language made me dismiss the entire scene as hyperbole. Later on, as I learned more about the Baby Scoop Era, I read a passage from historian Rickie Solinger that described Cassandra's exact experience: "Unwed mothers were defined by psychological theory as not-mothers. . . . As long as these females had no control over their reproductive lives, they were subject to the will and the ideology of those who watched over them. And the will, veiled though it often was, called for unwed mothers to acknowledge their shame and guilt, repent, and rededicate themselves."⁴ As mentioned previously, I had dismissed the entire section as hyperbolic melodramaticism, motivated by Anderson's desire to make Mormons seem weirder than she'd already painted them. In actuality, this type of reindoctrination probably happened repeatedly across the country throughout the 1950–1970s, regardless of religious affiliation. What if Anderson had just sketched the scene, letting readers understand the significance of this horror for themselves?

Every time a Mormon speaks in the novel, I am reminded of a 2022 review of *Under the Banner of Heaven*, a television crime drama set in Utah, written by McKay Coppins, a reporter for the *Atlantic*. Coppins observed, "The characters speak as though their dialogue was written in another language and then run through a creepy-Mormon version of Google Translate."⁵ I feel like Anderson did something similar. Raised as a member of the Church, Anderson might be depicting these

4. Baby Scoop Era Research Initiative, "What Was the 'Baby Scoop Era'?"

5. McKay Coppins, "Under the Banner of Hulu," *Atlantic*, June 15, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/06/under-the-banner-of-heaven-hulu-mormonism/661279/>

characters based on her memories, but I wish someone like an editor or a Church consultant had intervened and pushed her to create real people rather than this stereotypical community.

As Adichie warns, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” When Anderson forgets the single story of Mormonism and tells Cassandra’s personal story, the novel is captivating; however, too often she seems so intent on presenting what one character describes as “a weird trip to Utah . . . [an] Adventure amidst the Mormons. An old formula.” By doing this, she loses the power of the personal story. I wish Anderson had listened to her own character’s advice. Drop the old formula, the single story of Mormonism, and just tell Cassandra’s story. It’s more than enough.

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Finally! A Scholarly Biography of Joseph F. Smith

Stephen C. Taysom. *Like a Fiery Meteor: The Life of Joseph F. Smith*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2023. 445 pp. + xvi. \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1-64769-128-8.

Reviewed by Christopher James Blythe

In the summer of 2009, as a master’s student, I sat in one of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute’s summer seminars when the topic turned to the absence of a biography on Joseph F. Smith. I listened to Terryl Givens

pontificate on the importance of this understudied figure and the significance of his presidency in the period of transition. An end of an era. One of my colleagues, Joseph Spencer, suggested that the groundwork for such a study had been established in Jan Shipp's masterful 1985 work, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Illinois). It was a memorable discussion and one I have had many times since. The LDS academic community has long been aware that we needed a biography of Joseph F. Smith. Steve Taysom took up the task several years ago, and we finally have the fruits of his labor. I'm not disappointed.

Joseph F. Smith lived a fascinating life. He was the son of the martyred Hyrum Smith and served mission after mission. Smith had multiple marriages and many children. He was pulled into the apostleship as a counselor to Brigham Young when he was not yet thirty. And, of course, he would eventually become *the* Prophet, Seer, and Revelator of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—a position he would hold for seventeen years. It was under Smith's presidency that we saw the Reed Smoot hearing, the second manifesto that put a final end to Church-supported plural marriage, the First World War, and the planning of the Hawaiian temple. Even if you did not find Smith's personal life of interest, the events surrounding him are key to our understanding of the development of the modern LDS Church.

If you have paid even the most casual attention to the buzz surrounding this biography, you know that the most noteworthy discovery pertains to Joseph F. Smith's tendency toward violence. Joseph F. Smith was not kind to his first wife, Levira, and reading the details of their relationship is painful. The marriage was doomed. Levira suffered from mental illness and infertility, while Joseph F. Smith was physically distant due to numerous missions. Smith accused Levira of infidelity and said nearly unforgivable things about her mental illness. Ultimately, on one occasion, he beat her with a switch. It is in this moment that I realized the quality of Taysom's biographical craft. He couched this incident from both viewpoints and then contextualized it into perspectives on domestic discipline (we'd call it abuse) in nineteenth-century America.

He has no problem covering Smith's failings, fierce temper, and anxiety while also allowing us to see the man's more compassionate and loving nature. Taysom's writing surrounding Smith's reactions to the deaths of his children were particularly powerful for me.

Taysom is a relentless researcher. I am very impressed with his ability to dive into the sources and bring out such compelling material. At the same time, I think there should have been a more generous citation of previous scholarship. In the handling of postmanifesto plural marriage, I would have expected some reference to B. Carmon Hardy's *Solemn Covenant* (Illinois, 1992). I don't think we should write about depictions of Joseph F. Smith in contemporary newspapers without some acknowledgement of Paul Reeve's *Religion of a Different Color* (Oxford, 2015). I was particularly surprised to see no reference to Jan Shipp's *Mormonism*. As I note above, Shipp was likely the first to recognize just what a turning point Joseph F. Smith's presidency was in LDS history. When writing about Joseph F. Smith's 1918 revelation that would become section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Taysom notes that multiple scholars have interpreted this revelation in the context of Joseph F. Smith's son's death and World War I, but for some reason we don't find out who these scholars are. In truth, I was surprised to find no evidence Taysom had consulted my own work, which would have added substance to his discussion of Joseph F. Smith's reactions to the idea of the One Mighty and Strong and, more importantly, Joseph F. Smith's apocalypticism and reimagining of Zion in World War I.

Despite this criticism, *Like a Fiery Meteor* is one of the strongest titles published in 2023 in LDS studies. It is an original piece of scholarship that outshines previous studies of Joseph F. Smith—there is no question. Yet, like all such works, it is the product of the accrual of knowledge in the LDS studies community and that fact should be recognized.

The biography follows a chronological framework, covering different eras as distinct moments. Taysom acknowledges at the outset that some readers would prefer to read a thematic study of Joseph F. Smith's life with chapters covering different themes, rather than a chronological

study of his life. Yet, the chronological organization works quite nicely. Taysom leads us through the ups and downs of a life while helping us better understand major moments in LDS history. I would place *Like a Fiery Meteor* alongside the best LDS biographies. It deserves the same recognition in LDS historiography as such pathbreaking works as Val Avery's *From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* (Illinois, 1998), John Turner's *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Harvard, 2012), and Terryl Givens and Matthew Grow's *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (Oxford, 2011). I suspect that I will return to this book many times in the years ahead.

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Peacebuilding through Latter-day Nonviolence

Patrick Mason and J. David Pulsipher. *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and Deseret Book Company, 2021. 290 pp. Paperback. \$19.99. ISBN: 9781950304165.

Reviewed by Shiloh Logan

If the strength of a religious community is determined by how vigorously its leaders, scholars, and members can renegotiate the historical and common interpretations of its sacred texts while maintaining community cohesion, then the (re)scripturalization of Restoration scripture

within *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict* by Patrick Q. Mason and J. David Pulsipher offers significant evidence of the cohesive vigor of the Latter-day Saint community. The book makes many constructive claims, but its provocative thesis is that Restoration theology not only has a place in the millennia-old nonviolence discourse (which it has not previously been a part of) but that the obscure message of nonviolent peacebuilding “is at the heart of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ” (xvi). For these authors, “Restoration scripture offers a prophetic critique of all three forms of violence—direct, structural, and cultural” (xxiii), and “to ‘proclaim peace’ is to renounce all forms of violence” (xxiv). While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a peace church that institutionally advances nonviolence, *Proclaim Peace* explicitly states that it is time for Latter-day Saints “to claim a seat at the peacebuilding table” (xxv).

Proclaim Peace offers scholars within a strong hierarchical religious community ample evidence of how to (re)negotiate old and new interpretations of scripture and (re)consider old and new concepts about God’s nature. A Latter-day Saint nonviolent hermeneutic requires deeper consideration than grappling with the Bible alone. Scholars working in Latter-day Saint spaces must also consider the authoritative words of Church leaders who preside over the community. The often shaky and sometimes contentious relationship between Latter-day Saint scholars and Church leaders is well documented, but *Proclaim Peace* mitigates potential conflict by differentiating between *doctrine* and *theology*. Whereas “only those called as prophets, seers, and revelators have the authority” to set and define “doctrine,” the authors argue, “all Church members can participate in the work of theology, by which we mean reasoned reflection on the doctrine received by the body of the Church” (xx). The authors contend their book does not assert any new doctrine but “is at its heart a work of scriptural theology” (xx). Restoration scripture is the book’s primary source material to apply and promote a nonviolent hermeneutic. Quotes from Church

leaders functionally reify possible bridges between the authors' new hermeneutic and commonly accepted understandings of God's nature and violence within the Latter-day Saint community. In this manner, *Proclaim Peace* can successfully renegotiate the community's understanding of scripture without immediate conflict with Church leaders who have never taught or promoted an unequivocal nonviolent reading.

The book's ten chapters address common themes in the Christian nonviolence discourse, including Christ's atonement, the definition and essence of love and peace, the relationship between justice and mercy, the qualifications of justified violence, modern concepts of power, and divine violence. *Proclaim Peace* uses many unique stories and theological nuances within Restoration scripture to apply nonviolent interpretive methodologies. One of the book's many strengths contrasts how creative nonviolent responses to commonly violent "cycles of conflict" in the Book of Mormon produce deeper and more effective peaceful outcomes (74–93). Close attention is given to distinguishing between *justified* violence and *righteous* nonviolence as set forward in the often-ignored standard of section 98 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Violent self-defense is only justified after an assailant attacks three times but is counted as righteousness to the victim when the victim spares the assailant from violent recourse a fourth time (128–147). The final chapter, "Just Ward Theory," is a practical call to action that synthesizes the book's nonviolent peacebuilding theology and encourages members of the global Church to reject worldly reactionary violence and apply these suggested principles locally in a renewed effort to build Zion.

The most difficult theme in Christian nonviolence discourse is resolving the many scriptural examples of divinely mandated or divinely enacted violence. A common Christian nonviolent reconciliation is that God's violence is not incongruent with requiring his children to be assertively and nonviolently peaceful. This argument is more difficult within a Latter-day Saint discourse, which has, at some point, asserted that humans are "gods in embryo" and that mortal life is a learning and testing period to "become gods" themselves. *Proclaim*

Peace borrows from the common Christian narrative in resolving the Latter-day Saint conundrum by arguing that “the moral calculus by which God decides to strike one person or society and not another remains hidden to us” (157). While the authors offer examples of God working within the nonviolent paradigm, more work is still required to convincingly reconcile a Latter-day Saint nonviolent understanding of a Jesus that commands “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27) and who also admits, only a few pages earlier, to gruesomely destroying at least sixteen cities full of men, women, and children “because of their wickedness and their abominations” (3 Nephi 9:12).

Originally writing for an academic audience, the authors pivoted toward a Latter-day Saint audience at the behest of preliminary readers (xi). It is arguable whether *Proclaim Peace* firmly made the transition from arguing to the broader academic community that Restoration theology has a reasonable place in nonviolence discourse to convincing the Latter-day Saint community of a central nonviolent understanding of their sacred texts. That *Proclaim Peace* was copublished by the BYU Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book makes sense to maximize distribution but also magnifies the ambiguity of its seemingly dual-facing audiences.

These mild critiques aside, there is never a better time than the present to reimagine peace within our communities. Mason and Pulsipher have accomplished the difficult task of offering the Latter-day Saint community a rare understanding of peacebuilding and nonviolence within their faith tradition. *Proclaim Peace* lays sufficient groundwork for Latter-day Saints to reimagine and build a more peace-centered religious community. Further, the authors succeed in effectively arguing that Restoration theology has a legitimate seat at the peacebuilding table if it desires.

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Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *Bed Time*
acrylic on canvas, 24 x30 inches, 2023

CARRIE ELLEN CARLISLE {carrieellenartstudio@gmail.com} is originally from Cache Valley Utah. She earned her bachelor of fine arts from Utah State University. Her mediums of choice are acrylic painting and digital painting. Carrie now lives in Andover, Kansas, with her husband and her two children. Carrie's art focuses on everyday family life.



Carrie Ellen Carlisle, *A Mother's Loss*
digital painting, 2023

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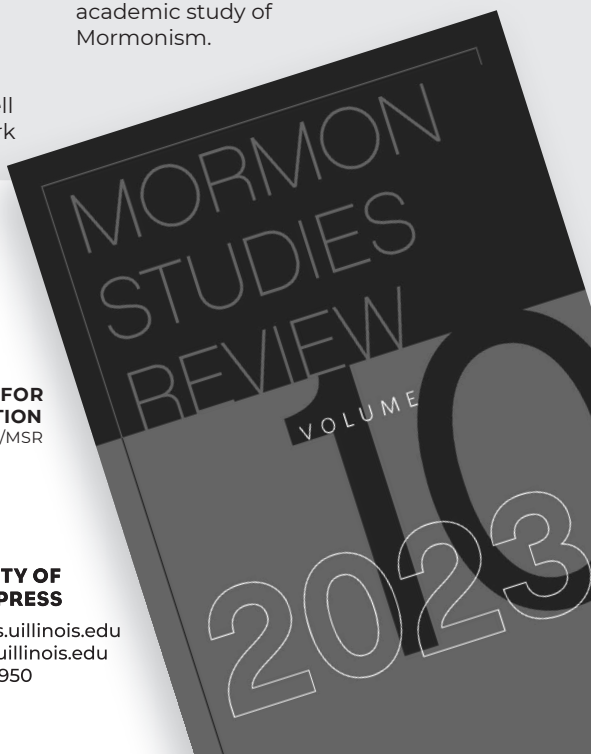


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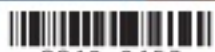
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