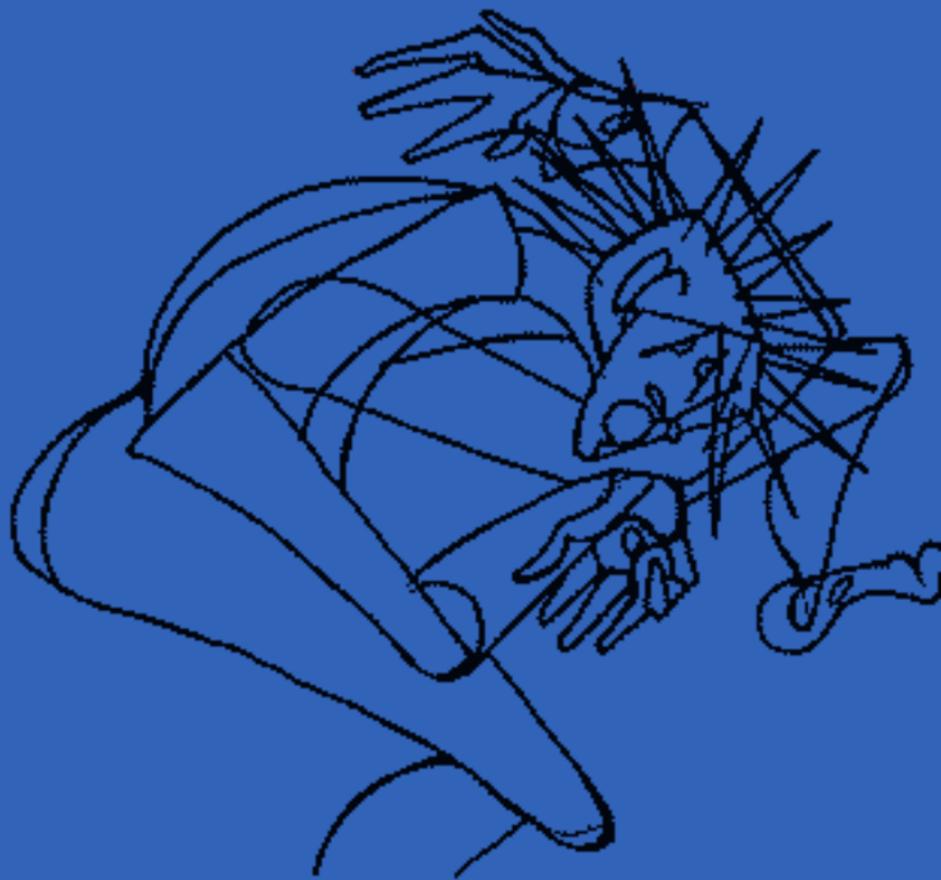


SUNSTONE

VOLUME EIGHT NUMBER FOUR

THREE DOLLARS



**MORMONISM
AND A TRAGIC
SENSE OF LIFE**



SUNSTONE

VOLUME EIGHT, NUMBER FIVE

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Readers' Forum

Certainty Better Than Probability

C. Robert Mesle misrepresented the position of Elder Boyd K. Packer in suggesting that Elder Packer understands faith as "belief without evidence" (SUNSTONE vol. 7:6). On the contrary, Elder Packer would surely maintain that faith, built upon the witness of the spirit, is itself a fully reliable "evidence of things not seen." By immediate spiritual intuition Elder Packer and many others know beyond a shadow of doubt that Joseph Smith experienced the First Vision just as he described it in the official 1838 account. Elder Packer claims to have perfect evidence and *certain* knowledge in the only way one could have it: by an indubitable, immediate intuition. Brother Mesle might argue along with Bertrand Russell that many people "know" many contradictory things by "indubitable intuition." But this does not prove that Elder Packer is mistaken. He may be right where others are wrong. In any case, no historian can be *certain* that Elder Packer is wrong. As Brother Mesle pointed out, a historian's knowledge is always provisional, never fully objective.

But Brother Mesle did not carry his critique of historical knowledge far enough. He correctly pointed out that for historians "the past is never directly observable," that historians are confined to the interpretation of interpretations of the past. However, he failed to point out that even if a historian could be on the scene and directly observe a historical event, he would still have just another interpretation of the event, not objective knowledge. Most philosophers nowadays concede that we have no access to ultimate *reality*; we simply have a set of assumptions and a version of reality consistent with our assumptions. Brother Mesle's assumptions surely color his talk about "evidence" and "our dilemma" (*our* cannot include Elder Packer or thousands of other Latter-day Saints); his assumptions color the assertion that "one thing does seem certain: we cannot be certain about the First Vision" (thousands of people with other assumptions are certain).

A startling reversal can follow from this analysis. If by evidence we mean reality itself (the only absolutely reliable evidence) then it is possible that Elder Packer bases his belief on evidence while it is certain that Brother Mesle holds his belief without evidence. Elder Packer at least claims to have immediate access to reality; historians cannot make this claim. And if Elder Packer does absolutely know that Joseph Smith saw God, he is quite right to insist that no one can properly write Mormon history without believing Joseph's report. A historian should try to explain away the apparent contradictions between Joseph's various reports if he shared Elder Packer's certain knowledge that Joseph saw God. That which is certain must always take precedence over that which is merely probable.

For my part, I share Brother Mesle's assumptions, and I applaud his effort to preserve faith from historical falsification by mythologizing our dogma. I think, however, that he has not properly emphasized the cost of changing one's definition of "faith" from *true belief* to *loving commitment*. I have followed the course he outlines in recent years, and I am keenly aware that one loses a good deal in making the transition. I do not think that the Utah church could survive as the dynamic, confident faith that it is if the Saints generally regarded our dogma as myth rather than as history. Delivered before the Mormon History Association or published in SUNSTONE, "History, Faith and Myth" is a blessing. If published in the *Ensign*, it might be a curse.

Val Larsen

Religion or Culture

Dian Saderup's story "Out There" contains all the essential elements for good SUNSTONE fiction: a little apostasy, a little death, some slightly illicit sex, a little carefully placed profanity, and lots of nostalgia and bittersweet memories of home and bottled fruit.

Stories of disenchanted young

Mormons who hate their parents but can't quite break away must have great appeal, because they appear with some regularity. Who is it, exactly, that reads these stories? And more importantly, what is it that they get out of reading them?

Perhaps what bothers me is that I share some of the feelings and doubts of the protagonists of stories such as Saderup's; but I am always brought up short because the details used to portray Mormonism have little to do with any Mormons I ever knew. Having grown up in a Mormon family outside Utah (and Idaho and Wyoming and California), it strikes me that these stories have a lot more to do with Utah than they do with Mormonism, even though they claim to deal with religious issues more than just local culture.

Richard Popp
Chicago, Illinois

"Both-sideism" Charged

Gary Browning's article, *The Russian Chimera*, in the November-December SUNSTONE (vol. 7:6) was, to put it mildly, exasperating. He is apparently a practitioner of what Meg Greenfield has called irreverently "both-sideism." For those who may have missed her editorial a while back, I will just say that "both-sideism" describes the stance that blame should in all cases be evenly distributed among the contending parties, e.g. the Soviets have thus and such good reasons for arming themselves because America has shown itself to be untrustworthy in thus and such ways, just as Pol Pot in Cambodia had good reasons for decimating his country's population a few years ago. Do you get it? All bastions of fashionable thought, such as the national media, feel obligated so to be "fair."

As Latter-day Saints who believe passionately in our religion (many or most of us), we may draw a clear line. The skeptics and naturalists among you out there may smile condescendingly as I say this, but I cannot deny that I have experienced the reality of an influence in this world that is committed to the degradation of mankind and of an influence that is committed to our betterment. For the sake of convenience I think of those influences as God and Satan.

How can a Latter-day Saint equate, however roughly, the policies of the USSR which denies its citizens access to the gospel, and one like the United States which permits this access? Browning suggests that the Soviets fear us for precisely the same reasons

we fear them, but more on this later. This is the tactic of the "both-sideist." One is implementing policies which further Satan's enterprises, while the other is pushing in the other direction. If our Church is God's church, we cannot condone any policy or system that impedes our efforts.

If the two great superpowers are equally benevolent or malevolent, the historical record should bear this out. But what is that record? The Soviets crushed all of Eastern Europe except Yugoslavia in the late forties and are still there. They have been gassing innocent civilians in Afghanistan for a few years. Vietnam wasn't a debacle because we sent troops there—it was just that our ham-strung military wasn't permitted to do its job. Thieu and Ky and the others may not have been tooth fairies, but in their years there were not boat people. The Berlin Wall did not go up because western talent was flooding east and we haven't asked that it stay there. The "both-sideist" might describe this edifice as a symbol of East-West tension as if in some arcane way we are equally to blame. But are American hands clean? Well, we didn't stay, for example, in the Dominican Republic, and today the citizenry there is at least permitted a variety of religious options, as are the Chileans and the South Africans.

I for one have nothing against the Russian people. I pray daily that they will see a governmental change in their land to allow religious freedom. It is the policies of their rulers that are reprehensible, and anyone who thinks otherwise has his or her head in the sand. I don't see a Russian chimera, but I recognize a Soviet (there's an enormous difference) threat.

Frank Riggs
Montgomery, Alabama

Jekylls and Hydes

In the article "The Russian Chimera," which appeared in the November-December issue of *SUNSTONE*, Gary Browning does not dwell overmuch upon the pervasiveness of totalitarianism in Russia. Nor does he distinguish between (1) the fundamental Anglo-American jurisprudential premise that legal authority should be limited to allow each individual a protected private sphere of civil rights in which to act without governmental interference or abridgement, and (2) the opposing premise, underlying the totalitarian regimes of Russia and other countries, that the totality of human and natural resources must be controlled by the

state so that the affairs of every department of life may be directed by social planners in order to bring about one, uniform, materialistic utopia for all citizens.

What Browning and many others apparently cannot face is that a totalitarian premise undergirds all of Russian culture and life (the good and the bad of it), and that it is this political premise that is evil. It is evil for the same reason that any aggressive war is evil: it operates upon the principle of unbridled coercion directed to the attainment of ends defined by a few individuals who, in seeking their objectives cannot and will not recognize the existence of any private zone of individual rights that is off limits to the probes of their meddling superiority.

But America (both the good and the bad of it) rests upon another premise: all power ought rightly to be limited and the use of legal force ought always to be restrained by a superior commitment to a belief in individual, unalienable rights which no earthly sovereign can bestow nor earthly authorities abridge or take away.

Any similarities between this American concept of individual rights and the Soviet concept of group rights are superficial and rhetorical. For in Russia one's rights are a privilege bestowed upon an individual in return for his loyalty to the group in power. Rights do not exist separate from this group; and they may be changed, abridged, or abandoned by powerful and influential individuals whose self-proclaimed expertise give them the status to define and redefine the power group's structure and goals without regard to the rights or interests of individuals within the collective.

The question, of course, is not "Are We Making Monsters Out of the Russians?" Attempts to paint America as lily white and Russia as blood red are superficial and ultimately self-deceptive. The truth is we are all mortals, and there is a monster or two in each of us and, certainly, in every nation. We are all Jekylls and Hydes.

But the Soviet leaders have drunk so deeply and so often from that seductive cup of totalitarian elixir that they can no longer maintain their Jekyll personality. They will turn into Hyde and obsessively employ their technique of unlimited political power in the pursuit of even the most trivial of objectives.

In this country, I believe, the Jekyll in

us is still dominant. But here, too, regrettably, it will only be a matter of time before all the hopes and expectations of which we can conceive as Dr. Jekyll will appear achievable only by means of Mr. Hyde.

Paul James Toscano
Orem, Utah

No Name Calling

According to Bruce Fairfax (letters, Jan.-April, '83), my earlier criticism of Marvin Rytting involved "name-calling." The loaded expression "nominal member" was, I then felt, obviously implied by Rytting's own position in the article with which I took issue. But a personal attack was never intended. I wish therefore to apologize to Brother Rytting for leaving that impression with him or anyone else. Though Brother Fairfax's rebuttal has not changed my view of the matters raised, I would like to reiterate my admiration for much of what Brother Rytting has written. Right or wrong, I took exception to two of his contributions and, unless he was being ironic, still do.

Thomas F. Rogers
Provo, Utah

Thanks

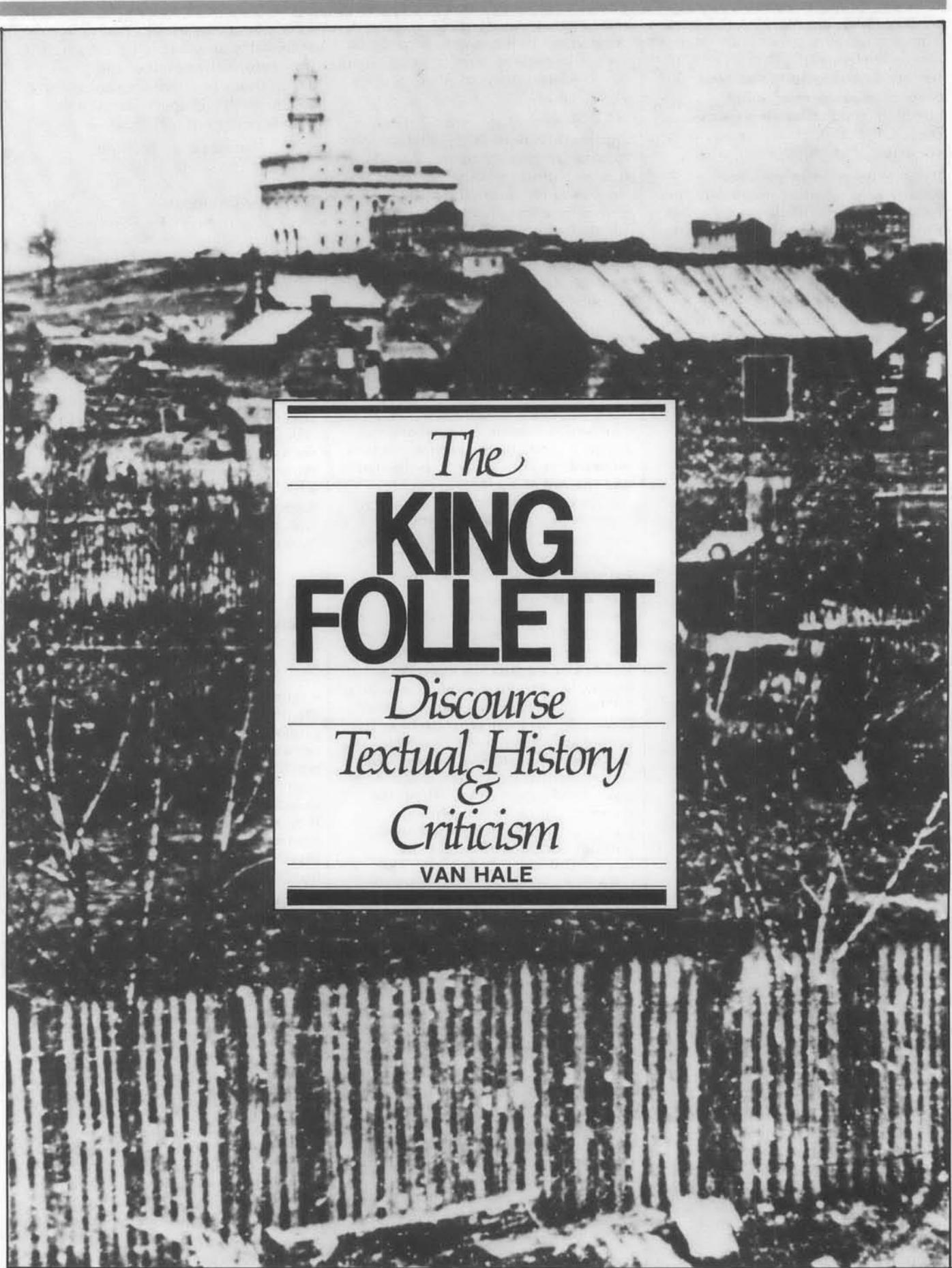
Just a few lines to say "thanks" for printing "I am Not a Good Egg" (*SUNSTONE* January-April) by Marvin Rytting. His surprisingly compassionate insight and perception probably provoked more silent "hurrah's" than the members of the lucky majority would ever imagine. For those of us who can not even sign letters such as this, Rytting's comments offered hope that one day the prophets may allow themselves to wonder why it is we Mormon gays keep saying the same things over and over again.

Not Ready for Excommunication

More Dialogue Needed

As a believing Mormon woman whose affectional/sexual preference is for other women, I have found Marvin Rytting's articles addressing the quandary of the Mormon homosexual to be a concerned, allied (albeit tardy) voice in the silence which has long shrouded our heterosexist Mormon culture. Rytting perhaps approaches this taboo subject with a certain credibility and safety not available to most lesbian and gay Mormons, for he is a good—meaning straight—egg. Even so, he risks seeing life through the eyes of a gay person by imagining a world where same-sex love is the

continued on page 44



The
**KING
FOLLETT**

*Discourse
Textual & History
Criticism*

VAN HALE

THE seventh of April, 1844, was a beautiful spring day in Nauvoo. The countryside was turning green; the blossoming peach trees attracted the season's first butterflies.¹ In this beautiful setting thousands of Latter-day Saints had gathered to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of the restoration of the gospel.

Behind the temple, in a grove specially prepared for the occasion, Joseph Smith approached the stand at 3:15 P.M. He looked out over the largest congregation of Saints ever assembled during his life and delivered what was to be his most famous sermon, perhaps the most famous ever delivered in Mormondom. The discourse was given in honor of Elder King Follett who had been killed accidentally while digging a well. Although a number of topics were addressed, the most prominent doctrine, that for which the sermon is most remembered, was the plurality of gods. He declared: "Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth. . . . God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. . . . He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ. . . . you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you."²

These were new ideas to most members in that congregation although they had been discussed in private circles for several years.³ In fact, three weeks prior to the King Follett Discourse, the Saints had been counseled by Hyrum Smith to "let the matter of the grand councils of heaven, and the making of gods . . . entirely alone . . . until by and bye."⁴ It was not until after Joseph's presentation of these ideas at conference that the Saints considered them doctrine.

No one familiar with any era of Mormonism will be surprised to discover that there were widely varied reactions to the introduction of this major new doctrine. Thomas Ward, editor of the Church's *Millennial Star* in England, predicted two of them: "We feel greatly the importance of the principles upon which it [the King Follett Discourse] treats, and are convinced they will have a mighty effect, generally upon the Saints, for good or evil. The honest hearted will rejoice in the light of truth, and their minds will expand in the comprehension of principles so glorious; while it may be that some may turn away, being unable to endure the everlasting truth of heaven."⁵

Most members accepted the doctrine as a glorious new truth. Within a few months of the discourse, this doctrine, in part, was published by Orson Pratt under the heading "The Mormon Creed," and by John Taylor in an article entitled "The Living God." Taylor proclaimed that "it may be well enough to say at the out set that Mormonism embraces a plurality of Gods."⁶ Nearly fifty years later Wilford Woodruff referred to the King Follett Discourse at the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple and "testified that only on one previous occasion had he felt the spirit of God more powerfully manifest than during the dedication of this Temple—that was when the Prophet Joseph delivered his last address. The Prophet in that instance stood on his feet three hours, and the spirit of God was present like a flame of fire."⁷ Others who were present have left similar record of their positive impressions of that occasion.⁸

Not all members shared this attitude, however. Within eleven days of the conference, Joseph Smith's second counselor, William Law, was excommunicated for his active opposition to the Prophet's politics and doctrine, including his teaching of the plurality of gods. By the end of April, William had rallied a number of Nauvoo citizens, some of considerable prominence, into his Reformed Church.⁹ On 7 June they published the first and only issue of their weekly paper, the *Nauvoo Expositor*, in which they denounced Joseph as a fallen prophet. Their reasons included his "introduc[tion of] false and damnable doctrines into the Church, such as a plurality of Gods above the God of this universe. . . . we therefore are constrained to denounce them as apostates. . . . among the many items of false doctrine that are taught the Church, is the doctrine of many Gods, one of the most direful in its effects that has characterized the world for many centuries."¹⁰ They also published statements exposing the practice of plural marriage, and called for the repeal of the Nauvoo Charter for alleged gross abuse of civil power by Joseph as mayor.

After two days of discussion, the mayor and the city council concluded that the *Expositor* threatened the future and the safety of the city, and could thus be abated as a public nuisance, a power they maintained was granted them in the Nauvoo Charter.¹¹ The press was destroyed by the Nauvoo Police on 10 June.

For this action, Joseph Smith and others were charged with inciting a riot, and finally surrendered themselves to the constable at Carthage on 25 June. They were murdered two days later.

Although the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum brought the demise of William Law's Reformed Church, the dissension and division continued. Many of its members and sympathizers became prominent in the several schismatic groups which were organized in succeeding years. A key element among most of the break-offs was that the Prophet had fallen into doctrinal error. While some of these groups ignored the plurality of gods, most totally rejected it, including the followers of William E. McLellin, David Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, James J. Strang, Granville Hedrick, and William Bickerton.

Yet the King Follett Discourse was not an easy body of doctrine for even the most loyal of Joseph Smith's followers, both in the Utah Church and in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The difficulty for both groups was that the discourse contains doctrines which, over the passage of time, became unacceptable. Although the two churches questioned different portions of the doctrine presented in the speech, they both faced the problem of reconciling the Prophet's teachings with later Church doctrines.

The two churches seemed to find a similar solution to the problem: To question, even deny, the accuracy of the sermon as reported became more acceptable than to deal with the broader issue of doctrinal disharmony. A review of the history of the text of the discourse makes this evident.

Textual History of the King Follett Discourse

As Joseph Smith spoke on 7 April 1844, four men independently recorded his sermon. The reports of

Thomas Bullock and William Clayton, who had been assigned as clerks for the conference, each contain a version of the discourse. Another account was recorded by Willard Richards, who, in keeping the Prophet's diary for two years, had recorded a number of sermons. In addition to these three official reporters, Wilford Woodruff took notes at the time of the discourse and later entered his version into the comprehensive diary which he kept throughout his life. Although none of the four were trained in taking stenographic, or word for word, accounts, all had had significant prior experience at recording discourses, and were capable of recording Joseph Smith's teachings accurately on that occasion.¹²

Thomas Bullock was delegated the responsibility of preparing the conference minutes for publication. On 10 April 1844, the day after the close of the conference, he met "with the Twelve to arrange the minutes."¹³ He was

*The
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most of Joseph Smith's loyal
followers to accept.*

provided with William Clayton's minutes, and from 23-28 April he combined, or amalgamated, the two reports into one, which was fuller and more complete than either separately.

Publication of the conference minutes in the *Times and Seasons* began on 1 May, with the Bullock-Clayton report of the discourse appearing on 15 August. This version served as text for three reprints of that sermon over the next two years.

In 1855, the manuscript of Joseph Smith's history, which eventually became the six-volume *History of the Church*, was being completed in Salt Lake City by the Historian's Office staff. A clerk in that office, Jonathan Grimshaw, who had been assigned to prepare Smith's sermons for the *History*, began work on a new text of the King Follett Discourse, combining the Richards and Woodruff reports with the 1844 Bullock-Clayton amalgamation from the *Times and Seasons*. Although the Richards and Woodruff versions contained no doctrines not found in the 1844 text, they did fill out phrases and ideas already in the first version, expanding it by about

fifty percent (see the included six column parallels for example). Although there were some minor problems with this process¹⁴ the combination of words and phrases was effective, often reproducing Joseph Smith's exact wording. In fact, in numerous instances the precise wording can be determined with considerable confidence. A comparison of the 1855 amalgamation with the four reports, and of the four reports, with each other, reveals a strict harmony of content and will not support a claim of any substantial alteration or discrepancy in doctrine.¹⁵

Jonathan Grimshaw began his work on the sermon on 3 October 1855 and completed it on the fifteenth of the same month. On 5 November, Thomas Bullock and Church historian George A. Smith read the completed text, which they "carefully revised and compared."¹⁶ It was "read in Council Sunday 18th Nov 1855, and carefully revised by President Brigham Young."¹⁷ Grimshaw's copy containing revisions in the handwriting of himself, Bullock, and Albert Carrington is filed in the Joseph Smith Collection in the LDS archives. With perhaps one exception, the revisions are minor in nature and do not add to, delete, or alter any of the basic doctrines of the discourse, but only improve its readability, fluency, and clarity.

By 5 April 1856 it was written into the manuscript of Joseph Smith's history. From this manuscript, the *Deseret News* printed for the first time the 1855 amalgamation in its 8 July 1857 edition. This printing has been made the basic source for all subsequent printings of the discourse by the LDS church.¹⁸

All reliable information supports the current version as being the result of a significant and a conscientious effort to produce a faithful and accurate report of the discourse. Considerable effort was expended to report the speech by four competent reporters. Through the process of amalgamation, the reports of the four were united to produce the fullest possible version, and to ensure its accuracy. It was compared with the originals, reviewed and revised several times by men who had heard the sermon, and who had been intimate associates of Joseph Smith. These men had firsthand knowledge of his theological beliefs and were thus qualified to recognize any of the doctrines in the reports that did not harmonize with those of the Prophet. Additionally, reports of the King Follett Discourse are consonant with Joseph Smith's teaching of the same doctrines on other occasions both public and private.¹⁹ Therefore, although it must be recognized that the current version is not, for the most part, a word-for-word report, to doubt that it accurately presents Joseph Smith's teachings on that occasion is unreasonable.

RLDS Criticisms

The difficulties posed by the King Follett Discourse for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have centered around the doctrine of the plurality of gods. As early as 1864, those who accepted the doctrine (Isaac Sheen, Zenos Gurley, and W. W. Blair among them) were charging those who rejected it (Joseph Smith III and Jason Briggs) with apostasy. By 1890, however, Briggs's position prevailed: The plurality

of gods was "the doctrine of men . . . and the doctrine of devils."²⁰

Rejecting the plurality of gods, however, meant rejecting a teaching of Joseph Smith, unless the report of the offending discourse could be shown to be faulty. In 1893 the RLDS church published their abstract of the "Temple Lot Case" which included this testimony from James Whitehead: "I heard what is known as the 'King Follett' sermon preached. That sermon was published. Joseph Smith did not in that sermon teach the plurality of gods."²¹ This was only a partial report of Whitehead's statement, however. The following significant lines in the original transcript were omitted in the abstract: "He did not that I know of. If he did I did not hear it, but I was not there all the time he was preaching for I was called out for a time."²² The RLDS church history published in 1896 presented four arguments suggesting "suspicion as to . . . [the] genuineness"²³ of the King Follett Discourse. These ideas have persisted to the present. In 1965 RLDS Apostle Aleah G. Koury restated them, contrasting LDS and RLDS claims in his book *Truth and Evidence*.²⁴ And in 1971 RLDS historian Richard P. Howard repeated yet again these same ideas, this time in question form, with the tone of inquiry, rather than polemic.²⁵

The first and most obvious of the charges that can be brought against the veracity of the discourse was that no verbatim report was made of its delivery; hence it must have been written from memory, or, at best, from notes. The question of the reliability of the reported sermon has been considered in detail above.

The second objection suggests that in style and diction, as well as doctrinal teachings, the discourse differs markedly from the body of Joseph Smith's work, thus making its genuineness suspect. Although only the most preliminary work has been completed to date on the question of diction, because the sermon was recorded by four witnesses, and because their reports have such a high degree of correspondence, it may be that this is one of the best-preserved examples of the Prophet's style.

Although a lengthy and complete response to the charge that "its doctrinal teachings differ . . . widely from the productions of Joseph Smith as found elsewhere"²⁶ is beyond the scope of this paper, it may be sufficient to state that some forty-nine references showing the development of the doctrine of the plurality of gods and Joseph's belief in it have been collected and published.²⁷

The third objection is to the brevity of the reported discourse. The address was said to have been a very long one, lasting two hours and fifteen minutes, yet the extract printed in *Times and Seasons* can be leisurely read in about twenty-five minutes. From so meager an extract, it is argued, one cannot get the true sense of the discourse.

A close examination of the four manuscript reports refutes this assumption. The close thought-for-thought parallel in the four reports suggests the probability that the 1855 amalgamation is a comprehensive report of the ideas Joseph Smith presented. An examination of parallel #1 on the plurality of gods (which is quite representative of the entire discourse) provides convincing evidence that the "true sense" of the sermon has been accurately preserved. In fact, so many of the

identical words are found in more than one report, that this version appears to present much of the Prophet's very wording. Of course there is no doubt that a stenographic report would vary from the 1855 version, but probably in wording only, not in doctrine.

If the 1855 version does indeed present the correct sense of the King Follett Discourse why did its presentation require two hours and fifteen minutes? What follows is admittedly speculative, but not unreasonably so.

The funeral sermon was deferred from 5 April to 7 April because Joseph Smith's voice had been under great strain, the result of his frequent public speeches without

A *comparison of the four reports of the discourse will not support a claim of substantial alteration or discrepancy in doctrine.*

the benefit of a public address system.²⁸ As he began his address, he requested "Pray that the Lord may strengthen my lungs." The wind was blowing hard, and the congregation was the largest that he had ever addressed. The strain he experienced during this sermon is evident from his remarks of the following day: "It is just as impossible, for me to continue the subject of yesterday as to raise the dead. My lungs are worn out."²⁹ Perhaps these factors caused him to speak slowly, pause frequently, and possibly stop for a few minutes occasionally to rest his lungs. If so, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the 1855 version could be almost a full report, and yet be read aloud in less than one-half the time President Smith occupied the stand.

The final objection RLDS history brings against the veracity of the report of the King Follett Discourse is that because the text was not printed until after Joseph's death, its published version had not been inspected by him. This statement, of course, is correct. However, preparation of the minutes of the conference for

KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE EXTRACTS

PARALLEL NO.1 — PLURALITY OF GODS					
WILLIAM CLAYTON	THOMAS BULLOCK	TIMES AND SEASONS	WILLARD RICHARDS	WILFORD WOODRUFF	HISTORY OF THE CHURCH
<p>Going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity—</p> <p>he was once as one of us and was on a planet as Jesus was in the flesh—</p> <p>You have got to learn how to be a god yourself in order to save yourself—to be priests & kings as all Gods has done—by going from a small degree to another—from exaltation to ex— till they are able to sit in glory as with those who sit enthroned.</p>	<p>he was God from the begin of all Eternity & if I do not refute it—</p> <p>God himself the father of us all dwelt on a Earth same as Js. himself did & I will shew it from the Bible—</p> <p>you have got to learn how to be a God yourself & be K. & God Priest to God same as all have done by going from a small capy to anr. from grace to grace until the resn. of & sit in everlasting power as they who have gone before</p>	<p>I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity.</p> <p>God himself; the Father of us all dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible.</p> <p>You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be Kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power</p>	<p>refute the Idea that God was God from all eternity—</p> <p>you have got to learn how to make yourselves God, Kings, Priests, &c.—by going from a small to great capacity. Till they are able to dwell in everlasting burning & everlasting power.—</p>	<p>I want you to understand God and how he comes to be God. We suppose that God was God from eternity. I will refute that Idea, or I will do away or take away the veil so you may see.</p> <p>he once was a man like us, and the Father was once on an earth like us,</p> <p>And you have got to learn how to make yourselves God, king and priest, by going from a small capacity to a great capacity to the resurrection of the dead to dwelling in everlasting burnings,</p>	<p>I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.</p> <p>He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible.</p> <p>you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.</p>
PARALLEL NO. 2 — STATURE OF CHILDREN IN RESURRECTION					
WILLIAM CLAYTON	THOMAS BULLOCK	TIMES AND SEASONS	WILLARD RICHARDS	WILFORD WOODRUFF	HISTORY OF THE CHURCH
<p>told of parents receiving their children</p> <p>Note-Columns 1 and 2 were amalgamated into column 3 in 1844. Columns 3, 4, and 5 were amalgamated into column 6 in 1855.</p>	<p>Mothers you shall have your Children for they shall have it—for their debt is paid there is no damn. awaits them for they are in the Spirits—as the Child dies so shall it rise from the ded & be living in the burng. of God.—it shall be the child as it was bef it died out of your arms Children dwell & exercise power in the same form as they laid them down</p>	<p>Mothers you shall have your children, for they shall have eternal life: for their debt is paid, there is no damnation awaits them, for they are in the spirit.—As the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead and be forever living in the learning of God, it shall be the child, the same as it was before it died out of your arms. Children dwell and exercise power in the same form as they laid them down.</p>	<p>Shall mothers have their Children? Yes. they shall have it without price. redemption is paid possessing all the intelligence of a god. the child as it was before it died out of your arms thrones upon thrones. Dominion upon dominion just as you—</p>	<p>A question will Mothers have their children in Eternity yes, yes, you will have the children But as it falls so it will rise, It will never grow, It will be in its precise form as it fell in its mothers arms. Eternity is full of thrones upon which children reigning on thrones of glory not one cubit added to their stature I will leave this subject here</p>	<p>A question may be asked—"Will mothers have their children in eternity?" Yes! Yes! Mothers, you shall have your children; for they shall have eternal life, for their debt is paid. There is no damnation awaiting them for they are in the spirit. But as the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead, and be for ever living in the learning of God. It will never grow; it will still be the child, in the same precise form as it appeared before it died out of its mother's arms, but possessing all the intelligence of a God. Children dwell in the mansions of glory and exercise power, but appear in the same form as when on earth.</p>

publication in the Church's *Times and Seasons* had been completed by 28 April, two months before the Martyrdom. Although there is no evidence that the Prophet inspected and approved the minutes, he certainly had the opportunity, and perhaps the inclination, since on several previous occasions he had listened to and revised minutes.³⁰

At any rate, it seems certain that the minutes received at least the approval of the Twelve, for they were prepared under their direction, and the publication supervised by two of their number, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff. Furthermore, thousands had heard the discourse, and considerable objection to its teaching of the plurality of gods had been festering for four months by the time it was first published. If the report were in error on this subject, it is almost inconceivable that no one would have attempted to set the record straight. Yet from the opponents and proponents of the doctrine there is no known record of any expressed dissatisfaction with the 1844 printings of the speech. It appears that of the thousands who heard it, not one challenged its accuracy at that time.³¹

Thus, for at least ninety years, the King Follett Discourse has been unwelcome in the RLDS profile of Joseph Smith, a profile which cannot be complete without it.

LDS Criticism

Although LDS authorities had less difficulty accepting the doctrine of plurality of gods, two other concepts contained in the King Follett Discourse became doctrinally uncomfortable for them after a number of years: the question of the stature of children in the resurrection and the matter of the independence of intelligences in the premortal existence. As the sermon was reprinted by leaders of the LDS church in ensuing years, their method of handling the apparent contradictions in doctrine proved to be essentially the same as that of their RLDS cousins: to delete the offending sections, blaming the inaccuracy of transcription of the discourse rather than to reject overtly a teaching of their founding prophet.

First let us examine the history of the conflict regarding resurrected children. Close scrutiny of early records and diaries reveals that few mothers of that era escaped the heart-rending experience of losing an infant child. Near the end of the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith sought to comfort those grieving parents with these remarks: "Mothers, you shall have your children. . . as the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead. . . *It will never grow, it will still be the child in its precise form as it was before it died out of your arms. Children dwell and exercise power, throne upon throne, dominion upon dominion, in the same form just as you laid them down. Eternity is full of thrones upon which dwell thousands of children, reigning on thrones of glory, with not one cubit added to their stature.*"³²

This was neither the first nor the last time he had taught this concept. Two years earlier, at the funeral of Windsor Lyons's child, the Prophet proclaimed that "all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young, there will not be 'added unto their stature one cubit.' . . . Children will be enthroned in the presence

of God, and the Lamb; with bodies of the same stature that they had on earth. . . they will there enjoy the fulness of that light, glory, and intelligence which is prepared in the Celestial kingdom."³³

Six weeks before his death, President Smith again affirmed this concept: "In order for you to receive your children to yourself, you must have a promise, some ordinance some blessing in order to ascend above principalities or else it may be an angel—they must rise just as they died—we can there hail our lovely infants with the same glory, the same loveliness in the celestial glory where they all enjoy alike—they differ in stature, in size—the same glorious spirit gives them the likeness of glory and bloom."³⁴

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of their founding prophet.*

The consistent thought runs through all these statements that in the resurrection those who died as infants will be of the same stature as when they died, but will not be denied any intelligence or glory. Further, no sources contemporary with Joseph Smith have been found which in any way contradict or modify this publicly and privately stated position. Of the reports of the King Follett Discourse, three of the four record this concept, with a harmony among them which does not support the argument later advanced that this part of the discourse was inaccurately reported.

After Joseph Smith's death, the subject of the stature of children in the resurrection continued to receive attention. In an 1854 discourse Brigham Young restated Joseph's teaching with some expansion:

Little children can, after death, increase in all the wisdom, power, glory, gifts, and blessings that pertain to the Celestial kingdom. . . . Suppose the inhabitants of the eternal world should range from two to fifteen feet what

matter of that. . . . This heavenly, beautiful, and glorious variety you discover in the works of God here below, will be seen in the resurrection. You will see the child of three, four, and five years old, possessing all the intelligence in them that makes them capable of enjoyment and duration. Resurrected bodies will be as diversified as the bodies of mortal flesh, for variety, beauty and extension. . . . The height of my body, or its extension in width will make no difference to my enjoyments and blessings in the eternal worlds.³⁵

Acknowledging that there had been considerable interest in the subject, President Young again addressed the subject at the funeral of the infant son of Jesse C. Little. This time he introduced a note of uncertainty as to Joseph Smith's final ideas on the subject:

The question has often been asked, how it is with little children; will they grow or not after; Joseph once said

*Joseph
Smith consistently taught that in
the resurrection those who died as
infants will grow in intelligence
and power but not in stature.*

they would, and then he said they would not, he never had any revelation upon the subject. I have no doctrine to give upon this subject. I believe in the great variety in the vast Creation of God. I do not believe that the Lord ever made two worlds alike, or two things alike in any world, nor that the human family has been alike in stature in the various ages of this world. The Lord has power to give a soul or spirit in a tabernacle two or three ft. high, as in a giant 8 or 10 ft. in height. . . . My doctrine or belief is that we shall find all children and people at the resurrection of the same stature as when they died.³⁶

Again, in 1867, he said he had "heard Joseph Smith say that Children would not grow after death & at Another time that they would grow & he hardly know how to reconcile." Brigham continued to present a reconciliation of the alleged contradictory statements of Joseph Smith, stating "he would like a variety in

Eternity. Children might grow in intelligence & not in stature as well as a given person."³⁷ This seems consistent with Joseph Smith's teachings that infants who die will, in the resurrection, continue to grow in intelligence, in knowledge, in glory, and in power and dominion, but not in stature (see parallel #2).

There is no indication that Brigham Young ever questioned the accuracy of the report of the King Follett Discourse. All evidence is that he had full confidence in the 1855 version of the report. As has already been pointed out, it was upon President Young's final examination and approval 18 November 1855, that the 1855 version was incorporated into the manuscript of the History of Joseph Smith then being completed.

The Saints may have been consoled by the teaching that one who dies in infancy is an heir of celestial glory, but seemed to find the notion that an infant's growth and progress toward perfection will not be physical rather disconcerting. This idea caused "quite an anxiety," according to Orson Pratt in 1873.³⁸ What was one to do with this unacceptable teaching of Joseph Smith? Pratt suggested several possible solutions:

1. The report of the sermon did not give the Prophet's full idea on the subject.
2. Joseph Smith had not been fully instructed by revelation on that point.
3. Pratt had heard that shortly before his death, Joseph had obtained further light on the subject to the effect that there would be growth after the resurrection.³⁹

Here the same arguments reappear: Either the report was in error, or the Prophet changed his mind, or (quite frequently) both.

During the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the idea which won almost universal acceptance among the Latter-day Saints was that one who died in infancy would be resurrected as an infant, then nurtured to maturity by his mother from mortality. This allowed for an easy reinterpretation of Joseph Smith's reported statement: Yes, infants will be resurrected as infants; there is no growth in the grave, but they will then grow after the resurrection to their full stature.⁴⁰

In support of this belief several contemporaries of the Prophet wrote statements in later years to the effect that they had heard Joseph teach that infants would grow after the resurrection.⁴¹ But if Joseph Smith did reverse his position, no evidence of it from or near his era has yet been uncovered. Good sources establish the Prophet's doctrine on this point to have been consistent from March 1842 to May 1844, just six weeks before his death. It is not reasonable to discard the report of the King Follett Discourse on the basis of several reminiscences which emerged from a period of LDS history charged with sentiment contrary to the doctrine expressed in the discourse.

One of the interesting episodes in the history of the discourse was that of its exclusion from the first edition of B. H. Roberts's *History of the Church*. To Roberts, the sermon was the climax of Joseph Smith's teaching career. As he edited the first edition of the *History*, he did considerable work on the discourse, preparing extensive footnotes in which he revealed a great reverence for it, though he doubted the accuracy of some parts of the

text. The sermon was to fill pages 302-17 of volume six of the *History*. At the last minute, and without Roberts's knowledge or consent, those of higher authority decided to delete it, and the *History* appeared with sixteen pages missing.⁴²

The reason for the deletion was stated in a letter by George Albert Smith, 30 January 1912: "I have thought that the report of that sermon might not be authentic and I have feared that it contained some thing that might be contrary to the truth. . . . Some of the brethren felt as I did and thought that greater publicity should not be given to that particular sermon."⁴³

It is tempting to conclude that the subject responsible for its deletion from the *History* was the issue of the stature of children in the resurrection, for certainly neither the plurality of gods nor any other subject in the discourse had received any significant public criticism.

Disagreement over the doctrine of premortal intelligences apparently led to the discourse's deletion from the History of the Church.

The discourse had been published three years earlier in the *Improvement Era*, with Roberts's footnotes. The problem of the disputed statement on children in the resurrection had been resolved by omitting the paragraph and including this footnote by Roberts: "The omitted paragraph indicated by the asterisks refers to the exaltation and power that will be wielded by children in the resurrection before attaining to the development of stature of men and women; but which development will surely come to those who are raised from the dead as infants. It is quite evident that there was some imperfection in the report of the Prophet's remarks at this point, and hence the passage is omitted."⁴⁴

However, further investigation reveals that another doctrine of the discourse was probably the immediate reason for its deletion from the *History*. In August 1911,

B. H. Roberts had completed chapter 55 of the "History of the Mormon Church" which was being published in the *Americana*, a historical magazine published by the National Americana Society in New York. This chapter was entitled "The Prophet's Work—Mormonism a System of Philosophy," and was devoted to a discussion of Joseph Smith's philosophical and theological beliefs.⁴⁵ This chapter was reviewed and amended by President Joseph F. Smith's two counselors, Anthon H. Lund and Charles W. Penrose. In his diary entry of 25 August 1911 President Lund observed: "Today we had Bro. Roberts read his article on the Philosophy of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Bro. Penrose made a splendid speech on eternalism opposing the view of Bro. B. Roberts who holds that intelligences were self-existent entities before they entered into the organization of the spirit."⁴⁶ Again on 29 August he wrote:

I spent the forenoon in the H.O. where Bro. C. W. Penrose and I listened to Bro. Roberts read his concluding chapter on the prophet Joseph Smith. We got him to eliminate his theories in regard to intelligences as conscious self-existing beings or entities before being organized into Spirits. His doctrine has raised much discussion and the inference on which he builds his theory is very vague. The Prophets speech delivered as a funeral sermon over King Follett, is the basis of Bro. Roberts doctrine: namely where he speaks of mans eternity claim. Roberts wants to prove that man then is co-eval with God. He no doubt felt bad to have us eliminate his pet theory.⁴⁷

From President Lund's diary it appears that the issue current at the very time that the discourse was deleted from the *History of the Church* was that of intelligences existing as conscious entities before being organized into spirits. Thus, it seems probable that this issue was immediately responsible for its deletion from the *History*.⁴⁸ Again, an unacceptable doctrine led to criticism of the text of the discourse.

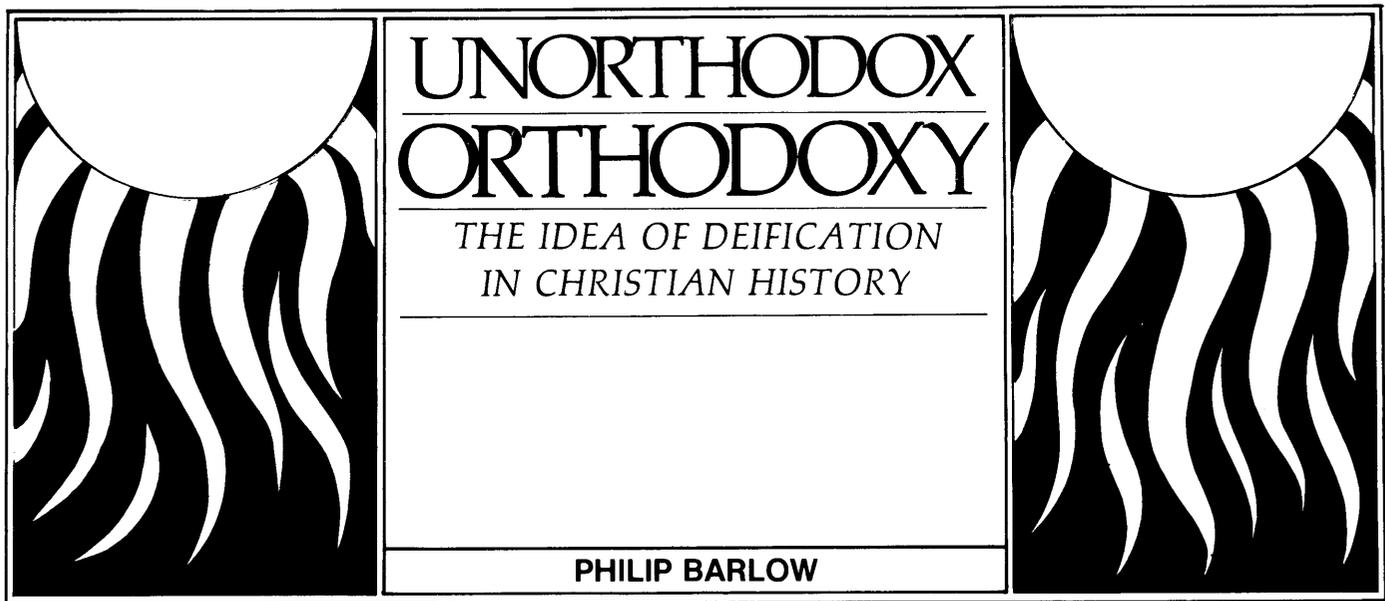
But the two issues here discussed are not isolated concepts of Joseph Smith's thought. To discard them diminishes our understanding of his thinking and of related doctrines. When he taught that those who die as infants will one day reign upon thrones as gods without one cubit added to their stature, was he saying that mortals' concepts of physical perfection will be meaningless in eternity? Was he stressing the nonphysical attributes as being immeasurably more important than the physical? Was he saying that physical variety is even more important than the mortal quest for physical perfection? Was he saying that physical perfection is not related to eternal happiness, glory, power, or ultimate perfection?

Whatever the answers to these questions, it is obvious that the King Follett Discourse has been an object of intense interest from the day of its delivery in April 1844 to the present. It has been described both as blasphemy and glorious truth. Whichever it is, the preservation of pertinent manuscripts has led to a reliable reconstruction of Joseph Smith's remarks on that occasion. Therefore, all portrayals of him which neglect the King Follett Discourse, in whole or in part, must continue to be needlessly incomplete or distorted.

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Notes

1. Diary of Thomas Bullock, Historian's Office Journal, 6 and 7 April 1844, Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.
2. The version quoted here is the Jonathan Grimshaw amalgamation in Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932-51), 6:305-6; hereafter cited as *History of the Church*. Compare this version with its equivalent in Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 200-1; hereafter cited as "A Newly Amalgamated Text."
3. Van Hale, "The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 209-25.
4. Letter of Hyrum Smith, 15 March 1844, in *Times and Seasons* 5 (March 1844): 474.
5. Editorial by Thomas Ward, *Millennial Star* 5 (September 1845): 95.
6. Orson Pratt, *The Prophetic Almanac for 1845* (New York: Prophet Office, 1845-46); John Taylor, "The Living God," *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 1845): 808.
7. Diary of L. John Nuttall, 20 April 1893, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. While the King Follett Discourse was not Joseph Smith's last sermon, it is clear that Wilford Woodruff was referring to this discourse from the fact that this was the last sermon he heard; Elder Woodruff left on a mission on 9 May 1844 and did not return until after the Martyrdom.
8. Donald Q. Cannon, "The King Follett Discourse: Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon in Historical Perspective," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 185-90.
9. One account numbers attendance at one of their meetings at about three hundred (*Warsaw Signal*, 15 May 1844).
10. *Nauvoo Expositor*, 7 June 1844.
11. *Nauvoo Neighbor*, 19 June 1844; *History of the Church*, 6:430-39.
12. These four reports, preserved in the Church Archives, have been published in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), pp. 340-61. Background information regarding the reporters and their method of reporting is provided in Cannon, "Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon," pp. 182-84 and "A Newly Amalgamated Text," pp. 193-94.
13. Diary of Thomas Bullock, 10 April 1844.
14. This process resulted in some awkwardness in several places where Grimshaw chose to include statements from two reports rather than fuse them into one. Thus in the final report it appears Joseph Smith made two similar statements, when in reality they are two reports of the same statement.
15. These are, however, general observations. There are numerous examples where word order, or even the placement of a comma is significant. Thus the examination of the four reports on any technical point may be critical.
16. Historian's Office Journal, 3, 10-15 October 1855; 5, 17 November 1855, Church Archives.
17. Manuscript History of Joseph Smith, note at the end of the entry for 7 April 1844, Church Archives.
18. Recently Stan Larson has produced a new amalgamation following methods more acceptable to contemporary standards of scholarship. Several new features were added to the process, resulting in an even clearer text. The new version is printed in the Winter 1978 issue of *BYU Studies* ("A Newly Amalgamated Text," pp. 193-208).
19. On the plurality of gods, see Hale, "Doctrinal Impact," pp. 212-20.
20. Briggs's comment is found in *The Messenger* 2 (November 1875): 4. That this position prevailed by 1890 is shown by the following sources, which present arguments on both sides of the issue: *Truth Teller* 1 (1864): 14, 32, 37, 38, 40, 41, 50, 51, 55, 60-62, 84, 92; William Cadman, *Faith and Doctrines* (West Elizabeth, Pa.: Committee, 1897), p. 17; William Cadman, *Faith and Doctrines*, 2d ser. (West Elizabeth: Roscoe Ledger Print, 1902), p. 16; *True Latter Day Saints* 1 (December 1860): 280-83.
21. *Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), p. 37.
22. Transcript of the "Temple Lot Case," James Whitehead Testimony, p. 45, Church Archives.
23. Heman C. Smith, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 4 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1951), 2:736.
24. Aleah G. Koury, *Truth and Evidence* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1965), pp. 16-28. This includes a discussion of Joseph's changes in the "New Translation" of the Bible, Doctrine and Covenants 121, the Book of Abraham, and the King Follett Discourse.
25. Richard P. Howard, "The 'King Follett Sermon' Teaches a Lesson in Church History," *Saints Herald* 118 (September 1971): 49.
26. See note 23.
27. Hale, "Doctrinal Impact," pp. 212-25.
28. *History of the Church*, 6:287.
29. *Ibid.*, 6:318.
30. *Ibid.*, 5:364, 368, 369, 380.
31. Only after the passing of some thirty years was the first doubt expressed of which anything is currently known (discourse by Orson Pratt, 28 December 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saint's Depot, 1854-86; reprint ed., 1967], 16:335).
32. "A Newly Amalgamated Text," p. 207; cf. *History of the Church*, 6:316.
33. This discourse was published in the *Times and Seasons* (3 [15 April 1842]: 752) while Joseph Smith was its editor. It also appears in Wilford Woodruff's diary, 20 March 1842, Church Archives. Further record of the Prophet's teaching of this concept is found in William Clayton's diary for 18 May 1843: "I asked the Prest. wether children who die in infancy will grow. He answered 'No, we shall receive them precisely in the same state as they died ie no larger. They will have as much intelligence as we shall but shall always remain separate and single'" (as quoted in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, p. 136).
34. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, p. 369; cf. *History of the Church*, 6:366.
35. Discourse of Brigham Young, 19 February 1854, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.
36. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 31 January 1861), Church Archives.
37. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 8 September 1867.
38. Discourse by Orson Pratt, p. 335. Forty-five years later Joseph F. Smith confessed that he never did believe that "those who died in infancy would remain as little children after the resurrection . . . yet . . . did not have the courage to say so" (Joseph F. Smith, "Status of Children in the Resurrection," *Improvement Era* 21 [May 1918]: 571).
39. Discourse by Orson Pratt, p. 335.
40. A few names from the long list of advocates of this concept include Orson Pratt, Franklin D. Richards, Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, B. H. Roberts, Joseph F. Smith, and more recently, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Bruce R. McConkie.
41. *History of the Church*, 4:556-57.
42. An interesting reminiscence of Roberts's displeasure and reaction was related to the Mormon History Association in 1973 by the late T. Edgar Lyon (see T. Edgar Lyon, "Church Historians I Have Known," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11 [Winter 1978]: 14, 15).
43. George Albert Smith to Samuel O. Bennion, 30 January 1912, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, as quoted in Cannon, "Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon," p. 192.
44. B. H. Roberts, ed., "The King Follett Discourse," *Improvement Era* 12 (January 1909): 189.
45. In 1930 this series of articles became the basis of Roberts's multivolume history of the Church (Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6 vols. [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1965]).
46. Diary of Anthon H. Lund, 25 August 1911, Church Archives.
47. *Ibid.*, 29 August 1911.
48. The section deleted from the *Americana* ([October 1911]: 1002) was reinstated by Roberts in his 1930 *Comprehensive History of the Church* (2:392). It contains quotations from the Book of Abraham, chapter 3, and from the King Follett Discourse.



FEW Mormon doctrines are so offensive to modern Christians as the teaching that humankind may literally partake of the divine nature—may become gods. It does not require a clever person to understand why such a doctrine grates on many ears. In addition to the abstract implications of polytheism is the pragmatic problem of conceit. Thinkers as early and prestigious as Augustine held that “pride, the desire to become like to God and overpass the limits set on human beings as creatures” was “the initial sin” of Adam and Eve.¹ Similarly, many critics of the Church today consider the idea of human deification to be the very embodiment of blasphemy.

This essay will attempt to foster understanding and lessen the unnecessary offense by making two points. The first observes that the notion of human exaltation has existed among prominent “orthodox” (a difficult word, this) Christians in every century since Christendom’s founder walked the earth. Entertaining the possibility of human exaltation has not always been viewed as antithetical to humility. At many times and in many writers it has served as the *basis* for the humble pursuit of the Christian life. Certain peculiarities of Western Christian history—among them, the Roman Catholic-Eastern Orthodox schism, the Protestant Reformation, and the two great American religious awakenings—have served to obscure that fact.

The theology of “deification” (which I shall use as equivalent to “divinization” and to the Greek *theosis*) has assumed many different forms and meant many different things to many different groups in many different contexts. But important writers in every Christian era (especially in earliest Christianity) have insisted that *human deification is the essence of the meaning of Christ*. While space limitations prevent a thorough study, even the overview presented here will demonstrate this notion emerging from surprising quarters.

My second objective is to suggest why the doctrine matters. As Lowell Bennion has reminded us, abstract

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theology may serve a purpose, but “it saves no one either in this life or in eternity.”² The idea that a human being may become like his or her creator may be shown to address the most elemental psychological and spiritual needs of the race.

I

Perhaps the most interesting modern adherent of the possibility of human exaltation is the twentieth century’s champion defender of “orthodox” Christianity: C. S. Lewis. Lewis is claimed as ally not only by Mormons, but by Christians of many varieties (particularly by evangelicals—those who seem most bothered by Mormonism’s “conceited” claims). “There are no ordinary people,” writes Lewis. Rather, we “live in a society of possible gods and goddesses. The dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.” In *The Screwtape Letters* Lewis has his devil say,

the obedience which the Enemy [i.e., God] demands of men is quite a different thing [from his own Satanic goals]. One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and his service is not . . . mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on a miniature scale, will be qualitatively like his own.³

Indeed, the concept of deification may hardly be said to be incidental to Lewis’s writing. It is, to borrow an obnoxious phrase from an old chemistry professor, “utterly ubiquitous.”

There are others of our century who have been equally preoccupied with the idea of man becoming god—some with a predilection, others with an antipathy for the notion. Santayana questioned, “What should be the end of life, if fellowship with the gods is a means only?” The agnostic Will Durant perceived man as grasping at faith, surrendering to the natural hope to be raised to a godlike and immortal destiny. Related ideas occur in the writings of numerous thinkers of this century.⁴

In the previous century, Joseph Smith’s own, the idea

SOME WRITERS BELIEVED THAT CHRIST WAS THE REVELATION OF WHAT MAN MIGHT BECOME.

was so pervasive that some current critics, ignoring or ignorant of the concept's long history, have thought Joseph's environment alone accounted for his use of it. As in our own time, thinkers of the nineteenth century formulated divinization theology with radically varying intentions. It was used atheistically, as in Feuerbach: "God is merely the image of what man could be." It was used in self-centered ecstasy by the Romantic writers, as in Whitman: "Divine I am, inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch." It was even used as a cousin to manifest destiny by President-elect Andrew Jackson: "I believe man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character."⁵ William Ellery Channing, revered even in the heat of controversy by religious conservatives and liberals alike, insisted at length on man's "Likeness to God." Theodore Parker, with Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most influential of the American transcendentalists, thought that the church's role was to teach "the true idea of God, man, and their relations." Above all the church was to help man become Christ's equals: "sons of God as much as he . . . incarnations of God, as much and as far as Jesus was one with God, and an incarnation thereof."⁶

One of the most interesting expressions of the man-becoming-god concept was articulated by the brilliant and eccentric Margaret Fuller, companion to Emerson and anticipator of the women's rights movement. Fuller conducted a series of didactic "conversations" in Boston which were attended by the female social elite of her time. On 22 March 1841 the topic for "conversation" was an ambitious one: "What is Life?" After many of the participants had offered their encapsulated understandings of life, Fuller was then pressed to say what she

considered life to be. Fuller's response is memorialized by an anonymous witness:

She began with God as Spirit, Life, so full as to create and love eternally, yet capable of pause. Love and creativeness are dynamic forces, out of which we, individually, as creatures, go forth bearing his image, that is, having within our being the same dynamic forces, by which we also add constantly to the total sum of existence, and shaking off ignorance, and its effects, and by becoming more ourselves, i.e., more divine—destroying sin in its principle, we attain to absolute freedom, we return to God, conscious like himself, and, as his friends, giving, as well as receiving, felicity forevermore. In short, we become gods, and [are] able to give the life which we now feel ourselves able only to receive.⁷

While Joseph Smith's revelations began at least as early as 1832 to suggest the possibility that some persons would be exalted to the status of divinity, it is still interesting to note that Fuller's "conversation" took place three years before the King Follett discourse.

But the nineteenth century was by no means the starting point of this idea. In 1647, the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University, Ralph Cudworth, preached a sermon before the House of Commons. His thought represents the perfectionist impulse which, it is commonly held, culminated in the eighteenth century preaching of John Wesley. Cudworth defined to the Commons what he took to be the object of the Christian witness: "The end of the Gospel is *Life and Perfection*, 'tis a *Divine Nature*, to make us partakers of the Image of God. . . . Happiness is nothing but . . . goodness itself;

CHRISTIANITY WAS LONG FAMILIAR WITH THE VERBAL FORMULA, "GOD BECAME MAN THAT MAN MIGHT BECOME GOD."

and this is the same thing we call Holiness. . . . I mean by Holiness, nothing else but God stamped and *printed* upon the soul."⁸

The early sixteenth century (and nearly every century before it till Christ and beyond) included a distinctly mystical understanding of the union with God. Catherine of Genoa, for example, wrote that "by God's

grace [the soul] receives a certain dignity which makes it like unto God; nay, rather he lets it share his goodness so that it becomes one with him." "The nearer they come to him, the more they partake of what is his." Meister Eckhart, from the fourteenth century, is another example. "The seed of God is within us," he writes. And "capacity is a need." Thus (to complete his elliptical

AS THE LIFE OF JIM JONES SHOWS, DEIFICATION CON- CEPTS MAY ASSUME A CLEARLY PERNICIOUS CHARACTER.

syllogism), to mature to godhood is natural—is, in fact, a need.

"Mystical union" was a strong motif throughout the Medieval era. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is an early example. For Dionysius the *method* was the traditional mystic's triad of "purification, illumination, and union;" the *object* of the method was "assimilation to God and union with him."⁹

Moreover, it is significant that "deification talk" may be located not only in figures of peripheral importance to Christian history, but also in persons without whom that history would look substantially different. Thomas Aquinas, almost certainly the most important theologian to Roman Catholicism even to date, may serve as an instance. In the note which follows, Aquinas is examining the promotion of man toward "the Good." In fine scholastic style he is making his fifth point on the second article of the first question of the third section of the *Summa Theologica*. He argues that the Incarnation was appropriate "in respect of the full participation in divinity, which is man's true blessedness and the end of human life; and this is conferred on us by the humanity of Christ." To clarify his point, he then quotes an earlier writer: "God became man, that man might become God."

These words are crucial. They constitute a verbal formulation which has been handed down through the ages from Christian leaders of one century to another. The formula was once locked into the Christian consciousness in a manner analogous to the way in which Lorenzo Snow's couplet ("As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may become") is lodged in the

Mormon mind. Thinkers of different eras understood the thought variously as the pressure of their theological context dictated. But the formula itself changed very little from the earliest Christian fathers. Hence, Maximus the Confessor, by consensus the "greatest thinker of the seventh century," speaks much like Aquinas on this point, though the two were separated by five hundred years. "He became what we are," insists Maximus, "in order that we might be what He is."

In point of fact, Aquinas, in explaining why the Christ became incarnate, was quoting his favorite authority, the man who for Christian history ranks as the most influential extrabiblical theologian of all time, St. Augustine. "We were not to follow man, who could be seen," Augustine asserted, "we were to follow God, who could not be seen. Wherefore, that man might be shown one whom he could both see and follow, God was made man." Elsewhere he writes, "God became man, that man might become God."¹⁰

Yet even Augustine inherited this formulized theology. Apollinaris of Laodicea (d. 340) summarized in creedal form the central tradition of the Church which actually defined salvation itself in terms of deification: "We declare that the Logos of God became man for the purpose of our salvation, so that we might receive the likeness of the heavenly One and be made God after the likeness of the true Son of God according to nature and the Son of man according to the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ."¹¹

In the Fathers who are contemporary with or who antedate Apollinaris, that is, those of the second through the fourth centuries (particularly in the more sophisticated Eastern church) it is almost impossible to find an important writer who does not allude to the conception of man's eventual deification. Gregory of Nazianus (329-389) taught that "I may become God to the same extent as He became man." Basil of Caesaria (ca. 330-379) preached that the Holy Spirit aids man in "being made like to God—and highest of all, being made God." Athanasius (295-373), the champion defender of the Nicene version of the Trinity, also championed the deification understanding of salvation: "[God the Logos] assumed humanity that we might become God."¹²

Deification theology takes on a different light as one delves earlier into the third and then the second centuries. This is so because as one moves back in time, the Christological and theological context becomes first less clearly trinitarian and then not clearly trinitarian at all. Hence, what the writers of this period may have meant when they spoke of becoming gods looks somewhat different than in later years when the trinitarian conceptions were taken for granted.

Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254) urged all to "flee with all . . . power from being men and make haste to become gods." From Christ, he wrote, "there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught." Origen's teacher, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-ca. 215) made certain that no one ought to mistake deification for simple immortality, as at least one influential modern writer has done. Says Clement, "The

soul (which is kept pure), receiving the Lord's power, studies to become a god." Additionally, he constructs an especially clear rendition of the by now familiar formula, "The Logos of God had become man so that you might learn from a man how a man may become God."

Irenaeus (ca. 130-ca. 200) is among the most influential and representative of the early "orthodox" defenders against "heresy." His writings are replete with allusions to the uniting of man to God, and man's partaking of God's splendor. "And how shall man pass into God," he rhetorically queries, "[if] God had not been caused to pass into man?" Irenaeus noted a divinely ordained progression from manhood to godhood. In order to perfect us "to be what he is" Jesus Christ our Lord came to earth.¹³

As far as I can determine, we have in Irenaeus and Clement the earliest lucid and indisputable formulations of the divinization (*theosis*) view of salvation which have

BEHIND THE VENEER OF PRIDE IS AN INSECURITY, AN IMPULSE TO DISGUISE OURSELVES.

been preserved to us. The fact that the concept appears almost contemporaneously in writers as geographically distant as these, however, virtually assures the existence of an earlier tradition from which they drew.¹⁴ This takes us back very nearly to the period when the last of the New Testament documents were being composed. At this early date not only those whom the modern Christian world thinks of as "orthodox," but even their principal rivals, the Christian Gnostics, shared the belief that an essential element in Christ's mission was to reveal and exemplify the path out of sin and toward the deification of human nature. If one would accurately interpret the numerous biblical allusions to this concept, one must attempt to transcend the Reformation-manufactured lens through which much of the modern Christian world views theology. One must allow for the understanding of the early church.

Obviously, the foregoing discussion does not detail what each of the figures actually thought they were saying when they wrote of "being made God." A number of classical and medieval philosophical problems (e.g.,

universalism versus nominalism) as well as some modern ones would need to be considered in such a discussion. It is important here, however, to keep in mind that what one believes about God's nature and Christ's nature will of course bear on what one means by "deification." Thus if one believed—as did the eleventh-century theologian, Michael Psellus—in a god without body, parts, or passions, one might believe as Psellus did that deification meant "to lead [man] out of the material realm, to deliver him from passions, and to endow him with the ability to deify another." Maximus the Confessor, to cite another example, often writes as though he understands deification to be the mystical union with God so often found in the Middle Ages. Elsewhere, however, he observes that "all that God is, except for an identity in *ousia* [substance], one becomes when one is deified by grace." He therefore does not mean a physical or metaphysical union with God.¹⁵ There is obviously a sense in which the various deification allusions here considered have only verbal similarities to Mormon understandings of exaltation. I therefore do not wish to be misunderstood as implying that any or all of the thinkers referred to herein thought of *theosis* just as the Mormons do.

On the other hand the affinities with Mormon thought of some thinkers are striking. Particularly in earliest Christianity, some writers believed that Christ was the express image of his Father, the revelation to man of what God is, and the revelation of what man might become. Early Christians were invited to "study" to become gods (note the plural and its polytheistic implications). It was clearly held that souls would eternally retain their resurrected individuality, becoming all that God is without becoming ontologically indistinguishable from him. This they would do as a result of the grace of God and as a result of their own actions in response to that grace.

This link with Mormon thought is not superficial, but fundamental. Furthermore, these ideas exist in the writings of many of the most important theologians of all Christendom. They are most prominent in the literature bequeathed us by the earliest church fathers, quite before the creedal formulations of the Trinity or of creation *ex nihilo*.¹⁶

The third- and fourth-century church inherited deification ideas from the earliest fathers. The *language* of deification remained relatively stable, while its *meaning* evolved in connection with the working out of trinitarian formulations. It appears to have been particularly under the influence of Augustine, who early used deification talk but later discarded it, that the Western church eventually abandoned these conceptions. Americans and western Europeans have inherited their traditions from the Western church through Roman Catholicism and/or the Reformation. Consequently they have not been attuned to those beliefs of earliest Christianity which were maintained by Eastern Orthodoxy as inherited from the primitive Eastern church. And in the primitive Eastern church deification was the *central* theological concept.

II

One might appropriately question whether great fuss about a technical matter of theology is worth the bother. Does it matter? I once read of a rabbi who, writing

shortly after the Jewish holocaust, insisted that no statement, theological or otherwise, ought to be made that would not sound credible in the presence of burning or starving children. I think his test is apt. A theological truth, to be of genuine worth, must have bearing on the pressing realities of this world.

Not only does the Mormon doctrine of deification seem to lack this relevance, it is offensive as well. To quote one aggrieved clergyman: “[The] dream of becoming God is out of the realm of possibility, and [is] the height of arrogance.”¹⁷ Indeed, the danger of pride is real. The misapplication of the idea of deification might easily lead to blasphemous or even bizarre expressions. The late Jim Jones, who may serve almost as an archetype of bizarre and blasphemous things, is a case in point. Among the 971 audio tapes from California and Guyana which Jones left to posterity may be found thoughts to this effect: “Christianity was never based on

THE CONCEPT OF DEIFICATION IN THE WRITINGS OF C. S. LEWIS IS UTTERLY UBIQUITOUS.

the idea of an unknown God. . . . Jesus said that every human being was a god. It’s written that you’re a god. I’m a god, and you’re a god. But until I see [that] all of you know who you are, I’m going to be very much what I am.”¹⁸ Deification concepts may thus assume a clearly pernicious character.

This being the case, one might legitimately ask why God would ever reveal such a thing. If the essential human task is to walk in faith, to humbly pursue righteousness and to emulate the Christ, why risk exacerbating the human propensity toward pride by revealing the almost unthinkable potential of the race?

My own speculative response is that pride may not be the fundamental human fault, the archetypical sin that it is often made out to be. Indisputably there is a malady that may be described as irreducible pride. But I think that the basic human problem, and one on which much or most pride is based, is a profound and almost universal quest for a sense of self-identity and worth. The problem may be termed “existential insecurity.” It perhaps lies beneath some forms of that difficult-to-

define pathology which psychologists call “neurosis.” When I discover myself indulging in prideful actions—name-dropping, perhaps, or the unnecessary use of an esoteric term or the excessive pursuit of possessions or position—I frequently find upon examination that behind the veneer of pride and selfishness is an insecurity with what I am, an impulse to disguise myself to myself or to others.

Mormonism holds to the belief that the beveled situation of the human race is, despite all of its ignorance and suffering, a necessary and positive circumstance. A most fundamental corollary to this beveled circumstance is existential insecurity. The ultimate antidote for this insecurity is the revelation of what we may become as displayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The mission of God’s Antidote (Christ) to the suffering, sinful, neurotic human condition may be viewed fruitfully from several vantages. One of them is to explore the meaning of the cross and the human potential for sin. But another, equally necessary, is to explore the human potential for good, to understand that the Logos was made man in order that man might be made God. Not only the death, but the entire life of Christ was *charis*, a free gift, an act of grace to which God’s children are invited to respond.

If it is so that, on the one hand, we must operate as mortals apart from the presence of God in freedom and faith, and on the other hand that we share a desperate urge for direction and worth and identity; then there could have been perhaps no more appropriate response from the heavens than to send God’s own son as the revelation of what God is (direction) and what we may become (worth and identity).¹⁹ Hence the scriptural injunction to be perfect *as* (= in the sense that) God is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Hence the promise that we are joint-heirs with Christ of God (Rom. 8:15-17). Hence the emphasis on our being made in the image of God, not only metaphorically, but in the same sense that Adam begat Seth “in his own likeness, after his own image” (Gen. 5:1-3). Hence the assurance that when God shall appear, we shall be like him (1 John 3:2).

The true spirit of the LDS hope in man’s potential godhood is not an ambitious lust for power. Nor does the idea exist to provide a forum for intellectual gymnastics or to reinforce the hollow satisfaction that one is sitting in the right pew, on the right religious “team.” On the contrary, the appropriate and useful applications of this concept are both profound and diverse. While they cannot be detailed here, a few such applications of this concept bear mention. An understanding of the human and divine natures, for example, ought to prompt a deep sense of one’s own worth and dignity. One ought to comprehend that excessive self-loathing is a kind of blasphemy, an affront to the divine within. One also ought clearly to discern the image of God in one’s neighbor: Every person matters infinitely. One ought to recall that the most exact reflection of God’s image, Jesus, was radically “other-centered,” was prepared to live among and lift the despised, was insistent that he wash his followers’ feet. Too, one ought to align oneself more anxiously with God’s revealed purposes, for they are in reality one’s own. Since granting immortality lies beyond our sphere, perhaps the nearest human

approximation of God's work and glory is to labor to bring to pass the *mortality* (that is, the full *humanity*) and the eternal life of man. One ought therefore to see the irrelevance of many of our materialistic pursuits. Further, one ought to see that in the theology of deification one has a marvelous tool for screening pettiness from one's life. One ought to recognize and respond aggressively toward the diabolical in social systems that are, by way of sexual or racial or economic or even religious imperialism, limiting human growth and therefore dissonant with the revealed creative and constructive work of God.

The essence of the idea of deification in Mormon thought is that God has by grace revealed to man the proper way to realize himself, to respond to his difficult but necessary surroundings. In order for man to realize himself, he must in some measure know himself. The riddle of man's essential nature has perplexed the best thinkers of our race. Pascal has fared better than many in this vein. He pondered at length the poles that mankind may touch. I take license here with his original intent, but his words portend more than he knew: "What sort of a freak then is man? How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious! Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error, glory and refuse of the universe! Who will unravel such a tangle? This is certainly beyond dogmatism and skepticism, beyond all human philosophy. Man transcends man."²⁰

God's response to "paradoxical man" is revealed in the Christ. What is man? The Mormon position to the question is actually a mediating one between those who, like Unitarians, disparage the abyss and clutch of sin, and those who, like Luther, have looked so deeply at it that they have despaired of human dignity. Christ transcends both views. The potential evil of a human is of such a depth that the Son of God died in the flesh to confront it. The potential good of a human is of such a height that the Son of God lived in the flesh to reveal it.

Notes

1. Kari Elizabeth Borresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of American Ink, 1981), p. 207.
2. Lowell Bennion, *I Believe* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1983), p. vii.
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 15 and C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1973), p. 45.
4. George Santayana in Edwin Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 70 and Will Durant, *The Reformation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. 4.
5. The skeleton of Ludwig Feuerbach's psychology of religion is the assertion that traditional religions arise out of man's unconscious deification of himself; see especially his *The Essence of Christianity* (London: J. Chapman, 1854), passim; Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1940), p. 61; and Andrew Jackson in Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1944), p. 22.
6. William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God" (the ordination sermon of the Rev. F. A. Farley, Providence, R.I., 1828) in *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1886), pp. 291-302 and Theodore Parker in William R. Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers* (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoe String Press, 1972), pp. 178-79.
7. W. H. Channing et al., eds., *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 2 vols., (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co., 1852), 1:302.

8. Quoted in John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 17.

9. Catherine of Genoa, "Treatise on Purgatory," in *Late Medieval Mysticism*, ed. Ray C. Perry (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.), p. 412 and passim (see also the various writings of Eckart included in that same volume) and Pseudo-Dionysius *Celestial Hierarchy* 3. 2.

10. Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 3. Q. 1. art 2. The quotation from Maximus comes second hand from a lecture by Prof. Margaret Miles of Harvard on "The History of Christian Thought," 1981. Maximus's writings, however, are so immersed in the idea of deification that it is clearly dominant in his thinking. See especially the fine discussion in Jaroslav Pelican, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 10-16. Augustine *De Nativitate Domini* sermons 22, 13.

11. Apollinaris quoted in Jaroslav Pelican, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 233.

12. Gregory Nazianus *Orations* 29. 19; Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 9. 23; Athanasius *On the Incarnation of the Word* 54; and Athanasius *Orations against the Arians* 1. 11. 38-39, 2, 19, 47 and throughout his works.

13. Origen *Against Celsus* 3. 28; the modern writer is Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 18; Clement *Stromata* 5. 1. 14; Clement *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1. 8. 4; Irenaeus *Against the Heretics* 4. 33. 4, 4. 38. 4, 5, preface.

14. I was belatedly alerted to an early issue of SUNSTONE (1 [Winter 1975]: 15-19) in which Keith Norman examines "Divinization: The Forgotten Teaching of Early Christianity." The point about a tradition which antedates Clement and Irenaeus is his, and is undoubtedly correct.

15. Pelican, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, pp. 247, 267.

16. The point is relevant here because when the "mystery" of the Trinity was taken for granted it was not a difficult transition to take the deification of man to be "mystical union" with God. One of the important reasons why the doctrine of divinization eventually lost the meaning it had in the early Church was its conflict with an *ex nihilo* creation, which had gained acceptance by the middle of the third century. Man was made out of nothing; he could therefore never really partake of divinity, which was eternal. "Mainstream" Christianity in the course of several centuries came to reject Platonic anthropology (which thought of man as immortal spiritual substance) while appropriating the transcendent, infinite, incomprehensible god of Neoplatonism. See Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 56.

I note here that varying notions of man's divinization may be discovered in secular and/or non-Christian philosophies and theologies. One could cite thinkers from Plato and Lucretius to Shakespeare to Goethe and Dostoevski. One could cite non-Christian Gnosticism or pre-Christian Jewish mystery cults or ancient Egyptian religions or modern Eastern ones.

17. Rev. George Nye, as quoted in "Baptist Says Mormons Aren't Christian," SUNSTONE REVIEW 3 (July-August 1983): 8.

18. Jim Jones, as quoted in John Leo, "The Voice of Jonestown," *Time*, 27 April 1981, p. 56.

19. While Joseph Smith taught this with particular force and clarity and scope, it need not be construed as antithetical to the central Christian tradition. As a follow-up to the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, recognized as a major turning point in the Christian ecumenical movement, an International Missionary Council was organized. At a council meeting in Jerusalem in 1928, the I.M.C. succeeded in what was thought earlier to be all but impossible: the formulation of "The Christian Message" which could gain the full support of all the denominations represented. A central paragraph in the declaration proclaimed:

Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is and of what man through Him may become. In Him we come face to face with the Ultimate Reality of the universe; He makes known to us God as our Father, perfect and infinite in love and in righteousness; for in Him we find God incarnate, the final yet ever-unfolding, revelation of the God in whom we live and move and have our being. (The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, 8 vols. [New York: International Missionary Council, 1928], 1:402.)

Mormons could not agree more.

20. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), #131, p. 64.



HUGH Mattson was not a pioneer. He never claimed any of the skills necessary for taming the wilderness. He could not shoot. He spoke no Indian dialect. He blazed no trails. His descendants would fill a moderate-size Idaho town, though, and there are kin today who have cause on occasions like family reunions and Pioneer Day to talk about his exploits and feel momentary sparks of gratitude.

He was born in Kent, somewhere after the beginning of the reign of Victoria. "Folkestone, in Kent," he would always add in his apologetic manner, as if it made any difference to anyone but himself.

While he was a lad, poverty drove his family to London to look for better things. "And we were poor, mind you," he would say later with a chuckle. "Me mam would butter our bread, then scrape it off and save it for the next buttering."

The Mattsons fared no better in the back alleys and warrens of the city, but Hugh got on. He grew to manhood soon enough, not a tall man, not a big man, just a dark Kentish fellow with the look of one always hungry. His education was piecemeal, here and there, and not destined to instill in him a love for the classics. The only oratory he picked up was gleaned from spending his Sundays in Hyde Park, listening to the crazy people and the Mormon elders.

He was lucky enough to fall into a job running cloth for a draper. Like the good son he was, he turned his wages over to his mam and continued to eat the family's hollow bread and watery tea.

His employment was not promising in any way, but he did catch the one good eye of Margaret, the draper's daughter. After that moment, his future was chipped in stone.

Margaret was three years older. She too was small and dark with a decided squint in her left eye. She managed her father's shop, looked after his three motherless children, and figured herself on the shelf at twenty-three.

Hugh never would admit to what he saw in Margaret, but he married her at St. Michael's in Bow Street and promptly got her with child.

They had a son and daughter in quick order. They continued to live in their one room over the draper's shop, and Margaret still managed the store below. Hugh

probably would have gone on running cloth for the old man, but he stayed a bit too long one Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park.

The Mormons were out again, attracting an even more belligerent crowd than the free love followers and the Irish home rule advocates. There were two of them, one young, one older. The old man, name of Kimball, and the young man took turns working the crowds about the Second Coming and Joe Smith's Golden Book.

Hugh stopped to jeer, but he stayed to listen. He came back Sunday after Sunday, bought a copy of the Book of Mormon, and read it on the sly when Margaret was upstairs nursing the baby. After two more weeks of the street preaching, he tossed away his cigar, straightened his coat, and walked home.

Flinging open the door of the shop, he looked his wife square in her good eye, puffed out his skinny chest, and bellowed, "Wife, I have heard the truth." He spoke too loud. His fear of what she would say had engendered in him an unaccustomed boldness.

Hugh Mattson was baptized the following week, dipped with practiced skill in an out-of-the-way slimy pool in London's backwaters by a man with even more fervor than Mattson himself possessed.

The brethren crammed their hands down hard on his head, promised him the gift of the Holy Ghost, then shook his hand. No one had ever shaken Hugh Mattson's hand before. The gesture smacked of American ideals he had hitherto never considered. The handshake brought tears to his eyes, something even the spiritual promises of a moment before had been unable to do.

"And now, Brother Mattson," said the older elder, "I reckon you'll be wanting to gather."

"Beg pardon, sir?" asked Hugh Mattson.

"Gather, lad, gather. Go to Zion. Home of the Saints. Utah Territory," the missionary said.

"Well, no, I hadn't considered it," Hugh replied, suddenly shy again in the presence of these men with their high silk hats and frock coats. "Must I, now?"

"Well, no, no, but you'll be wanting to."

He wasn't so sure. Hugh walked home, his head down. England had never done him any favors, but it was his country. Besides, whatever would Margaret say? She had looked with pointed disfavor on his joining with the Mormons but laid her arguments aside by considering

his foreign background. Everyone knew that Kentish folk still bayed at the moon. But America?

Yet America it was. When his neighbors, and more especially, his father-in-law, learned of Hugh's new religious preference, life lost all serenity. The canon from St. Michael's spent all odd hours in the draper's shop praying for and with Margaret. He succeeded only in grinding her down to the point where she spoke to the missionaries and was dipped in the Thames, too. Never mind a conversion. Any church man who would argue with such vigor against the Mormon religion must know something she didn't know. In her silent, tight-lipped way, Margaret was content to follow her husband.

Late in May they set sail on the *Horizon*, a leaky tub that promised to send the Saints to a quick reward, should a storm of sufficient dimensions arise. The passage money was four pounds, five shillings for each adult, three pounds, five shillings for young James, and ten shillings for baby Emma. Margaret had dunned her father unmercifully until he paid half the fare, and Hugh had sold his share in a piece of Kentish marsh to a cent percenter named Bloom for the rest. They bundled up their bedding and cooking utensils, Margaret sewed the rest of their coins into her drawers, and they set sail for Boston.

As became a Kentishman with ancestors who smuggled rum from France to England in tiny boats, Hugh Mattson fared well at sea. The only leaning over the rail he did on the whole five weeks' passage was to watch the dolphins at play in the water. Margaret spent the first two weeks turning her face away when he offered her salt pork and oatmeal. She ate just enough to keep her milk flowing and shook her head over the rest. She lay with her good eye hidden in the pillow. James ate, but with a disinterest on his face that assured the father that the son was not a seafarer.

The *Horizon* with its cargo of Saints arrived in Boston at the beginning of June and promptly joined with a cluster of newly minted Mormons from Sweden. They had nothing in common with the English Saints except religion, and Hugh soon grew tired of smiling at them.

The returning missionaries who had accompanied their group of five hundred co-religionists from England herded their charges onto railroad cars before any children were lost or any Swedes gulled. They got off the train at Rock Island, Illinois, spent a sleepless night in a public house listening to some drunk veterans below refight the Mexican War from Buena Vista to Chapultepec, then left the next day for Iowa City.

Hugh concluded early in the journey from Boston that he would never be an American, not a real one. He had never seen such a race of giants. Even the women were tall. Everyone spoke in loud voices and moved with an energy that Hugh couldn't fathom.

There was something about these people who drank too much, ate overcooked meat swimming in grease, hollered to each other, and ran when Englishmen would have walked. He almost shrank back from their vivacity, their brashness. He knew that he, Hugh Mattson, late of Folkestone, Kent, did not possess the background that made these people Americans. Indeed, he did not want it for himself, not really. But after only a week in that new,

raw land, he knew that he would die if he had to, just so his children could have what would never be his.

Nothing was ready for them in Iowa City. The unexpectedly large numbers of Mormons from Europe had overwhelmed the handcart carpenters, and they were weeks behind. Unseasoned wood was all they had to build with. In their encampment by the river, Hugh laid his head down at night to the sound of hammers and saws and awoke in the morning to the same noise. He found himself humming tunes to fit the cadence of the carpenters' pounding, little songs sung over and over in his head that dug their own ruts in his brain.

The carts were ready by the end of August. Hugh spent some time in the carpenters yard, running his hands over the wood, hefting the shaft that pulled the cart. "She'll hold five hundred pounds," one of the carpenters shouted over to him.

Five hundred pounds, indeed, Hugh wondered. And who's to pull it? Maybe one of those monster Yankees but not a Kentishman, surely.

As he lingered, ankle-deep in sawdust, Hugh wondered about the lateness of the season. During the few weeks they had camped in Iowa City, he noted how darkness fell a little sooner each evening. The days were still blistering hot and muggy, unlike anything he had ever experienced before, but the nights were cool. He watched the sky for birds flying south, but as yet there were none. Still, he wondered about the wisdom of starting out so late.

Edward Martin, returning missionary and company leader, gathered the Saints together one night after supper. The Willie Company had left two weeks before, and the Martin Company was the last camp preparing to leave that season.

Martin spoke slowly, allowing his Scandinavian Saints time to translate his words. He asked them what they thought about leaving. The general opinion filtered back to him that the Lord would provide.

They would leave on the morrow for Zion. "And that was what they agreed, Margaret," Hugh told his wife as they sat together that night on their pile of bedding.

She snorted. "And what did you say?"

"I didn't say anything," he replied, his voice muffled as he lay down and turned his face to the tent wall.

Margaret was silent for a moment. "I think all of you are crazy," she said from her side of the bedding.

They set out early the next morning, six hundred people with one hundred fifty carts, seven wagons to haul the rest of the food supply, and fifty cows and cattle. A short time saw them traveling along the Platte, that great river road that seemed to go in one direction only.

A handcart was allotted to every five persons, so Hugh and Margaret Mattson and their two young ones found themselves assigned to Ole Sorenson. A single man in his forties, Ole spoke no English other than "Please" and "Thank you," which he said with a smile and a duck of his head whenever anyone spoke English to him. He and Hugh took turns pushing and pulling the handcart. Margaret walked alongside, carrying Emma on her hip. James rode in the cart, playing with the wooden horses

Hugh had carved from leftover wood during their wait in Iowa City.

They soon learned not to look back down the trail. There was something almost painful about glancing back along the road they had traveled, as if it constituted a betrayal to face east ever again. The men would joke among themselves, "For heaven's sake, Brother, if you have to fall down, make sure you fall west."

The August sun was hot on their backs in the morning. It shone in their eyes in the afternoon. They plodded on, pausing only for Sundays and lost children and childbirth.

The traveling exhausted Hugh at first. Left to himself, he would have turned back after the first day. As it was, he kept his feet moving. By the end of the week, when his blisters were turning into callouses, he declared to Margaret that he would make it. She made no reply, only set her lips more firmly in a straight line.

Everyone was assigned a task for the journey. The leaders in the group were appointed captains of hundreds, fifties, and tens by Brother Martin. The wheelwrights, coopers, and carpenters were busy with their trades. As there was no need for a cloth runner, Hugh was assigned to collect buffalo chips. It was employment for women and youths, but Hugh took the calling seriously, picking up odds and ends of buffalo leavings and tossing them into his cart.

They gathered in group prayer each evening, praying about weather, Indians, blisters, lost cows, fretful children, diaper rash, all the mighty and trivial details that confronted them.

The Martin Company soon encountered Pawnees. With the practiced skill of big-city Irish toughs, the Indians slipped away with a couple of cows and any piece of finery that wasn't anchored down. The Mattsons suffered a bad moment when one brave approached Margaret as she was carrying Emma, reached out a brown hand and stroked Emma's blond hair.

By a strange quirk that sometimes affects homely people, the Mattsons' offspring were uncommonly fine-looking. The brave trailed Margaret for most of the afternoon, watching the baby. Hugh slept that night with Emma breathing peacefully on his chest, his arms tight around her. The Indian was gone the next morning, and they did not see him again.

The Martin Company traveled the Great Platte River Road alone through September and into October. The season of travel had ended back in August, even before they set out. Although everyone was aware that night came earlier and that a skim of ice had to be knocked off the water barrels each morning, no one said anything about it. As the days grew shorter, the evening prayers grew longer.

By the time they reached Fort Laramie in October, the birds were winging south, weaving the sky with v-shaped patterns. The fort was a dot on the horizon, a couple of buildings huddled together under a slate-grey sky and presided over by an oversized American flag that snapped in the wind like a pistol shot.

Hugh would have bartered there for some food, but he had little to barter with. Margaret still had some coins brought from London in her drawers, but that was their stake in the future, to be used when they reached the Salt Lake Valley.

Knowing the condition of their finances, Hugh was

startled when Margaret returned to their camp on the other side of the Platte with a small bag of flour. She had told him to tend Emma, and he thought she had gone down to the river to wash.

"Whatever did you trade for that, Wife?" he asked as he sat dangling Emma on his knee.

"Nothing any of us will ever miss," was all she would say, but he noticed while she was stirring cornmeal mush over the fire that evening that her wedding ring was gone.

For several days after Brother Martin's Camp of Israel left Fort Laramie, they trailed a party of Cheyenne headed for winter camps. One brave dogged the pretty young Swede who pushed the cart in front of Hugh's. Hugh had watched her himself for many a mile, enjoying the way her hips moved, and appreciating the curving column of her spine that stood out in relief when the sweat soaked through her dress. Margaret was scandalized by the Indian's attentions, but Hugh silently admired the man's good taste in women.

The Cheyenne strolled into camp one evening when the handcarts had been circled, trailing eight ponies after him. He offered them to the girl's father, who shook his head and then burst into tears. The Cheyenne backed off, but he was there again in the morning. He pulled the Swede's cart three or four miles that day, looking back now and then at the young woman who pushed behind him.

He finally stopped in mid-afternoon, put his hands on his hips, and took one last look at the girl. With a bone-chilling yell that sent James leaping from the cart onto his father's shoulders, the Indian jumped on his horse and raced off after his own people, who by now were a half-day's ride ahead.

Hugh watched the girl's face as she stood there behind her handcart, looking after the Indian. She opened her mouth as if to call to the horseman and raised her hand, but the Cheyenne never looked back.

They followed the Platte in its northwesterly course. By now, even the birds had all flown south. They were alone on the high plains.

The deaths that had begun as they inched across Nebraska became more frequent. The sound of the carpenter's hammer was still the last thing Hugh heard each night. The unseasoned handcarts made in such haste in Iowa City began to warp and fall apart in Wyoming. When the boards couldn't be repaired any longer, the wood was fashioned into coffins.

As the days grew shorter, the rations got smaller and smaller. Some of the very old and the very young just sat down and died. Babies shivered and shook themselves to death in the cold. A week back, the loads had been lightened because the Saints were growing too weak to pull the carts. Bedding and blankets were tossed out, and now the people died of exposure.

The carpenters gave up. By the time they left the Platte and traveled to the Sweetwater, there wasn't time in one night to build coffins for the morning's funerals. The bodies were lowered in shallow holes. All useful outer clothing was kept aboveground to warm still-living family members, and the Saints were sent off to their next estate in shifts and long johns.

The Swedish girl who pushed the cart in front of Hugh was found stiff and white one morning after the first snowfall. Hugh helped dig the hole for her, wishing

with all his heart as he shoveled away that her father had accepted those eight horses a couple weeks back.

The burial took longer than usual. The mother carried on at length about leaving her daughter like that with nothing to protect her face from the dirt that was soon to fill the hole.

Margaret turned back to their handcart, rummaged around under James, and came back to the grave with a sieve. She knelt down by the hole and put the sieve over the dead girl's face. The mother stopped wailing, the brethren tossed the dirt back in the grave, said a few words in English that the family couldn't understand, and walked away.

It came to Hugh Mattson that evening as he scavenged for buffalo chips that the Lord will not necessarily provide. He sat down on a rock and thought about it for a minute, then went back to gathering chips. The children no longer teased him as he walked hunched over, eyes to the ground, looking for dung. Now they sat still where the family carts had rolled to a stop, only their eyes moving.

Snow fell steadily all the next day. By later afternoon, the handcart pioneers were walking in snow up to their knees, tugging and prodding at carts that were empty now, except for the silent children.

As the shadows deepened, one old woman lay down to the side of the trail, folded her arms across her chest, shouted "Alleluia," and died while Hugh watched. As he still stood there, Edward Martin picked up the woman. He started to brush past Hugh with the corpse.

Hugh couldn't have explained why he spoke up then. For weeks he had been content to let others speak. He placed no value on his own opinions, but he had something to say finally. He cleared his throat.

"Brother Martin," he said, stepping in front of the leader.

"Yes, Mattson, what is it?" Martin snapped as he stood there holding the dead woman.

"It has come to me, Brother Martin," Hugh said, in the overloud voice he reserved for special occasions, "It has come to me, Brother Martin, that the Lord doesn't bless you when you're stupid."

That was all he had to say. He turned back to his cart, let Ole pull, and pushed past Martin and his corpse.

The snow continued the next day. With the innate wisdom of rats deserting a foundering ship, the livestock that hadn't died weeks ago began to wander away that afternoon. No one did anything to stop the cattle.

Hugh watched the animals drift away. A plan was working its way around in his brain. He thought it through the rest of the afternoon, mulled over it while he brushed aside snow to gather the chips, and cogitated in silence while Margaret fed a handful of mush to James. Hugh shook his head when she offered him some, and she didn't object.

He pantomimed his plan to Ole, who shook his head over the scheme but offered his rifle anyway. The gun had only one charge in it.

Margaret bedded the children down in the tent, sang Emma to sleep, and joined her husband by the handcart. She looked at the gun in his hand and without a word dug around in their belongings until she unearthed an

old case knife.

The handle was missing, and the blade was nicked in several places, but he took it from her with a smile. Hugh found a little hatchet in the cart that he had picked up a couple weeks back on the Platte, the remnant of some previous pioneer discard. He stuck it in his belt.

They waited until after evening prayers. When the camp quieted down, Hugh and Margaret Mattson set out across the plains, heading east again.

It was too cold to speak, but Hugh had to say something. "I watched one cow. Four miles back or so. In a ravine."

Margaret carried the case knife and a burlap sack. Both her eyes were squinting against the wind that blew snow back in their faces. Hugh looked at her. He could see no reproach in her face, no anger at his folly that had driven them to this place.

It was approaching midnight when they reached the ravine. Margaret sank down in the snow, and Hugh lurched off to search for the cow.

He found her leaning against a rock, looking like a bag of ghostly bones in the moonlight. He went right up to her and stroked her nose. "Well and well, old girl," he said softly.

Hugh had no illusions about his marksmanship. He had fired a gun once at an exciseman in Folkestone, but that had been at a great distance and on a dare. He backed away from the cow and raised the gun to his shoulder.

The Englishman in him compelled him to step back to fire. Any Yank in similar circumstance would have put the muzzle in the cow's ear and pulled the trigger, but Hugh Mattson did not think that would be a sporting gesture.

As his finger squeezed the trigger, the cow leaned away from the rock. The bullet pinged against the stone.

Hugh turned away. Margaret had joined him in the ravine by then. She put her hands on his shoulders and gave him a little shake. "Oh, Hugh," was all she said.

There was nothing left but to cut the cow's throat. Hugh pulled the case knife out of his belt and started toward the animal, which by now seemed to sense, even in its misery, that something was up.

They surrounded the cow. Margaret grabbed the animal by the horns, and Hugh plunged the knife into the throat.

Nothing happened. The knife was so dull, and the cow's hide so loose and leathery that Hugh felt like he was poking a cone of butter at a brick. Again and again he jabbed at the cow. The animal finally wrenched away from Margaret and clattered further down the ravine.

They shambled after the animal, falling and rising in the snow. Margaret grabbed the cow's horns again, and Hugh started sawing on the throat.

For an hour they sawed at the cow, changing places as they grew tired. When its throat began to hurt, the cow would shake them off like deer flies and stagger away. They took turns with the knife and finally gave up when the blade broke.

Hugh stumbled back to the rock where he had left the hatchet. Panic twisted his empty stomach into a Turk's knot when he didn't see the hatchet at once. He threw himself down in the snow and pawed around in the dark until he found the handle. The blade was nicked on both

corners and as dull as the archbishop of Canterbury, but they had nothing else.

Margaret managed to catch the cow again. She wrapped her arms around the animal as her husband stood in front and brought the hatchet down hard between the horns. They pounded away at the cow's head, changing places and battering away as the sky lightened around the edges. By switching places, they managed to hack a fist-sized hole through the bone.

Hugh was cradling the cow in his arms when Margaret slammed down a blow that finally sent the animal to the ground. The cow collapsed on top of Hugh. Margaret shrieked and tugged on the carcass until Hugh squeezed out from under.

"Cease to paddy, woman," Hugh growled, as he crouched panting on his hands and knees by the moribund cow. "Come now, help me shift this old bovril."

The two of them tugged the cow onto its side. The snow started falling again, and Margaret shivered in the cold. She had a warm cloak, but she had left it covering James and Emma back in camp.

Hugh grasped the knife by the end of its broken blade and lunged at the cow's gut. As he expected, nothing happened. He sat down in the snow and stared at Margaret. She stared back at him until her lips started to twitch. "Hugh, what are we to do, you silly man?" she said and then burst out laughing. Hugh laughed along with her, enjoying, even in his total misery, the sound of her laughter. Margaret Mattson was not one to engage in frivolities, but she laughed until she cried then wiped her eyes on her frozen dress.

They took turns sawing away at the cowhide. By the time they had poked a sizeable hole in the animal, the sun was struggling up through the clouds and snow. Working with the knife blade and tugging with their hands, they pulled back the hide. Hugh split open the carcass. The entrails poured out in a greasy slide, still warm and steaming. Margaret put her hands inside the carcass, rubbing her fingers and uttering little cries of pleasure. When her hands were warm, she took the knife from Hugh and he put his hands inside.

When she hacked some of the flesh away from the bones, Margaret floundered back to the edge of the ravine where she had left the sack. After hunting around in the snow, she found it and trailed it behind her, back to where Hugh was jabbing away. They put the chunks of meat into the bag. Hugh scooped in half of the meat, then stopped.

"You know what will happen when we show up with this."

Margaret nodded, a faint smile on her face. She was flecked with blood from her hair to her hem, but even with that squinty eye, she looked pretty in the sunrise.

"Well, old Martin can't have all of it, Maggie." He had never called her anything but Margaret before, and he glanced at her quickly, almost shyly.

They wrapped the remainder of the meat in Margaret's shawl, lifted up her skirts, and tied the messy bundle around her waist. With her skirts smoothed down, and Hugh's blanket-robe over her shoulders, she looked just the same.

Hugh shouldered the burlap sack, and they started back toward camp. After a quarter hour's travel, they realized they were going in the wrong direction. They

turned around, passed the cow's head, hooves and tail again, and after a couple more hours, topped the rise where the camp was.

They stood there, looking down on the sprawl below them. The sun was well up, but no one was stirring about much. Few of the Saints had bothered with tents, but they could see Ole Sorenson squatting in front of their tent holding Emma, who was howling with surprising vigor.

Margaret smiled and nudged her husband. "She takes after your side, Hugh Mattson." It was her first attempt ever at a joke. Hugh smiled back at her. He was too tired to laugh, but he winked and she blushed, a faint pink tinging the raw white of her face.

"Well, let's go down there and face the wrath, Maggie," Hugh said and heaved himself up off the rock he had rested on. The burlap bag pulled him backwards, and he fell down. Margaret hauled him to his feet.

They slid down the slope. Before they even reached their tent, Edward Martin was there to meet them. Hugh held out the burlap sack. Martin took it and peered inside. He didn't say anything, but Hugh could see his Adam's apple moving up and down as he swallowed over and over.

Hugh cleared his throat. "Since the Lord wasn't about to provide, Brother Martin, I figured someone had to," he said.

Martin snorted and looked up at Hugh and Margaret. "Do I recall something in the good book about lilies and sparrows? Or maybe it was loaves and fishes. I forget."

Hugh shrugged. He'd heard it somewhere too but like Edward Martin, he was too tired to work the phrases around in his head.

All he really wanted to do was get inside the tent and hide the rest of the meat. If they really stinted, it might last a week. Surely by then Brother Brigham would have sent some help from Salt Lake. If not, well, they would manage. Hugh Mattson had spent his whole life living tight, and he knew how.

Margaret went inside the tent and closed the flap. Hugh followed her in and helped her take the meat from around her waist. He wrapped it in Margaret's one good dress and stashed it in the bottom of her satchel. He sank down next to his sleeping son just as the camp bugler played what passed for reveille. Margaret reached outside for Emma, brought her in, and started to nurse the baby. She looked over at her husband.

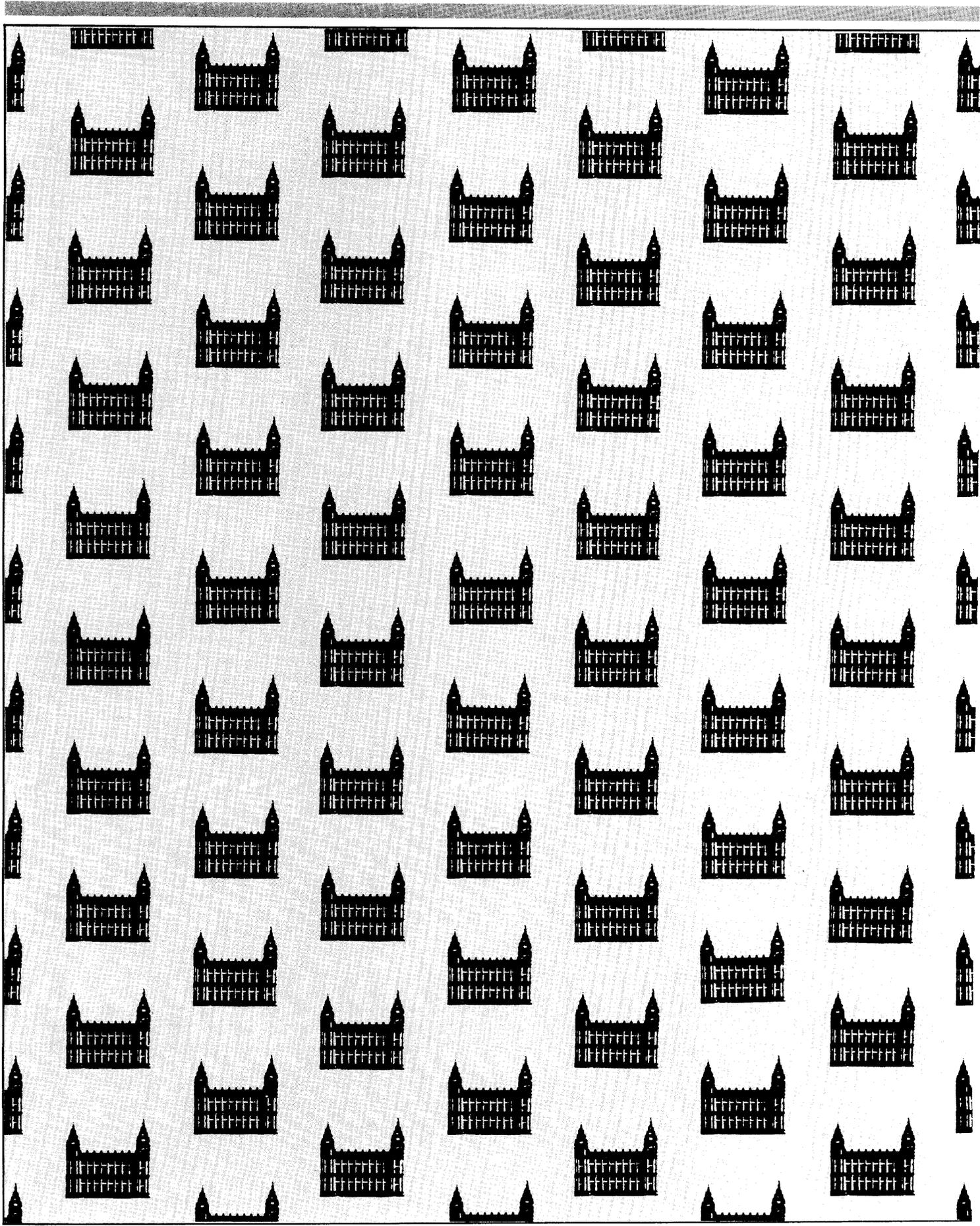
"Best shift yourself, Hugh. A calling's a calling, and folks need those chips."

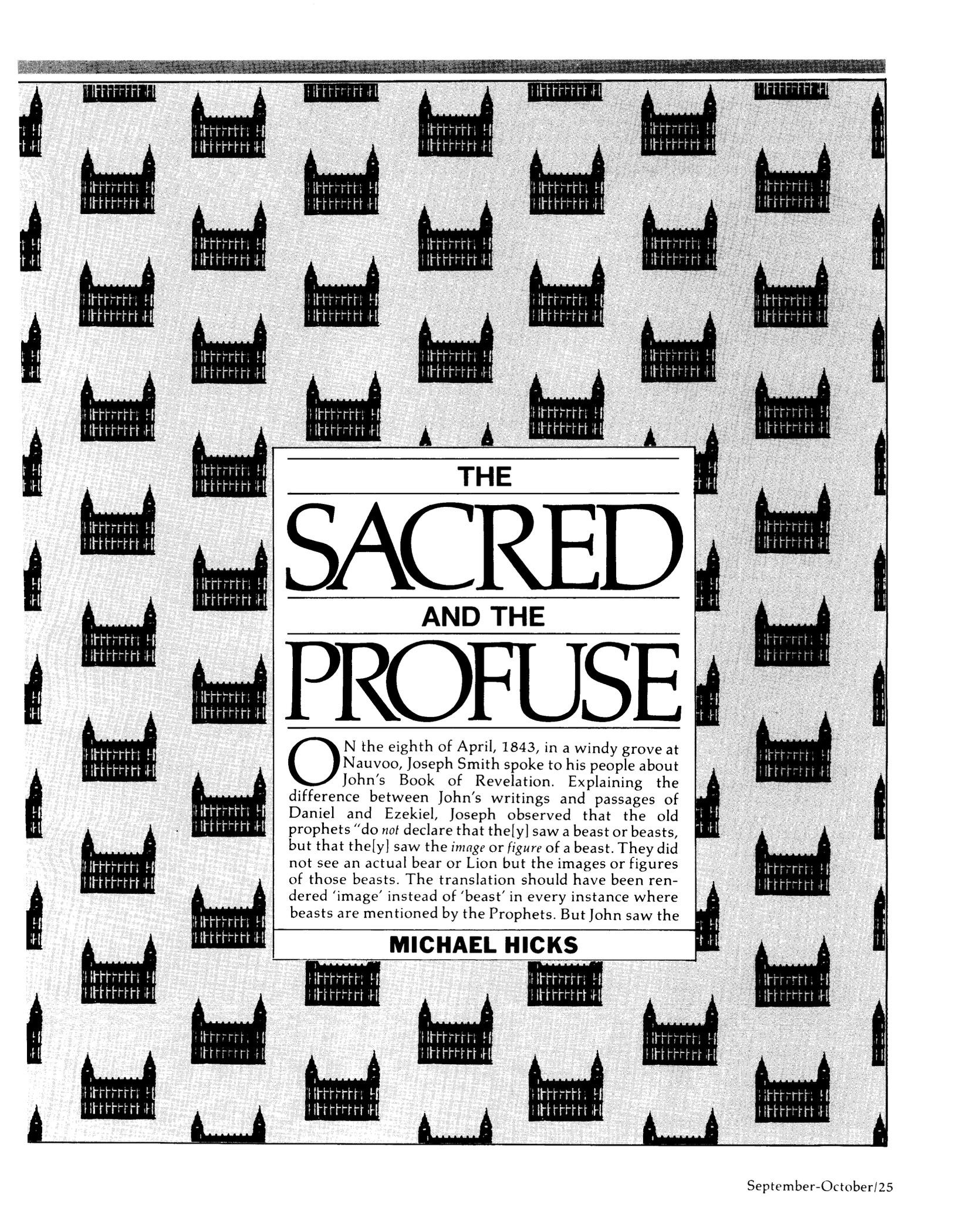
Hugh sat up. Margaret was cuddling Emma and leaning against the tent. He smiled at the two of them, his wife and daughter, and went back outside. He poked his head back in the tent.

"When we get to the valley, woman," he roared in his overloud voice saved for special occasions, "no more chips, do you hear?"

Satisfied with himself, he began to root around in the snow, humming and thinking about breakfast.

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THE
SACRED
AND THE
PROFUSE

ON the eighth of April, 1843, in a windy grove at Nauvoo, Joseph Smith spoke to his people about John's Book of Revelation. Explaining the difference between John's writings and passages of Daniel and Ezekiel, Joseph observed that the old prophets "do not declare that the[y] saw a beast or beasts, but that the[y] saw the *image* or *figure* of a beast. They did not see an actual bear or Lion but the images or figures of those beasts. The translation should have been rendered 'image' instead of 'beast' in every instance where beasts are mentioned by the Prophets. But John saw the

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actual beast in heaven.

As he said this, Joseph could surely not help recalling his own visionary experiences, perhaps even back to the now renowned "First Vision"—an occurrence that would later represent for most Saints the very birth of the latter-day gospel. Joseph had not been so careful with his terms in describing the appearance of the Father and the Son as he was about the appearance of so many beasts. In that earlier grove in Palmyra, had he *envisioned* by the Spirit or had he been, in fact, *visited* by God and Christ? While he wrote to John Wentworth of being "enwrapped in heavenly vision," in another place he said that "the Lord opened the heavens unto me."² Was there a difference here such as he had found between the visionary beasts of the Hebrew prophets and the real heavenly beasts John saw? Had Joseph seen the actual or the image?

Across the sea, two months before Joseph spoke in Nauvoo's grove, Ludwig Feuerbach wrote a preface to the second edition of his *Essence of Christianity* which contained a modern application of the same kind of distinction Joseph made: Feuerbach wrote that the people of his era preferred "the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being."³ He, like his American contemporary, was heir to a view of the world that distinguished between image and reality.

Interestingly, both Joseph and Herr Feuerbach were speaking and writing just at the moment when Louis Daguerre was entering his heyday of image-making. Forsaking painting in favor of his new photographic process, Daguerre soon mesmerized the Western world with the most exact of representations. The age of mechanical image reproduction—what we sometimes call "the media age"—was waiting in the wings. This new era, our era, would offer media with powerful ritualistic and religious forces and begin to blur the clear distinction between image and actuality.

Image-making Media

Two things separated the new medium of photography from old image-making media. First was the conquest of exactitude. The perfect accuracy of image that portrait painters, engravers, and sculptors had tried through skill and cultivated craft to achieve was now a job for hirelings.

The second triumph of the new medium was what Paul Valery called the conquest of ubiquity. For not only could objects be turned into images by mechanical means, but the images so made could also be copied and sent anywhere. The original object, the actual, became in Valery's words "a kind of source or point of origin whose benefits will be available . . . wherever we wish. Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign."⁴ The actual, transformed into these vagrant images, thus loses its specific location in space and time. All boundary, all enclosure dissipates. The twin conquests of exactitude and ubiquity gave the new media—photography first, and later movies, sound recording, and broadcasting—their power to confuse the actual and

the image.

The Church has been far from oblivious to the new media. On the contrary, it has embraced them as heartily as has the world, and often for the same purposes. One reason the world employs these media, for example, is to cope with the overriding condition of modern man, what Ortega y Gasset simply calls "plenitude," that sense of fullness to the world, the spectre of the multitude in every locale.⁵ In other words as society becomes more crowded, life becomes more chaotic. Exactitude and ubiquity give electronic media the power to organize and make sense out of this chaos. Similarly, the Church faces its own problems of plenitude: Spencer W. Kimball, in his first conference address as President of the Church, said that "our greatest problem is our rapid growth." Such growth destroyed the true faith anciently as leaders found it impossible to prevent an increasingly large body of people from "transgress[ing] the laws, [and] chang[ing] the ordinance[s]" (Isa. 24:5). Aware of this danger, the Church seems to have embraced the standardization offered by the new media as the ideal solution to such chaos. The kingdom is made safely homogenous by clothing the body of Christ with electronically and mechanically produced images.

Media as Ritual

But the standardization provided by reproductive media is only part of a larger process: The profusion of uniform images in the temple, in the chapel, and in the Saints' homes serves a ritual function. The profuse becomes the sacred, that which creates order from chaos, "cosmicizes" the international Church, and fills unpatterned space with divine patterns.

For, when we speak of "ritual," we mean something by which we can imitate the divine pattern of things in order to achieve it. We seek by ritual to find the regularity beneath the random surface of life; we attempt to reveal and embody what really *is*, the "being" behind "becoming." In ritual, to quote Eliade, "reality is a function of the imitation of a celestial archetype."⁶ Too, ritual gives us power over the unruly course of time. In the repetition of sacred gestures and the reenactment of mythic happenings, time submits to a fixed order of events and becomes indefinitely recoverable and infinitely repeatable.

Just as archaic man acts out his rites, modern man takes pictures. He pursues the beautiful, the ideal, and when he finds it, he "shoots" it (the ultimate taming). At the aim of a camera the actual is brought down into a fixed image. Like ritualistic temple and city building, photography helps us to "take possession of space in which [we] are insecure"⁷ by turning that space into small, manageable objects. The photo frame, like the building frame, and for the same reasons, attempts to give a regular shape to existence. Moreover, photography ritualistically seizes hold of time and reduces it to a set of images to which we may continually refer. These images objectify our memory. They preserve the details of youth long after old age has set in, and make our pleasant hours tangible that they may provide refuge during our unpleasant ones.

The Church, scant in its own liturgy, takes a great many pictures for us, mass-reproducing them in a

stream of booklets, manuals, and magazines. Certain images prevail: photographs usually capture families at home, teenagers engaged in wholesome activities (study, sports, helping neighbors), priesthood holders doing Church assignments, women doing “womanly” things, General Authorities, popular religious paintings, and Church buildings, especially temples.

Pictures of temples fill an essential symbolic role in the Church, one almost as important in the Saints’ everyday lives as the temple itself. For once we have taken a snapshot of a temple we have taken control over a portion of sacred space; by hanging it on the wall or putting it into an album we incorporate the sacred space into the house space. Unfortunately, mass-reproduced photographs of sacred objects like temples, especially photographs taken from inside them and distributed in booklets to temple-goers and tourists alike, leave stumbling blocks for the psyche. I have given names to two related obstacles: the disruption of sacred space and the waning of the aura.

Disruption of Sacred Space

Everything that represents tries to inspire awe of the original. A photograph does this as much as or more than any representation: we often have to validate an event or object by photographing it, because “the camera doesn’t lie.” The camera records light as it is; it is legal, court-sanctioned evidence of what *is*. But a photograph is more than just a representation; it is also a fragment or relic of the original. It is built from light particles that have emanated from the object itself; it is like the skin of an onion or of a shedding snake. A photograph thus attains its power by a kind of sympathetic magic, for it proves by its very existence that it has been near to its subject. When we view a photograph we experience sensations akin to those we would experience in the original’s presence, because we are only once removed from that presence. Elizabeth Barrett wrote of this as early indeed as 1843. On a Daguerrotype of a friend, she wrote, “it is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases—but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing . . . the fact of the *very shadow of the person* lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think.”⁸

The inside of a temple must be holy ground. Temple space is space that has been consecrated and made stable by being symbolically aligned with the heavenly pattern and blessed with the presence of God. Its walls shut out the uncensured world: Within those walls we find true enclosure. When the appearance of that enclosure is, in effect, stencilled by photography into thousands of books and pamphlets, so that we may examine and contemplate them at will, sacred space is disrupted. The profusion of images copied from the actual object, turn the temple inside out and return us to chaos. The consecrated space of the temple is turned into an image—not to mention reduced, cropped, and so on—for the consumption of the profane world, literally the world “outside the temple.” Furthermore, being within the temple is an experience for which we must be recommended and initiated; photographs leave consecrated space on display for all. That the stewards of the temples themselves should market these

photographs is a singular irony. For while we are enjoined to speak little of the temple outside its walls, each picture is worth a thousand words.

Waning of the Aura

The sensations evoked so powerfully by the accuracy of the photograph may seem worth the disruption of sacred space. Our desire to impart the blessings of being inside the temple impels us to do everything possible to excite others to want to come inside too. But each photographic image we take from the temple is like a layer of power skimmed off. The sensations evoked by the image reduce or, at best, distort the sensations evoked by the actual thing. The inspiration we feel from a sacred image interrupts pure communion with the original. This is especially true of a sacred image we see many times before encountering its actual counterpart: We are conditioned to respond to the image. After repeated encounters with the medium we subconsciously come to venerate it along with the object being mediated. As a result, the representative medium becomes a decoy. We lose the ability to wholly separate image and actuality. Thereafter, when we encounter the original object without the medium—for example, the actual temple walls we have only seen in pictures—we sense a great psychological gap, an abyss where the absent medium once stood. It is just as a 1975 Polaroid advertisement put it: “Suddenly you see a picture everywhere you look.”

Thus, as we gain power over the temple by photography, the temple’s aura begins to wane.

The Disembodied Voice

Of course, photography is not the only medium to have ritualizing and religious effects on us. One truth taught us within the temple is that the disembodied voice, that speech whose mouth is “behind the veil,” wields power. The scriptures confirm this. Most divine communications come by a voice speaking without a speaker who is seen. After the Fall, for example, Adam and Eve heard “the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” God called to them, while Adam confessed, “I heard thy voice . . . and I was afraid.” Later, God accused Cain upon the evidence that “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

Since the fall of man and the first murder, we grope about in a shadow world, the divine all but lost to sight yet present in the disembodied voice.⁹ Moses is called by a voice from a flaming bush; Jesus’ call is confirmed by a voice at his baptism, and again later, where some merely thought that “it thundered” (John 12:28-29). The Old Testament Saul is called by a clear voice in the night; the New Testament Saul is called by a voice in the day, accompanied by a strange light. Joseph Smith, understanding the divine principle, harmonized both accounts of Saul or Paul’s vision to show that the light could be seen by all who were present, but the sacred portion, the voice itself, was heard by Paul alone.

Radio incorporates the power of the disembodied voice. The voice that we hear while “seeing no man” obtains its influence over us because we have been divinely programmed to respond to such a voice. This quasi-divinity of the radio voice has been demonstrated by certain political leaders such as Churchill, F.D.R., and especially Hitler. The “golden age” of radio signalled a

renewal of despotism because the medium itself awakened impulses of obedience in our spirits.

Besides empowering the voice, radio enabled music to reach the ears of all while leaving its source veiled, thereby becoming the embodiment of heavenly music. The ancients understood all music as a cosmic power. The nineteenth-century Romantics tried to revive this notion; Wagner, attempting what technology had not yet devised, placed the Bayreuth orchestra in a pit in order that the music would rise "like vapours rising from the holy womb of Gaia beneath the Pythia's tripod."¹⁰ Radio fulfilled this Romantic dream of music with no visible source. In a bizarre twist of fate, Wagner's own *Parsifal*, which he never intended should be performed outside the temple at Bayreuth, was the first music ever broadcast over radio. His music gained the mystic immanence he sought, but at the same time the "sacred" enclosure of the *Festspielhaus* was dissolved. In this instance, the sacred became the profane.

As it pushed beyond the experimental stages, radio programming achieved the regularity of liturgy. The daily cycle of the wireless became a kind of monastic office for profane man. Each day's broadcasts had standard personalities, programs, and repetitive formulae (commercials). Each day had its schedule that could be counted on. The week as a fixed cycle was reaffirmed, each day and each hour of the day took on its peculiar role in the culture. In this way, the radio listener ritually possessed and controlled time.

Radio also became, in effect, "the prince of the power of the air." Whether in music or in the spoken word, radio's voice was not still and small but ponderously mighty. We may sense this transcendent power of radio as we drive across the desert late at night tuned to a strong signal: That signal becomes a supernatural point of stability in the wilderness.

The omnipotence of radio is further apparent from its very omnipresence. In a 1936 novel, for example, Rudolf Arnheim described the reader of a book sitting and listening while he reads:

Now there is silence except for slight noises and cracklings, the reader closes the book and gets ready to go out, and suddenly an entirely different voice from the loudspeaker announces that he will now hear Beethoven's 8th Symphony. The reader puts on his coat and cuts off Beethoven's introductory bars in the middle by a pressure of his finger. But the music persists, though more distant and raucous, drifting up the stair from the hall-porter's room. The reader nods to him as he goes past, bangs the front door, but Beethoven follows him down the street, loud and strident from the shoemaker's back room, softly from the second floor of a villa, and braying across the market-place from a little cafe—an acoustic relay race carried on from house to house, everywhere, inescapable.

Busy and idle, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick—they all hear the same thing.¹¹

With such language Arnheim forecasts the coming of a cultural hell. The Church, on the other hand, prophesied the triumph of Zion through the ubiquitous voice of radio. Its omnipresence was a promise, not a threat. For by radio the Church could leaven the masses with its aural messages, just as it had with its visual images, only with greater authority—the dominion of

the disembodied voice. By radio the Church could create all that the word "network" implies: a structure in which members could be interconnected and ultimately tied to a single line. The broadcasting of general conferences came close to achieving this with seemingly universal meetings of the Saints. In these meetings the voices of Church leaders took on the generalized authority of the radio medium. Their strictures became more powerful than if written on stone tablets, at least for the moment, and their encouragement and humor became ever more inspirational. To hear their voices at all was a miracle. That sense of the miraculous present in the medium was transferred to the Church leaders who spoke; how the voices were heard enhanced what was being said.

The Impact of Television

Today, the miraculous descends to us in the guise of television. This young medium arrived as a stepchild of the automobile. It answers to our modern obsession with rapid transit and the exhilaration of pure speed. However, it does not bring us into the world, but (to quote a CBS slogan) brings the world home to us. It has become the principal medium of news, showing us pictures of far-off events and telling us about them—always in the quickest, most simplistic way.

The way we watch television—I should say *half watch*—suggests that deep involvement with the images is not part and parcel of the medium. The latest pocket and wristwatch televisions should demonstrate that television is above all a medium of convenience: Its weak images, lacking the sharp definition of a good film, are a way of getting a few essentials without fussing over details. It gives an encyclopedic, if not rankly text-bookish, vision of the world—the highlights without the nuances, the bones without the flesh.

The Church uses television in several ways: to grasp at greater accuracy in representation during conference broadcasts; to send forth inspirational commercials that teach principles in the way best suited to television—catch phrases, lightning-quick portrayals of complex situations, and so on; and to make video tapes for Saints throughout the world to watch. These tapes are the modern versions of the tract; they are convenient, lively, and simply stated. Because of the inattentiveness we have cultivated toward television, such video religious texts are not relied on to teach hard concepts or deep theology. They best display gospel essentials. With the force of low-definition, high-energy advertisements, they stamp our minds with the eternal basic.

The Church's interest in television has prompted many articles, editorials, and conference addresses on the subject. Two themes recur: First, television and other media, when used by the Church, are explained as a fulfillment of many prophecies. Second, in others' hands, such media are said to have a capacity for massive evil. In other words, new media *techniques* are accepted without qualification as inspired by God; only *content* is believed to have significant effects on people. But in our necessary preoccupation with communicating as efficiently as possible, we usually neglect the fact that humans experience media methods and techniques as much as media content.

Consider, for example, what happens on those occasions when we really do *watch* television. We put out

the lights and focus on the frame of the glowing tube. At such times television becomes what the poet Anne Waldman calls a "surrogate moon."¹² Man has a history of staring at cosmic lights in the darkness—the moon, the planets, and the stars. These lights evoke sensations of awe and inspiration, and seem to speak directly to the spirit. The ancients, for instance, studying the heavens with a primal fascination, organized their star-gazing into a science that tried to explain the expectancy they felt from the lights of the sky. But along with this wonder of celestial light came the terror of infinite space. There was nothing so frightening as area without bounds; it was the void, chaos. The recent capture of electrical power represented an awesome taming of the cosmic forces. Now man could replicate the sun, however vaguely, and turn on the lights whenever he wished. In real television *watching*, we gaze at the lit tube in an otherwise dark room, fascinated by the solitary light but freed from the terror of infinite space. We keep our moon indoors. The electric cord is a leash.

The medium of television affects us in other ways as well. The television screen is bombarded by particles of light, as are our own retinae by natural light. The swirling dots of the television set, accompanied by their hiss and soft, high ringing, gives us a controlled image of pure energy: We feel the quiet power of electrons as they are blown like a cloud of stars against the screen. The pulsations hypnotize us into believing we are ingesting this cosmic power. Light, for us, connotes truth; and a dense concentration of light suggests a convergence of truth. Our spirits are hence inclined to embrace the images assembled by television light. The television screen becomes like the mirror written of in the scriptures, by which we "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory . . . are changed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18). That is, we look to it for a vision of celestuality and become what we find. We are told of extreme examples of this transformation on the television news itself: people acting out some violence they saw on a show because of the imposing power of the medium. But we all live with subtler examples every day, hidden in our conversations, our gestures, and our thoughts. What television gives us we receive as an image in our countenances.

Dangers

The modern media have supplanted and in some ways superseded old forms of ritual in bringing order from chaos. For this we may thank them, tentatively. Their danger lies in their ability to rob us of both actual and image—the worlds of matter and of imagination. As the media more and more occupy our attention, we surrender our sensory contact with people and with the earth. A second veil falls on our minds; our senses are cut off from the earth just as they have been from the heavenly world. Ordinarily, when senses are deprived of direct contact with material things, either by our own choice or by others', our minds devise images to fill the void. The media not only distract our senses from the things of the world that we can feel and smell and see and hear and taste, but they then fill the void themselves. Our internally generated images are blocked or curbed by outwardly imposed images. As Feuerbach lamented, we yield up our perception of the actual for the sake of images—images controlled by someone else's

imagination and will. Instead of returning to reality or to private imagination, we grasp at ultimacy in media images (3-D, for example, or so-called multi-media). We miss the feel of the actual but are unwilling to give up the imposed images. What we must realize, for safety's sake, is that as media images roll into our minds, burdens roll onto our shoulders. These are the burdens of discernment, of choice, of temperance, and of clear thinking.

There are two remarkable scriptural passages that suggest what God intends for man in his sensory and imaginary experience. The first was written by John, who taught that "when [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This was, we presume, by that John who saw the actual beasts—and people—living beyond the veil. Those were not just images without substance, according to Joseph, but beings to whose realm we should aspire. A second scriptural promise, one of a very different sort, was uttered by Joseph about William Law, who perhaps failed to obtain its fulfillment. One hopes that others may lay claim to it: "and he shall mount up in the imagination of his thoughts as upon eagle's wings" (D&C 124:99). Here then is a confirmation and sanction of the mind's power to conceive its own images, and by them to be propelled into new regions of truth. If we can live for these promises of actuality and image, we may rise in the last day to find ourselves blessed with feeling bodies of flesh and bone, and minds just as solid.

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Notes

1. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), p. 185, emphasis in original.
 2. See Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), pp. 154-81, for the various accounts.
 3. This is Susan Sontag's translation in her *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977), p. 135.
 4. Paul Valery, *Aesthetics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 226.
 5. Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957), pp. 11-12.
 6. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1959), p. 5.
 7. Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 8.
 8. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 161, emphasis in original.
 9. I was led to think along these lines by Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).
 10. William Ashton Ellis, trans., *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 7 vols. (New York: Broude Brothers International Editions, 1966), 5:335.
 11. Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), pp. 258-59.
 12. Quoted in Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1978), p. 170.
- Aside from the works cited in the notes, I recommend and confess my indebtedness to the following standard works:
- Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film As Art*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. (See the final essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.")
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Harvest Books, 1959.
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MORMONISM AND A TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE

U. CARLISLE HUNSAKER

A sense of life is either one of our most precious possessions, or the source of our private hell. It is the emotional corollary of our personal philosophy of life, or the emotional form in which we experience our deepest view of existence. It is the background music, if you will, which accompanies all we do and experience. It is the baseline from which we spring or stumble into our daily activities. A sense of life is an emotional sum—a derivative of the thinking we have done or failed to do in providing ourselves with a symbolic map or model of the context within which we live and of our place within it. With the help of such a conceptual map, we understand who we are and what we can do, and we project and plan how we are going to live and what we shall try to achieve.

Consider a series of questions: Would it be unfair or extreme to suggest that most of us trudge through life having as our background music not music at all, but a cacophony of feelings based upon a disorganized grab bag of notions which we have passively allowed to settle into our souls by a process of cultural osmosis? Is it possible that many of our personal, institutional, cultural problems are in fact due to our tendency to evade the demands of the human prerogative to know who we are and what we are about? Do we cheat ourselves individually and institutionally by our tendency, born of sloth and fear, to memorize answers provided by others without ever really becoming aware of the questions? As Henry Weiman asked, "Do we look the

answers up in the back of the book without ever learning how to work the problems?"¹ I, of course, mean these questions to be rhetorical. Nonetheless, I believe that, for the most part, honest answers would reveal the reason why there is within so many of us so much of the time what William James called a great buzzing confusion.

A religious tradition constitutes an invitation to develop for one's soul a particular style, a way of being in the world. It seems to me that the style encouraged by Mormonism is based upon a sense of life which I call *tragic*. The philosophical and theological underpinnings of a tragic sense of life might entail the following:

Dimensions of a Tragic Sense of Life

First, a tragic sense of life includes the willingness to view our pervasive shortcomings against the backdrop of our divine potential. In facing up to the implications of our failures, we would be well-advised to turn our attention away from theological doctrines concerning ultimate fulfillment. Instead, we should fully recognize the tragic sense that can accompany the realization of how often we sacrifice the here-and-now richness of experience to the self-imposed littleness of our lives.

There must be moments, perhaps during the inescapable quiet and solitude of the night, when we agonize over our easy contentment with the trivial and the routine, when we recognize that it may be evasion and sloth at the bottom of our inveterate busyness. This same nighttime vigil may also reveal that our busyness

in the Church may have so little to do with greatness of soul.

It's not a question of doing more, of home teaching earlier, or doing better professionally. Instead, it may be a process of doing less, of coming to see these as being less important than previously supposed. It is essential to face really hard, tragic facts—like the courage one has not been able to muster or the effort one has been unwilling to expend in truly being with a wife, a daughter, or a son. There can be a cleansing despair in the sudden insight that we have been so fearful of the passion and heartbreak of a personal search for truth that we have relinquished the responsibility for developing our own hierarchy of values, and have fallen prey to conformity; we are left to strive for the appearance without the substance.

I am thinking of the frequency and ease with which members of a ward or stake are told they are great—an ease and frequency which almost makes a mockery of what could be. Are we unable to face the tragedy of how far we are from greatness without collapsing into self-hatred? Can we openly accept our accomplishments without succumbing to a too-easy contentment? Is it not possible to develop what Walter Kaufmann called "humbition"—a working balance between pride and humility? To disown our failures robs us of the capacity to change. Failure is tragic and painful, but a denial of its reality creates that deeper pain born of illusion and stagnation.

Perhaps we should be more inclined to listen to the criticisms of those who suggest that it is blasphemous to speak of God as an exalted man or that men are gods in embryo. Perhaps these ideas *are* blasphemous—not the doctrines themselves—but our careless, sometimes embarrassing notions regarding what exaltation requires, i.e., attendance at meetings, payment of tithes, and generally staying out of mischief.

Unfortunately, our culture fosters a two-pronged conspiracy against aspirations to godly greatness. On the one hand our so-called realism warns, "Don't hope for too much; the worst thing that can happen is to desire and not be satisfied." On the other hand, we may be encouraged to aspire, but toward questionable goals. Hence the proliferation of positive-thinking and success seminars in our culture at large and our tendency to focus on objectively measurable aims within the Church. The problem in these approaches is that this kind of focus can result in personal or institutional success which becomes a distraction from our commitment to spiritual depth.

Oh yes, there is need for balance, for times of guiltless relaxation, and for the enjoyment of the many unearned gifts of life. But peace and serenity—these all too elusive fruits of gospel living—are only enjoyed when one gives oneself completely and consciously to that which satisfies the deepest and most comprehensive needs of human nature. In this connection I recall some of Kierkegaard's words which, for me, perfectly express the relationship between serenity and a commitment to spiritual development. He said, "Anxiety is our highest powers crying out for full employment."² God help us not to succumb to the blandishments of trivia and easy routine as a means of evading that anxiety.

The second mark of a tragic sense of life involves a rejection of the notion that God manipulates the leading strings of history and that all events serve some cosmic purpose. In this view, one accepts randomness as a fact of existence and realizes that the meaning of events must be provided by those who experience them.

This aspect of a tragic world view demands that we forsake the indefensible, demeaning—if sometimes comforting—assumption that God tailors the experiences of our lives to our particular needs; and, from the vantage of his empyrean calm, views the events of world history and our individual lives as they unfold according to his preordained plan. It is amazing there are so many in the Church who believe this when our doctrine rejects predestination.

Instead of viewing God as the sole author of world history, it seems more consistent to see him as a deity who awaits with desperate personal suffering our willingness to accept our role as coauthors. My contention is that metaphysical facts constrain him to act persuasively rather than coercively and thus require him to plead for our active participation.

I was deeply moved by thoughts expressed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer during his incarceration in a Nazi prison camp. As he anguished over human suffering and sin he realized that he was sharing in God's anguish, and he wrote, "Christians stand by God in His hour of grieving." As Donald Evans observes, "It is as if Bonhoeffer were standing by a grief-stricken friend, helping him by being present, as together they mourn the loss of humanity in human life."³ Such a view of God and his relationship to the events of our lives does not strip God of his divinity. It is obvious that man needs God; that God needs man is also true, but seldom emphasized. If we truly believe that God can be not only the paradigm of passionate concern, but also the *focus* of human concern, many of us may find a new dimension to our relationship with him.

Such a view has important implications for the way we view human suffering. At least fifteen million children under the age of five die of starvation each year (roughly one child every two seconds). Many millions more will sustain physical and mental impairment because of prolonged malnutrition. Nearly one billion persons on this planet live in absolute poverty. In human terms, absolute poverty is "a condition of life so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality, and low life-expectancy as to be beneath any rational definition of human decency."⁴ Does the gospel promise these children ultimate relief? My faith answers *yes*, but even so, does this justify the grotesque suggestion that we needn't concern ourselves with their plight because it is all part of their God-ordained destiny? Is this suffering tailored to their particular needs? Does God passively view these conditions as part of his plan for these people? My answer to these questions has to be *no*. These are examples of conditions which need not exist; conditions for which we must, tragically, bear a measure of personal responsibility.

A non-tragic view of life which fails to recognize the random nature of existence can encourage a cavalier attitude toward the misfortunes of victims. It allows the comfortable conclusion that hope for victims of sustained suffering is hope deferred—deferred to the

postmortal realm. Thus our efforts to give meaning to suffering often dismiss it, thereby demeaning its victims as well as ourselves. We ought to be embarrassed and offended by elaborate explanations as to why God caused a particular misfortune. As William S. Coffin, Jr., declared in reflecting upon the accidental drowning of his son, "My own consolation lies in knowing it was *not* the will of God that Alex die; that when the waves closed over the sinking car, God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break."⁵ The fact is that sometimes the best answer to an agonized "why?" is, "It just happened, and now the meaning of this event is to be defined by our response." Surely God's role in most misfortunes is to stand ready to enable us to reach into the depth of our souls and fashion a dignified and courageous response.

Without a tragic dimension to our faith, it is also easy to make a mockery of the antidote to suffering: service. Service can come to mean saving my own skin by playing

We ought to be embarrassed and offended by elaborate explanations as to why God caused a particular misfortune.

an assigned role in a game the outcome of which has already been decided. We must identify and discard those careless theological conclusions which contradict our own better moments when we yearn to serve with love and with the sense of being summoned to a dignified and necessary role. Indeed, to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and seek out the prisoner is not only to do these things to people but also to God. What a far cry this is from looking to God as a Saturday-night paymaster, the dispenser of our reward for staying out of mischief and attending to our church chores.

Spiritual sensitivity can render us incapable of condoning glib, shallow, too-easy answers to tragic problems which exist in the world and help us develop the courage to actively oppose such answers. More importantly, our own efforts to alleviate suffering may prove to be our most eloquent objection.

The last mark of a tragic sense of life is the pain and joy of autonomy, or the responsibility to make our own decisions. The human race has had something of a love-hate relationship with autonomy, and religion has most often been its greatest deterrent.

With this in mind, I am intrigued by two statements, one from Sigmund Freud, the other from Brigham

Young. Freud objected to the suggestion that the essence of religion is the feeling of absolute dependence, saying: "It is not this feeling that constitutes religiousness, but only the next step, the reaction to it, which seeks a remedy to this feeling. He who goes no further, he who humbly resigns himself to the insignificant role man plays in the universe, is in the truest sense of the word irreligious."⁶ Brigham Young's equally pointed and more theologically oriented statement came in response to the question, "Why are we left alone and sad?": "Man is destined to be a God—and has to act as an independent being—and is left without aid to see what he will do, whether he will be for God, and practice him to depend on his own resources, and try his independency—to be righteous in the dark—to be the friend of God. and do the best I can when left to myself. act on my Agency as the independent Gods, and show our capacity."⁷

Our history, individually and collectively, is in many ways the story of our struggle for autonomy as well as a witness to our fear of it, and our efforts to flee its demands. Sartre's famous 1943 declaration that man is "condemned to be free" suggests that men find freedom hard to bear, and Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor is a compelling description of man's tendency to use religion as a means of escaping fateful decisions. "Didst thou forget" asks the old inquisitor, "that man prefers peace and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?" Rollo May comments: "Christ's mistake, says the inquisitor, 'was that in place of the rigid ancient law,' he placed on man the burden of having 'with free heart to decide for himself what is good and what is evil,' and 'this fearful burden of free choice' is too much for men."⁸

I am convinced that autonomy is indeed a fearful burden and that a tragic sense of life stalks one who is determined to decide, to make significant decisions for himself. Furthermore, any tendency to sneer at those who suggest that freedom is fearful may itself be an indication of how far removed one is from the autonomous life.

Perhaps we have so succumbed to Manichaeism—to think in black and white, to reduce baffling issues to simple "either-or" choices—that we have blinded ourselves to the complexities of life, and in fact are not personally acquainted with the process of making fateful decisions.

We are indeed free, but our freedom is mortal and limited, and therefore essentially tragic. We simply lack the time and talent to satisfy all legitimate claims made upon us. Reality is a matrix of conflict—conflicts of ideas, aims and desires. In an effort to deny this fact of existence, we too often give in to what Frances Menlove called the myth of the unruffled Mormon: There is good and there is evil and the choice is so clear.

But such an approach does not stand up to Lehi's assertion that there "must needs be . . . an opposition in all things" (2 Ne. 2:11). The context of this statement is Lehi's counsel to his son, the main theme of which is that the joy of life must be experienced through, not around, opposition. Thus Lehi's remarks seem to refer not only to opposition between good and evil, but to the opposition between many competing goods. The true

adventure of life lies in attempting to achieve a workable harmony or synthesis between complimentary opposites. I understand the joy of which Lehi spoke to be the subjective accompaniment of growth. Reality, characterized in large measure by polar opposites, provides us with a framework of growth by presenting opportunities to achieve a fusion of such opposites, a fusion which becomes more than the sum of its parts. Such a fusion brings expansion to the soul, and hence joy.

Think with me of the example of a fifty-year-old woman who recognized opposites within herself: "I can see clearly," she says, "two separate worlds within myself, spirituality and sensuality. Perhaps because of my cultural heritage, the mere thought of experiencing one dimension hopelessly suffocates the other one." This woman is so beset with conflict that she feels she isn't pure enough for the spiritual world. On the other hand, she at the same time feels that she has missed complete sensual and sexual fulfillment. If this woman were able to achieve a fusion of these dimensions of life, something new and fine could be created, something more complex than either spirituality or sensuality, but including both.

Reality, as I believe Lehi was teaching, dictates that synthesis or growth occurs only after difficult choices are made. The choices are difficult and, to some degree, tragic because they inevitably involve the acceptance of limitations and restrictions. The life of joy of which Lehi spoke cannot be given over to sensuality as a simple either/or choice nor can it be given exclusively to spirituality. You choose your own set of complimentary opposites: work/play, obedience/individuality, gregariousness/solitude. The principle remains the same.

This view of decision-making has definite implications for our simplistic approach to teaching. Do our efforts, for example, to teach chastity sometimes result in feelings of ambivalence toward the sensual, sexual side of our being? We ought to teach rather that the responsibility and sometimes the pain of self-imposed restraints can result in the joy of synthesis. This is the agony and ecstasy of autonomy.

A review of these three aspects of a tragic sense of life (and many others that could be elaborated) makes it obvious that such a world view is not for the child. Paul's suggestion that he once saw as a child, but now as a man, and that he achieved this coming of age through the instrumentality of the gospel now takes on more meaning.⁹ There is an apparent contradiction between this insight and Christ's urging that we become as children. Perhaps the real intent of Christ's teaching was that we develop the faith and courage to maintain a childlike face-full-to-the-front stance toward life even as we experience its darker realities—realities which are wrought into the structure of what is precious, lovable, beautiful, and holy.

Obstacles to a Tragic Sense of Life

By now it should be clear that I do not equate a tragic sense of life with the notion of ultimate failure or pervasive pessimism. Basic to my faith is the hope for ultimate fulfillment. But on the other hand, I fear that an emphasis upon ultimate, other-worldly fulfillment can encourage a Pollyannish passivity toward proximate

problems and needs, a blunting of an appropriate sense of urgency as well as a tendency toward glib, too-easy answers to agonizing problems. Such answers are, I believe, an offense to many who suffer, to the spiritually sensitive and certainly to God. To explain away or repress our awareness of the tragic nature of much of our experience is to dehumanize ourselves and to be involved in the irony of denying ourselves that intense joy which is reserved for those who face reality without the benefit of illusions. I am convinced that a tragic sense of life provides something better than a choice between optimism and pessimism. As A. Powell Davies suggested, "If religion were optimism we should never have heard Jesus agonize in the Garden of Geth; if it were pessimism, Jesus would never have begun his mission!"¹⁰

*It is obvious that man needs God;
that God needs man is also true
but seldom emphasized.*

Mormonism, like any religion, can be made into an elaborate means of escape, of refusing to tear away the veil and live with pain and difficulty. Man truly faces a choice here because he is a being whose consciousness, within certain limits, is volitional. To me, then, man's basic sin is evasion. Ethical and spiritual awareness do not come freely. They are gained only at the price of inner conflict and anxiety. This anxiety need not entail self-hate. We can despair over a lack of efficacy while preserving a love of self and of the life within us which still awaits release and expression.

Our hope and our quest is to know an inviolate peace but not without the full release of all capacities—what the Savior referred to as the abundant life. This cannot be until we learn with Camus that it is in the midst of winter that we finally discover that there is within us an invincible summer, that crucifixion precedes resurrection.

The Nature of God

Since understandings of God shape ideals for human existence, it follows that one's sense of life—tragic or otherwise—is significantly influenced by one's interpretation of God's style, his way of being and relating to the world. A tragic sense of life implies a rejection of a number of popular traditions regarding the nature of God. I wish to mention four.¹¹

The first is the foundational notion upon which the

other three rest. It is that God is to be understood as controlling power. All things, allowing no exceptions, are possible to God. Omnipotence, in its traditional sense, implies that God determines every detail of the world.

The second notion is that God is the sanctioner of the status quo, the present order exists because God wills its existence. To be obedient is to preserve the status quo.

The third notion is that God's perfection entails immutability, lack of change, and impassibility which stresses that God must be unaffected by any other reality.

The fourth notion is that God is a kind of cosmic moralist, one who proclaims arbitrary rules and who punishes offenders.

All of these propositions assume that God is a nontragic being. All that is is as he wills it—there are no conflicts, there are no self-determining and self-existent constituents of reality with which he must struggle. Nothing can disturb God's tranquility. In sum, all is well, there is no reason for concern, there is no suffering. Those who espouse these interpretations of God's way of being—if they truly understand them and if they are consistent—will develop their own human version of a non-tragic stance toward life.

Oh, life can be circumstantially difficult for these people, but there are few really difficult decisions—everything is so obvious. They need not accept any responsibility for the way things are, nor need they suffer the burdens of being an agent of change, for that is not their role. They tend not to be goaded by their own potential greatness for that is hubris. And they are certain that their nontragic, controlling God will save their souls in spite of their wretchedness. They may try to alleviate some suffering but only because that is one of the rules they are given to follow. Ultimately such efforts are only a kind of game because there is a cosmic reason and cause behind all suffering. There is no reason, therefore, to give excessive attention to those conditions which spawn suffering.

Juxtapose, if you will, these four points of emphasis with some different assumptions which I believe are demanded by Mormon theology.

First of all we must deny the existence of a god with all-controlling power. Our allegiance must be to a laboring, suffering god who functions, of necessity, by persuasion. If we respond to a god who can and does fail in specific situations and with certain individuals, our sense of his divinity may be actually enhanced and our desire to participate with him may increase.

Second, our theology demands that we deny the existence of a god who is a sanctioner of the status quo. I believe that to understand our theology is to be persuaded that the matrix of activity we refer to as mortality is in fact a stage for the drama of transformation; and that the direction taken by the flux of events results from a composite of our own choices, randomness, and God's persuasive activity. We strive audaciously to transform ourselves and the world in which we live.

Third, the Mormon God is not unaffected by the events of our lives. We have no need to reconcile traditional notions which attempt to define a passionless

god as loving. As is true of all parents, there is no desire nor way to shield himself from the results of our choices. All of our emphasis concerning ultimate victory for his plan cannot detract from the reality of losses along the way. He awaits and is profoundly affected by our response.

Finally, ours is not a god who is primarily concerned with a set of arbitrarily fashioned moral rules, but rather the fulness of life. He is not interested in negation, but in that intensity of experience which we have come to designate as his (God's) life. Spiritual maturity requires that we completely free God of the role of rewarder and punisher and finally conclude that we are our own reward or punishment.

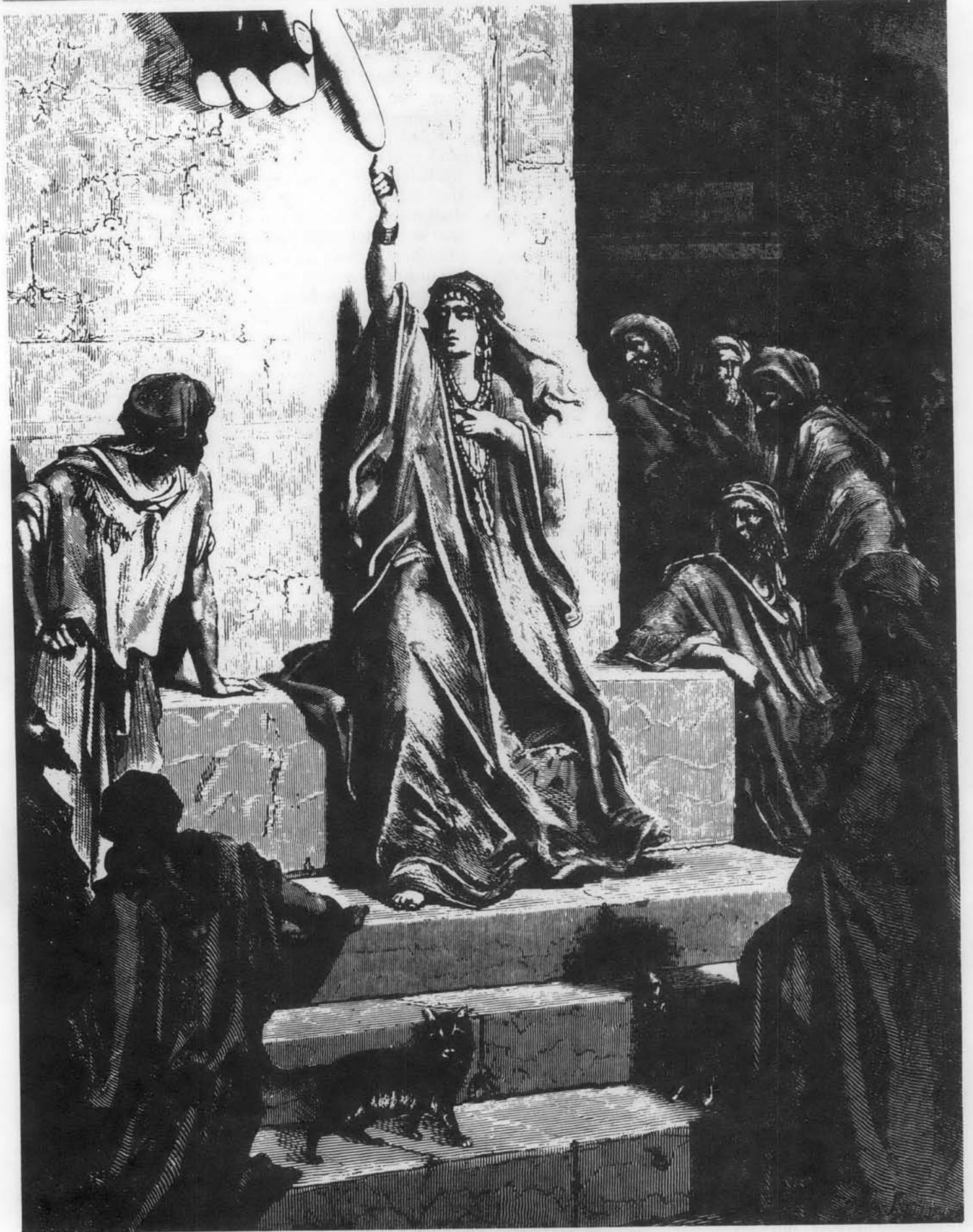
In sum, for us God epitomizes the tragic hero. He envisioned and became fascinated with a magnificent possibility—the enhancement of the quality of existence. What he proposed was audacious. He formed his plan with the knowledge that there would be failure and suffering and that some of those who ventured with him would be lost. There would be some facts before which he would have to stand powerless. One of these, for example, is our own inviolate, self-existent capacity to choose. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever not in the traditional nontragic sense, but in the sense that he remains steadfastly committed to us and to what he knows to be our potential destiny. We stand in awe before all of this, but at the same time, we, with Bonhoeffer, stand *with* God, who requires our participation.

It now occurs to me that all that has been said of God as a tragic hero could, on our level, be true of each of us. We began this venture with boldness, uncertain of the outcome but anxious to try. We stood with Christian in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who, when warned of impending danger, said, "You make me afraid, but whither shall I fly to be safe? I must venture."¹²

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Notes

1. Henry Nelson Weiman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1958), p. 195.
2. As cited in Colin Wilson, *Religion and a Rebel* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957).
3. Donald Evans, *Struggle and Fulfillment* (Cleveland: Collins Publishing, 1979), p. 147.
4. Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1981), p. 97.
5. As cited in "A Dad Reflects on the Death of His Son," *Context: A Commentary on the Interaction of Religion and Culture* 15 (1 & 15 September 1983): 1.
6. As cited in Walter Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1961), p. 102.
7. Office Journal of President Brigham Young, 28 January 1857, Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
8. Rollo May, *Man's Search for Himself* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1952), p. 189.
9. See 1 Cor. 13:11.
10. A. Powell Davies, *The Temptation to Be Good* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 154.
11. Adapted from David Griffin, *God Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).
12. As cited in Davies, *The Temptation to Be Good*, p. 78.



HULDAH

AND THE MYTHS OF MALE SUPERIORITY

LAURENCE IANNACCONE

MYTHS about “woman’s nature” and “woman’s place” are numerous. Nevertheless, the story of a single woman, recorded in a single chapter of scripture, suffices to dispel five of the most popular misconceptions. That woman was Huldah, and the five myths are as follows:

MYTH #1: God never calls women to positions of leadership, particularly not positions of spiritual leadership.

MYTH #2: This is a backup myth, invoked in those embarrassing situations when myth #1 clearly fails: If God does happen to call a woman to a position of authority, he does so only as a last resort, because the available men have proved themselves unworthy or unwilling. If men would rise to the occasion and exercise their natural leadership, God would never have to turn to women.

MYTH #3: Women are by nature more easily deceived or swayed by emotion than men, and cannot be trusted with important decisions.

MYTH #4: Married women should defer major decisions—particularly those concerning spiritual matters—to their husbands, who, as heads of the household, have primary responsibility for determining God’s will. Wives should operate behind the scenes, limiting their contributions to recommendations and requests.

MYTH #5: A woman’s place is in the home. Thus, even though a married woman may serve God outside her home, her primary roles remain domestic: cooking, child-rearing, housekeeping and so forth.

That these aphorisms are indeed myths is clear from the story of Huldah, recorded in 2 Chronicles 34 and repeated in 2 Kings 22. Huldah, the wife of Shallum, keeper of the royal wardrobe, was a prophet called to speak for God. This alone contradicts the first myth, for the spiritual leaders of her era were almost always prophets. As a prophet, Huldah stands with Israel’s most celebrated religious “greats,” people like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Elijah. Indeed, Paul ranked prophets second only to apostles and clearly above teachers, healers,

miracle workers, administrators, and tongues speakers (1 Cor. 12:28). Huldah was a spiritual leader, God’s mouthpiece, a woman with authority.

The scriptures reveal much more about Huldah. She appears during the greatest religious revival in Israel’s history. For centuries the nation had drifted toward idolatry. But in the eighteenth year of his reign (621 B.C.), King Josiah initiated a sweeping reform. He cleared the countryside of pagan shrines and ordered a renovation of the temple in Jerusalem which had fallen into disrepair. In the midst of the renovation, the high priest Hilkiah discovered the book of the Mosaic law, which for centuries had been lost and forgotten. Recognizing the importance of the discovery, he immediately had the book conveyed to the king. When Josiah heard the law he tore his clothes in anguish, for he suddenly realized that even his own sweeping reforms had not begun to restore Israel to its original covenant relationship with God. If the book were authentic then the nation was guilty of greater sin than anyone had suspected. But was the book authentic? And if so, what should be done?

Josiah summoned the highest officials in the land and ordered them to obtain the word of God in this matter. Now it is significant that Josiah did not go into prayer requesting a personal revelation concerning the book, nor did his officials, nor did even the high priest. Rather, they went straight to a *woman*, the prophetess Huldah! But Huldah was not overwhelmed; she immediately replied, “Tell the *man* who sent you to me, Thus says the LORD . . .” (2 Kgs. 22:15-16, emphasis added). She proclaimed that (1) the wrath of God was upon Israel for its idolatry, but that (2) because of Josiah’s humility and repentance God’s judgment would wait until after his death. Implicitly, she also confirmed that (3) the book was authentic, and that (4) the law must be reinstated immediately. (2 Kgs. 22:16-20.) Upon receiving this word, Josiah read the law to all the people of Israel and began a second, far more extensive reform. Just how far Israel had strayed is apparent from the fact that the passover was observed for the first time since the period of the Judges.

Thus, Huldah stands at the center of Israel’s most important religious event since the Exodus. When the nation’s most powerful political and religious leaders could not trust their own judgment they turned to her, God’s prophet. They turned to a woman, and she replied

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with the authoritative word of God.

But were they right in doing this? Perhaps the king should not have deferred to a woman in such a weighty matter. Perhaps Josiah was weak or misguided and failed to realize that women are “by nature” unfit for leadership and that “a woman’s place is in the home.”

Everything we know about Josiah rules out this possibility. Josiah was anything but weak or misguided; he ranks as one of Israel’s greatest kings. Of him we are told, “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the way of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left” (2 Chr. 34:2).

Elsewhere the scriptures state that before Josiah “there was not a king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Kgs. 23:25). A critical error at the start of his greatest achievement would not have been overlooked. Likewise, his ministers were singularly capable and committed; everything we know about them is good.¹ Thus, there is not a trace of evidence that Josiah and his ministers were mistaken in turning to a woman for the authoritative word of God. So much for myth #1.

Perhaps this analysis overestimates Huldah’s stature: Does she really deserve a place beside spiritual giants like Isaiah and Jeremiah? Could it be—as myth #2 asserts—that she was called upon only as a last resort, because no qualified male was available? Not at all! Huldah was by no means a last resort. 2 Kings 23:2 states that the king read the book to “all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the prophets,” indicating Huldah was not the only prophet available for consultation. Moreover, these others were not merely “false” or “lying” prophets. Quite to the contrary, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, two of the greatest prophets of all time, were contemporaries of Huldah.² Zephaniah’s ministry was just ending as the law was discovered. Jeremiah, on the other hand, was to remain active for many years to come. He began to prophesy around 626 B.C., five years prior to the discovery of the law, was active in Judah at the time of the reform, lived in Anathoth only four miles from Jerusalem, was known and favored by Josiah, and is even thought to have been involved in the early stages of the reform. Thus, it is quite possible that Jeremiah and Zephaniah were among the prophets who had the law read to them in 2 Kings 23:2, and under no circumstances were they far from the scene. Why then did not Josiah consult one of these male prophets instead? Why did he not at least check Huldah’s opinion against that of Jeremiah or Zephaniah? Certainly the matter was sufficiently important to merit their attention. The obvious answer is that in the matter of reinstating the Mosaic law, Huldah alone was God’s chosen spokesperson, not the high priest, not Zephaniah, not even Jeremiah. Huldah’s pronouncements were fully authoritative, both necessary and sufficient, and *not* because masculine leadership was lacking. There can be no doubt on this point.

So much for myth #2. God works through women even when qualified males are available in abundance. God called a woman to minister beside such spiritual giants as Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and King Josiah. He calls

women *at all* times, not just as a last resort.

The scriptures also relate that Huldah was married. Her husband must have had high status, for he was in charge of the royal wardrobe.³ Yet, he never emerges in the account as anything more than Huldah’s husband. Confronted by the nation’s leaders, and called upon to make what was perhaps the most important pronouncement of her life, Huldah acted on her own. She did not refer them to her husband, who as “head of the household” might be expected to have made all the major decisions. She did not scurry home and ask him to make the final choice; she did not even consult with him. As far as the account indicates, she unhesitatingly and immediately spoke on her own. What a contrast to the fully domesticated, Victorian stereotype that is so often mistaken for the ideal Christian wife! So much for myth #4.

Likewise, the account calls into question myth #5. The record does not state whether Huldah had any children, though it certainly is likely that she did. Nevertheless, the most important service this woman performed had nothing to do with domestic chores. She might have reared a dozen fine children; she might have kept the house spotless and served the finest kosher food in all Jerusalem, but the scriptures do not regard any of these details as worthy of mention. Instead, they report only her one great ministry—that of being a prophet. I have no wish to belittle Huldah’s domestic achievements, whatever they may have been; but it is clear that in God’s eyes her primary service was *not* domestic.

The implications of Huldah’s story can be summarized in a series of “un-myths” about the ministries of women:

1. God *does* call women to positions of great leadership and spiritual authority.
2. That call is in no way a last resort. God chooses women to serve beside many equally qualified men.
3. Women can provide men with deep spiritual insights and divine wisdom in matters of tremendous importance.
4. A married woman may be called to ministries which in no way simply support those of her husband, and in performing those ministries she may be called upon to act independently of him.
5. A woman’s place is wherever God wants her. Her crowning achievements might be domestic, but, equally, they might be in other areas like that of a formal church ministry.⁴

Notes

1. For example, Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, saved Jeremiah’s life at a later date (Jer. 26:24).
2. See Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, [1975]), pp. 298-309.
3. Some translations state that he was in charge of the “temple” wardrobe.
4. Jesus made this point in regard to the differing ministries of Martha and Mary. Martha perfectly fulfills the traditional stereotype of the ideal Christian woman. Every time the Bible mentions her she is busy waiting on others, devoting herself to domestic chores, and leaving the learning to men. Moreover, like many Christians today, she insisted that Mary do the same. But Jesus did not condemn Mary for being “out of her place” when she forsaked the cooking to sit at his feet and hear him teach. On the contrary, he rebuked Martha, and praised Mary for having chosen “the better portion.” (Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-3.)

FIRST VISIONS

BY
LAWRENCE
FOSTER

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ON JOSEPH SMITH'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

THE conventional Mormon and anti-Mormon interpretations of Joseph Smith's first vision and related visionary phenomena are both unconvincing to me for much the same reason: neither takes seriously the full richness and complexity of Joseph's religious experiences. The pro- and anti-Mormon arguments are analogous to a dispute between two blind men, each of whom has hold of a different part of the elephant's anatomy and proclaims that only *he* knows what the elephant really is. But I believe that Joseph Smith's religious experiences were so powerful and significant that they deserve the most comprehensive treatment possible. Indeed, if properly understood these experiences may raise vital issues not simply for Mormons but for all those concerned with the nature and significance of direct religious experience.

The following observations possible framework for such a have deliberately chosen to refer talization to emphasize that I am experience itself rather than account. Like some of the other scholars to understand the own interpretation inevitably Joseph's direct religious experi- personal observations of a non- some new directions worthy of as well.¹

Perhaps the greatest single attempts to understand the first experiences of Joseph Smith has in the context of similar phe- cultures. Joseph Smith himself indicated in the 1838 account that of St. Paul on the road to cally that he could not deny the



matter what others might say. Most Latter-day Saints, however, have shied away from considering the broader parallels to Joseph's visionary experiences. The primary reason, I believe, is that such an analysis would indicate that, far from being unique, Joseph Smith's first vision and related experiences were almost a classic model of such phenomena in all times and cultures. This can be seen most clearly in the description by the anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace of the characteristic way in which new religions—or as he calls them "revitalization movements"—originate. Based on a consideration of hundreds of different groups on five continents, Wallace concludes: "With a few exceptions, every religious revitalization movement with which I am acquainted has been originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory visions by a single individual. A supernatural being appears to the prophet-to-be, explains his own and his society's troubles as being entirely or partly a result of the violation of certain rules, and promises individual and social revitalization if the injunctions are followed and the rituals practiced, but personal and social catastrophe if they are not." Wallace observes that thereafter the "prophet feels a need to tell others of his experience, and may have definite feelings of missionary or

are an attempt to set out part of a broader analysis. Note that I to the "first vision" without capi- talking primarily about the simply about the canonized 1838 fine recent efforts by Mormon nature of Joseph's visions, my will fall short of conveying ence. Yet perhaps these purely Mormon scholar may suggest consideration by Mormons

weakness of most previous vision and related visionary been the failure to consider them nomena in other times and was aware of such parallels, as he when he compared his vision to Damascus and declared emphati- truth of his own experience no

messianic obligation. Generally he shows evidence of a radical inner change in personality soon after the vision experience: a remission of old and chronic physical complaints, a more active and purposeful way of life, greater confidence in interpersonal relations, the dropping of deep-seated habits like alcoholism. . . . Where there is no vision (as with John Wesley), there occurs a similarly brief and dramatic moment of insight, revelation, or inspiration, which functions in most respects like the vision in being the occasion of a new synthesis of values and meanings."²

One need not accept the value judgment Wallace makes when he refers to such visionary experiences as "hallucinatory" (that is, not literally true), to accept his general description of what happens in such instances as strikingly similar to the case of Joseph Smith. Young Joseph, though highly talented, was at loose ends initially—viewed by some as a pleasant and outgoing ne'er-do-well who spent much of his time hunting for hidden treasure. The series of visions that he had in his teens ultimately led to the transformation of his life and the founding of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although surviving accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision are far from wholly consistent on points of detail, such as whether one or several figures appeared to him, the accounts do indicate that young Joseph was deeply disturbed by the competing claims to religious truth that were being put forward in his area. Joseph was bright enough to understand that such mutually exclusive claims simply could not all be true. Eventually he would realize that he had been specially called by God to introduce a new religious synthesis which would integrate and supersede all previous ones. As Joseph Smith described the development, a series of subsequent visions led to his finding a set of golden plates and his dictation of a "translation" of those plates, which was first published in 1830 as the Book of Mormon. In the meantime, he had also begun to deliver revelations, many of which would later be published in the various editions of the Doctrine and Covenants.

To say that Joseph Smith's visionary experiences correspond to a pattern seen in the visionary phenomena of other times and places is not to reduce them to triviality, any more than a skillful description of how a great athlete, musician, or scientific genius operates reduces our appreciation of his achievements. Indeed, quite the contrary is the case. If Joseph Smith's visions had been completely unique and beyond human comprehension, they could have little meaning for any of us. The same holds true for the experiences of other great religious leaders such as Jesus. Traditional Christianity emphatically affirms not only that he was "wholly God" but also, paradoxically, that he was "wholly man" as well. He was not a supernatural being outside of human history and untouched by it (that was the heresy of the gnostics) but a very special synthesis of the divine and the human who pointed the way toward and made possible our salvation. Joseph Smith's religious experiences, though they may be understood in some degree as to their form, are also in a deeper sense ultimately a mystery. This mystery is not really grasped by those Saints who bear their testimony, almost as though it were a creed, that Joseph Smith had a vision of God the Father and the Son and that somehow *that* was the chief point of the experience. Even if Joseph did see

(or believe he saw) God the Father and the Son (and I shall question that point below), the deeper mystery still remains for those with faith.

Both Mormons and anti-Mormons often appear to have a curiously limited understanding of the first vision. Neither is primarily interested in reconstructing precisely *what* Joseph Smith actually experienced. Both reduce the phenomena in all its rich complexity to a narrow true-false proposition. An enormous amount of water has gone under the bridge, for example, concerning whether or not the first vision took place in the year 1820. Ingenious anti-Mormons such as Wesley Walters seem to suggest that if they could show that the vision could not have happened in 1820, then perhaps no vision actually happened at all. Defensive Mormons, on the other hand, have believed that if they could establish the plausibility of the vision's having happened in 1820, as stated in the canonized 1838 account, then the conventional story of Joseph Smith's having seen God the Father and the Son is thereby also established *en toto*. Both these approaches beg the question logically. Whether or not an error was made in dating precisely when a vision occurred has no necessary connection with whether it occurred (perhaps it could have occurred at another time) or what specifically occurred. While at least one other error in dating exists in the early pages of the published *History of the Church* (due presumably to normal memory lapses in writing of events that occurred more than a decade before), such trivial errors in dating by no means establish that a reported event did not happen at all.

The underlying question which such scholasticism conveniently avoids is precisely what happened in Joseph Smith's early visionary experiences. The primary reason that Mormon apologists have for the past several decades been tied in such intellectual knots regarding the first vision is really very simple: The 1838 version of the first vision, which has been canonized as *the* First Vision, seems less reliable historically than the earlier accounts of the vision, especially Joseph Smith's account of 1832. Originally, as the 1832 account suggests, the vision was chiefly important to Joseph Smith himself as he began to establish his personal sense of mission, and it was almost totally unknown to the general membership. Today, however, as historian James B. Allen observes in his pathbreaking article, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought": "Its significance is second only to the belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. The story is an essential part of the first lesson given by Mormon missionaries to prospective converts, and its acceptance is necessary before baptism."³

Under the circumstances, even Mormon historians who understand the problem of describing what actually happened in the first vision are unable to explain that problem in a way that could be comprehended or accepted by most Latter-day Saints. The result of this unfortunate situation is that even many conservative Mormons unnecessarily suffer pangs of doubt at inconsistencies in the accounts that could be resolved if it were possible to begin with the more reliable 1832 version of the vision as the basis for religious education and analysis. Yet the prospects for effective change in this situation in the foreseeable future are slight. The 1838 version is the one which was canonized, it is the

more appealing from a literary point of view, and millions of Latter-day Saints have been brought up to believe that *that* specific version is one hundred percent correct as written. Latter-day Saints may indeed have to wait, as the saying goes, until the coming of the Millennium to see this man-made confusion resolved.

The chief reason why the 1838 version of the first vision has been so important to Latter-day Saints is probably that it has been used as the primary means of supposedly "proving" the Mormon concept that God the Father has a physical body. This may or may not be the case, but in my opinion the first vision is certainly not a convincing way of establishing the point. The 1838 version of the vision only indicates specifically that Joseph Smith saw two "personages" but does not explicitly identify them. Further indication of the fundamental unimportance of the specific identity of the personage or personages is suggested by the fact that the 1832 account only mentions one figure (presumably Jesus). If seeing God the Father in physical form was so important, why wasn't he even mentioned in the 1832 account? And why wasn't Joseph Smith more explicit in

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making the direct identification in 1838? Once again, modern Mormonism has chosen to emphasize an element that appears to have been of slight importance to the early faith's understanding of the vision, perhaps even to the understanding of the Mormon prophet himself. In my opinion, surviving accounts of the first vision strongly suggest that the chief importance of the vision to Joseph Smith himself was its tremendous emotional power, not anything in particular that he may have seen. What he saw could be described very differently as he looked back later with growing insight at the powerful formative vision which even he may not have fully understood at the time.

The power and psychological complexity of visionary phenomena are highlighted by a vivid example from the celibate Shakers of the nineteenth century. When John

Lyon was about fourteen, he began to become increasingly disturbed by his developing sexual impulses which he viewed as extremely sinful. He confessed repeatedly to the Shaker elders, and genuinely tried to follow their advice, but inwardly he was deeply divided and doubted what they told him. In 1802 when he was twenty-one, Lyon had a powerful visionary experience which he describes with much insight. In great inner turmoil, he was alone at work, when "suddenly I was taken from all sense of the things of time . . . apparently the whole heavens were filled, seeming to roll forward and backward, and in every direction." He saw a thin verticle streak of light toward which he walked at the command of a voice, but suddenly he stood next to a great gulf and became "enveloped in a horrible darkness." There was nothing beneath his feet; he was unable to move in any direction and was in great distress, utterly lost and terrified.

Eventually Lyon discovered that by keeping his eyes firmly fixed on the thin ray of light, he was able to move forward safely through the unknown. But every time he lost his concentration on the light, he was overwhelmed in blackness and terror again. Finally he decided to ask for help. He was instructed in obedience and vowed in his heart that if he survived the experience, he would never disobey his elders again. Then at last he was able to move through the darkness into a bright, lovely vision. After an unknown interval of time, "I heard the same sound which I had heard at the commencement of the vision, it came rolling through the heavens, and seemed to fill all things . . . and I found myself upon my knees, having wet with my tears, a place some ten or twelve inches in diameter." Approximately four hours had elapsed. From that time forth, despite occasional inner conflicts, Lyon was firmly dedicated to the Shakers. He went on to become one of their great leaders.⁴

Visiary accounts, past and present, of which I have read and investigated hundreds, have led me both to be skeptical about specific truth claims derived from visionary experiences and to have a deep and abiding respect for the powerful personal transformation which such experiences can bring. Let us look at both reactions as they relate to Joseph Smith's early visions. On the skeptical side, I find myself sometimes puzzled and annoyed by Latter-day Saints who have never impartially investigated religious phenomena outside of Mormonism, but who categorically assert that Joseph Smith's experiences were unique. In particular, I have repeatedly heard the assertion that while other individuals may have had visions, only Joseph Smith claimed to have seen Jesus Christ and God the Father. Such statements are simply untrue. To begin with, the history of Christianity is filled with saints and other figures who said they had seen Jesus. I have personally talked with many who make that claim. Such assertions were also common in the nineteenth century, especially in areas where Joseph Smith and the Mormons were most active. The further claim to have seen God Almighty is much less common, of course, probably because anyone publicly making such an assertion is typically viewed with incredulity. Thus, the only people I have encountered who insisted that they had literally seen God have been patients in mental institutions. The common assumption that anyone making such an

extreme assertion must be either a charlatan or deranged probably helps explain Joseph Smith's own initial reticence in talking about his visions, especially his first vision, except to people who already respected his prophetic powers.

Does this suggest, then, that I reject the notion that Joseph Smith actually saw angels or other heavenly personages? This is a complex question, and my basic answer is two fold: I personally do not think that Joseph's visions were literally true, yet at the same time I cannot discount the possibility that they might have been.

In any case, however, this is not the most important question. There are broader and more significant issues that are missed when exclusive attention is directed toward the question of whether certain events did or did not literally occur. As my grandfather once pointed out to me, individuals who are preoccupied only with the question of whether or not Jonah was, or could have been, swallowed by a "great fish" (popularly, a whale) miss the whole point about the Book of Jonah. That book is not concerned with the narrow literalistic question of whether a man could actually have been swallowed by a great fish, live for three days in its belly, and then emerge alive. Rather the Book of Jonah teaches, among its many other messages, that there is ultimately no running away from God's commands and that God cares about all of his many children, not simply his "chosen people" the Jews.

The significance of Joseph Smith's first vision, like that of the Book of Jonah, is not based primarily on whether a particular event actually occurred. Even if Joseph's visions reflected his own personal psychology rather than contact with beings from another dimension of reality, the perceived source of a vision by no means determines whether the message itself is not also true in some deeper sense. Joseph Smith was one of the most complex individuals who ever lived; if he interpreted the deeply felt inner truth of his prophetic mission as an objective experience, that interpretation in no way invalidates the truth of the mission itself. Surely if God works through fallible human agency, then it may well be that he has to operate at times through psychological experiences perceived as literally true. This may be necessary in order to communicate a complex divine message to the limited human agents through whom that message must be transmitted.

Having said all this, it still remains possible that what appears to the modern secular mind to be best understood as psychological truth may, in fact, have been literally truth as well. Joseph Smith possessed remarkable powers of dissociation. It cannot be asserted *a priori* that he did not have literal contact with beings from another dimension of reality. To paraphrase the great psychologist of religion William James, if there were to be such a thing as direct communication with God or with powers from other dimensions of reality beyond our own, perhaps that contact would have to come through individuals who were capable of transcending their normal state of conscious awareness, much in the way that Joseph Smith could.

That there may well be dimensions of consciousness beyond our normal waking state which have a "real" existence is an idea that I believe any religious person must seriously consider. My investigation of so-called extrasensory or paranormal phenomena, as well as the

experiences of some of my friends, has convinced me that such an hypothesis may indeed be the best way of understanding certain types of otherwise puzzling occurrences. Such phenomena might also have been associated with Joseph Smith's visions.

The major problem, however, remains one of seeking to understand the first vision experience in its historical and personal context. If only we could temporarily leave aside the long-standing dogmatic, doctrinal, and polemical approaches, many of the apparent problems associated with the vision could be overcome. For example, the changes in the accounts of the vision over time (which many Latter-day Saints find so disturbing) are really not surprising at all. Even as we look back over our own relatively more mundane life experiences, each of us tends to reinterpret those experiences with more concern for their significance for us in the present than with an attempt to achieve precise blow-by-blow accuracy with respect to particular details. Sometimes, in fact, we consciously or unconsciously exaggerate or modify our accounts when we retell our stories to others in order to make a deeper point more effectively.

This is even more true with regard to dreams or to visions, which can provisionally be described as powerful waking dreams which may serve to transform an individual's life. Biblical prophetic dreams, for example, could be subject to divergent interpretations, even as they were felt to communicate profound truths from powers beyond the purely human. And in Mormonism, dreams and visions were closely and in certain circumstances properly linked, as is suggested by the statement in the Book of Mormon: "I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Ne. 8:2). The significance of religious dreams and visions lies not so much in their specific content as in their meaning. So it happens that in the first vision a figure (or figures) that Joseph Smith saw could be variously identified, even while the power and truth of the experience remained to him undeniable.

It is this wide range of variation in Joseph Smith's first vision accounts that makes them inappropriate as an authoritative basis for specific Mormon doctrinal beliefs such as the nature of the Godhead. For the first vision was not originally a doctrinal experience at all; the doctrinal interpretations of the vision were added later. The only irreducible content of the earliest accounts appears to have been Joseph Smith's deep personal sense of forgiveness from sin and a reaffirmation of faith in Christ. The nature of Joseph's specific mission and the manner in which it was to manifest itself became apparent only in subsequent visions.

Thus there is strong reason to believe that a more important vision for Joseph Smith than his "first vision," was his vision of 21 September 1823, when he stated that the angel Moroni appeared to him. He was told then that he would eventually "translate" a set of golden plates—a "translation" that would become the Book of Mormon. The 1823 vision was the one that was highlighted in the first officially printed account of the origin of the Mormon faith, which appeared serially in the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* in 1834-35 under the authorship of Oliver Cowdery. And it was this 1823 vision that was referred to over and over again in early missionary accounts and writings of the Mormon church. If

the "first vision" by itself was of such overwhelming importance to Joseph Smith and Mormonism, why was it so seldom referred to while he was alive? I would suggest, as an hypothesis for further investigation, that no single vision by itself was the decisive source of Joseph's sense of mission, but rather that the early visions should properly be considered as a unit. If one vision must be singled out, however, it should be the vision of 21 September 1823, not the "first vision," whenever it may have occurred.

The 1823 vision is the most important one, in my opinion, because of its relationship with the "translation" of the Book of Mormon. That document is the heart and soul of Mormonism—an immensely impressive book, no matter what position one may take on its literal historicity. It was the Book of Mormon, combined with the belief in Joseph Smith's role as the latter-day prophet of a new dispensation of God, that was the core of the early Mormon faith. Unlike Joseph's visions, judgment of which ultimately depends on one's prior assessment of his reliability, the Book of Mormon is a tangible product which can be analyzed in its own right. I believe that a vital Latter-day Saint faith in the late twentieth century would do well to downplay the more speculative source of authority provided by the first vision and emphasize the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's other revelations as the starting point for their faith, just as did the first Mormons.

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Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented on 28 August 1982 at the annual Sunstone Theological Symposium in Salt Lake City, Utah. Since this article is primarily a personal statement directed to those already familiar with the basic literature on the first vision, only direct quotations are cited in these notes. The "Bibliographic Essay" which follows identifies some of the key sources so that those who are interested may further investigate the issues raised here. For a discussion of my overall approach toward Mormonism, see Lawrence Foster, "A Personal Odyssey: My Encounter with Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Fall 1983):87-98.

2. Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 56 (April 1956): 270-71.

3. James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Autumn 1966): 29.

4. The paragraphs on John Lyon's experiences are taken from Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 50-51. Used by permission of the copyright holder, Oxford University Press.

Bibliographic Essay

The chief disagreements over Joseph Smith's first vision lie not so much with the evidence itself as with the interpretation of what that evidence means. Since this article has been directed to those who have already given some thought to the first vision and its significance, this bibliographic essay will not be comprehensive but will merely highlight some of the most important primary and secondary sources which may be helpful to those seeking to further develop their own interpretation of the vision. The few direct quotations in the article have been cited above.

The starting point for all serious investigation of Joseph Smith's first vision must be the surviving accounts of the vision, which are presented in an exact transcription by Dean C. Jesse, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 275-94. One other important primary account with bearing on Joseph Smith's early visionary experiences is found in two letters of

Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (December 1834): 41-43 and 1 (February 1835): 77-80. For a pioneering account of the importance that the vision has had for Mormons, see James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 1 (Autumn 1966): 28-45. An important non-Mormon interpretation which analyzes the significance of Joseph Smith's early experiences for Mormon development is Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue* 1 (Spring 1966): 68-88. Strengths and weaknesses of the major polemical positions on the first vision—including those of Fawn M. Brodie, Wesley P. Walters, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Milton Bachman, Richard Bushman, and others—are presented and analyzed in Marvin S. Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue* 15 (Summer 1982): 31-46.

For the larger context of historical, anthropological, and psychological studies of visionary experiences in other times and cultures with which Joseph Smith's visions may be usefully compared, perhaps the best introduction is Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 38 (April 1956): 264-81. Also helpful are Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), and Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1969). An indication of the extraordinary range of writings in this area is Weston La Barre, "Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults: A Bibliographic Essay," *Current Anthropology* 12 (February 1971): 3-44. Four compelling, yet partially conflicting, approaches to the causes and significance of visionary and trance phenomena are found in Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); William Sargant, *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1959); I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971); and William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1972).

An introduction to the nineteenth-century background of Joseph Smith's activities and experiences is presented in two biographical studies with divergent perspectives: Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet*, 2d ed. rev. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971) and Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1977). The larger spiritualist movement, with which Mormonism had certain strong affinities, is conveniently summarized in Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Pocket Books, 1972). The rich Shaker spiritual manifestations between 1837 and 1847, which are strikingly similar in certain respects to some of the milder Mormon visionary experiences of that same period, are described in Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 62-71. Two recent accounts of dissociative or paranormal experiences which have special relevance for understanding Joseph Smith's visions are Robert A. Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1977), and Jule E. Eisenbud, *The World of Ted Serios* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967). An intellectual approach helpful for understanding the concept of multiple dimensions of reality is provided in Edwin Abbott's classic, *Flatland* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

Perhaps the most influential of the modern polemical treatments of the first vision was Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival," *Dialogue* 4 (Spring 1969): 60-81, with Richard L. Bushman's critique and Walter's rejoinder, pp. 82-100. Three important approaches to the first vision are found in volume 7 of the *Journal of Mormon History* (1980). Perspectives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are discussed in Richard P. Howard, "Joseph Smith's First Vision: The RLDS Tradition," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 23-29. A comparative analysis which places the vision within the context of nineteenth-century revivalism and the perspectives of Mircea Eliade and writers in the History of Religions tradition is Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 31-42. And the historical development of Mormon conceptions of the first vision is further elaborated in James B. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43-61. These and many other analyses must be taken into account by those seeking to move beyond mere true-false polemicism toward a deeper understanding of the first vision.

continued from page 3

norm and he is the deviant. This simple exercise in consciousness raising is, I think, effective. It is also akin to the vicarious pronoun switching lesbians and gays have always used in relating to the heterosexual world.

In light of the prospect that it may not be any easier for a homosexual to reverse her or his sexual orientation than for a heterosexual, Rytting asks in another article: "How certain should we be of our doctrinal basis, and are we?" It is a question which I asked two years ago when I first came to terms with my irrefutable romantic ardor for women. Why was it wrong to love someone of my own sex? How could something which made me feel so whole, alive, and happy not be right?

Given the premise that there are reasons for why things are "right" and "wrong," that "commandments" are not dictums doled out to suit the whims of an omnipotent God but, rather, descriptions by a loving, more advanced fellow being of the best road to human happiness, the most plausible theological justification I could find for the doctrine of heterosexuality was that, the Book of Mormon teaches, existence is contingent on opposition and that as a trusted professor of mine suggested, female and male are perhaps the fundamental types of that opposition. Furthermore, as most blatantly evidenced in the creation of children, only in the synergistic union of the sexes are certain material and spiritual dimensions of creative dynamic tension feasible.

Needless to say, this theorizing wasn't much comfort. My searching took me away from BYU to a community in the East known for its large lesbian population where, in the company of women-identified-women, I felt euphorically validated in essential parts of my psyche. It was here that I eventually fell deeply in love with a woman to whom in another context I could have easily, joyously, committed myself "for time and all eternity." However, for no convincing doctrinal reason, nor due to any internalized shame or fear of retribution by a homophobic god (such as being plagued with AIDS), I painfully ended my lover relationship with Carol. For some profound reason I don't understand, but which I attribute to a guiding spiritual voice, I personally could not be at peace as a lesbian. Losing Carol has been devastating. It is still too soon to

know what we can salvage in the context of friendship.

Although I find celibacy as sustaining as white bread, I do feel a degree of inner harmony. I also feel lonely, and I desire to strike through the isolation imposed by the contradictory label "Mormon lesbian" by exploring with others an issue which, in my sense, haunts a good many of our sisters and brothers. I don't doubt that being

celibate in the East allows me, as Rytting, a certain safety in exposure which others in the Church aren't granted.

I appreciate Rytting's articles, and I yearn for more concerned enlightened voices to foster a much needed climate of tolerance, dialogue, and community.

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The N oumenonist

THE ROYAL WE

Paul M. Edwards

I have been thinking about prophets and the royal *we*. This all came about in remembering an old story about the butler in the household of Queen Victoria. On his first day of work he arrived with tea at the queen's bedchamber and asked for entrance. From behind the door came the polite response, "We are using the royal facilities." The butler (apparently concerned with having enough tea) asked, "May I inquire madam, who is in there with you?" Or as the more contemporary among us ask: "You got a mouse in your pocket?"

In our institution, while not intended by the speaker, the use of the royal *we* reaffirms for me a split in the responsibilities and expectations of our leaders. Prophets are called to stand at that point where the vision of their insights confronts the traditions of their times. But in our tradition this prophetic vision is also attached to another set of roles: president, administrator, business manager, personnel director, and ceremonial chieftain. The *we* spoken by the prophet leaders in the Mormon movement—with the possible exception of the Church of Christ-Temple Lot—emphasizes the dual personality that is expected. The royal *we* is not just an affectation of those in positions of extreme authority, nor of the community nature of the positions they hold, but also represents the expressive dualistic nature of their positions. And by way of reflection, of ours.

Not only is there considerable difference between the role of visionary (the one who speaks of the spontaneous) and that of leader (the officer of compromise), there is downright

contradiction. The prophetic role is to see not only those things which are inherent in the nature of our existence, but to see the results of our behavior as well. Thus, this prophet speaks to our times of the implications of our times, to challenge that which has always been done in order to do what must be done to attack the traditions of our times in order that we might respond to more than our times.

On the other hand, this leader serves as the penultimate, if not the ultimate, authority: the manager. For this role the concern must be with tradition and preservation. It arises in the leader's role as fence-mender and as spokesman for the Church members in their community. It requires the leader to walk a thin line between extremes and status quo. Here he must represent those who see the Church as sanctuary. He must walk openly with those more afraid of the future than aware of its challenge. He must somehow protect the Church from the pressure to make it the frontier of human knowledge and activity. He must take a position which does not offend anyone, thus often a position that states nothing.

In the capacity as an organizational administrator, he plans procedures ignoring the mission to break out; he solidifies when the call is to fragment; he seeks position when the need is to convert to the dream we must pursue; he orders and defines when the calling is to the chaos of the world in which we must work. His paradoxical responsibilities require him to smooth the ruffled feathers of the bureaucrat while the world desperately needs someone to jar them out of their current behavior.

Lacking not only prophetic vision, but office and calling as well, I do not know what an unencumbered prophet might

be able to see. But playing "let's pretend" for a moment, I suspect that if the divine wind were to blow away the fogs of institutional regulation, the first light of a dawning revolution might appear. The heart of this revolution is irony, an irony arising from the opposition between reason and spontaneity. Socrates, as we understand him, symbolizes the point at which reason began to be enthroned as a more perfect and more superior approach to life. The idea, as it emerged, began to compromise and replace the spontaneous life. But in doing so it created a duality in our being. For although such spontaneity can be, and was, suppressed, it cannot altogether be removed. The irony of Socrates is that in his discovery we have supplemented a primary movement with a secondary one. And because of it, we find ourselves rationalizing spontaneity in such a way that instead of saying what we think, we pretend to think what we say.

Shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century, rationalism began to uncover, not new types of reason as they expected, but the limitations of reason. Boundaries with the irrational became apparent, and rather than replacing spontaneity, reason was seen to depend upon and be maintained by it.

This, I would suggest, is the potential understanding of the prophetic view of our generation and the challenge to our institutional vision. While still mourning the loss of reason we stand at the opposite point to the mind of Socrates. He hit upon the power and direction of reason; we have found the first light of new discovery in the vitality of the spontaneous.

This is not, I trust you understand, some return to primevalism, not yet another stanza to the melody "The Good Old Days." Rather it is the realization that extremes of reason—and those pragmatic wolves living in the sheep's coat of reason—must be reduced to their proper rank. It does not deny reason; it simply recognizes that contemporary persons mistrust it and ridicule its pretensions to absolute sovereignty. The mission of the age is the conversion from the assumption of reasoned tradition (and traditional reason) to the inclusion of the revolutionary aspects of this irony.

The irony here is that our church has become unified into systems, and the systems designed to preserve them have become their greatest challenge. We find now not only an affirmation for the taste of certain things, but the determination to have distaste for others. It is a frame of mind which sees both the need for and the distrust of

progress. This revolution now at its dawning is not, as are most, against the abuses of our system, but against usage or custom, or tradition that does not speak, of methods that do not effect, of efforts that do not produce. This peculiar and unmistakable disposition of mind is in an infantile stage. But so is its counterpart. For the frame of wisdom of those dominated by ancestral ideas and held in time through one of the many forms of historical malnutrition are also infantile. The first is a youth of vitality and the second of sterility.

The irony is further represented in the almost unfathomable confrontation that exists in our expectations for our leaders. The institutions' traditionalist mind is to be found living in obedience to the status quo, precisely because it is established and possesses an almost invulnerable prestige of "having always been." When faced with the challenge of

meaning and feeling as epistemological and action tools, it never seems to occur to us to reform the structure of the accepted tradition.

The irony produces its own call to take up the service of the ideas of change. The call is to respond to the spontaneity and its product: the radical reappraisal of the relationship between life and ideas, between being and becoming. Of course it must preserve true continuity with the past, for only by tying in with what persons have known and accepted can it be accepted. But the answer must also take sufficient account of new factors that now render the old answers and old ways inapplicable. And in the process there must be someone who remains sensitively aware of the essential humanness in every position that humans take, and to respond to it. Such a person is, and will be, prophetic rather than presidential.

P aradoxes and Perplexities

FOREVER FRIENDS

Marvin Rytting

About ten years ago, I was wandering through the more sordid parts of the library when my eyes—and imagination—were captured by the words *Nun, Witch, Playmate* standing together in close proximity. I was intrigued by the juxtaposition of three so seemingly dissimilar roles and curious about what the nun, the witch, and the playmate had in common. I was pleasantly surprised to discover, in this oddly titled book by Herbert Richardson, an insightful discussion of Mormon theology. I have learned to grasp for the rare nuggets of thought about Mormon theology wherever I can find them and this one was for me a true gem—a pearl of great price. It gave me a new appreciation of the power of Joseph Smith's teachings and provided a new perspective on the nature of eternal marriage.

Richardson treats sexual mores as a function of the evolution of consciousness. He suggests that Joseph Smith's concept of celestial marriage is based upon an expanded consciousness which creates new possibilities for intimate relationships. He points out that the Prophet Joseph taught that a relationship between two unique persons cannot be

dissolved, but must itself be a spiritual reality. Thus, the eternal nature of the marital and sexual union is a direct expression of our awareness of ourselves as eternally unique spiritual beings.

The implications of this doctrine, however, have been dissipated and largely lost by a confusion about the meaning of *eternal*, particularly between two distinct uses of the term. When *eternal* is used in the scriptures, it does not always refer to the concept of lasting forever, but often is an adjective synonymous with the possessive *God's* (because God is eternal). Thus, eternal life does not refer to living forever but to living as a God or living God's life. Likewise, scriptural references to eternal punishment are not to be interpreted as meaning that the punishment will last forever. Eternal punishment is God's punishment (D&C 19:6-12). Likewise, I would argue, eternal marriage does not mean that the marriage will last forever. Eternal marriage is God's marriage or a marriage like unto God's. It would be less confusing if we stopped using *eternal* in this context and replaced it with *celestial*. Thus we should talk about celestial life and celestial marriage.

One characteristic of eternal existence

is that it is universal—it applies to everybody. This is the one thing about which there is no choice. The question is not “to be or not to be.” I cannot choose not to be. I am. I always have been. I always shall be. My eternal existence is a given—backwards and forwards. Another important characteristic of my eternal existence is that I am unique: I am an individual and I am conscious of myself as a separate identity. I always have been and always shall be unique and individual. A corollary of this premise is that my eternal existence has a continuity; I am eternally the same person. There will be no miraculous changes in my personality when I die. I shall continue to have the same strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, friends and enemies.

The doctrine of eternal marriage is a logical extension of our nonnegotiable, unique, and continuous eternal existence. I suggest, however, that the doctrine as we typically discuss it is only part of the story. Just as with eternal life and eternal punishment, eternal marriage is marriage after the order of God and we need to make a clear distinction between this celestial marriage and the more general category of eternal relationships. We are taught that only celestial or temple marriages will be held together by eternal covenants and that only by entering into this new and everlasting covenant can we attain the fullness of exaltation and have eternal increase. It is not inherent in this doctrine, however, that temple marriages will be the only eternal relationships. Couples may not be legally married in the terrestrial kingdom, but who is to say that they cannot live together forever?

The logic of eternal existence implies that if you and I are unique and eternal beings, our relationship *must* also be unique and eternal, no matter what the nature of it is. Any significant relationship which I establish here with another eternal individual will have an eternally meaningful existence commensurate with the level of commitment established here. If we hate each other here, we should expect to hate each other there. If we are friends here, our friendship should be eternal. If my personality is indeed continuous across the experience of death, then I expect to enjoy being with the same people in eternity whose company I seek out now. I shall want to have not only the same family ties, but also the same circle of friends.

We have not thought through the concept of eternal relationships very

clearly and consequently our images of the afterlife are distorted.

Typically, we picture a romantic version of the nuclear family for those of us with temple marriages. This does not make sense, however. Even though my children are sealed to me, I do not expect them to live with me forever, nor do I expect to live with my parents forever. In the ideal vision, my children will have established their own families, just as their children will and as my wife and I have. Thus we are really talking about an extended family where we may get together for occasional family reunions. In terms of actual interpersonal relationships, the consequences of being sealed to parents and children are unclear.

The image really becomes one of us, as husband and wife, starting a new family of spirit children with whom to populate the worlds that we are going to create as gods. As exciting as that sounds, however, I am not sure that I want to do it full-time for eternity. Can I not get time off to play racquetball or visit with friends? As much as I love my wife, I am not sure that I want to spend all of my time—I mean my eternity—associating only with her. Just as I enjoy being with many people during this life, I suspect that I shall want to spend time with many friends in eternity.

We focus so much on the goal of godhood that we have not developed any vision of what eternity will be like for those of us who do not become gods. We do have the infamous “ministering angel” image but we do not really have a clear picture of what ministering angels do with their time (or their eternity). In the lower realms of the celestial kingdom, will we be forbidden to talk to each other? It seems fairly clear that we shall not be involved in eternal pregnancy, but what about our interpersonal life? Again, I suspect that we shall continue to have the same type of friendships that we have here.

We have no vision at all about interpersonal life in the terrestrial or celestial kingdoms. Are the terrestrials going to sit around in enforced solitude? If we can associate with others there, are we not likely to be involved with those people whom we enjoy here? I can see no justification at all for assuming that if we have spent fifty years living together happily on earth, we shall be prevented from associating with each other—and loving each other—in the terrestrial kingdom. It simply does not fit with a logical Mormon concept of eternal existence.

If we take the concept seriously that we are all eternally existent as unique individuals with continuity of our identity and that our existence is a spiritual reality, the logical conclusion is that *every* relationship established by two such spiritual beings has an eternal existence which is as real as we are. I suggest that eternal relationships—within and beyond the family—are a given and we shall all have them.

If all of this is true—if all relationships are indeed eternal—what is the significance of the temple sealing ordinances, especially marriage? Is marriage for time and all eternity symbolic of the inherent reality of the eternal nature of all relationships or is it a necessary ritual which will determine the quality of our interpersonal eternity? I suspect that it is some combination of the two, but I have no way of knowing exactly where on the continuum the true answer falls. It is largely irrelevant anyway. Even if the marriage ceremony is only symbolic, it is a very important symbol and should be valued and performed as if it were literal. And even if it is a literal requirement for exaltation, I suggest that it affects only the quality or nature of our relationship and not its eternal existence.

This view of eternity suggests that our typical approach to temple marriage is distorted. We often present (especially to the youth) a very romantic argument for temple marriage wherein the reason to be married in the temple is to be together forever. We ought to put more emphasis upon the nature of celestial marriage as a path to exaltation.

We also ought to pay more attention to relationships other than the marital one. We need to recognize that marriage might not be the appropriate model for everybody and definitely not for every relationship. We should look for other images of acceptable eternal relationships for those for whom the marital one might not fit. Even for those who have marriage as a primary relationship, we ought to recognize the importance of the other relationships in life. We need to devote more energy to friendships and treat them as eternally significant. We should make room for both singleness and multiple relationships as acceptable models for time and eternity. We need to go beyond our constricted perspective and be true to the expanded consciousness of Joseph Smith’s vision of eternity.

Law of the Land

THE SUPREME COURT AND THE RELIGION CLAUSES, 1982-83 TERM

Jay S. Bybee

Each year the Supreme Court reviews decisions in thousands of cases which have been appealed, and in each case the appellant or petitioner characterizes his case in the most unique way possible in order to convince the Court that a significant error has been committed and that the case is worthy of review. From these thousands of cases the Court will agree to hear only a few cases in which interpretation of federal statutes or of the U.S. Constitution is implicated. In the most recent Supreme Court term, which ended in July, the Court heard arguments in and decided over 125 cases—a taxing output for the Supreme Court as this number does not even include the cases in which the Supreme Court took some action such as summarily disposing of the case (by reversing or affirming) or vacating or remanding the case for further consideration.

Aside from representing a prodigious output from the Court, the cases decided this term include some very important decisions. I think that, without question, the most important decision rendered this term is the *Chadha* case in which the Court struck down the legislative veto in the Immigration and Nationality Act—and with it, legislative vetoes in almost two-hundred other acts. Also significant were decisions in three abortion cases (*Simopoulos*, *City of Akron*, and *Planned Parenthood*) upholding the right to abort, and a case holding that the use of sex-based mortality tables in determining insurance rates for men and women is unlawful discrimination (*Norris*).

The term, however, did not see a major case involving the religion clauses of the First Amendment. That is not to say that the Court decided no cases implicating the First Amendment which were not important or which did not make the headlines. In fact the term had both.

In *Bob Jones University v. United States*, BJU challenged the decision of the IRS

to take away the university's tax exemption because the university maintained a policy against interracial dating and marriage. The case attracted a good deal of attention because of the flip-flop position of the Reagan administration. In an eight-to-one decision written by Chief Justice Burger, the Court held that the IRS had the power to take away BJU's tax exemption and that this power was not limited because the university had based its policy on the sincerely held belief that the Bible prohibits intermarrying of the races. With regard to the university's claim that the IRS policy infringed its right to free exercise of religion, the majority found that the government's interest in eradicating discrimination based on race "substantially outweighs whatever burden denial of tax benefits places on petitioners' exercise of their religious beliefs." The lone dissenter, Justice Rehnquist, did not dispute the government interest at stake, but believed that Congress simply had not authorized the IRS to deny tax exempt status to institutions practicing racial discrimination.

A second case, *Larkin v. Grendel's Den, Inc.*, was also decided by an eight-to-one vote with Burger writing the decision and Rehnquist dissenting. In *Larkin* the Court considered the constitutionality of a Massachusetts statute which gave churches and schools the power to veto liquor license applications for establishments within five hundred feet of the church or school. The majority held that such a statute was not constitutional. The majority found that the state's grant of power to the churches could be employed for numerous purposes—including to further the religious goals of the church. Thus, "the mere appearance of a joint exercise of legislative authority by Church and State provides a significant symbolic benefit to religion in the minds of some by reason of the power conferred." In dissent, Justice Rehnquist commented that, just as hard cases make bad law, so "silly cases" make bad law. He then pointed out that Massachusetts could simply prohibit the granting of a liquor license to any establishment

constructed within five hundred feet of a church. All Massachusetts had done was not make the prohibition absolute by giving the churches the power to object. Thus the legislature had enacted a less restrictive measure than they constitutionally could have: "The flat ban," Rehnquist observed, "which the majority concedes is valid, is more protective of churches and more restrictive of liquor sales than the present [statute]."

Perhaps the least analytical case was—literally—a sentimental favorite. In *Marsh v. Chambers*, the Court considered whether the Nebraska legislature may employ a chaplain without violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. In a six-to-three decision, again authored by Chief Justice Burger, the Court held it may. The majority found that the practice of employing a chaplain is so "deeply embedded" in the tradition of the United States and "has coexisted with the principles of disestablishment and religious freedom" for so long that it must be a "tolerable acknowledgment of beliefs widely held among the people of this country." The Court further noted that "[t]he content of the prayer is not of concern to judges where, as here, there is no indication that the prayer opportunity has been exploited to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other, faith or belief." In a carefully worded opinion, Justice Brennan, joined by Justice Marshall, dissented on the grounds that the majority had failed to rely on the analysis traditionally used by the Court. The dissenters stated that, instead, the majority had reasoned that because the founding fathers had chaplains and they enacted the First Amendment, there could be no conflict. The dissenters further stated that the Constitution is not a static document and that the majority ignored the recent decisions to carve out an exception to the holdings of the Court. In a separate dissent, Justice Stevens found that the difficulty with this particular case was that the Nebraska legislature had employed the same Presbyterian minister for sixteen years, thus constituting the preference of one particular denomination over another. This, he implied, would clearly violate the intent of the authors of the Constitution.

Finally, in an obscure but important decision, the Court held five-to-four that Minnesota may allow its taxpayers to deduct certain expenses incurred in educating their children even if those expenses are in connection with a nonpublic, sectarian

school. In *Mueller v. Allen*, Justice Rehnquist, writing for himself, Chief Justice Burger, and Justices White, Powell, and O'Connor, decided that the statute satisfied the traditional analysis applied to claims of government establishment of religion. This analysis consists of a three-part test which asks (1) does the law in question have a secular purpose? (2) does the law advance sectarian beliefs? and (3) does the law promote excessive government entanglement with religion? In the *Mueller v. Allen* case, the five justices concluded first that the law did have a secular purpose because it promoted education. Second, the law did not advance the sectarian beliefs of the schools because the deduction was limited to educational expenses. Third, they decided that the statute did not foster "excessive government entanglement with religion." In a vigorous dissent by Justice Marshall, who was joined by Justices Brennan, Blackmun, and Stevens, the minority protested that the effect of the statute was "unmistakably to provide financial support for nonpublic, sectarian institutions." The fact that the deduction was allowed for educational items such as tuition, books, and supplies did not account for the fact that the state was individually subsidizing sectarian schools. "Secular textbooks, like other secular instructional materials, contribute to the religious mission of the parochial schools that use those books." Justice Marshall said the Court's decision violated the principle that "a State may provide no financial support whatsoever to promote religion."

These four cases are hardly contiguous strands of a seamless web. The *Bob Jones* case, for all of its publicity, may not be a particularly important case from a First Amendment standpoint. The Court took such an unsympathetic view of the university's policy because it was race-related that the Court did not explore under what circumstances the assertion of a sincerely held religious belief might serve as a defense to popular government action; the importance of the case is therefore not clear. It would have been a tougher case if the university's policy had involved prohibitions on abortion or contraception, but the decision, nevertheless, may well authorize the widespread use of tax incentives to shape administration or congressional policy.

The *Larkin* case is also interesting but is not a surprising or trailblazing case. Because the statute involved is somewhat unusual the case is a fairly

narrow precedent, and I do not believe that *Larkin* will be regarded as a landmark decision.

On the other hand, I am somewhat surprised by the *Marsh* and *Mueller* cases. *Marsh* is disturbing because the majority plainly ignored the Court's three-part test and simply deferred to tradition. The realists among us will no doubt say that it was a politically expedient decision: Since the House of Representatives and the Senate have also employed chaplains and still begin each day with an invocation, the decision served the political end of

avoiding future conflicts with coordinate branches of government.

The *Mueller* decision is also problematic because, although the majority used the Court's three-part test, the analysis is noticeably weak. *Mueller* may signal some kind of retreat from the hard line taken in previous sectarian education cases. In any event, it is an open invitation to the states to grant tax deductions to parents with children in religious-sponsored schools, and may have the most immediate impact of the four cases decided this term.

J. Golden Nuggets

MISSIONARY DAYS

James N. Kimball

Uncle Golden served two missions in the southern states—first as an elder and then as mission president. He said during both experiences he encountered tremendous antagonism toward the Church. As an elder, it came primarily from the ministers of religion and later as a mission president from the Ku Klux Klan. He often said, "They didn't want to hear about the restored gospel; all they wanted to hear about was the Mountain Meadows Massacre and polygamy and sometimes I got so damn mad I told them about both."

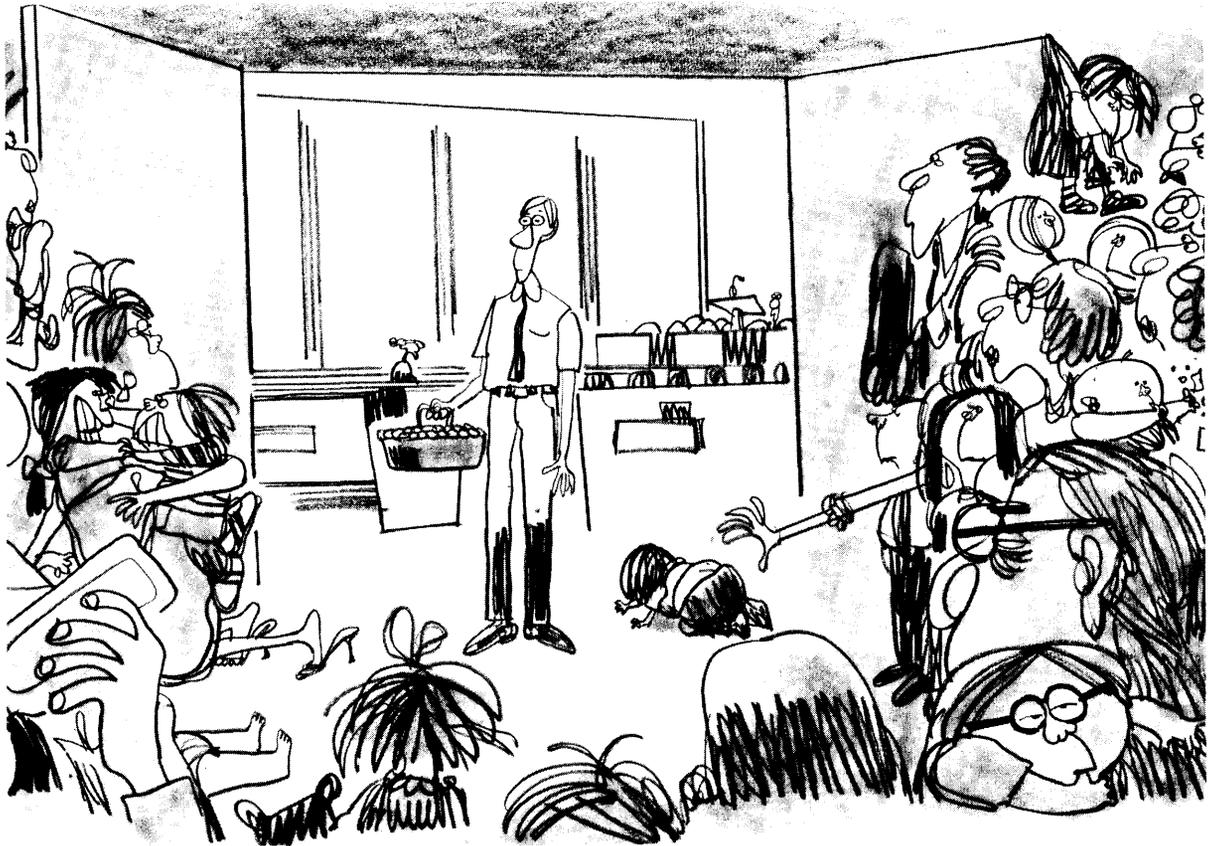
Once in downtown Chattanooga he recognized a minister who had been particularly antagonistic toward the Mormons. He approached young Golden and his companion on the street. As he got within speaking distance he said, "Good morning you sons of the devil." Golden Kimball tipped his hat and said, "Good morning, father."

As a mission president he stated in his diary that he debated this same man. The minister made much of the fact that all the Mormons were going to hell. At one point in the debate he pointed to Uncle Golden and said, "That man when he dies is going straight to hell." When it came Golden's turn to speak he stood before the minister's congregation and said, "Your minister has made much of the fact that all of the Mormons are going to hell. I'll tell you something. I would rather be a Mormon going to hell than not be a Mormon and not know where the hell I'm going."

Golden traveled into the backwoods of Arkansas to attend a meeting with the Saints. According to his account, they met in an abandoned Baptist church. When he arrived for the meeting there was a great mob surrounding the small chapel. Golden said that he knew he could anticipate tarring and feathering, whipping, or even a shooting. He said he got off his horse and walked straight through the crowd and no one stopped him until he got to the door where several men were blocking his entry. One of them had a knife in his hand and the other two were carrying pistols. He said he looked them straight in the face and said, "I am here to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to my fellow Saints. Now get the hell out of the way." He pushed his way through and began the sermon. One of the three men that he had confronted stood back from the door and fired a volley of shots into the chapel. Golden left the pulpit, threw open the door, grabbed the man by the collar and said, "You keep that up, you son of a bitch, and you are going to kill somebody." Golden turned and walked back in and slammed the door. He said in his diary that the crowd had dispersed by the time the meeting was over.

Reflecting on his days as an elder, Golden made the following comment at a stake conference in Canada: "When I went out as an elder I was a complete ignoramus. I'll tell you, brothers and sisters, the gospel must be true; otherwise ignoramus, greenhorn missionaries like me and others would have ruined it a long time ago."

SUNDAY'S FOYER



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