

*I think the Father and Mother of this various, dangerous, particolored planet are too limited by even our most elegant theorizing. Who says God must be bleached, leached, and etherized?*

## DE COLORES

I NOW LIVE IN LOS ANGELES, WHERE MANY OF THE good people I meet don't speak my language. When I go to the stake center for meetings, I drive Pico Boulevard, past *carnicerias*, *botanicas*, storefront churches—the small chapels to which the faithful come, carrying shopping bags, to stand on tired feet, to sweat out the week nights evangelical-style, complete with electric guitar.

At the stake center, when the evening descends smoggy and mothy, the kids from the ward swarm under parking lot lights, spinning in games and laughing in Spanish. I am met at the door by women from the Korean ward. We smile, we say "Sister" in greeting, and the word takes on a new tenderness. We have peace here, tentative, hard won. The mufflers on passing cars pop loudly. Red lights flash.

Off this small lot, this city is a sometimes scary place, limned along neighborhood lines that have less to do with neighborliness than fear. I happen to live in a section of the city where the vectors intersect—on my stretch of Fairfax there are five Ethiopian restaurants and two kosher delis. The next block is entirely Latino. Two blocks east the signs are all

printed in Korean.

When I have a day off, I take my car deep into neighborhoods that aren't mine. I go where people don't look like me. I go where white people like me don't go, even during the daytime. I know that in some neighborhoods, people like me aren't welcome, that "tourism" may be taken as a sign of disrespect. But I go, with the greatest respect. Maybe I am willfully stupid, or maybe I am pathologically hopeful, but I go. I go because this is a big city and I refuse to believe that goodness is limited to neighborhoods full of people like me.

What I learn on my day off is that goodness grows everywhere, blooming between the cracks in the sidewalk, stubborn and green. You can see it, especially, in faces. People wait at public phones on street corners. Women nurse babies, waiting for buses. Brides wait in white organza outside a Mexican wedding chapel in East

Hollywood, while street vendors roll by, ringing bells, selling mangoes. Downtown, there is little else to do but wait, and the homeless sit on milk crates outside their cardboard houses, a bright Virgin de Guadalupe mural blooming under blood stains on the wall behind them. In Echo Park on Fridays, lines are especially long outside the Western Union, where people wait to wire money home to Jalisco. In Hancock Park on Saturday mornings, families walk to temple together, heads covered. On Sunday mornings in Pico-Union, the women lead little girls in stiff pink dresses around the piles of rubble in the street.

What I learn on my day off is what God looks like. I've always had a hard time relating to a removed, mysterious God; perhaps abstract thinking isn't all it's been cracked up to be. I think the Father and Mother of this various, dangerous, particolored planet are too limited by even our most elegant theorizing. Who says God must be bleached, leached, and etherized? Whom does this type of thinking serve? To me, the good news of the gospel is that God the Mother and God the Father were once like us and that someday we may be like them.

What I learn on my day off is that God may not look like me. Perhaps our Heavenly Father once worked as a day la-

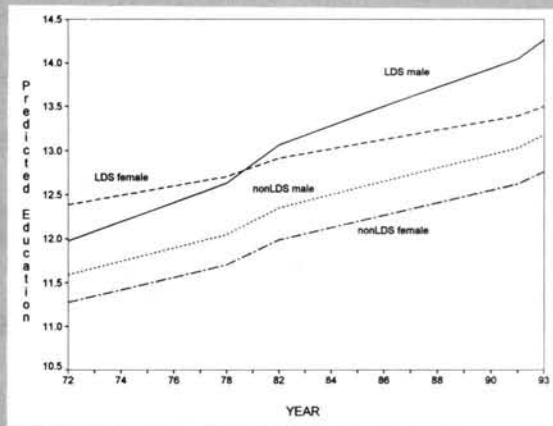
borer. Perhaps our Heavenly Mother jumped double dutch. I can see Her buying a strawberry *raspada* from the street vendors for her little girl. I can see Him under the hood of his Chevy. I can see Them sitting on the couch of their front porch in Boyle Heights, the grandchildren on bikes, the red sun crossed by power lines, steel bridges, dipping behind downtown warehouses, falling into the Pacific Ocean.

Such observations make Them even more holy and marvelous to me. I am made hopeful, confident that my Heavenly Parents are real people with real knowledge of the real joys and crises of the real world. I am also made humble, believing that each person I see is a someday God, regardless of how they appear to me. How beautiful this burnt, broken city is. How great that God blooms in a thousand neighborhoods. How great that the Mother and Father come in so many colors.

—JOANNA BROOKS

## PECULIAR PEOPLE

### TREND IN LDS EDUCATION



IN THE 1970s, LDS education was higher than the national average, and, unlike the country as a whole, LDS women were more educated than LDS men. Nationally, men and women have improved their education attainment at about the same pace. The pattern for Mormons is quite different. LDS men have improved at a rate above the national average, but the opposite is the case for LDS women. In short, LDS women have not kept up with the education progress of women nationally nor with LDS men.

Data are taken from the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. In most years since 1972, approximately 1,500 randomly selected adults are interviewed. Caution must be used in interpreting the data on Mormons because sample sizes are small (224 LDS females and 171 LDS males). In order to eliminate year-to-year fluctuation created by small samples, a regression line has been fit to show the linear trend over the 20-year period.



*Throughout the ages in Europe religion has been attached to the calendar, each season addressing itself aptly to the mood and the needs of humankind. Easter for me is more than a religious festival; it is a rite of spring upon which my personal chemistry depends.*

## EASTER HAS BEEN CANCELLED THIS YEAR

HAVING GROWN UP IN A RURAL ENGLAND parish in the early 1950s, and having attended the established church as a child, the festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, as well as Harvest Festival (Thanksgiving) and Remembrance Day Service are deeply imprinted on my memory of childhood.

Each had its own atmosphere, influenced by the seasonal climate, the religious event, and the particular traditions associated with it. At Harvest the church would be decorated with sheaves of corn and produce of every kind whilst we sang, "God our maker doth provide, For our wants to be supplied, All is safely gathered in, Ere the winter storms begin." I remember the October wind whistling and feeling a sense of warmth and snugness inside the draughty old church.

And so it was at Christmas. "The Holly and the Ivy, When they are both full grown, Of all the trees that are in the wood, The Holly bears the crown. Oh, The rising of the sun, the running of the deer, The playing of the merry organ, Sweet singing in the choir." We boy sopranists were chosen not so much for our ability to sing as that our souls would be nurtured. In our

cassocks and surplices we sang angelically, "Whilst shepherds washed their socks by night, All seated 'round the tub, Some bars of soap came tumbling down, And they began to scrub," relying on the older male choristers to drown us out with their correct renderings. We received old fashioned looks from the organist. Carols were sung by candlelight, echoing around the dark and aged pews in the nearly derelict twelfth-century building.

Easter particularly stands out in my memory. In England, days are dark for a large part of the year. April can sometimes (I hasten to add not always) arrive with Wordsworthian splendour. No flowers were allowed in the church during Lent, through Good Friday. Then on Easter Sunday morning, the aisles would be adorned with spring flowers: bluebells, daffodils, primroses. Their scent is still in my nostrils forty years on. A large congregation always filled the church on Easter Sunday. As a child I never minded the fact that most people would only come at Easter, Christmas, weddings, and funerals; at least they came *then*, and it made those occasions seem that much more immense. The church bells stopped their peal. The country parson—who put aside simple vestments and dressed in his finest for the day—would announce the first hymn. The congregation stood as one to acclaim, "Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia." The story of Mary Magdalene's visit to the tomb is inseparably connected in my mind with the flowers and the fragrances of those Easter Sunday mornings.

At eighteen I became a Mormon. In the chapel at Gorleston on the sea, Brother Cole, a man in his seventies, saw to it that there were always flowers in the chapel, especially on Easter Sunday. He had been a member for decades but he always ensured that old traditions associated with festivals were maintained. He was a saintly man, and crossed swords with the district president only once when an elderly sister handmade a beautiful lace cloth for the sacrament table and it was rejected by the DP; it was contrary to the rules concerning the plainness of sacrament linen.

That was thirty years ago. This year we were advised by our bishop that there would be no service in our chapel this Easter Sunday. "We will all be going to the stake centre in the afternoon to watch the general conference live from Salt Lake City." Hardly anyone else gave it a second thought, but I feel I speak for a number of members in Britain, and perhaps throughout Europe, when I say how desperately sad I am that little accommodation is made by general authorities for traditional religious festivals. I watched the live satellite broadcast Sunday afternoon. Few references were made to Easter. No seasonal hymns were sung. Breaking the otherwise omnipresent darkness surrounding the podium there appeared on the TV to be some rather expensively produced artificial "all season flora."

Easter for me is more than a religious festival. It is a rite of spring upon which my personal chemistry depends. Eostre, the Anglo Saxon goddess of the dawn, gave her name to the original pagan festival that pre-dated the coming of Christianity to the British Isles. I suppose it has, in a sense, become once again a pagan festival in Britain's modern secular society. Few go to church, but it is nonetheless a four-day

public holiday. Whilst I do not expect to find support for pagan rites among Church leaders, I feel bound to note that I see no possibility for the successful propagation of Christianity if it is pursued in a vacuum, divorced from any cultural surroundings. The same sort of argument applies to Christmas, itself a successor to the pre-Christian celebration of the mid-winter solstice. Throughout the ages in Europe religion has been attached to the calendar, in each season addressing itself aptly to the mood and the needs of humankind.

Spring's arrival can rouse in any sensitive person the sort of passions expressed by the romantic poets. Linking a celebration of Christ's resurrection to the arrival of spring would seem to me to be utterly proper and indeed powerful. I experience a dilemma of choice between an increasingly secular mainstream Christianity, which nonetheless relates to the living world, and Mormon Christianity, which is high in moral principles but in which the formula seems to have become detached not only from traditional cultural forms but from poetic impulse and feeling.

As I have reflected upon what I have written I realise that I may have criticised the very Puritan foundations of the Great Republic. If so, I do apologise. It was not Puritanism that killed Easter this year, it was a more modern and insidious complaint; that is, the enexorable effort to be businesslike at all costs.

—CHRIS SEXTON



## ON THE RECENT EXCOMMUNICATIONS

Last evening, walking by the chapel,  
I saw a shrub, stripped  
of its leaves, where  
someone had stabbed a bird  
onto a thorned branch—  
whose cruelty, I will never know.  
But pierced through the heart,  
the sparrow shrivelled, small  
as an open hand,  
its whole body twisted  
in unnatural death.

—THE GHOST OF ELIZA R. SNOW