



CORNUCOPIA



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PICTURE POSTCARDS OF LEHI'S DREAM

WHEN I HEAD WEST ALONG UTAH'S I-80, MY mind plays tricks on me. Or maybe the barren spaces breed a little magic.

The salt flats spread out like great sheets of paper, and I fill them up with random thoughts. My mind can wander in that wilderness for forty years.

The artist who set his tree sculpture just inside the Utah line knew the feeling. He wanted the salt flats for his canvas. And his one-of-a-kind tree sports huge, party-colored bulbs that dangle from concrete branches. The trunk juts up like a rocket silo.

The tree's called "Metaphor," but most people call it "The Tree of Life." And each time I whisk by it my mind flashes on Lehi's Dream from the Book of Mormon, where Lehi stumbles around in the "dark and dreary waste," then spies a narrow path, an iron rod, and a tree bearing funny fruit.

A river runs through the dream. On the far side of the river stands a "great and spacious building" filled with "people, both old and young, both male and female," dressed in fancy attire.

The great and spacious building stands for worldly materialism.

It's all there in the Nevada desert—except for the great and spacious building. But once you pull into Wendover, there it is: a gambling casino.

Other pieces fit as well. Lehi says he traveled many miles in the darkness to get to the tree. He says people who veer from the path get lost in the wasteland.

Nephi says the tree was white—like the sculpture.

Had the sculptor known all this? No. He was European and knew almost nothing of LDS theology.

And his name wasn't Lehi.

It was Karl.

Karl "Momen."

SINCE first running into Lehi's Dream in the Utah desert, I've seen it in many places. The

dream images seem random at first—an iron rod, a tree, a building, a river. But they actually form "a natural grouping," a "conceit."

Few scenes in rural America are more common, for instance, than a fruit tree, a fence-line and a stream, all set beside a large out-building. It's a Norman Rockwell painting. A sketch by Grandma Moses. The scene could be a postcard from rural New York.

In fact, Lehi's Dream once lived in my own backyard. My father's oldest cherry tree sat in the corner of our lot flanked by a fence and an irrigation ditch. Just beyond the ditch stood Alonzo Anderson's "great and spacious" stable, looking like the outside world.

Jesus chose scenes from daily life so his listeners would be reminded of his teachings. Lehi's Dream works that way. It pops up whenever fruit trees and property lines are set against canals and ditches, wherever a country lane wanders through a misty morning. Such scenes are almost cliché (red barn and fence framed by tree on the left).

The dream isn't an eerie moment of surrealism. It's a vision from the farms of Oregon, Germany, Italy, and Palmyra—even the Holy Land.

Lehi's dream is not a vision from some distant dream world. It's one more picture postcard from home.

—JERRY JOHNSTON

THE JOY OF UNLIMITED SALVATION

IN THE WINTER OF 1965, WHILE I WAS A GRADUATE student at Stanford, I took Christian Ethics from Robert McAfee Brown, the great Presbyterian theologian. One day, while he was talking about God's infinite, unconditional love as the basis for all ethics, he paused, and sitting on the first row, I could see tears in his eyes. After a few moments, he said, "I'm considered a heretic in my own church, because I can't accept its teaching that, when we die, we are judged and consigned, permanently, to heaven or hell. That's completely inconsistent with the God of perfect love I know. He would never stop trying to save us."

My heart yearned for him, and I rejoiced that I knew a religion that affirms such a God. I remembered how as a missionary I delighted in teaching people that God does not stand at the border between heaven and hell (or between three kingdoms), stamping on the fingers of those reaching up who can't quite qualify. God indeed never stops loving us and helping us repent; he welcomes us into his presence and eternal life *when-ever* we become able to repent, even after any imagined "final" judgment. That conviction has never wavered.

But I'm not a "universalist"; that is, I don't believe that God can *guarantee* universal salvation. Universalism is simply an optimistic version of predestination. It was a position held by many in Joseph Smith's time, including his grandfather, who renounced it when he read the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon, along with Joseph Smith's other teachings, provides a unique and powerful alternative to universalism that both avoids its flaws and increases its beauties: God is all-loving but not all-powerful; we are eternal agents like him; and thus he cannot force salvation upon us, but must teach and move and assist us to be saved. Like the best parent, however, he will do all he can and never stop.

Because Universalism guarantees salvation despite what we do and thus become, it removes the incentives to do and be good and allows the devil to lead us softly down to hell. Mormonism provides both the incentive and power of God's infinite love along with the knowledge that we must *choose* to use that power to do and be better, which can happen only as we obey eternal laws. God tries to provide all who come to earth with sufficient knowledge and power to be saved: "All are alike unto God" (2 Ne. 26:33), and he "brings forth his word unto . . . all the nations of the earth." (2 Ne. 28:15.) And then God's active grace extends into the post-mortal life and eventually provides—through continued teaching and temple work—an unlimited and guaranteed *opportunity* for *all* to be saved.

Salvation is not either a mere gift or something earned by works; it is a *condition* of being, the result at any time of what we, through accepting God's gifts, have chosen to do with them and have thus made ourselves into. Doctrine and Covenants 76 provides a snapshot of one certain time in the future, showing the great variety of conditions available to us

according to what we have become *at that time* (including choosing to become "sons of perdition" who are not beings God *refuses* to let repent but those who *become* incapable of repenting). But its basic message is that Jesus lived and died "that through him all might be saved." (v. 42.)

In the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith rejoices that "all the spirits God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement and improvement." Some may stop progressing for a while or permanently, but neither we nor God know when they might change; therefore we must always treat everyone, including ourselves, as potential gods. Yes, it is possible to "procrastinate the day of our repentance" until it is too late—not because God will ever refuse to accept us, but only because we can eventually, through our own choices, lose all desire.

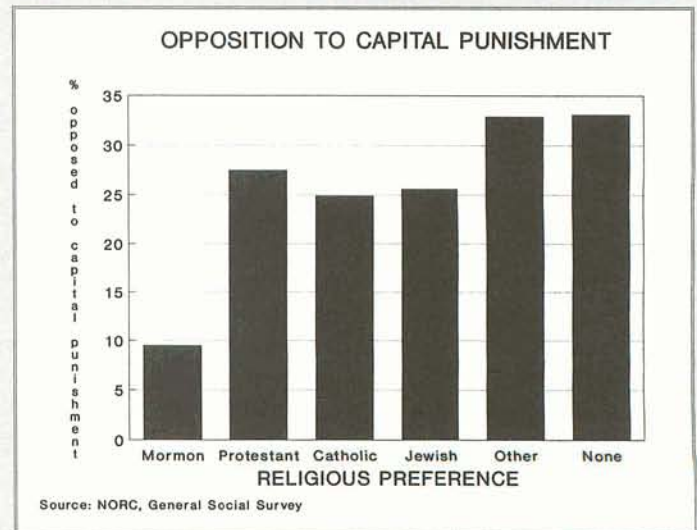
I rejoice in God's unlimited grace and forgiveness, and in a universe of plenitude, full of his glory and love. As the earth turns, new dawns and bright sunsets constantly revolve before us—God's never-ending show of grace; clouds turn with the earth, and rainbows grow up through the rain—God's never-ending promise of forgiveness. All of God's work is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life.

—EUGENE ENGLAND



PECULIAR PEOPLE

OPPOSITION TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT



A NATIONAL PROBABILITY sample indicates that Mormons are substantially less likely to oppose capital punishment than are other Americans. When asked, "Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?" slightly under 10 percent of Mormons reported opposition. In contrast, over a fourth of respondents nationally opposed the death penalty.