

P aradoxes and Perplexities

LOVE AND PAIN AND THE WHOLE DAMNED MISSION

Marvin Rytting

She stands in the door of the chapel staring into the blackness of a Saturday night. She's not beautiful, perhaps not even pretty. Yet, for some reason, she's extremely attractive. She's tall and stately and her long brown hair fits well. Her skirt would perhaps be condemned at BYU, but somehow on her it seems perfectly modest. Maybe her salient 'sweet spirit' makes everything she does and is seem right.

"Yet she so often has an air of sadness, of silent suffering. You sense that tonight as you watch her and you wonder what she's thinking. Is she

dreaming the dreams that 17-year-old girls dream? Does she realize how slim her chances are of having these dreams fulfilled? Saturday night is the night for romance. Does her heart long for the romance that she won't find at MIA? She comes into the chapel wearing that sad look that makes you ache with the desire to embrace her and kiss her and comfort her and make her smile. But, of course, you can't. You can't even talk to her. (Remember the rules, Elder.)

"During the MIA class she mentions that she wants to marry one who is worthy to go to the temple, that this is the quality she looks for. Your mind quickly reviews the possibilities. It doesn't take long, for all of the boys in the branch that are worthy are

spoken for. You think, 'Maybe in some other branch . . .' And then you remember other 17-year-old girls (and 22-year-old and 26 and 34) and you wonder in how many places and how many times this act is being repeated. And again you wonder what her chances are. (Where's your faith, Elder?)

"And of course you must teach the MIA lesson out of the book and tell them that they must not marry or even date boys outside of the Church. You very carefully describe the type of boy they ought to look for; and you chastise them severely when they think that they find the boy you describe in the person of a missionary. (Remember the rules, girls.) And thus, you put them in a nearly hopeless position.

"Maybe this girl will be lucky. Maybe at the next youth conference she will meet the one. But how many will be lucky? (Now, where's your faith, Elder?) Some will find a husband within the Church. Others will not find him but refusing to lower their standards, they will live their lives unfulfilled and will face the future as 'Millennium girls.' The majority will be charmed by a nonmember and will leave the Church. You sometimes wonder which is sadder. (What did you say, Elder?) You think of this as you look at her sad eyes and you want

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to cry. But then you ask, 'Where's your faith, Elder?'

This is a quote from my missionary journal, written about three months before I came home. I have resisted—with great difficulty—the urge to edit it because like most things in my journal, I am somewhat embarrassed by the style even while I recognize how real the feelings are. About two months after I returned home, I received a letter from the girl I wrote about in which she made a confession:

"While you were here, I grew to esteem you and consider you one of the best friends I've ever had, although our friendship was not very intimate and I didn't confide in you my sorrows. It's not that I think you look like a padre [actually, I did look like a padre at the time] but I want to confess some things in this letter. You may think it strange for me to say these things, but I don't want you to have a bad impression of me. . . .

"Since I was small, I learned that a Mormon girl should be an example and especially that she shouldn't date the missionaries but on the contrary should help them so that they can finish their missions with conviction that they have served our Heavenly Father. And I always fought against this temptation and I can say that

until last year I had never been in love with nor dated any Elder. I always treated them as friends and played with them, but that's all.

"But then I met Elder —; I don't know why, I think Satan helped a lot, but I fell in love with him. I fought to tear him from my heart, but it was all in vain. I tell you this because you were his companion and must have noticed that I liked him. I didn't date him, we all know that. When he left, I cried and resolved to forget him because I know that he is forbidden for me. I know that I love him with all my heart. They say that you can't control your heart and I think it is true; I want to force him out of my heart, but I don't succeed at all. I asked him to forgive me for having liked him because I know he is a missionary of the Lord.

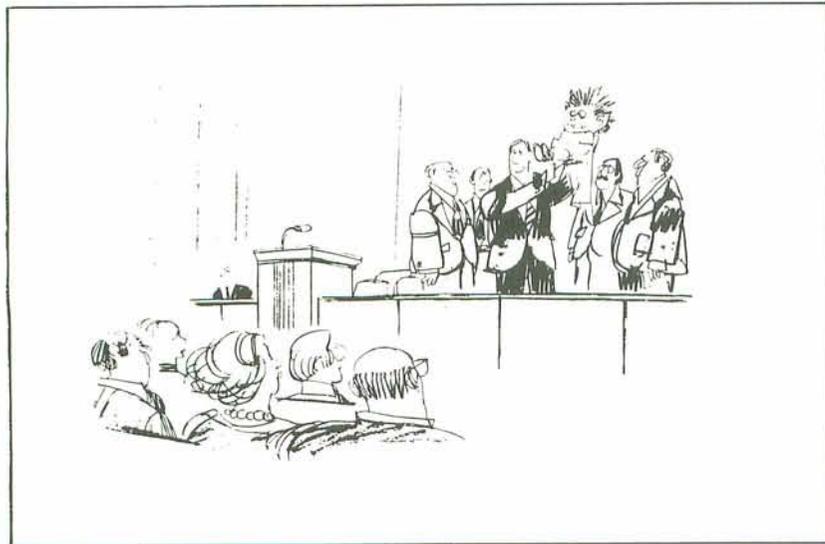
"I wanted to tell you all of this so you would understand why I acted the way I did while you were here as the leader. I was frank with you because I consider you a very dear friend who understands that we are subject to error. Pray for the Lord to help me. Forgive me for everything. This will be the first and only that I will love in my life. It will not happen again. I will never again even think about any Elder."

I was a little disappointed that it had

been my companion and not me for whom she had been pining, but I accepted the role of friend with grace. I do not know how widespread this dynamic between missionaries and young women in the missionfield is, but I know that I had trouble with some women during my entire mission. In Brazil fifteen years ago, there were several factors which contributed to romantic tensions. We were young American boys, and as such we were each seen as a potential Prince Charming. We were tickets to a better life in America, and there had been enough marriages between missionaries and local women to flame the fantasies. And we had little competition. In my last branch, we did a statistical audit, and I discovered that the most common convert was a 17-year-old girl. We were baptizing many young women (often converted to us, not to the Gospel), but there were few young men in the Church to complement them. So even those who were trying not to become involved with the missionaries found it difficult. These young women were in a real dilemma.

As missionaries, we faced a similar dilemma with many natural forces drawing us toward what was forbidden. For some of us it was more difficult than for others. For me, it was the crucible of my mission. I was

FREEWAY TO PERFECTION



HOT OFF THE PRESS—*Freeway to Perfection*, a collection of Mormon cartoons by Calvin Grondahl, political cartoonist for the *Deseret News*. Grondahl captures the fun in both historic and contemporary LDS situations. Since its creation in 1978, *Freeway to Perfection* has become a favorite of Latter-day Saints world wide. This new edition is just in time for Christmas. The perfect gift for missionaries, bishops, Relief Society presidents—in short, anyone who is immersed in LDS living and likes to laugh will love it.

shy, naive, religious and ugly—definitely not an experienced ladies' man. I had taken seriously the romantic notion popular at the time among the super-faithful that the best path to a happy marriage was to have the first kiss of your life across the altar, so my experience with girls had been completely platonic. All of a sudden I was thrust into a situation where it did not matter that I was ugly and shy—I was in demand. It was rather heady and difficult to resist.

A big part of my problem was that I was still operating from the platonic model of my youth. I was not bothered by sexual temptation at all (I was not quite sure what sexual temptation was—I probably would not have even recognized it). Therefore, it seemed silly to avoid women. I was sincerely trying to teach the Gospel of Christ, and I found that women were the most receptive. In the process of exploring the things of the spirit, we would discover an emotional and intellectual bond that felt an awful lot like love. But then there was no legitimate way to express it. Even though our hearts were pure, we had to deny the feelings of affection. In the midst of my despair, I waxed poetic (I knew it was poetry because the lines did not extend to the edge of the paper):

Someone could use me;
I could give much of my enjoyment
of life.
Together we could thrill to the joys
Of poetry, music, ideas, eternal
truths.
When two minds, running parallel,
meet,
They want to share, to forge the
way together,
To discover perhaps what only the
heart can know.
Yes, someone could use me;
I could help her find a fuller life—
But I'm a missionary.

Once while I was wrestling with this dilemma, Elder Kimball came to a conference and laid it on the line. The next day we had a branch picnic, and I retired to the woods to pray and try to find a resolution. The only thing that came of it was rumors started circulating that I was out with a girl from the branch who was not even at the picnic, but someone looked around and neither of us were there, so naturally everyone assumed. . . . In my journal I wrote, "I'm trying to be unfriendly and everyone thinks I'm mad, sad, or sick, and actually, I'm only miserable. I don't know."

That last phrase is a perfect summary. I do not know. I am not sure whether this dilemma is still a problem or if it

ever was for anyone except me. It is the sort of thing we do not talk about. I also have no solution. We cannot eliminate all restrictions from the missionaries. I only know that the system did not work for me. I felt

deeply and formed strong emotional attachments. It was frustrating not to be able to express what should have been not only acceptable, but laudable, feelings—if only I had not been a missionary.

Issues of Intimacy

A DOUBLE VISION OF SEXUALITY

Marybeth Raynes

Almost a year ago, I was asked to give a talk about "Expressing Sexuality Positively" to some university students who were members of the Church. Wanting the material to reach beyond the common list of what not to do before marriage in order to remain chaste and pure, I started by jotting down ideas about what we in the Church think about sex. Over the course of two weeks, as I wrote and rewrote my outline, it occurred to me that my difficulty in pinning it all down might be shared by others.

Although discovering our sexual identity is a difficult and universal task, as Mormons we may be additionally helped and/or hampered by messages we receive through Church channels. The premises about sex are sharply divided and closely related to the long debate over the nature of man. We are told "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25), yet we are all "carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature" (Alma 42:20). So with sex. Because it was ordained by God to ensure the continuation of mankind, sex is good. But sexual thoughts, feelings, and actions at the worst are seeded by the Devil and at best express our own carnal selves.

A number of sub-premises buttress this double vision. On the positive side we learn that the careful, proper honing of sexual urges and actions can add to the sweetness and richness of one's life, now, and by inference, everlastingly. Homer S. Ellsworth, in a November 1981 BYU fireside, quoted President Kimball as saying that what happens between a couple in their own bedroom, as long as both consent and are loving and caring, is

their own business.

This sounds encouraging but is partially countered by a recent First Presidency declaration that oral sex is an unholy practice. The implication then is that although sex may be freely explored in marriage, it should be done carefully, always with an eye out for the impure.

This unfortunately reinforces other negative admonitions about sex. Sexual urges, we are often told, are antithetical to righteous inclinations. We must control sexual thoughts, feelings, and urges by active righteousness, service, and prayer. Uncontrolled sexual thoughts, feelings, and fantasies will surely result in unrighteous sexual actions. An almost deterministic relationship between internal sexual occurrences and external sexual acts is described.

In addition, the effects of sexual wrongdoing are often portrayed as permanent. Although the repentance/nail-hole analogy has been denounced, standards nights still favor object lessons with wilted rose petals and bruised peaches, communicating that once you have done wrong, you simply cannot become whole again.

Sex then is a powerful force for good but with a sharp cutting edge. It is necessary but dangerous. A sharp distinction between good and evil, black and white, colors every discussion about sex.

Without trying to solve or discuss each of the above, I would like to add my own premises as counterpoint. First, I discriminate between the broad concept of sexuality (all of our feelings, thoughts, actions about being men and women, possessing sexual bodies, and having sexual potential)

and the narrower idea of sexual action (the behavioral expression of our sexuality). In my view, both are good.

Regarding sexuality: We are all sexual all of our lives. We are born sexual: both sexes evidence sexual response shortly after birth. We change and grow sexually without any conscious control on our part. Sexuality, therefore, is integral to all of our lives. It will be experienced differently by each person, with no one experience being "right" or "best."

Regarding sexual action: The "goodness" or "badness" of a sexual action comes not from that action but from *how* we interact, from *how* we treat ourselves and others while engaged in sexual activity. Some acts, such as rape or incest, are always wrong. But they are wrong primarily because they transgress important ethical principles of non-coercion, mutual consent, sensitivity to what is best for the other person, or generational and marital boundaries, not because they are sexual.

Moral transgression may be inappropriate, but it is rarely evil. People cross moral boundaries generally to satisfy a positive, legitimate need, such as closeness, security, or a need to feel alive. The acts may be wrong, but the person generally is good. Healing and positive discussion can help such a person become whole again.

Although sexual thoughts and feelings are preliminary to sexual action, they are not the final determinant of that behavior. People with sexually deviant behavior usually have deviant fantasy lives. Sexually healthy persons have positive, creative fantasies.

Sexual feelings, thoughts, and acts are compatible with spiritual feelings, thoughts, and acts. They can be experienced together or separately, depending on a person's orientation and skill. If all parts of us combine to make one pleasing whole, we can learn to mix and match all of our facets, experiencing all the diversity, collectiveness, complexity, and simplicity of ourselves.

Sex then is not NO at one time and YES at another. It always is. And it always is basically good.

Note: For a good profile of the sexually well person see Val MacMurray, "Sexual and Emotional Intimacy: A Need to Emphasize Principles," *Journal of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists* 1 (January 1982). For copies: Burton C. Kelly, Editor, *AMCAP Journal*, 149 SWKT, BYU, Provo, Utah 84602.

Outside Looking In

SISTER AND MISTER

Ray Ownbey

As a non-Mormon married to a Mormon, I am always assumed to be Mormon until I identify myself otherwise. In the same manner that most suburban, middle class communities find it hard to deal with single people, a Mormon community has trouble dealing with a couple where one is Mormon and the other is not.

I first became aware of this when the phone rang some weeks after we had moved in. A cheerful voice on the other end announced, "I'm your home teacher."

"I beg your pardon."

"I'm your home teacher."

"Oh, you must be my wife's home

teacher."

"Well, I'm your home teacher, and I'd like to drop by."

"I think you'd better talk to my wife."

A few months later there was another call, this one from another male ward member whose official position I've forgotten. After the usual greetings, inquiries about health, job, family, and the like we got down to business. It seems my wife was about to be asked to take a job in the Church, and before that request could be made, my permission was required.

In truth, I saw this as the opening of a whole new facet of our relationship, one in which all of her activities would be subject to my prior approval. I envisioned the Musicians' Union calling and asking me if she could

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perform on a specific night. I had brief fantasies about absolute power granting or denying permission for a lunch date, a clothing purchase.

However, with some effort I stifled these surprising manifestations of an obvious (though repressed) lust for power and responded to the caller with something like, "Well, you'll have to talk to her about that."

I know of no other organization where membership of one person puts such a strain on the non-member to join. Nobody in the Modern Language Association ever suggested that they wanted my wife to join so that she and I could both attend meetings. Even the National Geographic Society seems indifferent to the marital status or family arrangement of its members.

In the face of all this, I find myself constantly needing to identify myself as a non-Mormon. Whenever we are with a predominantly Mormon group and the conversation takes its inevitable turn toward Church activities, I bide my time for a chance to let the group know that I'm not one of them. Once my wife asked me why I always did that, and I blathered something about not wanting to be mistaken for a member of an organization whose beliefs and practices I disagreed with so strongly.

If I went to a meeting of the Freeman Institute, the PLO, or a party at the home of Madeline Murray O'Hare, I'd probably do the same thing.

I am making some inroads. Material still comes to the house addressed to Mr. and Mrs., but the Ward newsletter hasn't listed my name since "Mr. & Mrs. Ownbey" were identified as "new in the Ward."

At one point I considered going to the Post Office to get one of those forms that people use to have their names removed from pornographic mailing lists, but I thought better of it.

My wife, who is usually tolerant of my rages, asked once if I wanted them to address mail to Sister and Mister. It was a good line and in fact would suit me just fine.

Law of the Land

GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED NATIVITY SCENES: GETTING CHRIST OUT OF CHRISTMAS

Jay S. Bybee

State and local governments have long celebrated the Christmas season by erecting nativity scenes at government expense and, often, on government property. Typical of these

is the city of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, which for forty years has set up a Christmas display which in recent years has included carolers, a Santa, a village, lighted stars, a live Christmas tree, candy-striped poles, and a nativity scene. The nativity scene is the foreground of the display, which is put up each year by city employees in a private park in the heart of the

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shopping district. Like many other cities, Pawtucket has had a long-standing tradition of lighting the display by having Santa Claus arrive in a blaze of glory (in this case, a fire truck) and then distribute candy to the children gathered for the ceremony.

In 1980 several citizens of Pawtucket who were members of the local affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union brought suit against the city to claim that the city-sponsored display, specifically the nativity scene, violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The Establishment Clause in the First Amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The Supreme Court has interpreted this clause to mean that a government-sponsored activity is permissible if (1) the action has a secular legislative purpose, (2) the action's primary effect neither advances nor inhibits religion, and (3) the action does not foster excessive government entanglement with religion. The plaintiffs claimed that Pawtucket's maintenance of the creche violated all three of these criteria.

The arguments made by the city of Pawtucket in order to show that the setting up of the nativity scene had a secular purpose which did not advance religion and would not excessively entangle the government with religion should be very disturbing to those

concerned with the trivialization of Christmas. To demonstrate that the nativity scene had a secular purpose and did not advance religion, the city witnesses testified that the scene's primary purpose was other than to remind the viewers of the birth of Christ. The Mayor of Pawtucket stated that the creche satisfied cultural and traditional, aesthetic, and economic needs and that the creche was incidental to the display. A professor of philosophy, testifying for the city, claimed that the scene put people into a festive mood where they would be more inclined to "let loose with their money." The professor maintained that because the scene was in a commercial area, as opposed to a church, it did not induce viewers to worship, but rather to buy.

These arguments were not new in the Pawtucket case. Similar arguments were made in cases out of Denver, Washington, D.C., and Sioux Falls. For example in Denver the city argued that the purpose of the nativity scene was "to promote goodwill and feelings of selflessness, to enhance Denver's national reputation, and to depict the historical origins of Christmas, a national legal holiday." Indeed, the city employee in charge of lighting the display stated that the scene had no religious significance to him. Similarly, an expert witness brought in by the city testified that the

nativity scene had become secularized and a common item of American folklore. An historian noted that the city of Denver was proud of its display because it had been featured in national magazines and on post cards.

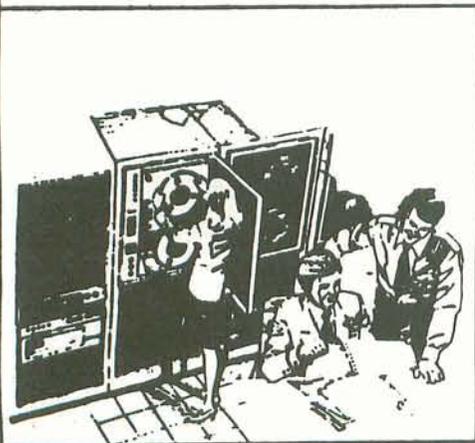
The irony in the arguments made by the municipalities should be obvious. The defendant cities, wanting to be able to put up their nativity scenes, have claimed the right to do so because the scene is no longer religious: the scenes have secular and commercial value which will promote peace, goodwill, fame, and money—anything but Christianity. In contrast, those seeking to have the scenes removed, such as the ACLU in the Pawtucket case, have maintained that the scenes are indeed a religious symbol of the divinity of Christ.

The results reached by the various courts are very different. Perhaps to its shame, Denver has won its suit so far as the city evidently has been able to convince the court that the creche was "a sign of the holiday season on a par with Santa and mistletoe." Similarly, in the Washington case, the city successfully proved that its lighting display had primarily cultural and historical value because it "symbolize[d] the celebration of Christmas, a national holiday."

Pawtucket, however, has not been so fortunate, as the court refused to accept that Pawtucket's citizens only saw the secular side of the nativity scene. In contrast to other decisions, the U.S. District Court in Rhode Island found that "the nativity scene remains firmly tied to its religious origins and continues to express a fundamentally theological message about the nature of the child whose birth is there depicted." Ironically, it was only the Rhode Island court, which ultimately prohibited the city from setting up its nativity scene, which did not find that the nativity scene trivialized the celebration of Christmas. The court was not unmindful of the frustrations of Christians who felt that creches were appropriate at Christmas; it was merely sensitive to the fact that under the First Amendment governments cannot establish religious symbols. As the court stated: "Although Christians may deplore the growth of secular dimension and deem it vital to retain the spiritual essence of Christmas as a religious observance of the birth of the Son of God, government may not assist in the fight to keep Christ in Christmas."

In light of the arguments advanced by the various municipal governments, it should be asked how much more assistance of this kind Christmas can stand.

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