

MORMON  
EXPERIENCE  
SCHOLARSHIP  
ISSUES & ART

# SUNSTONE

## Center Insert

Preliminary Program  
**2004 SALT LAKE  
SUNSTONE  
SYMPOSIUM**

**William D. Russell,  
Molly McLellan  
Bennion, and  
Mack C. Stirling**  
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essay contest winner  
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July 2004—\$5.95

*IS THERE A PLACE  
FOR HEAVENLY MOTHER  
IN MORMON THEOLOGY?*

*AN INVESTIGATION INTO DISCOURSES OF POWER*

*By Margaret Merrill Toscano*



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# SUNSTONE

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## BLUE-RIBBON FEAST

I THINK I HAVE ALMOST EVERY ISSUE of SUNSTONE. I have not read every article, but of all that I have read, John-Charles Duffy's "Defending the Kingdom, Rethinking the Faith" takes the blue ribbon. It is hard to believe that the author is just starting his doctoral work. If I were on his committee, I might suggest that he add a bibliography as long as his notes, and turn the article in as his dissertation.

Duffy exhaustively covers the intellectual landscape with a very balanced assessment. All the players are there: anti-intellectuals like Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert Millet, and Monte Nyman at BYU; orthodox scholars like Jack Welch, John Sorenson, and Noel Reynolds of the widely respected FARMS; all the pro-intellectual but contentious apologists, like Louis Midgley and Daniel Peterson; and many of the revisionists, those who opt for natural rather than spiritual explanations. After carefully reading the article, any interested reader has to know there has been a feast.

But from this reader's point of view, Duffy makes his greatest contribution when he cites Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn makes the convincing point that all scholars, of whatever bent, are driven by paradigms in their quest for the holy Grail. It's never a simple choice between "methods leading to conclusions" or "conclusions leading to methods."

I heartily commend Duffy for his comprehensive and thoughtful portrayal of the range of Mormon apologetics and for his preference for non-contentious scholarship. SUNSTONE should also be commended for its good judgment.

STANFORD CAZIER

Logan, Utah

## MODEL SCHOLARSHIP

BRAVO TO JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY and to SUNSTONE for the outstanding article, "Defending the Kingdom, Rethinking the Faith: How Apologetics Is Reshaping Mormon Orthodoxy" (May 2004). It is simply splendid: carefully researched, meticulously documented, thoughtfully and insightfully organized, a wonderful example of out-of-the-box thinking that helped me understand some of the perplexing and troubling trends of the last fifteen years.

A great contribution is Duffy's more so-

phisticated and nuanced definitions of intellectualism, apologetics, and orthodoxy, providing greater clarity in what has too often been presented as uncomplicated but brutal polarization. An even greater contribution is how eloquently and consistently it models courtesy and respect, even when dealing with sensitive and emotional topics. I hope that this same tone can be maintained as the dialogue continues.

LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON

Salt Lake City, Utah

## FORCED TYPOLOGY

I READ WITH INTEREST JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY's recent article on the intellectual influence of FARMS and FARMS-related scholars. (SUNSTONE, May, 2004). I am flattered, puzzled, and amused, however, to find that something I wrote is quoted along with statements from Joseph Fielding McConkie as an example of "orthodox anti-intellectualism" (page 30, note 80). I can certainly understand Duffy's need to produce footnotes to fill out his chosen typology, but I find his citation to my article a little forced. While I point out that scholarly activity can pose spiritual dangers, I then go out of my way to insist that this is not a good reason for abandoning scholarly tools, and the remainder of my article criticizes Mormon scholars for being insufficiently intellectual in their use of Mormonism.

In short, Duffy's citation was an a-contextual proof text worthy of . . . orthodox anti-intellectualism.

NATHAN OMAN

Little Rock, Arkansas

## CLIMBING TOGETHER

THANK YOU FOR PUBLISHING THE "Braving The Borderlands" columns by D. Jeff Burton. I believe Jeff's insight serves as a valuable guide for those who desire to move into new levels of spiritual development. A good example is Jeff's wise and sensitive council to "Jessica" (SUNSTONE, March 2004), helping her move smoothly through some very turbulent spots in her strained marriage.

Based on the descriptions at the beginning of each Borderlands column, I believe I would be considered a "core" Church member, although I believe I would have been considered a "borderlander" during much of the time I spent in the Vietnam conflict and

shortly after. With this in mind, may I offer some observations and ideas from a “core” perspective that may be of help to those who consider themselves “borderlanders”?

Imagine a mountain. One side is darker because it is on the side away from the sunlight; the climb is gradual. The other side is in the sunlight, and the climb is steep with jagged rocks. There are a number of climbers who attempt it from the gradual, shaded side, and a number who venture toward and sometimes into the lighter side, led by chosen guides. All are climbers; all are moving toward the top.

All fellow climbers have challenges in their journey, and all have unique positions on the mountain. Here are a few:

- **Committed Climber:** Those who have chosen to move toward the lighted side of the climb, who try to reach out with love, patience, and understanding to other climbers who are in need of help.

- **Guide Climber:** Those who have had some experience in climbing, who have been specifically chosen to lovingly help the others safely up the mountain.

- **Cautious Climber:** Those who are also reaching out to help with love but stay in the shade of the mountain, moving with caution toward the lighted side of the climb.

In my view, most of those who fit Jeff’s “borderlander” description would fit the “cautious climber” in my analogy. They sometimes feel they are a burden to those ahead in the climb, and often feel persecuted, unimportant, disadvantaged, unheard, unseen, lonely, a threat, separate, and unacceptable. This is truly a difficult position in the climb. Also, from their position in the shade, they often view those in “committed climber” and “guide climber” positions as insensitive toward their efforts.

May I offer a few suggestions for those who feel this way?

- Begin to acknowledge yourself as a valuable fellow climber in a courageous place on the path to the top.

- Begin to believe that you are a fellow climber with the others, someone who is loved and cared about and greatly needed by all the other climbers for the success of everyone in the journey to the top.

- Most important, begin to develop a new perspective of yourself as a fellow follower of Christ, moving ever closer and closer to his light, regardless of any past failings or any temporary alternative viewpoints.

This new perspective of yourself may require you to leave old and seemingly secure ideas behind in the climb. As you let go of the branches you’re used to holding onto,

you may even feel like you’re falling down the mountain. But remember that the presence of more light will help you place your feet onto greater paths of safety. You will notice you have more courage than ever before, more understanding about yourself and your fellow climbers. We all have unique positions in this wonderful earthly climb we’re making.

May all of us reach the top together.

JON BURTON  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## IT’S ME, IT’S MY DAUGHTER

**E**VEN TWO MONTHS AFTER READING it, I find myself still reflecting on the sad statement of Orson Scott Card in the article on the debate over gay marriage (SUNSTONE, March 2004): “Any homosexual man who can persuade a woman to take him as her husband can avail himself of all the rights of husbandhood under the law.” And I must respond on behalf of the many thousands of LDS women, including myself and my daughter, who have been the willing, naive sacrifices laid on the altar of false hope built by our church teachings, policies, and the encouragement and even promises of well-meaning but misguided LDS therapists, bishops, stake presidents, and even General Authorities.

As I said to my good friend and neighbor and home teacher and former bishop, as he came around a few years ago canvassing for California’s “Protection of Marriage” initia-

tive: “David, the deal is this—it’s not that the brethren don’t want gay men to marry. It’s just that they want them to marry *me*, and they want them to marry *my daughter*, and that’s not okay with me.”

It ought not to be okay with any of us. Seldom does one of these marriages “work” with any amount of satisfaction, and most of them end in enormous pain.

Scott, would you really want one of your own daughters to be persuaded into marriage by one of our sweet, earnest, kind, talented, devoted but homosexual returned missionary men?

CAROL LYNN PEARSON  
Walnut Creek, California

## LOOK CLOSER

**I**N “A MALAY SITE FOR BOOK OF Mormon Events,” (SUNSTONE, March 2003), Dr. Ralph Olsen, in his search “for a more suitable location” for the Book of Mormon’s geographic setting, identifies the following possible correlations to Book of Mormon sites from the Malay Peninsula (possible Book of Mormon site in parenthesis): *Tenasserim* (Teancum), *Manoron* (Moron), *Hill Maw* (Hill Ramah), *Lenya* (Lemuel), *Marang* (Moroni), *Raman* (Laman), *Baharu* (Bountiful), *Puteh* (Mulek), *Tanah Merah* (Zarahemla), *Marang* (Moroni), *Tahan* (Manti), *Kuantan* (Morianon), *Tapeh* (Antiparah), *Maran* (Moroni), *Malim* (Mormon), *Pilah* (Nephi).

Now consider another set of geographic



*I'm sorry, but the Handbook is very clear about brass instruments!*

locations with similarities to Book of Mormon sites: *St. Agathe* (Ogath), *Alma* (Alma), *Angola* (Angola), *Antrim* (Antum), *Antioch* (Anti-Anti), *Boaz* (Boaz), *Conner* (Comner), *St. Ephrem* (Ephraim, Hill), *Hellam* (Helam), *Jacobsburg* (Jacobugath), *Jordan* (Jordan), *Jerusalem* (Jerusalem), *Kish-kiminetas* (Kishkumen), *Lehigh* (Lehi), *Mantua* (Manti), *Monroe* (Moroni), *Minoa* (Minon), *Moraviantown* (Morianton), *Morin* (Moron), *Noah* (Land of Noah), *Oneida* (Onidah), *Oneida Castle* (Onidah Hill), *Omer* (Omner), *Rama* (Ramah), *Ripple Lake* (Waters of Ripliancum), *Sodom* (Sidom), *Shiloh* (Shilom), *lands of the Minonion* (Land of Minon), *Tenecum/Tecumsah* (Teancum).

The location for these others? The greater Palmyra area (see Vernal Holley, *Book of Mormon Authorship*, 3rd ed. [Roy, Utah: self-published, 1992], 54–64; available online at <http://www.solomonspalding.com/docs2/2001vern.htm>). The narrow neck of land lies between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and the above sites, within a five-hundred-mile radius of Palmyra. The sites in Canada correspond with those in “the land northward,” and U.S. sites correspond with those in “the land southward.”

Perhaps Olsen and others looking for the elusive Book of Mormon setting could consider the the area in which the Book of Mormon was translated.

CLAIR BARRUS  
*Draper, Utah*

## ANOTHER WITNESS

I CONTINUE TO BE ALARMED BY THE number of Latter-day Saints, and SUNSTONE subscribers, who have a hard time believing or who don't believe at all in the actual authenticity of the Book of Mormon. They seem to believe that the Book of Mormon is purely symbolic or metaphorical and not an actual record of real events and real people.

While I can't prove to them or force them to believe that the Book of Mormon is everything it claims to be, I would like to share my personal testimony of the Book of Mormon. It has truly changed my life, brought me closer to our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, and helped me to understand their ways better. Everything that we need to be able to return to them is to be had in this Church. Last, I know that others who are searching to know the truth of the Book of Mormon can indeed come to that knowledge for themselves, as I and millions of others have.

BENJAMIN H. LAYMAN  
*Louisville, Colorado*

## OUT OF THE QUESTION

In his response to my critique of his SUNSTONE essay on DNA and the Book of Mormon (letters, SUNSTONE, May 2004), Trent Stephens revisits his discussion of the four possible approaches to the problem of DNA and the Book of Mormon: (1) reject the Book of Mormon because of the data; (2) reject the data; (3) wait for more data; and (4) reinterpret the Book of Mormon in light of the data. Casting himself as a reasonable compromiser, he portrays me as intolerant and close-minded. Stephens grouches, “My options three and four are apparently out of the question [for Vogel].” Yes, and let me explain why.

*Proposition Three.* There is nothing wrong with a “wait-and-see attitude” as long as you are a skeptic on the outside waiting for proof of the Book of Mormon's historicity; but if a believer adopts a “wait-and-see attitude,” he is certain never to lose his faith since science cannot prove a negative. Ultimately, the burden of proof is on believers.

But what kind of proof? Discovery of Jewish DNA would not exonerate the Book of Mormon, as Stephens postulates, since Joseph Smith could have gotten the answer right for the wrong reasons. (He could have borrowed the idea of the Hebrew origin of the Indians from contemporaries such as Ethan Smith.) What is needed is the discovery of something specific to the Book of Mormon. Stephens doubts that this will ever happen, arguing that “had the Book of Mormon story been verified by scientific data, such verification would have placed the [book] in a class by itself relative to other religious texts.” Not so. Many places mentioned in the Bible have been located. For example, Jericho was one of the first to be discovered and excavated in the first decade of the twentieth century. So it can be done.

*Proposition Four.* Stephens suggests that we “reinterpret Book of Mormon or Biblical texts in light of scientific data.” There is another side to that coin, however, which Stephens and other apologists should consider. It is the fallacy of presentism, or the attempt to update scripture to conform to present scientific understanding. For example, some modern readers try to read Genesis within the context of evolution. However, Genesis is best understood on its own terms, as a poetic reflection of ancient cosmology.

Similarly, the Book of Mormon makes perfect sense as a reflection of the prevailing belief in Joseph Smith's day that the earthen mounds and ruins of North, Central, and

South America were constructed anciently by a single race of white-skinned, Christian agriculturalists who were destroyed by the Indians in the Great Lakes Region prior to discovery by Europeans. Apologists who ignore this nineteenth-century setting and attempt to update the Book of Mormon by espousing a limited geography and limited population are guilty of presentism.

As for testimony: spiritual experience is subjective and therefore cannot resolve historical questions. Nor can it override the Book of Mormon's anachronisms, compensate for the lack of physical evidence, or cause us to uncritically accept ad hoc apologetic hypotheses. Regarding the degree to which Stephens says he is confident about his “testimony,” I'll take “very,” as opposed to the usual “absolute” or “without doubt,” as a sign of progress.

DAN VOGEL  
*Westerville, Ohio*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

## SILENCES

By Dan Wotherspoon



WELCOME HOME! *We are pleased beyond words to welcome Eric Jones back following a ten-month tour with his National Guard unit in northern Afghanistan. Many readers will know Eric as SUNSTONE managing editor from 1996 to 2000. Since leaving that post, Eric's path has been filled with interesting twists in school, career, and his personal life, but through it all, he's remained a close friend, always willing to help a struggling new editor think and write more clearly and to do whatever is necessary to help our magazine and symposiums run smoothly. Law school is up next for G.I. Jones.*

*Interestingly, even before we knew the connection, we were busily preparing to publish the short story, "Desperation," by Ethan Skarstedt, who served for a time with Eric's unit in Afghanistan.*

*Eric and Ethan: We're very happy you're home—safe and in good health.  
May it be so for all our troops.*

HERE IT IS—our third issue within five months, and this one containing a symposium program to boot! We're exhausted around here, but extremely happy. The enthusiastic responses to our last few issues and to the symposium Call for Papers have been very gratifying. We're rolling; please keep feeding the momentum. Your calls, letters, submissions and proposals, praise and disagreements, dollars and suggestions, all help so much!

As is usually the case, it is only as we near the end of each magazine and symposium cycle that we are able to begin to look with any kind of wide-angle lens at the creation that has grown up under our weary, carpal-tunnel-plagued hands. Sometimes we have a good sense ahead of time about a particular magazine's or symposium's themes, moods, and potential cross-fertilizations, but because each magazine and symposium is put together from individual pieces, we're *always* surprised by what we notice after they're nearly completed.

What, then, of this creation? If this magazine and program could speak, what might they say?

I THINK I found something of what I'd been sensing about this issue and the upcoming symposium during the Simon

and Garfunkel concert I attended two nights ago. I had been able to see S&G in Sacramento last November, so my experience at this concert was less cluttered with excitement and thoughts of "I hope they perform this," and became more about the songs themselves, their lyrics and the times in which they were born. (During their second encore, Paul Simon quipped, "Here's an old song. Come to think of it; these are *all* old songs!") And though I've known every word and have understood something of its importance since we studied it as poetry in one of my high school courses, through the idiosyncrasies of personal taste, "The Sound of Silence" hasn't ranked much higher than seventh or eighth on my S&G favorites list. Until this past Tuesday.

I think it was because of the feelings I had been processing these final two weeks, especially my own complex emotions regarding the divine feminine, that during their performance, I finally caught something of a glimpse of the song's true power, and the multivalence of the metaphor of "silence."

*And in the naked light I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more.  
People talking without speaking,  
People hearing without listening,  
People writing songs that voices never share*

*And no one dare  
Disturb the sound of silence.*

Daring to "disturb the sound of silence." Is this what Margaret Toscano is doing in her cover article that rekindles the discussion of Heavenly Mother and the deafening silence that echoes in the hearts of those who look for but can only vaguely sense her presence? Was that what Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* did and what Margaret Starbird will do as she teaches a workshop and opens the Salt Lake symposium calling for Magdalene, the lost bride? Is this what Bill Russell, Molly Bennion, and Mack Stirling are doing in the magazine as they squarely face the complexities of scriptural inconsistency, immorality, and violence? Is this what Clifton Jolley will be doing at the symposium as he shares the matters of his heart with us after more than a decade away from LDS forums?

But is silence always something to be avoided? The shadow always to be feared? "Hello, Darkness, my old friend. . . ." Paul Simon's lyric hints that the very light that reveals the truth of the silence has a flip side—as does Maxine Hanks's short magazine essay with its sensitivity to the hidden, the unconscious, and the ignored as essential to balance and wholeness. When I've been able to steal a few minutes from the fray, I've been reading and thoroughly enjoying Heidi Hart's memoir, *Grace Notes*, which shares her journey toward the awakening of her voice through the silent praxis of Quaker meditation. In music, the silence *between* the notes, Heidi reminds us, is just as important as is the melody. We're very excited Heidi will sing for us during the Wednesday night opening session (11 August) and will then share some of her experiences with us the following morning.

WHAT might this magazine and symposium program say? I'm not certain which voices you'll hear the loudest, or how the silences will strike your ear.

This magazine and program have taken me to both new and old places. They have filled my mind with thoughts while simultaneously urging me to quit thinking. They have spurred me to want to speak up while whispering to me how difficult and deep the issues in these pages and promised by the symposium truly are. I'm ready to take the dare and do some disturbing of the ridiculous silences. But I must prepare, ponder, replenish, for the tasks ahead can only be met by those who are committed to the long haul. I'm grateful for these reminders. ☺



# CORNUCOPIA

SUNSTONE invites short musings: chatty reports, cultural trend sightings, theological meditations. All lovely things of good report, please share them. Send submissions to: <SunstoneED@aol.com>

## Personal Glimpses

### OUT OF DARKNESS

**I**N A FUNERAL TRIBUTE TO ELDER JAMES E. TALMAGE, President J. Reuben Clark quoted the following lines from Shakespeare, applying them to his mentor. He said Talmage found “tongues in trees, books in running brooks; sermons in stones and good in everything.”

The selection below from Talmage’s journal, dated 3 March 1914, shows how Talmage constantly searched for the kinds of metaphors that had so impressed President Clark. On this date, Talmage had attended a lecture by Helen Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan.

For many years, Talmage served as president of the Society for the Aid to the Sightless. His interest in helping the blind had been fed by an unfortunate accident in which eleven-year-

old James had accidentally punctured the left eye of his six-year-old brother Albert when the younger brother came behind James, who was was pitching with a digging fork. Following the accident, Albert developed “sympathy blindness” in his right eye, which caused him to be able to distinguish only shadows and bright colors. Both James and Albert were instrumental in having many Church publications translated into Braille.

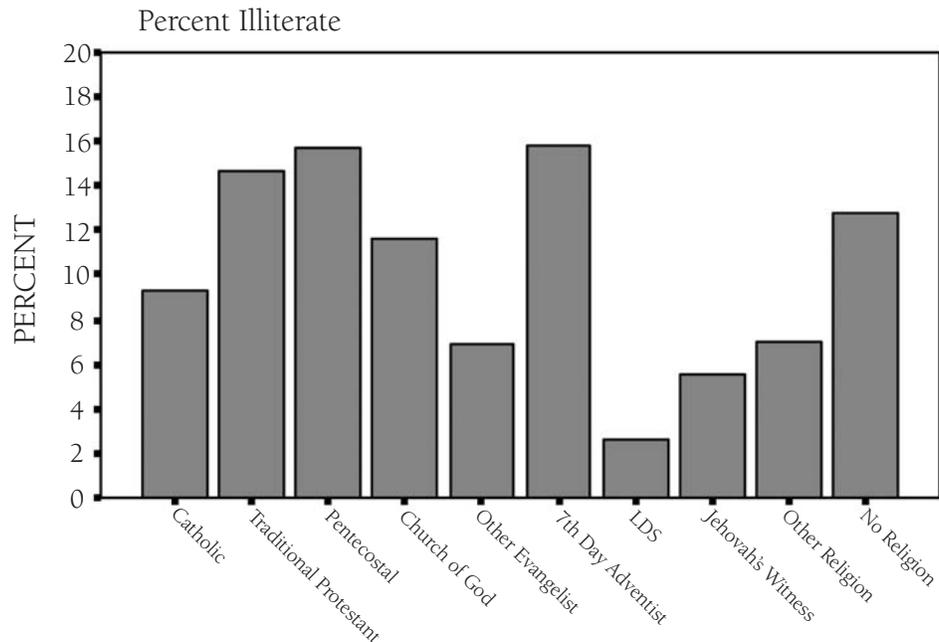
During 1914–15, Talmage wrote a series of “parables” that appeared in the *Improvement Era*. Albert L. Zobell Jr. collected these parables, publishing them as *The Parables of James E. Talmage* (Deseret Book, 1973). The 3 March 1914 journal entry, examining the saving role played by Anne Sullivan in the life of her young pupil, captures the spirit of Talmage’s parables:

Attended meeting of the Deseret Sunday School Union Board. In the evening with other members of the family I attended a lecture in the Assembly hall by Helen Keller, or rather an address by the famous and devoted teacher of this afflicted girl, Mrs. John H. Macy, known better by her name as an unmarried woman, Anne

## Peculiar People

### ILLITERACY IN MEXICO AMONG VARIOUS RELIGIONS

**A**CCORDING TO THE 2000 Census, LDS Church members have substantially lower rates of illiteracy than do members of other major groups in Mexico. Less than three percent of Mormons are illiterate compared to around ten percent nationally. Other Protestant traditions have much higher rates. Since only about a fourth of the million members claimed by the LDS statistical office reported LDS affiliation in the census, this finding could be a reflection of both selective conversion and selective retention.



Sullivan, which address was followed by a brief talk by Helen Keller herself. I feel there is no exaggeration in this statement that Helen Keller is in many respects one of the most interesting personalities upon this planet. She became totally blind and deaf when but nineteen months old, and was taken in charge by the teacher, who has made both the pupil and herself famous, when Helen was about six years old. The mind of this blind, deaf, and dumb child has been developed so that now she is in touch with the world through the medium of raised type for the blind and manual alphabet for the deaf. In answering questions from members of the audience, which questions were repeated to her by her teacher while she held her hand with fingers on the throat, lips and nose showed her unusual quickness of perception and her mental grasp. While her speech is of necessity somewhat mechanical she is exact and in all she says, as also indeed in her writings, one does not find an ungrammatical sentence. The quickening and fine development of some senses through the suppression of others was well illustrated in her recognition of the vibrations incident to applause by the audience. At every outburst she ceased to speak and awaited until silence had again resumed; and in answer as to how she knew of the applause of the assembly she stated that she could feel the vibrations through her feet.

Among the great lessons to be learned from this case not the least perhaps is this: That the mind can be lifted even from the depths of darkness, but an external saving power is requisite. To Helen Keller her teacher stands as a savior much as the Savior of all men stands to the race. Without the up-lift of His ministry and redeeming sacrifice man would ever have remained in the darkness of sin.

JAMES P. HARRIS  
*Saugerties, New York*

## Cybersaints

### KOLOB'S DOMINION OF DESERET

CYBERSPACE: THE NEXT FRONTIER. *These are the voyages of NetMo, whose continuing mission is to explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life in which the seeds of Mormonism have born fascinating fruit; to boldly go where no cybersaint has gone before.*

TO THE ATTENTIVE AND DEDICATED CYBERSAINT, the Internet reveals the myriad of ways in which Mormonism has influenced American culture—ranging from the beautiful to the bizarre. Nowhere is the latter more in evidence than at <http://business.gorge.net/zdkf/kufol/kol-ran.html>. This website advances the belief that alien beings from the planet Kolob invaded the earth some time ago to become the aboriginal Ainu of Japan. These are the RANI (Resident Alien Nation Invasion), and in various other in-

carnations, the RANI have been trying to conquer earth ever since. As the Axis Powers of World War II, they came closer to succeeding than they ever had before. And today they are making one last attempt at world domination through the Mormon Church, otherwise known as Kolob's Dominion of Deseret.

Mix *Star Trek* with *Plan 10 from Outer Space*. Stir in a cup of evangelistic Pentecostalism. Add a dash of Danites. Shake liberally, and you will have just a glimpse into the mind of one David Shaddox, creator of the labyrinthine ZDK Foundation website, the mirror of which can be found at <http://veldantia.com>. Veldantia is, apparently, a Viking word best translated as "The Kingdom of the Viking Princess." With these two websites, Mr. Shaddox represents himself as at the head of a large organization dedicated to gathering the children of Abraham from the ends of the earth in preparation for the human colonization of outerspace.

With identical graphical links being used to take you to completely different pages, navigating both websites is a bit like stepping through the looking glass. Given the multitude of names that may or may not be synonyms, and Mr. Shaddox's penchant for acronyms, the content of the twin website is mind-numbingly confusing. Don't dally too long trying to clear up your confusion. It is a fool's errand.

Having spoken liberally of such things as Kolob and Danites, I wondered what connection Mr. Shaddox might have with Mormon theology. On the Veldantia FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page, I found strongly worded assertions that "they" were neither Mormons nor even "secret Mormons." Veldantia, it said, denies membership to any and all "cultists and lodge members."

So, I wondered if Mr. Shaddox might not be a fringe member of anti-Mormon Evangelism. I communicated through email with a person who may or may not have been David Shaddox and asked a few questions about his background. Before answering my questions, the respondent demanded that I prove my identity by mailing him a letter of introduction from SUNSTONE and a hard copy of some picture ID. He ignored my request that he send his *bona fides* as well and then countered with the implication that I was an agent of some nefarious government conspiracy. Hoping to soothe his paranoia, I directed him to the Sunstone website. He soon responded with the demand that I delete his emails from my computer and with the advice that I watch out for Danites. But this he did only after asking how many of my wives were RANI.

I have come to realize that by merely typing the word "Kolob" into an Internet search engine, I had traveled into another dimension, a dimension not only of sight and sound, but of mind. A journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination. My next stop. . . .

NETMO  
*Third Moon, Oliblish*

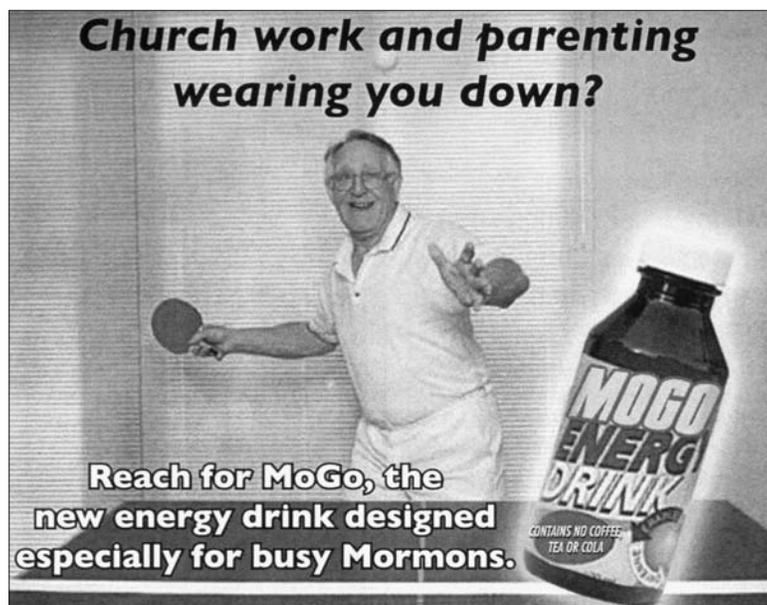
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All-Seeing Eye

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In the Belly of the WhaleCHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM  
YOU WILL SERVE

EDITOR’S NOTE: We’re excited to announce a new *Cornucopia* column, “In the Belly of the Whale,” in which Todd Robert Petersen will investigate Mormon culture, art, and politics from the perspective of a baptized outsider. Todd is a writer and humorist who teaches at Southern Utah University. His work has appeared in *Cream City Review*, *Weber Studies*, *Third Coast*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Dialogue*, and *SUNSTONE*. He is also an editor-at-large for *The Sugar Beet*, a satirical publication of Mormon news and culture.

SUMMER’S HERE, AND IT’S FAMILY REUNION TIME again in Zion, which is one of the things I like least about being a Mormon. I know I should be more charitable toward people who like family reunions; but you see, I was raised Catholic, and for us, a family reunion isn’t in full swing until someone is drunk and yelling, or drunk and crying, usually both.

On the other hand, reunions with my wife’s Mormon family (complete with their handcart pedigree) don’t get into full swing until someone has wept through a testimony on the power of having good roommates, performed “I Am a Child of God” on an autoharp, or blasted his twin brother in the face with hornet spray. Sometimes, when we’re lucky, we can get all three happening at once. And I would be lying if I didn’t admit some pleasure in a combination like that.

I guess since I’m being honest I should admit that I keep busy in the summers so I’ll have a legitimate excuse for begging out of reunions. I know that families can be together forever, even though I joined the Church nine years after Primary would have been an option. But just because families can be together doesn’t mean that they should or that they’ll enjoy it. I’ll be the first to admit that I’m kind of Scroogey about that. Normally in my role as the snotty English professor, I huddle together with my cronies in the hallway and natter along about Michael Moore films, xeric gardening, Walter Benjamin/Pater/Whitman/Cronkite, or laugh at jokes with punch lines like, “With vice-presidents like that, who needs enemies?” But during a family reunion, I’m relegated to conversations about things like, well . . . Sponge Bob.

Back when I was a greenhorn in the family, I got a lot of “Oh, you’re a writer—I just love *Ender’s Game*. Orson Scott Card is my favorite,” or “The boys are reading the *Nephites in Tennis Shoes* books right now, and I can’t get them to go to sleep at night,” or “Maybe you could read over this piece I’m working on for the *Ensign*. It’s about my sister’s home teacher who blessed away her goiter.”

Typically these encounters would trigger my head-nodding mechanism and make me utter something like: “Scott Card, yes. He lives in North Carolina, I believe.”

I have tried to read some of Card’s work, just to have something to talk about at these things, but I can’t bring myself to get past the first page. Once I foolishly said, “I taught Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris* this fall in my Intro to Lit class.” At that point, the cousin I was talking to excused himself to get seconds. I don’t blame him. After all, I did say, “Stanislaw,” which sounds a lot like “coleslaw.”

I know I can't pin it all on the family—that wouldn't be right. This phenomenon is Church-wide, and my wife and I are constantly aware of it. Like most liberal Mormons, we're comfortable talking openly about art and politics only in the calm harbor of our living room. On rare occasions, such as the time I spent twenty minutes of a temple recommend interview talking about Francis Bacon's hatred of Mark Rothko, my faith in Mormondom is momentarily renewed. Then it's dashed again when someone like my neighbor, the father of a certain ex-governor-of-Utah-turned-EPA-administrator, calls me on the phone to see if I've voted in the primary.

"They won't let me," I said sheepishly.

"Sure you can," he said. "The polls are open until eight."

"It's a closed primary," I said. The line went silent.

"Well, I think you can declare your party down at the poll if you're unaffiliated," he said.

I grew quiet and fidgety; then I told him I'd go down and check. I did, and I was right. I won't be allowed to vote until the general election in November. On the way home, my wife and I saw our neighbor and pulled over. "Thanks for the heads up," I said. Then I grinned and told him that the list clearly said Green Party members can't vote today. He swallowed and nodded and waved, and the corner of my wife's mouth curled deliciously.

That moment of self-disclosure felt like coming out of the closet. It was exhilarating. A couple of days later, on a Sunday evening at about eleven-thirty, I turned on the computer and ordered two John Kerry T-shirts. They will arrive in a week, too late for the family reunion but just in time for the ward picnic.

TODD ROBERT PETERSEN  
Cedar City, Utah

### Blogwatch

## GOODBYE BLUE

*A recent change in a key LDS missionary proselyting tool prompted the following 3 May 2004 post on the Times and Seasons blog (www.timesandseasons.org) by Greg Call, who served in the California Ventura Mission from 1993–95.*

### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BLUE PLANNER

Dear Blue Planner,

So it has finally happened. You've gone the way of Mr. Brown and projection films. I suppose I knew that someday you'd be gone, but I'd hoped against hope that you were somehow less transient than other proselyting aids that have fallen by the wayside. To me, you were nothing less than the platonic ideal of Planner.

Your departure, Blue Planner, is made even more poignant by the fact that your long-time travelling companion in the left breast pocket of my ZCMI-special Van Heusen 50/50-blend short-sleeve white shirts—the regal "white bible"—has been spared the long knives of the missionary department. What will keep that little vinyl folio snug against the back of the

black tag now? Oh, you will be missed.

Yesterday I saw two sisters carrying around your replacement, a secular-looking spiral bound long-term planner. I had to turn it over to find the familiar logo before I was convinced that it is your legitimate successor. It's a pale imitator, of course. What missionary wants to have a permanent list of contacts? I found it far more agreeable to throw you out every week and re-compose the list of contacts—rarely did more than half of our finding pool make it onto successive planners anyway.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that my feelings were not always so affectionate toward you. In fact, when I first encountered you, Blue Planner, I was insulted that you would ask me to actually write down a number to represent the souls of those I hoped to teach. Then the aspirational numbers written during some euphoric blast of optimism would inevitably begin to mock me as the week progressed and my inability to successfully mobilize the commitment pattern manifested itself yet again.

Having said that, I never wanted it to go down this way. A training video from the brethren, a distribution of shiny new planners at a district meeting, and you're never heard from again. It's a shame, really. But take comfort in knowing that your pre-impressed creases that made for surprisingly easy folding will always hold a place near my heart, even when I am not carrying you around.

Sincerely,  
GREG (NÉE ELDER) CALL  
Oakland, California

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2004 Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest, Third Place Winner

# CRESTS

By Lisa Torcasso Downing

**A**S ELENA'S DILAPIDATED COUPE RATTLED UP ANOTHER incline in the Texas hill country, she leaned forward to "help" the car along. She began to feel annoyed at the beat of maracas across the radio. She was late—again. The daycare center began assessing fines in five minutes, fines she couldn't possibly pay with her husband laid off. With the window down and the steamy summer air rushing past, Elena prayed to the Virgin to help her make it on time.

A first-generation Mexican immigrant, Elena was living the American dream with all its ups and downs. She and her husband, Vicente, were proud to have a mortgage with an American bank, to own two old automobiles, and to diaper little Edmund with disposables purchased at the H.E.B. Every night, she picked little Edmund up from day care, buckled him into a safety-seat, and drove him home where she gave him a cup of whole milk and rice and beans and had him listen to American T.V. shows so his English would come right. On Sundays, she and Vicente sat with him in the Quiet Room watching Mass, then strolled him to the park where he would squeal on the slide. Elena could not complain. And she tried not to worry. She trusted God with her life.

And today, such trust was necessary, for on the other side of that incline rose both a heavily burdened semi-truck and an impatient sixteen-year-old in his "new" used hot rod. The teenager's decision to pass the truck moving uphill was likely made at the same time Elena turned off the radio. She saw the cab of the semi-truck rising over the crest then heard the blaring of its horn. Suddenly, the teenager's car appeared, and, in the split second before it struck her head-on, she registered the revulsion and terror on the boy's face.

I OFTEN THOUGHT OF Elena during those months I lay in bed with my yet unborn daughter. I remembered the way Elena had loved to hold her boy, how she had never let the be-



LISA TORCASSO DOWNING is a homemaker and writer. She lives in Heath, Texas, with her husband Bret and their three children. Her daughter Rachel is now twelve years old and perfectly happy. She swims, plays soccer, tennis, and golf, and can't figure out what all the fuss is about. Lisa welcomes comments at: [downinglis@wmconnect.com](mailto:downinglis@wmconnect.com)

lief that he was God's gift wander far from her mind. As a first-generation Mormon, I, like her, was living a dream, with all its highs and lows. I fostered the same love in my soul for my children as she did for hers, so it didn't surprise me that thoughts of Elena frequently pierced my mind as I lay there day after day, protecting my unborn child from my own body. Like Elena, I couldn't see it coming.

ELENA DID NOT die. Though her steering wheel rammed against her chest; though steel from the front of her car sliced backwards, crushing her legs, Elena miraculously remained conscious. The truck driver appeared quickly. "I'll get you out," he said, his hands yanking fruitlessly at the mangled steel. She watched as the teenage driver wobbled toward her; saw the horror on his face as he looked through the debris at her; and heard him cry out, "Oh, God, no!"

She wanted to reassure the boy, tell him she was all right, not to worry, it doesn't hurt. Instead she groaned and fretted over who would pick up Edmund, wondered at the unnatural twist of her left arm. She rolled her head left and noticed a thin flap of skin was all that connected her arm to her shoulder. *There's little blood*, she thought. *That's a good sign*. They would be mad at the daycare center.

Suddenly, people, everywhere, such an embarrassing fuss. She thought of the traffic she was stopping. Sirens, lights, paramedics. . . .

"Elena?" shouted the medic. She gazed at him. She knew him from Our Lady. She had to tell him to get Vicente to pick up Edmund.

"Don't move," he said, "We'll take care of you." He dropped his blood pressure cuff, realizing he could only reach her severed arm. "How old is Edmund now?" His eyes scanned her body and the wreck, intermingled. "I bet he's talking up a storm." He wiped her forehead and continued speaking to her as though they were in the foyer after Mass. "Stay with me, Elena. So, you seen that new movie . . .?" Her gaze blurred. "Maybe you and Vicente and me and Andrea can go together." *Tell Vicente and Edmund I love them.*

IT WAS OUR bedtime ritual. Though it was far from romantic, it was loving the way my husband would slip the cuff on my arm. I'd wait, feel the thump, thump, thump of my

blood under pressure, and he'd tell me my reading and condemn me to another day in bed. Then one night, he took the reading and took it again, and again.

"What?"

"It's high."

"How high?"

His answer cut through me.

"I'll call the doctor." When he hung up, he pulled my overnight bag from the closet.

"I want a blessing." I was scared.

My husband telephoned our neighbor, who hurried over with oil and then stayed at the house with our sleeping toddler. At the hospital, I underwent tests which suggested that our daughter's lungs were developed sufficiently to endure an early birth. I was induced.

I HAD FIRST met Elena as she had eased into a chair across from me, resting her cane across her lap. She appeared to be in pain, though she said she was not. My clients were still taking paper/pencil tests, so the evaluation rooms were quiet as I began our interview.

Fresh out of BYU with an English degree, I had been hired as a vocational evaluator by a non-profit rehabilitation organization under fire for falling behind with its written reports. They needed someone capable of writing fast. No one cared that I knew nothing about disability or rehabilitation.

"Tell me about your accident," I began. She tipped her head and talked more to the table than to me. Her right hand held her left as she told of the horrible sound the Jaws of Life had made as its teeth bit down and pulled away the steel frame. "Then the pain came," she shrugged, "and I blacked out."

Put into a medically induced coma, Elena had awakened two weeks later. "Everything broke," she said, making a sweeping motion across her torso with her right hand. "You see how I walk." Based on the medical information provided me, I'd say her survival was a miracle.

"I can work," she said, "except for this arm." Using her right hand, Elena picked up her left arm and placed her left hand atop mine. It felt like ice. "It's no good," she said. "I can't type or hold anything."

"Your limitations aren't what counts," I said, offering up the line I'd been taught. "Your abilities do."

She spoke as though I hadn't. "Are you Catholic?"

Taken aback, I responded, "In heritage." I then explained that I had been raised a Catholic but was now a practicing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. "I consider myself a Catholic Mormon."

"Then you know . . ." She let the sentence hang. "Do you have children?"

"Not yet."

She exhaled heavily and, with her good hand, reached for her purse. Fumbling, she extracted her wallet, opened it and pointed at a photo of a chubby two-year-old. "This is my Edmund." I smiled and expected her to do the same, but she did not. Instead she closed her eyes. "I cannot hold him."

I felt myself breathe.

"My husband, he has to pick him up and put him on my lap, but Edmund doesn't want that. He wants me to stand up, dance with him like before. He kicks me." She opened her eyes and gave me a look that was both hard and eerily questioning. "He screams, 'I hate you.'" Suddenly her words came sharp, like claws, and I knew the subject had shifted. "I hate the boy who did this to me. I cannot forgive him, no matter what Jesus said."

IT WAS A small hospital with only one birthing room, and I didn't get it. So, when the time came, I took the old-fashioned Gurney ride from the labor room to the delivery room, wheeled by two nurses, one chatty, one not. Once inside the door, the chatty one waved good-bye—and the other panicked.

"You're not leaving me?" the nurse said.

"We have four other gals in labor."

"But I've never done this before."

I glanced at my husband. He was watching the doctor drape me.

"You were with me yesterday."

"I watched!"

"You'll be fine." The chatty nurse said as she exited.

The doctor took his place near my feet. I couldn't see him, but I heard him say, "Let's meet this little girl." The nurse anaesthetist positioned himself near my head.

The nurse spoke to me. "I've only watched once."

I patted her hand. "I haven't done this either," I said. "My first was a C-section, but if I can do it, you can."

I couldn't understand why she was afraid. I'd seen nurses deliver babies on T.V. All she had to do was raise my upper body, remind me to breathe, and yell at me to push.

The physician wasted no time ordering me to push, which I did as best I could considering I was numb from the epidural. Though I had expected the nurse to prop me up, she merely stood by my side, making nervous little sounds. She didn't touch the Gurney, much less me. My pushing didn't make progress, and soon the doctor "threatened" that he might have to use forceps.

"Help me raise up," I pleaded. The nurse backed nervously away. So, lying flat on my back, I tried to push harder still.

"Harder!" the doctor barked.

**S**uddenly her words came sharp, like claws, and I knew the subject had shifted. "I hate the boy who did this to me. I cannot forgive him, no matter what Jesus said."

"I am!"

I sensed him turn briefly, then I felt an increased pressure and knew he was using forceps. I tried concentrating on my daughter rather than on the damage those forceps were surely doing to me.

Moments later, the doctor announced. "Nurse, we've got shoulder dystocia."

"I don't know what that means," she said.

Frustration filled his voice. "The baby's stuck against the hip bone. You need to push down to help release it."

*Stuck?*

The nurse tentatively came to the top of my abdomen, put her hands below my breasts and, in sync with me, pushed down.

"Push harder," he ordered us.

"I'm pushing as hard as I can!" the nurse exclaimed.

I hadn't worried—until now; now when the doctor ordered both the nurse and the anesthesiologist, then my husband to help the nurse push down. Reluctantly, the men joined the nurse at the top of my abdomen and shoved the baby downward, toward my pelvis, as hard as they could.

"Push!"

"We are!"

This was when the physician decided to look over the barrier sheet. "Not like that!" he barked. Instantly my three reticent birth attendants jumped back as though zapped by an electric current. The obstetrician reached over the sheet and placed the heel of his hand over my hip and

pressed down, then down again. I watched his eyes and saw relief just before he disappeared behind the barrier to "catch" my baby, all unexpected nine pounds, three ounces of her.

The nurse quickly swaddled her. I had only a moment to gaze at her beautiful little face before she was whisked away.

ELENA CLOSED HER wallet. "The boy who did this, he came to the hospital with his parents, and I said, 'No, I don't want to see him,' but my priest said I should listen. So they came back, and he said, 'I'm so sorry. Please forgive me,' and he cried. 'Waa waa,' like he thought I should feel sorry for him! But all I felt was hate, and I told him, 'No, I don't forgive you. Go to hell.' I said that."

She rubbed her forehead. "I know Jesus will not save me in my sin, but I cannot forgive that boy."

I was in over my head. I said, "Jesus doesn't expect you to be perfect."

She cringed. "I don't want to hate that boy. I will go to hell hating him. I don't want to go to hell." She looked straight at me. "I want to hold my baby."

I WAS TOLD my baby had to remain in the nursery because she had "wet lungs," but that it was nothing, not to worry; and so I didn't. I trusted my doctor. I waddled into the nursery for visits whenever I could. So it was three days before one of the staff members realized that I didn't know. That afternoon in my hospital room, I had a surprise visit from the pediatrician who explained to me that my baby had suffered a birth injury, most likely at C-5, C-6.

They brought her to me. Swaddled, I placed her on the bed in front of me and pulled back the blanket. Why hadn't I seen it before?

My baby's right arm hung like dead weight against her small body, contracted, with the elbow up and palm out. The doctor placed a finger in the palm of her right hand. "She can grip. That's a good sign, but we won't know the extent of the injury for a while."

My heart broke. "What happened?"

"Some babies are too large for the birth canal and they get stuck. Getting them out damages or tears the nerves. The paralysis may or may not be permanent."

I ACHED FOR Elena. The accident had not only broken her body, but broken her spirit and denied her the physical comfort of lovingly holding her child. How could I possibly help?

"Do you pray?" I timidly asked her.

"Not any more."

AND SO I prayed; my husband prayed; our families prayed; strangers in the temple prayed. There were visits to specialists and therapists and a seemingly constant stream of range-of-motion exercises to be done at home. With every song I sang to her, I'd pull her arms up, then away from her body in rhythm, and I'd wonder . . . Would she ever be able to swim, or jump rope with her friends, or hold the handlebars of a bike? Would she ever reach up and throw her arms around my neck to hug me?

When all was said and done, my daughter was left without the ability to raise her arm above her lower chest, to supinate, or rotate her arm away from her body.

And me? I was left with guilt. If only I hadn't wanted a vaginal delivery. . . . If only I had chosen another doctor or hospital. . . . If only I had insisted on having an experienced nurse. . . . If only I hadn't failed my daughter before she took her first breath. . . . If only I'd had more faith. . . .

I hated myself for not saving my baby from this lifelong hardship; I hated my doctor for not noticing that I had every symptom of gestational diabetes, a condition which often leads

to large birth weight. I hated that nurse and the hospital negligent enough to pay her. I hated my husband for saying, "These things happen." I hated myself for being naïve and not realizing that such things as birth injuries even exist. I had to do something. I reached for the phone and began calling attorneys.

DURING MY WEEK with Elena, she complied half-heartedly with every test and task to which I set her. Still, rather than focusing on her abilities, she seemed only to see her disabilities. Her conversations with me often fell back onto her struggle to forgive and her sense of alienation from God. I hoped this woman of faith needed only the perspective of time and the luxury of fulfilling the mourning process before she could accept the difficulties inflicted upon her by a young man who one day made a horrible mistake.

THE MATERNAL DESIRE to protect a child is always strong, but for quite a while, I didn't want to let my baby girl out of my sight. One evening, I was holding her in the foyer of the stake center and listening over the intercom system to a former general Relief Society president speaking of the birth of a grandchild. Immediately upon delivery, the president had realized something was terribly wrong because of the way the baby's arm had hung limply. She had been injured during birth, but through the faith of her family and the power of the priesthood, the child regained full use of the arm.

As I listened, I clutched my sleeping daughter, her injured arm pinned between our hearts. Upon the last "amen," a stream of women came through the doors, arms encircled me, and near-strangers whispered words of support and comfort.

"This has nothing to do with a lack of faith," they whispered as they stroked my baby's hair.

I wanted them all to go away. I wanted it all to go away. But I said, "Thank you."

As I lay my daughter in her crib that night and gazed upon the unnatural way her right arm turned out, I trembled, knowing this problem was not going away. This was something we would live with—and overcome. I thought of Elena. I thought of her child. I thought of her child growing up with a mother consumed by resentment, anger, and hatred because of a foolish mistake made by a boy who not only had never wished her harm, but who also would probably have done anything to turn back the clock and change his fateful decision.

In time, I began drawing parallels between my situation and Elena's. I imagined what it would be like for my daughter to be raised by parents who, for who-knows-how-many-years, spoke in hushed tones about lawyers and malpractice and justice and settlements and what her life could have been. I imagined myself delivering Family Home Evening lessons on love, compassion, and forgiveness, then signing settlement documents and awaiting a big check. I knew that the doctor and the nurse who delivered her would never have harmed her intentionally. I knew that if they could, they, too, would turn back the clock, change the events, and present me a perfectly

healthy baby girl. Somewhere inside I knew they, too, had prayed for her.

I stopped seeking a legal remedy. I forgave the medical staff. I forgave myself. I forgave God.

OUR DAUGHTER KNOWS that we not only have faith in our Heavenly Father and are willing to accept when he deals a difficult hand, but she knows that we have faith in her. She knows her parents have the ability to forgive a stranger's mistakes, and therefore she knows we will forgive hers.

I still think often of Elena. Like her, I know Christ instructed us to forgive, but I believe he did so in order that we will heal ourselves from our own imperfections, be they physical, emotional, or spiritual, and discover the real abilities of our souls. None of us knows what awaits us over the next crest in our life. We hope for a clear road, but it is our reaction to the unpredicted hazards which defines us. 




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## SWEAT, THE WORDS, THE STONE, AND THE MEMORY

The architect has erected the monument once more, circling above The Dalles on dry golden heights of Columbia River wilderness, forgetting to cast shadow lines for passing salmon, those fish of repetitive time,

this second Stonehenge, puzzling it together from history and from fairy tale, from the patterns of travel, migration, a crudely drawn map, away from hemlocked Cascades and highways this granite crown for Mount Adams' knees just big enough for the man's dreaming or to catch hollowed sounds of roaring current before it slips away into ocean,

and the wind will hold this, for a moment, shaping the stones in cracks and cooling the sweat from the man's face; taking it, the words, and the stone, and the memory in a breath towards the bluing sunset, lifting his weight for a moment from the great gravity of earth

—BRANDY MCKENZIE

*If we relegate the Heavenly Mother to the dustbin of theology, we visit this same treatment upon her daughters—and upon all the outcast and despised.*

# IS THERE A PLACE FOR HEAVENLY MOTHER IN MORMON THEOLOGY?

## AN INVESTIGATION INTO DISCOURSES OF POWER

By Margaret Merrill Toscano

**W**HY ARE MOST MORMON THEOLOGIANS white males? And what does this question have to do with the nature of Mormon theology and how it is done?

Mormon theology is most often seen in either descriptive, prescriptive, or speculative terms; that is, it is either an explanation of Mormon doctrine (descriptive), an explication of what Mormons should believe and accept as doctrine (prescriptive), or an exploration of the implications of Mormon doctrine and its meaning (speculative). All three approaches can be employed by orthodox and liberal Mormons alike. Although the groups may argue about what texts, doctrines, and approaches are most legitimate, they share two premises: that theology involves a search for truth—whether it be the truth of historical context or ultimate divine truth—and that truth is always knowable.

While I value all three types of theologizing and recognize their importance in helping us understand both historical and metaphysical truths, neither the approaches themselves nor the truths they seek to discover are value free. That is, they are conditioned by authority structures (whether ecclesiastic, academic, or cultural) that predetermine what gets included in Mormon theological discourse and who is allowed to do it. Too seldom do we consider how power structures influence not only what we are allowed to express but the nature of knowledge itself and how we perceive it.<sup>1</sup> Seldom do we ask what ideas we have failed to consider, because society's organi-

zation creates blinders that block out a variety of perspectives from our view.

Power structures set up frameworks for how we think about things and whether or not we can even conceptualize, let alone promulgate, certain possibilities. Knowledge is not separate from human relationships, and all relationships are defined at least in part by power. This means that knowledge is not simply a list of objective propositions; it is intertwined with the way people relate to each other and how they create hierarchies. This also means that knowledge cannot be separated from ethics; knowledge always has moral implications for how individuals are treated.<sup>2</sup> How we conceptualize the relationships among God and the members of a religious community determines the nature of theology and vice versa. An example may help clarify my point.

In a recent *Ensign* article, President Hinckley outlines the four theological foundations of Mormonism—the “Four Cornerstones of Faith.” The first is the “testimony of Jesus Christ as the Son of God”; the second is the “First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith”; the “third cornerstone is the Book of Mormon”; and the fourth is “the restoration to earth of priesthood power and authority.”<sup>3</sup> While these four propositions may appear fairly neutral, they all have implications for how women are positioned in the Church organization since all four cornerstones center on male figures (who are represented as white). This non-neutrality becomes more obvious when we look at the four pictures the *Ensign* uses to illustrate each of the principles. The first and largest is a loving picture of Christ holding a staff (*The Lord Is My Shepherd* by Simon Dewey); the second shows a young Joseph Smith on his knees before God (*Joseph Smith's First Vision* by Greg Olsen); the third portrays the prophet Mormon writing (*Mormon Abridging the Plates* by Tom Lovell); and the fourth depicts John the Baptist bestowing



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the priesthood on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (*The Restoration of the Priesthood* by Del Parson). Note, too, that all four portraits are drawn by male artists and that President Hinckley's photograph begins the article. The absence of female figures underscores their exclusion from spiritual service in assisting God in his work and even raises the question of how these basic gospel principles apply to women.<sup>4</sup>

In asserting the interrelationship between knowledge and power, I am drawing on work that has colored academic discourse for the past thirty years, influenced by theorists such as Michel Foucault, for whom knowledge is always a form of power and the search for knowledge is indicative of the will to power. For Foucault, the question is always: How do power relationships set up conditions for the production of knowledge? How do such relationships open and close spaces for participation in discourse and the construction of cultural identity?<sup>5</sup> In other words, knowledge is not a set of mere abstractions but the way material reality shapes a person's identity within a community and the person's position and ability to speak.

**I** BELIEVE FOUCAULT'S insights have great potential for illuminating how authority structures predetermine who and what gets included in Mormon theological discourse.<sup>6</sup> Throughout this essay, I use the concept of a Heavenly Mother as a metaphor for what commonly gets marginalized and excluded in such discussions. In so doing, my purpose is not to develop a Heavenly Mother theology but rather to use the Heavenly Mother doctrine as a test case for how theological legitimacy is established in Mormon discourse and to explore why certain ideas and people get excluded in the process. Though I focus here on gender, this metaphor also contains clear implications for issues of legitimization and exclusion with regard to race and class. Moreover, by linking Mother in Heaven with larger issues of theological methodology and authorization, I want to suggest that gender relationships do not merely affect how women function within the LDS community but that they also fashion the way men interact with each other.

What follows is an expansion of a talk I gave at the Mormon Theology Conference, held 19–20 March 2004 and co-sponsored by the Utah Valley State College Religious Studies Program and the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology (SMPT). Not only was I the only woman participant on the program, but I was also apparently the only woman who submitted a proposal. Moreover, the audience was predominantly male, with about twelve men for every woman. Thus the conference itself was an enactment of my premise that there is something about the power and authority structure of the LDS community that discourages women from full participation in theological and philosophical discourse, not only in Church settings but in academic ones, too. Ironically, and perhaps predictably, the majority of the all-male planning committee initially balked at including my paper at all. Some criticized its logic while others saw it as too controversial and critical of the Church. (My status as an excommunicated

Mormon feminist did nothing to lessen the planners' concerns.) Although they made me jump through more hoops than any male participant had to, fortunately in the end, they included me in the program, maybe only to avoid the criticism of gender bias, which at least can serve as a starting place for dealing with the question of how power structures shape theological discourse.<sup>7</sup>

In Mormonism, the relationship between power and knowledge is crucial. In fact, the main problem any scholar faces in addressing Mormon theology is that of *authorization*. Since legitimate authority is central both to LDS Church structure and self-definition, any Mormon theologian must establish both the personal authority to speak and the authority of the texts upon which his or her theology is based. Typically, Mormon theology is established in two ways: first, by statements of Church priesthood authorities and, second, by unofficial statements of Church scholars (a broad category ranging from work found in conservative publications, such as *BYU Studies* or *Deseret Book's* fare, to what appears in more liberal presses or magazines).<sup>8</sup> I also suggest that the membership as a whole has an important role in what assumes importance in Mormon discourse, creating a third type of authorization.

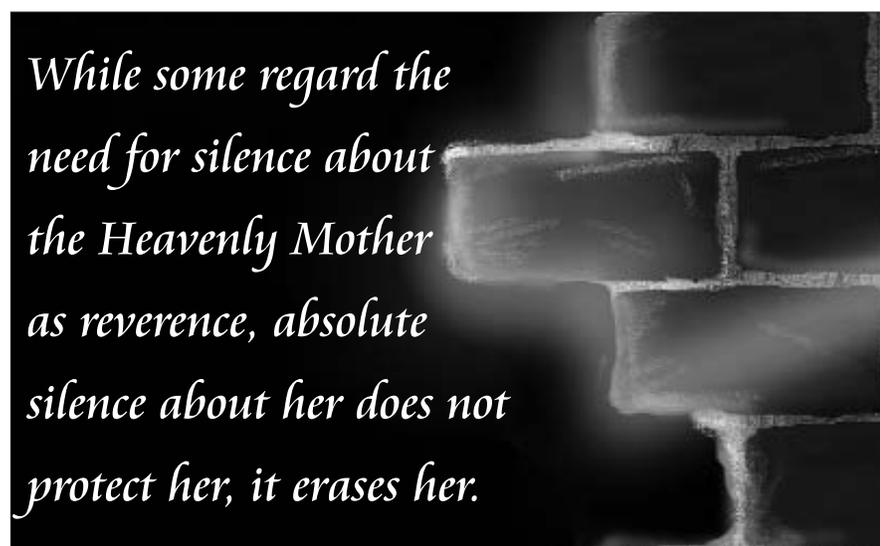
Revelation from the prophet signifies ultimate authorization. But official or semi-official pronouncements by General Authorities or other Church leaders also carry enormous authoritative weight; this second category would include signed and unsigned statements found in Church publications (official manuals, magazines, and so forth). While official authorization may appear to be fairly straightforward—either a doctrine is accepted or not—the validity of the concept of the Heavenly Mother provides an illustration of the complexity of such authorization. Joseph Smith himself likely introduced the doctrine of Heavenly Mother; subsequent Church priesthood authorities have reiterated her existence; and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* includes an entry on the subject, asserting that “the belief in a living Mother in Heaven is implicit in Latter-day Saint thought.”<sup>9</sup> All of these factors solidly establish the Heavenly Mother doctrine as mainstream. However, a recent informal Internet survey reveals that most Latter-day Saints believe discourse about the Heavenly Mother to be forbidden, which renders the doctrine controversial or at least problematic. In describing her findings, Doe Daughtrey, the survey's author, confirms what most of us have observed in our own interactions in LDS meetings and discussions:

After posting a list of questions as to the relevance of Heavenly Mother to Mormons today on Beliefnet.com, I was not surprised to be repeatedly warned by faithful Mormons that I had chosen an inappropriate topic and to hear almost verbatim statements regarding her sacrality and the necessity of her protection. Several of them warned me away from discussion about Heavenly Mother after seeking advice from their local church leaders.<sup>10</sup>

While no General Authority has made an official statement denying belief in a Heavenly Mother nor stating that her existence is too sacred to discuss, several factors may influence the

current trend that sees even a mention of Heavenly Mother as treading on forbidden ground. Members take their cues about what is acceptable doctrine from talks of General Authorities and official Church manuals and magazines. A word search on the Church's website, [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org), yields only twenty-six direct references to either "Heavenly Mother" or "Mother in Heaven" in the past thirty years of Church publications.<sup>11</sup> Such sparse referencing to the Mother in Heaven implies that she should not be a topic of major concern for members of the Church.

The most recent reference to her was made by President Gordon B. Hinckley in a talk given at the General Women's Meeting in October of 1991 and printed in that year's November *Ensign*. President Hinckley there responds to a letter addressed to then-Church president Ezra Taft Benson



from a fourteen-year-old girl, "Virginia" (a pseudonym), who asks, "Are men more important than women?" As part of his response, President Hinckley legitimizes the doctrine of the Heavenly Mother by attributing it to Joseph Smith and adding his own belief: "Logic and reason would certainly suggest that if we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. That doctrine rests well with me." But he then limits the scope of the Heavenly Mother by explaining that "in light of the instruction we have received from the Lord Himself, I regard it as inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven."

While President Hinckley says this prohibition in no way "belittles or denigrates her," it surely makes her secondary in some way to Heavenly Father, as does President Hinckley's assertion that men have a "governing responsibility" over women (though he says men are not supposed to rule despotically). While he does not forbid discussion about Heavenly Mother, he does mark her position as problematic, especially given the way he contextualizes his comments about her. After assuring Virginia that women are of equal worth with men to their Heavenly Father, who loves them, and after advising her that she should talk to her Father in prayer, President Hinckley

uses the mention of prayer as his segue to the inappropriateness of praying to the Heavenly Mother, privately or in public. He then remarks that those who have done so "are well-meaning, but they are misguided."<sup>12</sup>

For Church members eager to follow their leaders to the letter of the law, President Hinckley's prohibition can easily be read to mean that any who pursue the topic of the Heavenly Mother are also "misguided." Add to this a grassroots feeling that Heavenly Mother is too sacred to talk about because her husband does not want her name "taken in vain" like his is<sup>13</sup> (a rationale that itself reflects a notion of male control), and the result is the disappearance of specific references to the Heavenly Mother altogether in Church publications since 1991. No doubt the publicly discussed excommunications of feminists like Janice Allred, Lynne Kanavel Whitesides, Maxine Hanks, and me, all of whom were disciplined in part simply for talking about the Heavenly Mother, adds to the general sense that discourse about her is strictly forbidden.

While I have never seen any study that documents when or how the idea developed in the Church that Heavenly Mother cannot be talked about because she is too sacred, my sense is that it began in the 1960s and 1970s, at about the same time that there was a resurgence of interest in feminist questions in the Church, accompanied by the renewed interest of some women to search for the divine feminine.<sup>14</sup> I see the language of sacred taboo as part of a backlash and an expression of fear on the part of leaders and members that feminism might creep into the Church and disrupt current structures.<sup>15</sup> While some regard the need for silence about the Heavenly Mother as

reverence, absolute silence about her does not protect her, it erases her. Temples may be considered too sacred to reveal much of what goes on inside, but still we constantly talk about them, put up pictures of them, attend them, and devote resources to them—all of which reinforce their importance and sacredness. But we do not accord such treatment to the Mother in Heaven, which convinces me that all arguments about her sacredness are a cover-up for something else.<sup>16</sup> Insisting on silence about Heavenly Mother is iconoclastic—the smashing of a sacred image. It does not matter whether the doctrine of the Heavenly Mother remains part of official LDS theology or not; if there are no private or public occasions on which we can invoke her name and image, Mother in Heaven will surely fade from our memory.

This willingness by members to expand the taboo about the Heavenly Mother indicates that they themselves have a say in authorizing theology. Not every statement of a prophet gets promoted or even obeyed, in spite of the almost obsessive desire many Latter-day Saints have "to follow the leaders." For example, President Kimball's 1978 speech against hunting, while causing a stir initially, was quickly forgotten.<sup>17</sup> Mormon hunters as a group have never been subject to Church disci-

pline, at least to my knowledge, while Mormon feminists have. Ironically, though the principle of common consent is nearly void in official Church meetings, since members are expected simply to sustain the decisions of their Church leaders, if the members do not emphasize and promulgate their leaders' teachings, the authority of those teachings eventually fades away. Therefore, in a subtle way, the membership as a whole plays a role in authorizing Mormon theology—more as a matter of practice than of verbal agreement or dissent. But practice in due course reshapes stated belief. While most LDS people may acknowledge the soundness of President Benson's 1987 directive about women staying home with children rather than joining the workforce, economic realities justify disobedience when two incomes are needed to meet basic family needs or single mothers are faced with being the sole support.<sup>18</sup> In fact, many women in the workforce do not perceive themselves as disobeying prophetic injunction as long as they agree with the principle of the primacy of motherhood. Thus, faithful LDS women rationalize, "I would rather stay home, but my particular circumstances don't allow me that luxury." While the desire of the heart may be more important spiritually, actual practice is more crucial for defining religion sociologically. Ironically, a career woman who advocates conservative values will be seen as less of a threat to the Church than a full-time homemaker who questions women's roles. Nonetheless, the conservative career woman is still reshaping the image of what a Mormon woman is and can be.<sup>19</sup>

The recent LDS interest in the theme of the divine feminine in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, as manifest by the highly popular lecture series at BYU attended by more than a thousand people, may also show the power of members "voting with their feet" about certain ideas. Why so much enthusiasm for Dan Brown's book?<sup>20</sup> I believe it reveals the hunger that develops when a psychologically important element of religion is suppressed. Jewish scholar Raphael Patai, in his book *The Hebrew Goddess*, suggests that the "human craving for a divine mother" may explain the ongoing reemergence of feminine images to depict God within the highly masculine and monotheistic faith of Judaism.<sup>21</sup> While LDS people may not express their interest in the divine feminine by speaking directly about the Mormon Mother God, they can redirect their interest in an acceptable manner through participating in discussions about the way other traditions treat the feminine divine.

**M**ORMON SCHOLARS ALSO play a vital role in unofficially authorizing theology because the LDS community at large inevitably adopts some ideas that enter the membership's consciousness indirectly through scholarly discourse.<sup>22</sup> Typically scholars have taken two approaches: first, exegesis of past authoritative statements, and second, Mormon philosophical theology. A good example of the exegesis of authoritative statements is Linda Wilcox's seminal essay "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven." Although such exegetical efforts are vital as intellectual history and as groundwork for clarifying theological possibilities, they generally do not examine power issues directly because they

are descriptive rather than analytic.

Mormon philosophical theology is likewise limited due to its dependency on the Enlightenment paradigm that assumes that reason alone can unlock the truths of the universe. Therefore, this kind of typology typically has been able to validate only certain ideas and methodologies, in particular a systematic approach that favors logic and objectivity.<sup>23</sup> I do not wish to devalue this approach, but mean only to point out that some perspective is lost when one view monopolizes. Here the loss may be the suppression of poetic, mythic, and bodily ways of knowing. Ironically, while Mormon philosophical theology has argued against an absolutist, disembodied God, it has retreated back to this concept when dealing with gender. The God of Mormon philosophical writing is usually male but sexless and thus, in a curious way, both instantiated in gender while simultaneously beyond gender.

Blake Ostler's recent book, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God*,<sup>24</sup> provides a striking illustration of this point. In 485 pages of text, Ostler provides no discussion whatsoever of the question of God's gender although he refers to God by the male pronoun throughout, thereby underscoring not only God's anthropomorphism but also his maleness. In fairness to Ostler's fine book, his purpose is to contrast Mormon notions of God with traditional Christian notions, especially in relation to such thorny issues as God's foreknowledge, human free will, the problem of timelessness and immutability, and the relation of these concerns to Christology. However, his failure to engage with recent Christian discussions of God's gender is significant. While Ostler claims he is discussing the ways in which the Mormon concept of God differs from that of traditional Christianity, he does not present Mormonism's unique view of an embodied God whose gender is more than a metaphor or longstanding narrative tradition, as held by other Christian sects.

According to Mormon scripture, God has "a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (D&C 130:22). This assertion, it seems to me, has both positive and negative significance. On the one hand, it valorizes human embodiment. Because it posits the incarnation not only of the earthly Christ but of the Heavenly Father himself, Mormon theology does not share with orthodox Christianity a negative assessment of the body or of human experience.<sup>25</sup> Of course, as Ostler states, God's body must have qualities that transcend those of a mortal body; in other words, it must be a "spiritualized" body subject neither to time or death; and I agree with Ostler that Christ fully reflects the nature of God in all respects. However, the question Ostler's book raises, though unstated and unexplored, is whether or not the valorization in God of the body is meant also as a preference for the male body over the female body. Where does the Mormon notion of an embodied God put women? Can women reflect God? Ostler's book presents us with a chart that shows how the "Sons of God" go through the same process as the "Son of God" in order to return to God's presence and be glorified. But what about women? Ostler's chart makes no reference to them.

Traditional Christians argue that gender is merely an

ephemeral expression of mortal embodiment and that God and salvation are beyond gender; therefore, women need not worry about the potential for eternal subordination. But Mormon doctrine is otherwise. It asserts, according to the official “Proclamation on the Family,” that gender “is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”<sup>26</sup> This Proclamation also states that each human being is “created in the image of God” as “a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.” But the Proclamation further states that it is the male God alone, the Eternal Father, who is worshiped and whose plan governs and guides his children along the path toward immortality. What then of the Heavenly Mother? Is she at all involved in the salvation of her children? Is she an “equal partner” with her divine spouse as the Proclamation says earthly men and women are to be? How can she be an equal partner if she is absent from or invisible in the work of the Godhead? More important for our discussion here, does her absence impinge upon the

find it difficult to see how they participate in God’s work. Let me give you one pertinent example, of which there are countless others. The Doctrine and Covenants sets forth the following characteristics of the inheritors of celestial glory:

They are they who are the church of the Firstborn. They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; and are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son. Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. (D&C 76: 54–59)

The language in this passage is not merely male-centered; it is priesthood-conditioned. Inheritors of the celestial glory are identified as priests, a condition that raises the question whether women, barred as they are from priesthood, are included in this group of exalted beings. You may answer “yes,” that certainly a passage like this must include women because it is describing entrance into the celestial kingdom, which we know by tradition is open to men and women alike.

*Gender is not merely a secondary question; it is about core epistemology. It is about the way a woman (or a person of color or anyone on the margins of a white male church) establishes personhood.*

authority that women may assume in Mormon theological discourse? Does gender matter when it comes to how theology is done? Why the dearth of women theologians? Since it certainly cannot be because of their lack of intelligence and is not likely due to a lack of interest, we can only conclude that it is the authority structure of the LDS community that discourages women from full participation in theological and philosophical discourse. In a world where Heavenly Mother is cut off from communicating with her children, how can women talk authoritatively about God? This situation certainly affects women’s individual sense of their own worth; and for the community as a whole, the absence of women’s voices in matters of doctrine limits Mormon theology, both in its methodology and its fruits. The ethical implications of women’s absence in matters of theology are profoundly disturbing. This absence creates a class system where at least half of the Church is denied the benefits of full citizenship.

Because LDS texts focus on males, both as figures of authority and as depictions of the normative person, women can

But this interpretation is not obvious from the text. For a woman to understand and be edified by this text, she must first *read herself into it*. She must shoulder the extra burden that male priesthood holders do not carry of imagining herself in a description of heaven which does not in fact include her literally. This is why gender is not merely a secondary question; it is about core epistemology. It is about the way a woman (or a person of color or anyone on the margins of a white male

church) establishes personhood. Every act of reading a canonical text demands the re-construction of female subjectivity. In such a power structure, a woman’s status as a full person is always in question, always unstable, always tenuous. Women must always cope with the nagging question: Do I have the right to insert myself into this textual space? Can I assume that these promises apply to me? Or are these promises reserved for men only—for priesthood holders, as this instance in D&C 76 could imply? Again the Heavenly Mother is illustrative. Women who need a model for connecting themselves to the divine and celestial glory are forbidden to create a picture of God that includes their femaleness. Men are not under this same prohibition and are in fact encouraged to see themselves in the image of God (as illustrated by Ostler’s chart).

Interestingly, fourteen-year-old “Virginia,” to whom President Hinckley directed his talk discussed above, refers to the male language in D&C 76. Virginia perceives the issue clearly when she expresses her worry that in “the scriptures, I could not seem to find anywhere whether women may enter

into the celestial kingdom if they are worthy. Also, when someone such as Joseph Smith had a vision of the celestial kingdom, he only seemed to see men there.”<sup>27</sup> President Hinckley assures Virginia that women are included and tells her not to “be disturbed, my dear young friend, by the fact that the word *man* and the word *men* are used in scripture without also mentioning the words *woman* and *women*. I emphasize that these terms are generic, including both sexes.”<sup>28</sup> He then goes on to explain that this type of generic use of “man” was common historically, and he cites the phrase “all men are created equal” from the Declaration of Independence to show that such usage must include “men, women, and children.”

President Hinckley could not have chosen a worse example of historical equality and a better example for showing how exclusive language reflects and promotes discrimination.<sup>29</sup> Surely he must remember that it took almost two hundred years, a civil war, several constitutional amendments, and major Supreme Court decisions to demonstrate legally that the “self-evident” equality of “all men” under the law in America includes all races and genders. What seems to me to be President Hinckley’s genuine and openhearted concern for this young woman’s sense of her own worth (he did not have to address the question at all) is undermined by the overpowering evidence of male privilege and value in the talk itself, as demonstrated by the scriptures quoted, the subordination of Heavenly Mother to Heavenly Father throughout, and the overall structure of male authority that circumscribes every level of text and subtext. How can women believe that they “occupy a high and sacred place in the eternal plan of God, our Father in Heaven” when his plan seems to leave out the Heavenly Mother? Can they expect a better place than she is given? The very fact that men do not need to be assured of their worth and equal position evidences the imbalance.

**I**F EVERY ACT of reading a religious text for a Mormon woman must involve reestablishing her personhood in order to occupy the space of a good Mormon, then what extra burdens must she carry in order to occupy the space of a good Mormon theologian? This problem is further complicated because the models available to LDS women are almost all male. The Book of Mormon is a powerful text that presents us with prophetic figures who do not simply proclaim the word of God but seek to explain it in rational terms. Nephi, Alma, and Mormon are all examples of profound theologians. But once again, does this male pattern imply that women are excluded from this role? Virginia can write only to a male prophet to get an authoritative answer to her concerns about women’s place in the LDS religion. Only two females speak at each general conference amid a sea of males who outrank them in authority and number. The BYU Religion Department has only five full-time female faculty members among sixty-seven males (of whom, only one is non-white); and the BYU Philosophy Department includes no women faculty. Clearly the absence of women in authoritative positions and authoritative discourse makes it difficult for younger women to imagine themselves as theologians. But even worse, the lack of women

theologians reinforces the idea that to men alone belongs the power to teach, define, or explore what the LDS religion is. In addition, the lack of women’s perspectives limits the pool from which creative answers to religious problems can be drawn.

A basic assumption of feminist theory is that power resides in the ability to name; authority is related to authorship, etymologically and culturally. For this reason, feminist theologians of other traditions have emphasized the importance of women speaking for God if equality is ever to be achieved in the religious realm. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a leading Latina *mujerista* (womanist) theologian, asserts:

What has guided *mujerista* theology from the beginning are those wonderful words of Miriam in the book of Numbers, “Has Yahweh indeed spoken only through Moses?” (Num. 12:2). Well aware of the fact that she suffered severe penalties for daring to scold Moses, for daring to claim that Yahweh also spoke to her and through her, our sister Miriam invites *mujerista* theologians to throw our lot with the people of God and to hope that, just as in her case, the authorities will catch up with us, that they will eventually also see that we have no leprosy, that we are clean.<sup>30</sup>

As the words of Isasi-Diaz imply, one of the primary functions of feminist theologians is to develop hermeneutical techniques for reading women into sacred texts and sacred spaces. What may not be evident from Isasi-Diaz’s statement is her desire to do this from a believing perspective. Many mainstream LDS people assume that feminism is at odds with religion in general and Mormonism in particular. However, my reading in feminist theologies and my conversations with feminists of other religious persuasions has convinced me that most women who try to reinterpret religion as favorable to women do so because they have found many positive aspects in their traditions and therefore do not want to reject the whole because of gender inequality.<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains the irony that religious traditions, and the biblical tradition in particular, have empowered women as well as oppressed them:

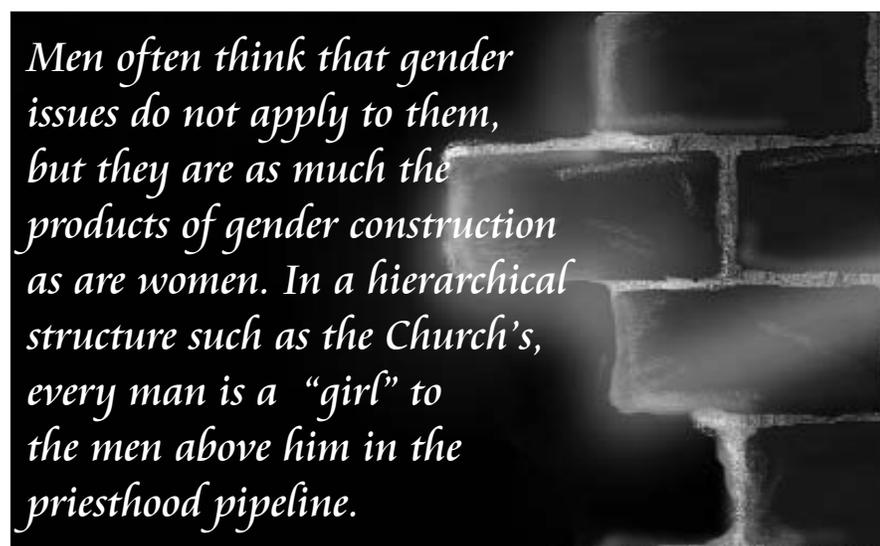
Reclaiming the Bible as a feminist heritage and resource is only possible because it has not functioned only to legitimate the oppression of all women: free-born, slave, black and white, native American, European and Asian, immigrant, poor, working-class and middle-class, Third World and First World women. It has also provided authorization and legitimization for women who have rejected slavery, racism, anti-Semitism, colonial exploitation, and misogyny as unbiblical and against God’s will. The Bible has inspired and continues to inspire countless women to speak out and to struggle against injustice, exploitation, and stereotyping.<sup>32</sup>

Such women claim that the love they experience through God and their religious community is what compels them to stay and work for change from within.

Women have used three main techniques to reclaim a role in defining religion for themselves and other marginalized

groups. The first is what is sometimes called “reconstructive theology,” or what Schüssler-Fiorenza also calls a “hermeneutics of remembrance.”<sup>33</sup> This approach uses historical-critical methodology to uncover the social-political layers that underlie the biblical text and other church traditions to reveal which elements are products of the patriarchal cultures out of which church traditions emerge and which elements are central to the ongoing universal Christian, Jewish, or Muslim message. Proponents of this approach also use literary and rhetorical techniques to remember and recover texts and patterns favorable to women, such as the important role of women in the ministry of Jesus or other historical instances of women’s theological and revelatory presence, (e.g., the role of mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen or Teresa of Avila).

The second hermeneutical approach borrows from philosophical feminism, such as that of Sandra Harding, to question the very foundations of western metaphysics, with its use of objective, rational modes of discourse that have traditionally privileged males.<sup>34</sup> The best voices in this approach do not suggest abandoning reason and systematic thought, nor do they assert that women are irrational. Rather, they insist on an ongoing questioning of the way reality is defined and a deconstruction of the methods we use to discover and construct it. In theological terms, this means looking at the underlying as-



*Men often think that gender issues do not apply to them, but they are as much the products of gender construction as are women. In a hierarchical structure such as the Church’s, every man is a “girl” to the men above him in the priesthood pipeline.*

sumptions behind privileged doctrines. It means always asking how certain ideas reach center stage and remain prominent. It means examining how language and cultural values shape theory.

The third approach is represented well by Latinas/Chicanas who connect with the liberationist theology movement and assert their right to construct theories of religion on an equal footing with men. They add gender concerns to the class issues raised by male liberationist theologians, arguing that both kinds of equality arise out of Christian texts of redemption and justice. Jesus’s treatment of the outcast and poor in the New Testament forms the center of this gospel message. Maria Pilar Aquino explains:

The core content and ultimate finality of God’s revelation is resumed in the term salvation. As the most precious gift of God to humans and to the world around us, salvation is understood by Latina feminist theology as liberation from every oppression. Thus the historical process of liberation from poverty, social injustice, and exclusion becomes the most effective and credible manifestation of God’s salvation.<sup>35</sup>

What all three of these approaches—the reconstructive, the philosophical, and the liberationist—have in common is the belief that theology begins with the lived experiences of the people of God or, in other words, that practice and theory are not separate. Certainly theoretical principles should inform the behavior of a believer (“whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them”—Matthew 7:12). In the same way, if the experience of the believer is at odds with principle (“Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak”—I Corinthians 14:34), then the believer should question and seek further enlightenment.

**B**UT CAN THESE approaches appropriately apply to Mormon theology, which is so thoroughly embedded in hierarchical structures? In other words, is feminist theology at odds with LDS doctrine? I do not think so for three reasons. First, Mormonism asserts an open canon and acknowledges that even scriptural texts can contain the “mistakes of men”—human “weakness,” as the prophet Moroni calls it (Ether 12). The importance of pairing these two beliefs—the need for ongoing revelation and the possibility of error—cannot be overstated. Continuing revelation then is not merely the addition of new doctrine but also the clarification, correction, recontextualization, and perhaps even the rejection of existing doctrine. Under this theory, the 1978 revelation on priesthood and blacks does not have to be asserted as God suddenly changing his mind. Rather, we should be able to admit that the prohibitive policy itself was the result of our own prejudice. Taking responsibility for our mistakes opens the door for new revelation.<sup>36</sup>

The second reason for seeing compatibility between feminist concerns and LDS doctrine is that Mormon scriptural texts reinforce the most important biblical texts of equality. For example, the famous Pauline statement that in Christ Jesus there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28) is expanded by the prophet Nephi, who teaches: “For none of these iniquities come of the Lord . . . he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33).

In fact, the Book of Mormon can easily be read as a text of liberation because of its ongoing motif of connecting spiritual liberation with political and class liberation (which is also ironic, considering that women are less visible in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible). The first section of the Doctrine and Covenants continues this theme by declaring that God “is no respecter of persons” and that the purpose of the Restoration **is** that “weak things” might “break down the mighty and strong” and that every person “might speak in the name of God” (D&C 1:19, 20).

My third reason for believing that feminist theology is not inimical to Mormonism is that current prophets have reasserted women’s dignity and equal worth with men. As the Proclamation on the Family states, they are to be “equal partners,” which is the goal of feminist theologies as well.

However, while I sincerely believe that in theory feminist theology is compatible with Mormon doctrine, in practice I also believe that no such compatibility now exists. Though in theory Mormonism asserts that all are alike unto God and that women are equal partners with men, in current practice, Mormonism is, at best, a religion of “separate but equal” genders, as illustrated by the Proclamation, which divides the roles of men and women into the traditional public and private realms and puts men in a proprietary position over women. Men are to “preside,” “provide,” and “protect,” while women are “primarily responsible” for nurturing children. And the Heavenly Mother has even fewer privileges than her daughters because she is the silent and invisible parent in the Proclamation and the heavenly home.<sup>37</sup> Further, by making Heavenly Mother a taboo topic, questions about the meaning of gender and of women’s theological role are also rendered taboo. Today, all discussions of Heavenly Mother are seen by Church members and authorities as the dangerous concerns only of radical feminists. There is no space within the Church where one can argue that “separate but equal” inevitably creates a hierarchy privileging the powerful and disenfranchising the weak—there is no space to argue that “separate but equal” is no more an ethical policy when applied to the genders of a church than when applied to the races of a nation.

**T**O MY INITIAL question—“Is there a place for Mother in Heaven in Mormon theology?”—I conclude that the weight of Church practice and authority says no. When I began this inquiry, my purpose was to develop a methodological model that balances the Mormon demand for official authorization with the theological need for rigorous philosophical analysis. I had hoped that in doing so, I could create a model that is cognizant of LDS sensibilities about authority but that could also suggest ways in which theologizing could be more open to and inclusive of women, people of color, or others who are disenfranchised. Sadly, my efforts have failed, and I must admit defeat for now. No amount of theorizing can change the dominant pattern in a church that accepts the present status quo as God’s will. Further, if the majority of LDS women do

not feel that they are in a subordinate position and are content with their present role in Mormon culture and discourse, then it would be unethical for me to try to define them otherwise. Nevertheless, my own ethical sense compels me to explain what I see as the way in which the current structure is at odds with the demands of Christ’s gospel. In spite of my present discouragement, I continue to write because a small part of me still hopes that others will see the gap between Christ’s injunctions for love and inclusion and the Church’s stratified hierarchy. Much of my discouragement comes from my awareness of the allure of power. Why should men give up their power and share it with women? The LDS Church currently has one of the highest rates of male activity of any American religious organization. If women had priesthood, would men see it as less desirable? Would their activity rate drop if they didn’t preside?

I recognize that in this essay, I am reopening the “old issues” that many think feminists have complained about too much already. However, by framing the question of sexism within the larger question of how power structures determine theological legitimacy, I have hoped to show the danger of letting authority hold sway over truth or beauty or love, not just for women, but for all. Though I have used the Heavenly Mother as a metaphor for whatever is currently marginalized and for whoever is disenfranchised, beaten, and left by the side of the road to die, men as well as women can occupy this spot. Men often think that gender issues do not apply to them, but they are as much the products of gender construction as are women. In a hierarchical structure such as the Church’s, every man is a “girl” to the men above him in the priesthood pipeline. Every doctrine is capable of becoming taboo like the Heavenly Mother, not on the basis of truth or logic or even popular disregard, but if it is pronounced such by those with the power to make it unspeakable. And every person can be labeled apostate when disagreement with any authority is made a sign of sin. Once the weight of authority is against a doctrine or a person, the only compelling argument for inclusion is an ethical one, based on principles of justice and love.<sup>37</sup> But can love ever prevail over power?

If we relegate the Heavenly Mother, her daughters, people of color, the poor, the outcast, the ignorant, the despised—the least of us—to the trash bin of theology and culture, then we visit this same treatment upon Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Father, whom we claim to honor above all. Christ said, “As ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me.” This is both a cursing and a blessing, depending on where we stand. We worship not by prayer alone, but through our answer to the Lord’s call to “succor the weak, lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5). We are Christ’s so long as we do the work of Christ, which is to empower the powerless and to relieve the pain of any who suffer. To fall short of this ideal is not only to fail to live Christ’s gospel but to create bad theology as well. 

## NOTES

1. This means that liberal Mormons and liberal publications also limit both the free expression of ideas and the type of knowledge that is circulated. What I am saying is that ethics demands that we liberal Mormons should turn our complaints about the Church's control of knowledge on ourselves. We must ask ourselves whether we have done what we have condemned in others. Do we truly want to open discussions with those with whom we disagree?

2. Emmanuel Levinas's famous idea that ethics are prior to epistemology succinctly states my point.

3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Four Cornerstones of Faith," *Ensign*, February 2004, 3.

4. President Hinckley says that the fourth cornerstone, priesthood, "is the power and the authority to govern in the affairs of the kingdom of God" and that the "qualification for eligibility is obedience to the commandments of God." He emphasizes all men may receive it, regardless of their "station in life," the "color of their skin," or "the nation in which they live." Gender, then, is the one difference that disqualifies half of the Church.

5. I am simplifying Foucault's complex theory, represented by such books as, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) or *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon (Sussex, England: Harvester Press, 1980). For a more accessible introduction to Foucault's thought, see Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

6. This does not mean that I find his theories fully sufficient. Feminists have critiqued Foucault for failing to engage sufficiently with the way gender relates to his theory. Also, from an LDS perspective, Foucault's theories are fairly deterministic since they downplay human agency.

7. I owe my inclusion mostly to the strong support of Brian Birch and Dennis Potter, UVSC faculty members and two of SMPT's founders.

8. While the term "independent publication" often implies a more liberal press, such as SUNSTONE, *Dialogue*, or Signature Books, in one sense, anything not published by the Church itself is "independent" of direct Church control. However, the common use of the term to designate "liberal" is telling because it implies that such publications are not *dependent enough* on Church strictures. Thus there are layers of perceived legitimacy in non-official publications, perceptions based simply on what seems to rely on Church and priesthood approval and theological guidelines.

9. Linda P. Wilcox gives the best history of the reception of the Heavenly Mother doctrine. She explains the problems with attributing it to Joseph Smith and outlines the statements by other Church leaders. See Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 3–21. Elaine Cannon is the author of the encyclopedia entry: *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 2, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. "Mother in Heaven."

10. Taken from her paper, "Bodies, Parts, and Passions," delivered at the 2002 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium (tape #SL02–254). Daughtrey's query generated a total of about forty posts on Beliefnet.com.

11. The result here is misleading, in reality, representing an even smaller number. Two references in talks by Mark E. Petersen describe the belief in a Mother God as a characteristic of early Christian dissenting groups. And most of the others are quoting or referencing two authoritative statements, one by Orson F. Whitney and one by Spencer W. Kimball.

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Daughters of God," *Ensign*, November 1991, 97.

13. President Hinckley could be interpreted as contradicting this idea in his talk in the November 1991 *Ensign* when he says that "none of us can add to or diminish the glory of her of whom we have no revealed knowledge."

14. Linda Wilcox quotes a 1960 statement from an LDS seminary teacher who speculates that "the name of our Mother in Heaven has been withheld" because of the way God the Father's and Jesus Christ's names have been profaned. (See Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," 7.) Whether he is the source of the idea or is reflecting a prevalent belief is hard to say. See also Melvin R. Brooks, *LDS Reference Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 3:142.

15. In Daughtrey's work on the disappearing discourse about the Heavenly Mother (cited above), Daughtrey asserts that the LDS Church's interest in covering up the Heavenly Mother doctrine is related to its desire to be seen as Christian by Protestant denominations, which means erasing anything that may seem "weird" to Protestant sensibilities, such as a plurality of gods. While I agree with Daughtrey, I still believe that the fear of feminism may be an even stronger reason to eliminate discourse about the Heavenly Mother.

16. Mary Douglas's classic *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) still offers insight. She says that taboos result from a desire for order as much as from fear and that the object or person under taboo may be considered dangerous and polluted as well as holy.

17. Spencer W. Kimball, "Fundamental Principles to Ponder and Live," *Ensign*, November 1978, 43–46.

18. First given as an address at a Church-wide fireside, 22 February 1987, his remarks were later reprinted in Ezra Taft Benson, *Come Listen to a Prophet's Voice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1990): 25–37.

19. Divorce and birth control practices among LDS people are other examples of how practice subtly reshapes belief. Where Joseph Fielding Smith advised my generation not to practice birth control at all, most LDS people today see birth control as a perfectly acceptable element of prayerful family planning.

20. The marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is obviously a topic of interest as well. But once again, this idea makes women more visible and central to Christianity.

21. Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd ed., enlarged (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

22. Most likely, Mormon scholars in the mainstream have a more direct influence.

23. A panel on postmodernism at the March Mormon Theology Conference did suggest that there are other approaches for Mormon theology. But these have not dominated Mormon theological discourse, which instead has tended to follow the pattern set by philosophical thinkers such as Sterling McMurrin, who exemplifies the tendency to position Mormon theology within the Enlightenment paradigm. Typical of his generation, McMurrin also uses exclusively male language to describe the norm—a pattern that few have broken away from since.

24. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001).

25. Paul Toscano and I treat the importance of Mormonism's contribution in our book, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990).

26. The Family: A Proclamation to the World. The full text is available on the Church's website at: <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,161-1-11-1,00.html>.

27. Hinckley, "Daughters of God."

28. If this is true, we could ask why the terms "God" or "Heavenly Father" do not include the feminine. If they do, then praying to Heavenly Father could include the Heavenly Mother, too.

29. Lynne Whitesides, Martha Esplin, and I interacted with President Hinckley's talk in a 1992 panel discussion, "Finding Our Bodies, Hearts, Voices: A Three Part-Invention," published in the *The Mormon Women's Forum: A Feminist Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (September 1993):18–22.

30. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, eds., *Oxford Readings in Feminism: Feminism and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95.

31. In the new book, *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers: Women Who Changed American Religion*, ed. Ann Braude (New York: Palgrave, 2004), leading women theologians of various faiths describe their feminist journeys. This book emerged from a 2002 Harvard Conference in which I was privileged to participate. I was profoundly moved by the spirituality and commitment of all these women.

32. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), xiii.

33. *Ibid.*, xx.

34. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003).

35. Maria Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodriguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), 151.

36. Of course, the Church has never admitted a mistake in its past policy on blacks and the priesthood. This adds, in my opinion, to our ongoing race problems. See roundtable discussion, "Speak the Truth and Shame the Devil," SUNSTONE, May 2003, 28–39.

37. I am profoundly moved by Emmanuel Levinas's assertion that a "face to face" relationship with the Other demands an "I-Thou" relationship. This kind of relationship provides the only immunity against the objectification of others as commodities to be eliminated when they do not readily fit into a privileged power system, theological or otherwise. To read about this theme in Levinas, see especially *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), and *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

## PILLARS OF MY FAITH

## THE GARDEN OF MY FAITH

By Nadine R. Hansen

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, MY HUSBAND AND I HAD THE opportunity to visit England and Scotland and to tour many of the beautiful cathedrals and chapels there. One of the small chapels we visited was the Roslyn Chapel, located about ten miles south of Edinburgh, Scotland. Built more than five hundred years ago, probably by Knights Templar fleeing the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in France, it is a most interesting little chapel, complete with many symbols of freemasonry and stone carvings of plants from the New World, even though it was constructed before the voyage of Columbus.

In the 1950s, the keepers of the Roslyn Chapel noticed that the inside pillars were beginning to deteriorate. To try to stop the deterioration, they whitewashed the pillars, hoping to preserve them. In the intervening decades, they have learned that the whitewash did not slow the decline. Instead, it sealed the stone, preventing it from breathing, which actually made matters worse. Now they are trying to figure out how to remove the whitewash without causing even further damage to the pillars.

I probably don't have to explain to this audience why the Roslyn Chapel pillars—those crumbling, whitewashed pillars—are an apt symbol of my spiritual journey. I probably don't have to say that Mormon history isn't like what they taught me in Sunday School. The Joseph Smith papyri, whatever they are, aren't from Abraham's own hand upon the papyrus. Words of dead prophets—once the definitive word of God to the people—are no longer regarded as authoritative, or even acceptable teachings, except after they have been filtered through the lens of correlation. And the latest studies of the mitochondrial DNA of Native Americans of both North and South America show that if ever there were Lamanites of Near Eastern descent in the New World, they aren't around any more.

I can tolerate cracks of all kinds in pillars. I don't expect perfection from anyone, even from the founding pillars of our



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faith. But I find whitewash most unseemly. No cracks could have shaken my faith in the pillars like the feeling I had been lied to and someone had tried to cover them up.

In the wake of my disillusionment over the state of the pillars, I decided to step outside, look around the grounds, and cultivate a garden of faith.

SIX YEARS AGO, we built a home in Cedar City. It's in a lovely location in the foothills. Since moving in, I have spent countless hours planning and landscaping the yard. I'm not a particularly skilled gardener. In my native California, one need not have much of a green thumb to get things to grow. Like the multitudes and varieties of California plants, ideas about spirituality also spring up spontaneously and thrive, especially in the liberal Bay Area, where I lived for twenty-nine years. Moving to Utah was culture shock! Spiritual ideas seemed as sparse as the desert growth which now surrounded me. But I accepted the responsibility for making it bloom.

In my faith garden, as in my home garden, I have found the plants best-suited to the environment of my spirit are familiar, native species or hybrids of native species, supplemented by others that I have introduced into the landscape. So let me tell you about the plants in my garden.

If I were to pick a tree from all those I know as a metaphor for God, I think I would choose the majestic Pacific coast redwood. Among the oldest living things on earth, these redwoods stand tall and straight, reaching to the heavens. They survive fire and flood and insects and almost everything short of a chain saw. But the trees of the temperate rain forest don't grow in the arid desert of southwestern Utah. So instead of a redwood, I had to look around for a better-adapted species for my metaphor and chose the pinyon pine as my symbol for God. Pinyons have the advantage of already existing in, and in fact, dominating, my backyard landscape, where they grow in small groves alongside Utah Junipers, which I chose to let represent humanity. I like the idea of God and humankind growing together, close enough for their branches to touch, both hardy, both evergreen, not the same, exactly, but with some similarities.

When I first encountered them, both kinds of trees were on the scruffy side. I pruned some dead wood from the pinyons—notions of a judgmental, patriarchal God with a

harem, who keeps score—and found, in what was left, a familiar, accessible deity. It may not be as majestic as a redwood, but neither are its reaches as distant. From the junipers, I lopped off the dead wood of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I then looked at my groves and saw that they were good.

Pinyon pines and Utah Junipers also share an interesting botanical trait. They are *monoecious*, which means that both female and male characteristics—cones or berries and the flowers that pollinate them—exist in the same tree. Thus both God and humanity in my garden are simultaneously male and female, and gender role constructs are simply irrelevant.

**T**HE DOMINANT LANDSCAPING feature of my front yard is the lawn. A healthy lawn is a lot like the institutional Church. As a ground-cover, it is unparalleled. It has a pleasing color and texture, survives being walked on, and with sufficient, appropriate care, can grow almost anywhere. Its blades are uniform, looking just alike. It crowds out the weeds of life, and the individual components grow close together, providing shade and shelter for a healthy root system. Its abiding popularity demonstrates its enduring benefits.

A lawn is not without its problems, however. It takes a great deal of effort to keep it looking good—fertilizer, weed killer, pesticides, frequent mowing, and copious amounts of water, a precious commodity in the second driest state in the union. Also, it is invasive, frequently spilling over into flower beds and other places where it is not wanted, even sometimes cracking concrete sidewalks at the seams.

Like the lawn, the institutional church can also be invasive, extending itself into too many private aspects of our lives and into too many public places as well. Particularly annoying, to me, is when the institutional Church spills over into the political arena, attempting to enshrine its beliefs and practices in the civil law, making up as it goes along the rules for what constitutes a “moral issue.”

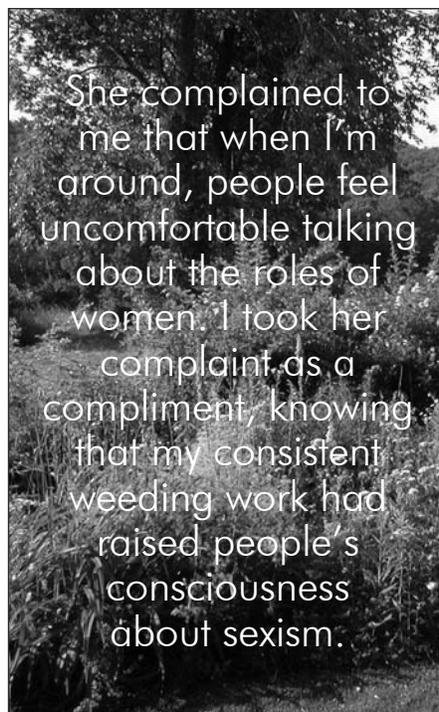
There is a place in my landscape for the lawn, the institutional Church, and it is still a fairly prominent one, right in the front yard of where I live. I’ve installed automatic sprinklers to reduce the amount of effort I have to put into it, and to regulate the quantity of resources that go into maintaining it. But as I see it encroaching into areas where it doesn’t belong, I wonder if I am affording it too much of my space and substance. For now it remains, hedged about in most places by concrete boundaries, which limit its spread, but I have not ruled out the possibility of displacing at least some of it with a ground cover more compatible with my life and resources.

In addition to pinyon pines and junipers, one other native

plant dominates the natural landscape of the Great Basin: sagebrush. Sagebrush, perhaps because of its abundance, is a much under-appreciated plant. Like the pioneers, it is hardy in the hottest summers and coldest winters. It may not be elegant, but it is as stable and constant and indestructible as the

pioneer stock who made a home in a hostile land. The memory of those pioneers, and others before and after, exemplifies faith and courage and the triumph of the human spirit; the memory is a vital part of my faith journey. The pioneers’ stories inspire me with a sense of who I am and how I came to occupy my time and place in the chain of life.

The subcontractor who cleared our lot to make room for our house had far too little respect for sagebrush. He drove over it and bulldozed it everywhere except where it managed to hide behind rocks or under junipers. Our pioneer forbears were not without their problems, but bulldozing the parts of their story that make us uncomfortable today robs us of our heritage and of the lessons we might learn from it. My sagebrush reforestation project includes doing genealogy and family history work to make sure their stories are preserved.



**M**Y GARDEN IS not without weeds. I generally find it pretty easy to control the small, personal ones. Whatever dissonance I may have over the condition of the faith's pillars, I believe deeply in the value of the Mormon way of life—the life of faith and family and community, of helping others, of respect for the body and keeping it free of harmful or mind-altering substances. Most of the time, my spiritual landscape exists comfortably and joyfully within the community of Saints. It is home to me.

A couple of persistent and particularly noxious weeds deserve mention, however. One I constantly battle is the ever-pervasive tumbleweed. It's a nasty little devil with tough, thorny seeds that can stick into your fingers right through leather work gloves. To make matters worse, I have discovered that despite a life free of plant allergies, even in California where almost everything grows, I am allergic to tumbleweed pollen.

I have decided that tumbleweeds represent the twin plants of sexism and homophobia that grow out of a patriarchal worldview and that have become pervasive and insistent during Mormonism's last quarter century. I find these weeds the most troublesome ones in the entire garden. It takes a constant effort to pull them out early, before the flowers pollinate, before the seeds harden and turn into thorns that implant themselves wherever they touch and sprout new offending plants. Once a ward member complained to me that when I'm around, people feel uncomfortable talking about the roles of

women. I took her complaint as a compliment, knowing that my consistent weeding work had raised people's consciousness about sexism.

In battling the tumbleweeds, I've learned some interesting things about them. First, they are an exotic species, introduced into America from eastern Europe. They do not belong in our landscape any more than sexism and homophobia belong in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have also noticed that tumbleweeds rarely grow where the native landscape is undisturbed. To spread, tumbleweeds must tumble. That is how they drop their seeds. They can tumble efficiently only in the open spaces of cleared land, only in places where minds have been diverted from the core teachings of Jesus and his concern for making life better for the oppressed. They can't tumble in sagebrush, in the common-sense independence of pioneers who didn't have time to think about gender roles when there was a job to be done. These same people, in fact, wrote equal rights into their original constitution, however much that provision has been ignored in the century following the achievement of statehood.

I have also noticed that the one place in my yard where I never see a growing tumbleweed is under the shelter of the pinions and junipers. The tumbleweeds get blown into the groves, where they are trapped by the dozens on the lower branches of the trees, but the seeds never sprout in the shady humus under the trees. Where God and humanity live in close proximity, even the most persistent weeds cannot take root.

The other troublesome weed in my garden is bindweed, another non-native, opportunistic plant that prefers cultivated, watered gardens over lands covered by sage and pinyon and juniper. Bindweed twines itself around other plants, if left alone, practically tying knots around them. It competes with them for light and water. I can unwrap it from the stems of the plants it entwines and pull it out of the ground, but it breaks off, leaving its deep roots intact. And it grows back.

Bindweed, it seems to me, is a metaphor *par excellence* for today's constrained, correlated approach to religious thought and, most noticeably, the incessant admonitions to be obedient to authority. I've never left bindweed alone in my garden long enough to find out what kind of damage it would do to my plants if left unchecked, but any plant so determined to take over the space of other growing things is suspect and unwelcome in my garden. Lesson manuals that specifically instruct us not to use other supplemental sources are too controlling and stifling for my tastes. I may not be able to eliminate this unwanted intruder from the landscape, but I won't let it smother free inquiry and discourse.

**E**NOUGH ABOUT WEEDS. Many, if not most, of the long-standing, traditional plants in my faith garden are desirable and welcome. Some staples like the perennial roses of compassion and care and community and helpfulness in times of difficulty are desirable in any garden, as are the perennial flower beds of the fruits of the Spirit enumerated in Galatians: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22–23).

Other native species are nice just as they are, but can also be improved upon. Among these is one I plant each year—the sunflower. Sunflowers are lovely, prolific plants that grow everywhere. They brighten our roadsides and fields and meadows. Where I live, they pop up wild in our gardens even without being specifically invited. Their golden color brings to mind the Golden Rule, a teaching of most religions, I am sure, but one that I learned within my native faith.

Native sunflowers, while attractive, have their limits. Though numerous, their flowers are small. In its native Mormon habitat, the Golden Rule inspires countless acts of kindness and undoubtedly prevents countless acts of nastiness. But it doesn't extend as far as it could or should. For instance, in a Church where sex is the first criteria for making assignments, it doesn't extend institutionally to women, and the fact that President Hinckley has to remind us not to be clan-ish or holier-than-thou is evidence of our reputation for our failure to extend the Golden Rule to non-Mormons. Conspicuously, the Rule doesn't apply to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, who want nothing more or less than to have their relationships recognized and valued in the same ways we recognize and value heterosexual ones. Instead, the Church crusades vigorously in many states to make sure they get no societal recognition.

Sunflowers have been developed and cultivated into more impressive species than the ones that grow wild along the roadsides. Hybrid species growing six or eight or ten feet tall, with flower heads ten or twelve or fourteen inches across, are big enough and bright enough to extend the Golden Rule to all people, even those different from us. By planting showy, inclusive versions of the Golden Rule in my own faith garden, by speaking up for the marginalized, I nurture the hope for a more inclusive institutional church.

I've tried a lot of other plants in my garden. Some, including certain New Age ideas, have intrigued me, but they never flourished or bloomed, and I let them die out. Others, like the faith and courage of Corrie ten Boom in hiding Jews from the Nazis, Pagan respect for the cycles of Mother Earth, and the sense of connection to all things living that I have developed from scientific discoveries relating to evolution and DNA, are non-native species I have welcomed to my garden. And, of course, the uncorrelated wildflowers of *SUNSTONE*, *Dialogue*, the Mormon Women's Forum, and other independent Mormon publications are indispensable additions to the preexisting native plants.

**T**HE PILLARS ARE still in their place. Though damaged and whitewashed, they still support the structure and form of a belief system familiar and, in many ways, comfortable to me. They remain relevant to my spiritual life, but they are no longer central to it. Lifeless pillars do not nurture my living faith, but living things do. In my faith garden, I am the gardener, the architect of the landscape, and it is up to me to choose what grows there. It is a work in progress, not set in stone like pillars. There is much more work to do there, and it is the joyful work of a lifetime. 

If there are faults . . .

# LET'S PUT WARNING LABELS ON THE STANDARD WORKS

By William D. Russell

**W**E ALL LIKELY AGREE THAT WE HAVE A MORAL obligation to teach the children in our families and in the Church those things in the scriptures which we believe to be valuable, uplifting, and containing sound moral values. Yet as parents and Church leaders, we “pick and choose” among the myriad of teachings in the standard works, ignoring those parts of our scriptures and historical traditions that we find of no real worth.

Regardless of any emphasis on scripture reading, we seem to have operating in our churches essentially an “oral tradition.” Although we Mormons are “people of the books,” I suspect that most of us as children didn’t read very seriously the standard works, or as we call them in the RLDS Church (now Community of Christ), “The Three Standard Books.” I was probably a fairly typical RLDS youth. I would have a really good spiritual experience at church camp and then go home determined to read the whole Bible. I would start at Genesis, Chapter 1, and was lucky if I made it all the way through Genesis. I did get to know Genesis pretty well, but I wish someone had suggested I start with the four Gospels.

As was my experience, I believe most of us actually learn the gospel through the oral tradition. Our parents and other influential adults teach us what they think is important from the scriptures and from our church’s history and traditions. They take us to church, where we sing the hymns and hear the preachers, the teachers, and the testimonies and prayers of the saints. Each—the hymnal and curriculum committees included—pass on to us things they have selected from our scriptures and history which they believe to be of spiritual value. They let us feast on what they regard as the plain and

precious truths, and they leave out “the garbage.”

My father was an RLDS church appointee, meaning he was a full-time, paid minister—one of those “hired preachers” the Book of Mormon warns us about. But there were many things in our scriptures and history that I never heard of growing up in a home where—except for school—the church seemed to be our whole life. Only as an adult historian did I learn some things in our scriptures and tradition that I am sure made no sense at all to my father. That’s why he never taught them to me.

**I** BELIEVE WE have a moral obligation to filter out the irrelevant, untrue, and immoral things in our scriptures and history, selecting for our young people only those things which we think are consistent with sound Christian moral principles. And I believe we have an equally strong moral obligation to teach our youth that not everything in the scriptures is true, and further, that some teachings found in our canon are immoral and should be condemned in the strongest terms. We should not justify immorality simply because some holy man practiced it and it happened to be recorded in the sacred text. If we don’t condemn immorality in the scriptures, we expose our young people to the possibility that they will engage in immoral conduct “inspired” by scripture.

We should not turn off our brains when reading scriptures or listening to church leaders speak. I don’t know if Utah saints often have prophecies uttered in church meetings. We used to in the RLDS tradition, reasonably often, but we rarely hear them any more. Back in the late 1940s, my father was the pastor in St. Joseph, Missouri. At a prayer service during a summer church camp, the place where prophecies most often occurred, a man arose and began by saying, “Thus saith the Spirit to my servant Melvin Russell. . . .” As the prophecy proceeded, Dad realized that this guy—a close friend of the stake president—was trying to get my father to accept some decision of the stake president that Dad considered unwise, even foolish. My father thought the stake president a shallow bag of wind, and this guy giving the prophecy was clearly serving as his henchman. As the “prophecy” directed at my father con-



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## they are the mistakes of men.

tinued, it became clearer and clearer that it was a political statement intended to intimidate my father into compliance. Dad finally had enough and got up and walked out of the tent where the service was being held, even before the so-called prophecy was concluded.

I wasn't there, so I don't know what happened when Dad walked out. (My source for this story is my older sister and brother, who were there.) But it's fun to imagine the closing lines of the prophecy: "Thus saith the Spirit unto my servant Melvin Russell . . . Melvin! . . . Come back here, Melvin!!"

We should not accept something we otherwise consider hogwash simply because it is in the scriptures or because some authoritative person says it is from God. In many parts of the world, we see people doing inhumane things to other people in the name of their sacred text or god. We easily condemn these actions when they are done in the name of other gods or other sacred texts. For instance, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson condemn Osama bin Laden and other Muslims for inhumane action justified by their reading of the Koran. Yet Falwell and Robertson seem unaware that they use a similar methodology in interpreting their own sacred texts—the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. As Jesus said, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but not notice the log in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3 NRSV)

In our world, we see terrorist activities which kill innocent victims. We see women treated as property of men and executed as adulterers. We see homosexuals imprisoned or killed. We see bad things being done in the name of other religions and other gods. And we condemn these actions. But do our own young people—based on their reading of scripture—engage in activities which are also immoral or un-Christian?

**W**E WHO ARE part of the Restoration movement have traditionally been people of the book, even people of the *books* (plural). The LDS "Articles of Faith" and the RLDS "Epitome of Faith" are both based on Joseph Smith's Wentworth Letter, and there is very little difference between them. Both doctrinal statements include Joseph's statement to Mr. Wentworth that "we believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly."

But Joseph's statement has serious problems. It suggests that Joseph thought significant errors had been introduced by the omission or alteration of plain and precious truths. He seemed to think the Bible had been tampered with by wicked monks during the Middle Ages. But we now understand those monks involved in the translation and transmission process to be good, devout, men of God who have rendered readings that are quite faithful to the original texts. We owe them a great debt of gratitude, not words of condemnation such as those which Joseph Smith uttered. Joseph's statement seems to be a product of a hostile attitude toward medieval Catholicism common in his day, as seen in the attitudes of Thomas Jefferson, Joseph Priestley, and Thomas Paine.<sup>1</sup>

But the more serious problem with Joseph Smith's statement is that it implies that the original texts of the biblical

writings were quite all right—that any mistakes that happen to have crept into our Bible can be attributed to the translation and transmission process. Unfortunately, the problems are usually *in* the original text.

RLDS General Conference Resolution 215, adopted in 1878, represents very well the church in which I was raised. The resolution declares that the scriptures—the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants—are the source of religious authority. If we can support our point from the Three Standard Books, we can be confident it is true.

In both our churches, as people of the books, we assume our sacred books are "true"—whatever that means. We quite naturally wax eloquent about the inestimable value of our sacred texts when we are articulating those ideas and events in them which we find of value. I doubt that any elder has lost church status for applauding the message of any particular passage of scripture or from praising the scriptures in general.

However, if an elder notices in scripture an idea which seems either irrelevant or immoral, I doubt his status will be enhanced by telling the saints about it. We applaud the teachings of the scriptures which seem relevant and true in our contemporary culture while we remain in cowardly silence about passages that might be considered wicked and immoral.

**C**ONSERVATIVES OFTEN ACCUSE liberals of "picking and choosing" what they will accept and reject in the scriptures. I hope we all plead guilty. In 1996, I was interviewed on Martin Tanner's KSL radio talk show in Salt Lake City, "Religion on the Line." One caller asked why I thought I could pick and choose among the scriptures. I replied, "Because God gave me a brain."

Although they might not admit it, conservatives also pick and choose, but their ideology often prevents them from seeing or admitting that they do. When confronted with a difficult passage, the liberal is more inclined to admit it is without merit while the conservative will more likely seek to find a way to explain it as somehow "true"—though sometimes great mental gymnastics are required.

For example, Leviticus says that if two men commit a homosexual act, they have "committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death." (Lev. 20:13 KJV) When conservatives challenge advocates of gay rights, they often cite Leviticus, the earliest of several biblical passages which they say condemn same sex relationships as sinful—even those that are loving, monogamous, and committed for "as long as we both shall live." But I have never seen an anti-gay advocate of Leviticus seriously suggest that we should execute people who engage in homosexual acts. They employ Leviticus to affirm it is an abomination, but they pick and choose within that very sentence by ignoring the holy scripture's call for capital punishment for these actions. And of course the scriptures also call for the death penalty for adultery, profaning the Sabbath, swearing at parents, and many other disapproved activities. Although Latter-day Saints tend to favor the death penalty, I doubt that many would advocate the death penalty for most of

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the offenses which the Bible says merit this punishment.<sup>2</sup>

If you were living in Kentucky in the 1850s, would you have been doing the will of God if you had obeyed the law of the land and assisted in catching and returning runaway slaves? The New Testament, in Ephesians and Colossians, says that slaves should obey their masters, and the master's first command is not to run away. Many good nineteenth-century Christians would have praised your adherence to God's word. But if instead you became part of the Underground Railroad and helped those runaway slaves make it to the free states—or better yet, Canada where they would be free from the reach of the Fugitive Slave Act—would you have been doing the will of

Our cowardly silence regarding the wicked passages in our scriptures—coupled with our general assertions that the scriptures are wonderful and “true” and have come straight from God—leave our people vulnerable to the possibility of acting upon the basis of immoral passages in the scriptures, all the while assuming we are doing God's will.

God? The slave catchers had the Bible on their side; the participants in the Underground Railroad had God on theirs.

We have the benefit of hindsight when we recognize that we no longer see the “slaves obey your master” injunction in Ephesians 6 as morally requiring the return of runaway slaves in antebellum America. But the same kind of language occurs one chapter earlier, in chapter 5, when Paul says “Wives obey your husbands . . . in everything.” Shouldn't we see this passage as reflecting a culture where male dominance was the norm? In the last forty years, who was doing the will of God: those who said, “Women, stay in your place” as defined by Ephesians chapter 5, or those who said, “Women, be all that you can be”? Who was doing the will of the Lord?

When a woman comes forward to tell of her continued abuse by her priesthood member husband, should we follow Mark's prohibition on divorce or Matthew's teachings which allow divorce only on the grounds of adultery and therefore

encourage her to stay in the abusive marriage? Or are we doing the moral thing if we encourage her to divorce—on the basis that no person should have to suffer constant abuse within the home? Which approach promotes “family values”

At one time, Alice, wife of Kirtland cult murderer Jeff Lundgren, left her husband and took her three children to her mother's home a hundred miles away because her husband had beaten her and for several months had only pretended to work a night job at the Kansas City airport. Her mother encouraged her to return to her husband. Had she sought counseling from church leaders, they might have urged her to do the same thing. Eleven years earlier, she had received a patriarchal blessing in which she had been told she would marry a man who would do a great work for the Lord. At times Jeff was very active in the church. Maybe he would yet do that great work, she hoped.

Alice returned. Jeff didn't do a great work, but he propelled the name of the RLDS Church into the media like no one else when he murdered a family of five from his twenty-nine-member group. Alice had been ten miles away when the murders took place, but she is serving 150 years in the Ohio Reformatory for Women.<sup>3</sup> If, ten years earlier, Alice had concluded that the Gospels of Mark and Matthew are wrong on divorce, and that her mother and her church's teachings were also misguided, and that an abused woman should get out of the relationship as fast as she can—church traditions be damned—I would claim she had received a revelation. And Alice clearly needed a revelation regarding the church and family traditions that bound her.

When as a teenager I read about Sarah being barren and Abraham taking Hagar in order to have sons, I knew this violated the moral teachings of my society, church, and parents. I also knew that if my mother had not produced any sons and my father had taken on a second wife or concubine so he could have sons, Mom would have exploded. I produced two daughters and no sons, and I'm sure my first wife and I would have divorced much sooner had I suggested Abraham's way to her. My second wife is more religious but not any friendlier to bigamy, even when commanded by God. Why is this solution a sin for us but all right for Abraham?

After the murders, Jeff Lundgren became a polygamist while hiding in the national forest of West Virginia, awaiting the return of Christ. In a prison interview, his son Damon Lundgren justified to me his father's polygamy—what most of the rest of us would call adultery—with this interesting theological statement: “You can put your penis where you want to if God says it's OK.”

**I**N MUCH OF the Hebrew Bible—especially in the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings) one does not find the concept of life after death as a reward for being good. Instead, righteousness is rewarded with good health, long life, material prosperity, and lots of sons. This kind of thinking has led many people to believe that when one is sick or has some disability,

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it is a sign of sin, a sign of God's displeasure. And since the sick can be healed if they have sufficient faith, if your prayers for healing are not successful, then obviously you just don't have enough faith!

In the scriptures, we see murder committed in the name of God. We see God order the destruction of all of the men, women, children, and even the cattle of their enemies, and God condemning Israelite leaders when they fail to kill the cattle and children as commanded.

When my daughter was about eleven, she said she would like to read the Book of Mormon. A few days later, she announced she had quit reading at page fourteen. In our Book of Mormon, page fourteen contains the story of Nephi's murdering Laban in order to steal his scriptures and his magnificent sword. No wonder Shauna got no further in the book. In both our two churches, we justify this murder on the basis that it was for a good cause—securing the scriptures for the trip to the New World. Well, Jeff Lundgren had a “good” purpose in killing the Avery family in 1989. He believed it was essential to bringing about the return of Christ and the establishment of Zion. I am convinced that the jury I saw in Painesville, Ohio, in September 1990 would have convicted Nephi of murder and robbery and sentenced him to death just as surely as they did Jeff Lundgren.

We glory in Moroni's promise at the end of the Book of Mormon. Yet do we really think we can accept or reject a book as “true” or “false” based on a prayer in the form of a question to God? As the late Roy Cheville, longtime religion professor, often asked students at Graceland College, “Does God work like that?” If we answered yes, he would then suggest that our God is “too small.”<sup>4</sup> Shouldn't we instead evaluate the Book of Mormon based on our reading of it and our judgment as to whether it teaches sound moral principles? In fact, isn't that what we *really* do, despite Moroni's promise?

**I** SEE TWO dangers if we are not honest about the scriptures and teach that they contain not only profound truths but also immoral teachings. The first danger is that our cowardly silence regarding the wicked passages in our scriptures—coupled with our general assertions that the scriptures are wonderful and “true” and have come straight from God—leave our people vulnerable to the possibility of acting upon the basis of immoral passages in the scriptures, all the while assuming we are doing God's will. There are fundamentalist Mormons in Utah who think section 132 (1843) is true for all time while others believe it was never, and isn't now, the proper, moral marital system.

I have a good friend, a recent Graceland professor who is Mormon and a former LDS bishop. I have asked him several times to talk about Utah Mormonism with my freshman Latter Day Saint history course. In the course of his interactions with my students, he is typically confronted with questions about polygamy, the plurality of gods, and baptism for the dead. In each case, my friend will say he cannot give a rational explanation for the doctrines, but he believes them to be true because God said so. That is a poor basis for belief. It is very dangerous to assume that everything in the Standard Works represents the words or word of God.

Our inability to be honest with our youth and engage in critical thinking with regard to the scriptures leaves our children vulnerable to the dangerous passages in the canon. The experience of the Lundgren cult in Kirtland in the late 1980s illustrates my point. The incredible thing is not that Jeff Lundgren murdered a family of five in the name of God: crazy people kill from time to time. The incredible thing is that only one of fifteen of his adult followers had retained enough independent moral judgment to recognize the immorality and criminality of Jeff's proposed actions. And I fault the RLDS church for not educating its people about the inherent dangers involved when people claim to speak for God.

The one person who retained enough independent moral judgment was a man named Kevin. The others in the group had lost their ability to think and exercise moral judgment. Jeff had an impressive ability to recall the details of the scriptures, which he spent countless hours studying. He knew the contents of “the Three Standard Books” very well. But when I lis-



People of Laman v. Ammon

JEANETTE ATWOOD

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tened to fifty audiotapes of his 1986–87 Sunday School classes, I heard lots of scriptures but not one sentence that would help anyone act more lovingly or justly. And never did Jeff explain the historical context of a passage of scripture. Most of his disciples were young adults, raised with an uncritical understanding of the scriptures. Jeff's ability to support virtually every point he made with reference to two or more passages of scripture swayed his disciples toward blind faith in him. Many of these fourteen adults were vulnerable for personal reasons—a recent, nasty divorce, getting married and called to the priesthood while being a closeted homosexual, and so forth. But they also were vulnerable because they had not been taught to apply critical thinking to the study of scripture. As a result, they were unable to make independent moral and intellectual judgments of all statements—whether from sacred texts or ordinary utterances. Clearly Jeff used the scriptures to lead people to break down and discard the moral teachings they had received from parents, church, schools, and the good parts of the scriptures.

The Lundgren cult developed in the context of the schism that took place in the RLDS church in the 1980s as a result of the ordination of women and other departures from traditional faith and practices. RLDS fundamentalists believed Wallace B. Smith was a fallen prophet because of Section 156 (1984) which called for the ordination of women. Couple this sense with an uncritical reading of scriptures and the personal vulnerability of some of Jeff's followers, and it is easy to see how Jeff was able to attract followers who allowed him to gain control of their minds, overpowering their moral conscience.

Meanwhile, about twenty thousand or more RLDS members were separating themselves from the church by joining splinter groups, usually called “independent restoration branches.” These were local branches independent of the RLDS hierarchy and not at this point answering to any authority above their local branch. While these people were mostly mainstream Americans of middle- and lower-middle-class socioeconomic status, the lack of a critical tradition in RLDS teaching left them vulnerable to claims of certainty about how to proceed to restore “the true faith” allegedly abandoned by Wallace B. Smith and other church leaders.

But since the scriptures are not always consistent, and ambiguity in scripture can be interpreted in differing ways, those who joined schismatic groups were often confronted with competing interpretations of scripture which called for differing organizational responses. Early on, in 1985, some elders took the view that the elders should take the lead in restoring the church. After all, the early conferences of Mormonism were elders' conferences. So they created an “International Elders Conference.” But that fell through, and by 1989, some Seventies had concluded that the Doctrine and Covenants confers on the Seventies the status of a third presidency, authorized to set the church in order when the two higher presidencies are out of order. So they started a new church and called a prophet and apostles. But in four or five years, they, themselves, were hopelessly splintered.

By 1998, a significant member of high priests living in the Independence area concluded that the Doctrine and Covenants directs the high priests to give leadership in such troubling times. By 2001, they had established the Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. They now have a prophet, Frederick N. Larson, seventy-two years old, who is a great grandson of Joseph Smith III.

In April 2003, patriarchs in the independent branches called for a general assembly to set the church in order. Perhaps they feel the scriptures indicate that patriarchs have the wisdom needed to discern the will of heaven regarding how to unite the schismatic factions of the RLDS Church. Isn't it interesting how members of each of these quorums seem, albeit unconsciously, to have read the scriptures with self-interested eyes.

**S**O HOW MIGHT we better approach scripture, especially in our teaching at home and in church? How have those from other traditions approached the difficulties inherent in any serious study of the scriptures? I believe the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a useful guide for helping us avoid destructive religious fanaticism. Developed by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral holds that there are four sources of religious authority. *Scripture*, of course, is the first one. But scripture must be tempered by *reason*, by *experience*, and by *tradition*. If in our churches, we educated our people on the need to bring reason, experience, and tradition to bear on our understanding of scripture, perhaps fewer members would undertake irrational or destructive actions, thinking they are pleasing to God.

We must teach our members, from their early years forward, to read scriptures critically, expecting to find inspiring and timeless insights as well as ideas that conflict with Christian moral values. We must explicitly condemn the latter in the strongest terms. We must end our cowardly silence about the destructive things in the scriptures. In effect, let's put warning labels on the Standard Works. 

### NOTES

1. For the intellectual worldview of the Jeffersonian circle see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948). See also Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896).

2. The Community of Christ took an official position against the death penalty at its World Conference in 2000 (World Conference Resolution 1273).

3. Of the thirteen cases the prosecutors brought against members of the Lundgren cult, Alice's was by far the toughest, since she was not at or near the scene of the crime. But prosecutors convinced the jury that Alice was in on the planning and was therefore a conspirator. I gave a 1993 Sunstone symposium presentation challenging the prosecutors' view (tape SL93–213).

4. Roy A. Cheville was a professor of religion at Graceland College from 1923 until 1960, and was Presiding Patriarch for the RLDS Church from 1958 until his retirement in 1974. He died in 1986. In his freshman introductory religion course, Cheville used his own book, *Growing Up in Religion* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1951). His constant stressing of the point about our God being too small and our needing to “grow up” in our religious understandings comes from his belief that we rely too much on easy answers provided by scriptures, church traditions, and prayer that hardly involves more than just asking God for favors or answers to difficult questions that we should carefully study first.

# THE RICHNESS OF SCRIPTURE

By Molly McLellan Bennion

**B**ILL RUSSELL'S PAPER CUTS TO THE VERY HEART OF human dilemma. He asks us to consider how we seek the truth and how we recognize the truth. We for whom religion is a help in that quest sympathize with Bill's concerns.

As one who has taught Gospel Doctrine for a total of sixteen years and other Church classes for almost that long, I have seen how Church manuals and members ignore the difficult scriptural issues Bill raises. We ignore them because the scriptures have too many blatant inconsistencies to support the literalism many Latter-day Saints accept in theory. We don't want to expose the depth of the problem, so we create manuals that are largely proof texts. This way, we neither officially endorse literalism nor challenge its adherents. Our teaching manuals display an arrogant distrust of the intellectual abilities and the spiritual insights of the common person. We do not teach people how to read the scriptures nor how to deal with troublesome texts. As Bill correctly concludes, we rarely discuss in Church settings even destructive passages. We also teach occasional falsehoods as we take scriptures out of context or make explanations based on guesses when historical or literary explanations are available.

Given a free hand, how would I teach scriptural study? Inspired by Bill's work, I address his warning labels and add a few caveats of my own. My response is not a criticism but rather first thoughts towards guidelines I might use to design scripture study for Church classes.

*I would teach that the scriptures, though inspired by God, are written by men.* God inspires men in their own languages and according to their understanding and circumstances. "For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3). With the exception of personal rev-



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elation, every message we receive from God is filtered through another person. The potential for mistakes, for just being wrong, is inherent in us mortals. In particular, the potential for our misunderstanding the context of a scripture originating in another time and place and filtered by another's understanding is always present.

*I would teach that the scriptures are histories, chronicling the good and the bad.* To understand them, we must learn as much as we can of the periods which they describe and in which they were written. I find the lives of ancient peoples instructive regardless of the merit of their choices or the current irrelevance of their cultural beliefs and practices. My brothers-in-law are no doubt greatly relieved that should my husband die, I will not climb into their beds under the foot of the blankets and demand my right to wed. And I must say that I'm also relieved that *my* culture doesn't put such an expectation on me. But Ruth's claim upon Boaz and his reluctance to honor his obligation tell us much of family, of loyalty, and of societies that undervalue women. The exclusion of bastards from the community, even up to the tenth generation, is another good example (Deuteronomy 23: 2). Why would a society have adopted such a rule? What conflicts had they with other cultures which might have led to this? Were women viewed as property? Probably yes—so what brings people to do that? How was power divided and controlled, and why? Was the purity of the community so important to its survival that God could have sanctioned such a law? Or is this a case of God giving humans agency and standing by to raise our sights only when we demonstrate a readiness to receive?

These stories leave us stewing in our juices, contemplating what is right and what is wrong. I find the stories useful. I regret that we ignore them because, were we to look for a constructive use for these stories, I think we would often find one. When we don't find any redeeming value, we can teach that a flaw doesn't render the scriptures useless any more than our own flaws render us useless. To glean inspired guidance from the scriptures, we must read neither too uncritically nor too cynically.

*I would teach that scripture writers value the humanity of the players.* Contemporary Mormon writers are much more likely

## If there are faults . . .

to excise the mistakes of leaders than were the scribes of old. I think a great strength of the Old Testament, in particular, is its portrayal of the moral and the immoral. It is easier to contemplate the difference when faced with examples, as well as principles or rules. It is easier to feel God's love and to find the strength to be worthy of it when we know prophets have stumbled and risen above their sins.

*I would teach that scholarship, even controversial higher criticism, is very useful.* So much is hidden without a knowledge of the historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage. I would provide good research materials to our teachers and encourage them to find and use additional sources. Of course errors will be made, but errors are being made now. I would prefer errors which can be questioned to errors accepted without question. I would also prefer an environment in which members face the fact that scriptures cannot always be taken at face value. I would teach that the scriptures tell us God meets us where we are. God has chosen not to insist on higher laws in some cultures. I suspect he is lowering the bar for us, as well. And isn't that a useful thought to ponder?

*I would teach that Jesus fulfilled the law.* The higher law is now the law. Much of the Old Testament is still instructive, but much is no longer correct. This leads to my next point: I would teach the Big Picture—the principles of the gospel against which we test all that would claim to be true. We too often teach rules rather than core principles. Love, justice, mercy, free agency, honesty, compassion, and the dignity of man cannot be denied by a scripture. If a scripture conflicts with the most basic elements of the gospel of Christ, that scripture is not binding. It may be good history or an interesting example of man in error, but it is no longer prescriptive.

*I would teach single passages of scripture only in context.* Proof-texting is rampant, lazy, and misleading. In one of his best books, *Religion and the Pursuit of Truth*, Lowell Bennion says of pulling a sentence out of context:

It is dishonest, unfair, and misleading, certainly with no legitimate place in life, particularly not in anything as sacred and important as religion. Bernard Shaw is said to have remarked that the Bible is a wonderful book because you can prove anything by it. He probably is right, if one is clever enough with the text-proof method. Shakespeare expresses the same thought in his picturesque way:

In religion, what damned error but some  
sober brow

Will bless it, and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament.

—*Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Scene 2<sup>1</sup>

*I would teach humility.* I cannot discern a rational explanation to everything. My mind and spirit have frustrating limits. They are not finite, though, and I hope to continue to expand

them both. But they are far from perfect, so I am slow either to reject intellectually what is difficult to understand or to act on anything that doesn't square with my understanding of the Big Picture. For example, I leave open the possibility there was no other way to ensure Nephi's safety and secure the plates than to kill Laban, but, like Bill, I find the story troubling and far less than a directive to kill.

*I would teach that the scriptures are a case in point for the principle that we must learn to deal with ambiguity.* Rather than excise conflicting versions of stories or accounts of what is immoral by present standards, I would urge the student to consider the blessing of a flawed or uncertain guide. How much better to force us to seek inspiration or, absent answers (as is so often the case), to muddle through with our best understanding of truth. I think if God thought it wise for us to have daily tablets written by his own hand, we would have them. But that would be the next best thing to Satan's plan. It is good for us to struggle without clarity. Remember the Psalmist: "Rouse Yourself, why do you sleep, O Lord?" (Psalms 44:24–27). Remember the long Jewish tradition of arguing with God. Jacob, Abraham, and Jeremiah all did it. Even prophets do not have all the answers. The scriptures do not have all the answers. I can expect fewer answers than I seek. And those few better mesh with the Big Picture: Love and Justice and Mercy.

*I would teach the importance of seeking the Spirit, not only in scripture study, but in all that we do.* The Spirit is not a substitute for study but a companion to it. Integral, not exclusive. Last month, a student asked me in a Relief Society class, "But how do you *know* the Spirit is speaking?" It is a profound question. Promptings can be so gentle we fail to recognize them for what they are. Separating them from our own emotions and insights is difficult. I believe a part of the answer is that if we have truly studied any issue in our own minds, using all the good resources we can, exerting our mental and spiritual powers energetically, we are more likely to understand the Spirit when it speaks.

**B**ILL IS ABSOLUTELY right: We must bring critical thinking to the study of religion. What could be more worthy of our best resources? It is blasphemous to offer less. Some of us are too vulnerable to the Lundgrens of the world; others are missing so much of the richness of the scriptures that manifests itself only when we understand their many dimensions. Even if we seek truth by scripture, reason, experience, and tradition, mistakes will be made. But even more mistakes follow a fearful and proof-texting treatment. Scripture study is not a rote science but one demanding all the resources, intellectual and spiritual, we can muster. ☺

### NOTE

1. Lowell L. Bennion, *Religion and the Pursuit of Truth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968), 165.

# UNDERSTANDING THE VIOLENT SACRED

By Mack C. Stirling

**I**N 2 SAMUEL 21, WE READ THAT ANCIENT ISRAEL under King David was experiencing three years of famine. The Lord was consulted, and he informed David that the famine was a result of blood guilt on the land. The blood guilt had been caused one or two generations earlier by King Saul's reckless slaughter of the Gibeonites. In the story, David then goes to the Gibeonites to ask what can be done to assuage the blood guilt and reverse the famine. The Gibeonites suggest that seven of the descendants of Saul be killed and exposed "before the Lord." This amounts to human sacrifice. David complies with this request and ritually kills seven of Saul's grandsons. Afterwards, the rains come, ending the famine.

This text presents the Lord as a violent and capricious deity who personally punishes Israel during the time of David for earlier sins of King Saul. The Lord retracts this punishment only when offered sufficient sacrificial victims. I am personally appalled by such a god and have no desire to get close to him. Furthermore, I simply cannot harmonize this bloodthirsty god with my own personal experiences of God's loving grace, nor with the New Testament.

When forced to confront such problematic biblical texts, Latter-day Saints commonly respond in one of two ways. The first is to suggest that the text may have been "translated" incorrectly and, therefore, may be ignored. The second is to attempt to justify or rationalize the violent actions of God as acts of love. I insist that both these kinds of responses are unsatisfactory and inadequate. Instances of capricious divine violence are simply too numerous and too pervasive to be ascribed to a



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translation problem. Furthermore, many instances of divine violence simply cannot be justified by any reasonable means. The story from 2 Samuel, with which I began, is an excellent example.

How do we use the Bible profitably to know God in the face of contradictory biblical portrayals of his nature? Do we ignore the parts of the Bible we don't like or understand? Do we simply wait for more canonized scripture? I find neither approach satisfactory. To put a sharper point on the problem, compare the God of the Flood with the Lord of the Gospels. We, of course, consider them to be the same person, Jesus Christ. In the Flood, God became grieved at the violent sins of the human race and responded by violently killing nearly all humanity for their sins. Now, contrast this with the Lord Jesus of the Gospels. This God allowed men to kill Him for their sins in order that they might be enabled to turn out of their sins.

There is a radical disjunction between the nature of the God of the Flood and the Jesus of the Gospels. I do not believe this disjunction can be solved by appeals to mistranslation, nor by attempts to construe the Flood as an act of love, nor by assertions that God treated mankind differently under the "lesser law" of the Old Testament. No, these are not satisfactory answers.

**I**BELIEVE RENÉ GIRARD can help. Girard is a recently retired professor of French language and civilization at Stanford University who through extensive study of the major Western cultural texts—especially in literature, anthropology, psychology, and biblical studies—has developed a wide-ranging theory of culture. To understand Girard's approach to this disjunction between the Old and New Testament God, one must grasp two things: (1) Girard's concept of the violent sacred and (2) his understanding of the cross.<sup>1</sup>

*The Violent Sacred.* For Girard, the origin of the violent sacred lies in the collective action of human beings. From his

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studies of myth, ritual, literature, and anthropology, Girard postulates that human culture originated in the violent killing of an arbitrary victim by the collective action of a unified mob. In the process, human beings, formerly at odds because of pervasive rivalry, suddenly find themselves unified in blaming one victim for their discord. In killing this scapegoat/victim, a community in chaos becomes unified. Rivalry and resentment dissipate, having been projected onto the scapegoat/victim. The catharsis that arises from the killing is powerful; the resultant peace, overwhelming. This newly found peace and harmony seem miraculous, utterly beyond human ability or comprehension, and, hence, the participants attribute it to a sacred, divine source. Thus human mental projections around

As we approach difficult, violent texts, Girard asks us to read them with open eyes and realize that violent acts, projected (wrongly) onto God, were performed by humans just like us. The Bible reveals to us our own rivalry and scapegoating violence so that we might have some chance of overcoming them.

a scapegoat victim create the violent sacred. Archaic religion, composed of ritual animal or human sacrifice, myth, and prohibitions, comes out of this violent sacred. And out of archaic religion comes the rest of human culture: law, literature, kingship, economic exchange, and medicine.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, in Girard's understanding, the violent sacred stands at the very origin of the natural man. It is part of our inheritance as we participate in the fall. From the violent sacred comes the concept of a violent god, of a god who desires or requires victims to appease his anger, of a god who justifies humans in killing others in his name. The violent sacred converts the evil we do to others into holiness, into the will of God. We found our culture on the blood of our victims and declare our social order holy or sacred. The violent sacred allows us to justify ourselves, to declare our own righteousness at the expense of our victims, whom we perceive to be guilty. The violent sa-

cred, which is the origin of idolatry, induces us to project our own violence onto the true God. We do this wrongly.

*The Truth of the Cross.* Girard sees Jesus as having the pivotal role in ending the cycle of violence that has haunted human beings since the beginning of culture. Jesus is God who came into this world and gave his life for us. He submitted to the age-old scapegoating process of the violent crowd. The cross reveals to us the true God of non-violence: a God who wants to be the last sacrifice by ending the shedding of blood; a God who willingly becomes the scapegoat for the world in order to end our sacrificial scapegoating; a God who willingly steps into the hell of the violent sacred in order to destroy its power over mankind; a God who has raised up witnesses to speak the truth of the victim and destroy the lie of the scapegoating crowd. We can see the truth only because of the cross. We must interpret all scripture from the perspective of the cross.

Why, then, does the Bible contain contradictory portrayals of the nature of God? Because, just as Doctrine and Covenants 84 tells us, ancient Israel—like most of us—could not accept the revelation of the cross, the gospel, all at once (D&C 84: 23–25). Therefore, ancient Israelite writers produced texts written from the perspective of the violent, self-justifying crowd. These show God as violent. In these texts, the community effectively transfers its own guilt to God, sanctifying itself at God's expense. However, ancient Israel also produced other texts, more heavily influenced by revelation, written from the perspective of the victim. These show a non-violent God who takes the side of the victim, unmasking the lie of the crowd. Examples include the Joseph story (Genesis 37–50), the story of Elisha and the blind Syrians (2 Kings 6:8–23), the book of Job, and Isaiah's "suffering servant" passages (Isaiah 42:1–9; Isaiah 49:1–7; Isaiah 50:4–9; Isaiah 52:13–53:12).

Girard's work, with wonderful extensions and applications by the Girardian scholar Gil Bailie, have given me insights which enable me to read the entire Bible profitably.<sup>3</sup> With the concept of the violent sacred in mind, I can begin to neutralize the distortions of God's nature present in some scriptural texts. By doing so, I come to understand both God and myself better.

**I**N ADDITION TO helping me eliminate distortions and better understand the unity of scripture and the goodness of the God I worship, Girard's work has led me to insights in other areas of inquiry and my faltering attempts at genuine discipleship. A few brief examples:

1. LDS scriptures teach us that "because of the fall our natures are evil continually" (Ether 3:2), that "the natural man has been an enemy of God since the fall of Adam" (Mosiah 3:19), and that since the fall, "our children are conceived in sin" (Moses 6:55). Girard has taught me to better understand this fall as my own fall; to see my own rivalry with my fellow man; to see my own violence and my own scapegoating of others.

As we approach difficult, violent texts, Girard asks us to read them with open eyes and realize that violent acts, projected (wrongly) onto God, were performed by humans just

like us. The Bible reveals to us our own rivalry and scapegoating violence so that we might have some chance of overcoming them. To avoid these texts because they seem distasteful or to consider them irrelevant because “we are better than them” is to lapse into the age-old reflex of projecting one’s own violence onto someone else in order to preserve the delusion of one’s own innocence.

2. As suggested above, self-justification is a deeply ingrained human reflex. As a natural scapegoater, I have a tendency to justify my behavior at the expense of others. Girard has helped me to see that I have not infrequently stepped into the role of the Pharisee of Luke 18. This Pharisee declared his own worthiness by comparing himself to the publican who stood nearby. Although worthy in his own eyes, he walked away unjustified before God. What does it really mean when we say we are worthy?

3. As a believing Latter-day Saint, I accept that animal sacrifice was in some sense ordained by God and that the animal victims typify Christ (Leviticus 1–7; Mosiah 2:3; Alma 34:9–14; Moses 5:1–10). Girard certainly sees all sacrificial victims as types of Christ and sees ritual sacrifice as essential to the stability of early human communities. However, his thesis that ritual sacrifice (human and animal) had its origin in mimetic human violence is challenging. From Girard’s perspective, the true God would never personally need nor desire animal victims. Girard has led me to consider the probability that God initially acceded to man’s dependence on ritual animal sacrifice while using revelation to forbid human sacrifice, to transform the meaning of animal sacrifice (Alma 34:14; Moses 5:6–7), and eventually to move mankind beyond animal sacrifice altogether (Alma 34:13; 3 Nephi 9:19–20; Hosea 6:6; Jeremiah 7:21–23).

4. Girard has helped me to accept that Christ’s Atonement was necessary because of man—because we required it—and not because God required it to satisfy his honor. This has relieved me of the tremendous burden of trying to reconcile the idea of a God of unconditional love actually requiring the punishment of a surrogate victim in order to be able to forgive us. This idea makes no sense to me.

5. The scriptures tell us that God will destroy the wicked at his coming. From this, it is often assumed that God will personally execute those who remain but who have not met his standards. Girard challenges us to conceive of a God who destroys the wicked by another means: by the word of truth. Those who accept the gospel give up their own evil. Those who reject the gospel descend into ever-increasing violence. Thus do the wicked destroy the wicked, as both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants tell us. (Mormon 4:5, D&C 63:33).

6. The last verse of Doctrine and Covenants 121 tells us that those who enter into kingdoms in the eternal worlds will attract kingdoms and rule without compulsory means. This suggests that this is how God, even now, rules—without compulsion. Girard has helped me to begin to understand and believe in such a God. 

## NOTES

1. In my opinion, the best introduction to Girard’s theories, especially the religious elements and their applications today, is Gil Bailie’s *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995). Girard’s own most important books are: *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), original work published in 1972; *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), original work published in 1978; *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2001), original work published in 1999.

2. To better understand Girard’s theory of culture formation, it is important to look to his insights into the nature of human desire (as opposed to physiological needs). Girard calls human desire “mimetic.” By this, he means that desire is learned (imitated) from others and that desire includes an acquisitive drive to possess what the other has or to be what the other is. We do not desire objects directly; rather, we desire objects through the eyes of others. For example, put two children into a nursery full of toys. The first child will perhaps select a toy at random. It will invariably be precisely that same toy that the second child will want and that he will assume he wanted all along. Adults at a garage sale behave no differently, only realizing how much they wanted an item when their neighbor picks it up.

Mimesis is a defining characteristic of human beings. Our mimetic capacity makes it possible for us to learn, to assimilate symbolic communication (language), and to become productive members of society. However, mimetic desire inevitably brings us into conflict with one another. Two hands reaching for the same object, or two people desiring the same position of honor, virtually always results in rivalry. The natural tendency of these mimetic rivalries is to escalate through a process of positive feedback. Due simply to the struggle itself, the contested object increases in value, making it even more desirable in the eyes of the aspirants. The struggle chains the two parties together in escalating conflict, with each person blaming the other for the conflict, each seeing the other as the cause of his unhappiness.

Because of education, rules (prohibitions), law backed up by legitimized violence, and the structure of social hierarchy itself, modern society is not torn apart by accumulated, unresolved mimetic rivalries. Primitive man was different. Girard asks us to imagine a group of early humans wracked by ubiquitous intense mimetic rivalries in a conflict of all against all. The very survival of the group is threatened. Suddenly two members of the group realize that they have a common adversary, who appears responsible for their problems. If this focus on one person is then imitated by yet a third individual, there is a significant likelihood this will lead to a rapid mimetic polarization of the entire group against one individual.

Mimesis itself thus transforms a war of all against all into a war of all against one. Accumulated resentment, accusation, and hate are transferred onto this scapegoat, who is violently eliminated. Peace and stability are restored to the group, or occur for the first time. In human beginnings, such events occurred many times in many different places. These primordial murders engender the violent sacred. Archaic or primitive religion, consisting of prohibitions, ritual, and myth, originates in the violent sacred. Prohibitions are rules against doing the evil things the original scapegoat is perceived to have done. Ritual sacrifice is an organized reenactment of the primordial murder. Myth is the distorted remembering of the murder by the persecutors. Myth transforms dead human scapegoats into living gods and human violence into divine violence. The victims are seen to have been killed by “God,” or it is perceived that God wanted them killed. Archaic religion is the wellspring of human culture, which is born in violent murder and self-deception.

I have written an extended essay on these themes in Girard’s work. See Mack C. Stirling, “Violent Religion: Rene Girard’s Theory of Culture,” in *The Destructive Power of Religion*, Vol. 2, J. Harold Ellens, ed. (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 11–50.

3. In addition to his book, *Violence Unveiled* (see note 1), Gil Bailie is president of The Cornerstone Forum, a non-profit educational organization. As a lecturer, he travels extensively teaching peacemaking strategies based upon Girardian insights to both domestic and international audiences. For more information about his work, visit [www.florilegia.org](http://www.florilegia.org).

2001 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Starstone Winner

# DESPERATION

By Ethan Skarstedt

I GRIPPED THE STEERING WHEEL AND MUTTERED under my breath, “Stupid punks.” A group of missionaries was clambering about on top of the sign at the entrance to the Missionary Training Center, getting their picture taken. They were dressed in their gym clothes and acting like crazed monkeys as they waited for the light to change so they could cross the street.

Erica punched me in the shoulder, “Jeff!” There was a warning note in her voice.

“What was that for?” I asked, taking my other hand off the wheel to rub the point of impact.

“I can’t believe the attitude you have about missionaries. They’re just kids.”

“They ought to show a little more dignity.”

She rolled her eyes. “They’re only nineteen. What do you expect them to act like? You just like getting them into trouble. The more names you turn in to the mission president the better, eh?”

I glanced over at her, an incredulous look on my face. “Hon! I had to deal with an awful lot of those kids as companions. They ought to act like the Lord’s anointed, not undisciplined little punks. Maybe if they acted like missionaries instead of kids while they were in the MTC, they’d get a little work done when they got to the field.”

“Oh, good grief!” She turned to look out the window.

A group of missionaries coming from the athletic field wandered up to the crosswalk. They grinned like fools and started yelling and waving at the people in the cars waiting for the light to change. The people in the cars waved and yelled back.

“Where ya goin’, Elders?”

“How’s the food?”

“Ya get ‘Dear Johned’ yet?”

Just before the light changed, a tall, blonde elder sporting a healthy tan leaned to the window of our car and said to Erica, “Hey! How are you today?” I drove into the MTC before she could answer. Punk.



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AS AN MTC security guard, I hate most the night of the 4th of July. It’s a holiday the mission presidency lets go of. With three thousand-plus missionaries in residence, you’d think they’d crack down on a holiday where the primary method of celebration is to trigger incendiary devices. Not so.

On the 4th of July, the curfew is pushed back until, “the fireworks are over.” To the missionaries, this means they get to stay up until 11:00 or 11:30, in casual clothes, milling around in a screaming, jabbering, flirtatious mass in the parking lot at the south end of campus. To security guards at the MTC, it means we have to watch the crowd wildcat out of control until 11:30 and then step in and try to calm things down with bullhorns and machismo.

I stood on the MTC’s eastern sidewalk, just south of the main entrance and east of Building 18M. The smell of trampled vegetation and fireworks swirled through the night air along with the frenetic crowd noise of the missionaries to the south of me.

It was almost time for the show to end. I was supposed to watch for and stop anyone using the confusion to jump the fence into the MTC and, conversely, to discourage missionaries from jumping out. There were about fifty people, BYU students mostly, milling around the east fence. None had done more than hang on it.

Officer 418 called me on the radio just as a young woman at the fence started to jump up and down, screaming, “Elder Smith! Elder Smith!” and waving a handkerchief. Twenty yards to my north, two elders, one in a bright yellow shirt, made a break for the fence. I sighed and began walking in pursuit. Keying the mike on my radio, I said, “418 from 408, standby.” If it couldn’t wait a minute, he’d call me again.

At the fence, a tight cluster of young people stood together—three or four males, the rest females. The young man in a bright yellow shirt was hugging the girl who had been screaming.

When I arrived at the fence, a lone missionary stood on my side of it. I looked across. “Are any of you missionaries?” They all shook their heads and avoided looking at Yellow Shirt. He still had his arm around the girl and wore a sullen look. I pointed at him, “What about you? Are you a missionary?”

He looked me straight in the face. “No.”

I turned to the lone elder on my side of the fence and asked him, “Well, are you a missionary?”

He nodded, and I said, "Where's your companion?" He pointed across the fence at Yellow Shirt. "Right there."

I turned to look across the fence again. "Elder, you can either get back over the fence right now, or you can just keep movin' all the way home. I don't even need you to tell me your name; I can get it from your companion."

Yellow Shirt took his arm from around the girl, "What are you talkin' about? I don't wanna go home. Whaddaya need my name for?"

His manner was aggressive and I was beginning to lose patience. "You just denied being a missionary, and you are, at this very moment, breaking one of the cardinal rules involved with being a missionary. Unless you come back over the fence, right now, you may as well call your parents to come and get you."

He silently clambered over the iron. The people he had been with cast dark looks my way and wandered off down the sidewalk, calling their good-byes.

The two elders followed me off a short distance. I stopped and faced the two of them. "What are your names, please?"

Yellow Shirt replied, "Elders Smith and Nash."

I looked up from my notepad, "First names?" They just looked at me. This breach of MTC etiquette puzzled them. I repeated the question, "First names?"

Yellow Shirt's companion spoke, "Michael and Joshua."

I kept my pen poised and unmoving, "And you are?"

He glared at me for a moment before saying, in an exasperated tone, "Elder Nash!"

I remained poised, "Michael or Joshua?"

"Joshua!"

"Thank you, Elder Nash." I turned to Yellow Shirt. "Elder Smith. You want to explain to me what you thought you were doing?"

He bristled, "What are you talkin' about?"

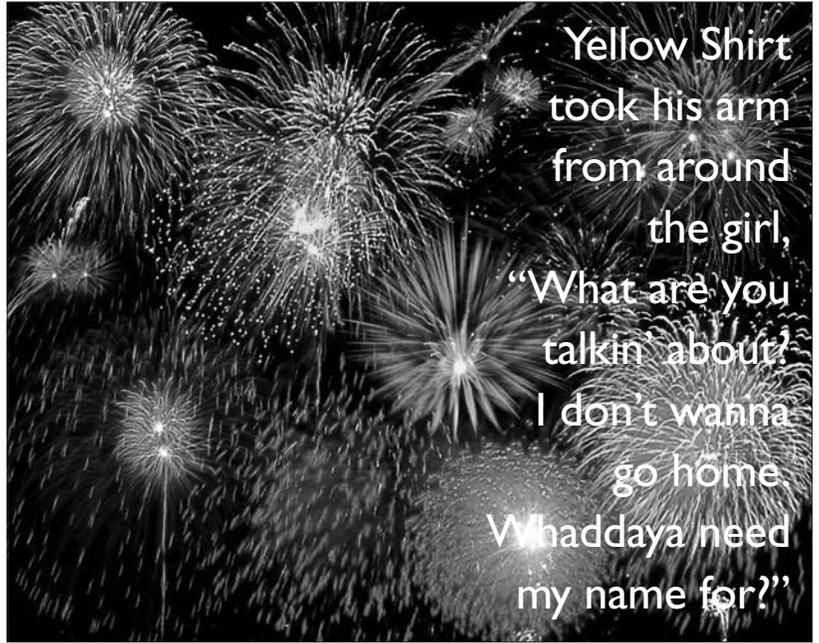
I put the notepad back in my pocket, "Elder, the mission president is going to hear about everything you've done tonight. I'd suggest you fix your attitude before you talk to him. But, of course, you will. You've got lots of practice putting on a false face for your elders, don't you."

Elder Smith looked at me and sneered, "Look little man, I didn't come here to obey your stupid rules. I came here to go on a mission. So shove off!"

I had thought that I was immune to attitudes like his, so my sudden rage took me by surprise. My heart beat faster and my hands clenched and unclenched. Quietly, I said, "Oh, Elder, I'll enjoy writing this one up."

He was yelling, "Why? What are ya gonna say?" He stepped toward me, trying to intimidate me with his greater height. His companion laid a hand on his arm, and he shook it off. I said nothing—just stood there, looking up into his face, seething.

The radio crackled, disturbing our pool of silence, "408 from 418. We need your assistance here at the south lot. . . ." The voice jerked away from the mike, "Hey, cut that out!"



To the south, I heard the sharp crackle of ladyfingers going off. The sound ricocheted among the buildings along with laughter and screaming. I couldn't tell if the screams were of pain or light-mindedness. Without another glance at Elders Nash or Smith, I ran towards the south lot.

LATER, AROUND TWO in the morning, I found myself in the tunnels. The access tunnels under the MTC are my specialty. I know every inch of them. Usually, they're very quiet, and I patrol them to avoid the noise of elders as much as to inspect for intrusion. I especially needed the quiet tonight. The incident with Elder Smith would not leave my mind, and whenever I thought about it, I started to seethe all over again.

There are two distinct sets of tunnels at the MTC; one is called the 'Old,' and the other, the 'New'. Despite what the missionaries think about secret passages to the temple for visiting General Authorities or bomb shelters or any of a thousand other wild speculations, these tunnels exist solely for the purpose of maintaining the MTC's plumbing and electrical systems.

All through them, breaking the dusty, concrete smoothness of the walls, are splotches of lighter gray paint covering graffiti:

"Elder Jones Rules!!! Venezuela, Caracas '96-98!"

"Berlin Germany Rocks!"

"Elder Jones is a polesmoking faggot!"

I was staring at a locked door leading to one of the elders' dormitories. On either side of the gray metal of the door hung dry wall, carefully cut and nailed in place. At least that's what used to be there. Now, only crumbling fragments hung from the framework. It was clear how the missionaries responsible for the fresh batch of graffiti I had just discovered had gotten in. They had simply kicked a hole in the wall, probably during the fireworks. On my notepad, I had a list of names, missions, and hometowns which I had gleaned from their scribbles.

My radio/phone rang, breaking the echoing silence, “Jeff! We’ve just had a call from Building 12M, room 323. . . .” The front desk clerk’s tone was frantic. I took a cue from his voice and sprinted towards the pop-up nearest 12M. He continued, “An Elder Biggs says his companion is lying on the floor, bleeding from the neck.” I switched my handset from telephone to radio function on the BYU police dispatch channel and keyed the mike, “Dispatch from 408. . . .”

They replied immediately. “Go ahead, 408.”

“Send an ambulance to 12M in the MTC. I have a report of an elder down, bleeding from the neck, unresponsive. . . . I am en route.”

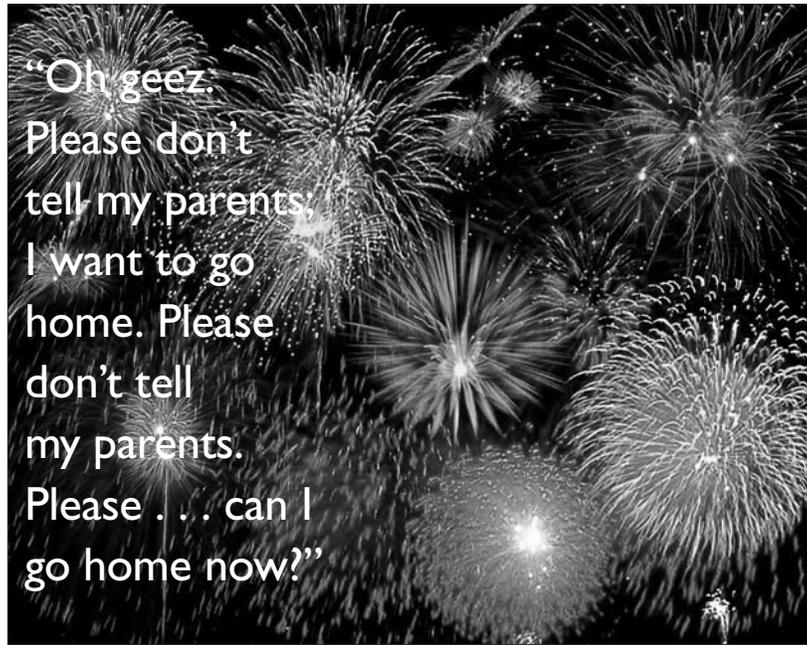
“I copy 408. Ambulance on its way. Break . . . 27 . . .”

Another voice, that of a BYU police officer, crackled over the airwaves, “This is 27, go ahead.”

Dispatch said, “27, respond to the MTC, Building 12M, medical emergency. Unit 408 will meet you.”

I broke in as I climbed one-handed the ladder in the pop-up nearest 12M, “Negative 27. Unit 418 will meet you at the north door of 12M. Break . . . 418 from 408, did you copy that? Room 323.”

Brian’s voice, “This is 418, I copy. 12M, 323.” I twisted the key and dragged the north doors of 12M open. The stairs were



empty and echoing. I took them three at a time.

Room 323 was on the third floor, far side of the building. My keys jingled in my hand as I ran down the dark hallway through the cloying smell of BO and deodorant.

Standing in the doorway of room 323 was an elder with his head bowed and his arms folded. I spoke, “Elder. . . !” He looked up at me and put his finger to his lips. I grabbed his shoulders and shoved him aside. I could barely see an elder lying on the floor of the room. Six or seven elders knelt around him, arms extended to his forehead. I pulled two aside and looked at his prostrate form.

Adrenaline poured hotly through my body before my brain kicked in and my thoughts started turning over swiftly. He was breathing. His shirtfront was a mass of red. A marbled pattern of blood, black stains, and dirty gray carpet surrounded him. Under the heels of one of the kneeling elders lay a hunting knife, blood on the blade and handle. That changed things from tragic accident to possible assault. I couldn’t allow the room to be disturbed any more than it already was.

The “voice” for the blessing they were giving cut off in mid-sentence when I pushed him over backwards. He flailed, and his eyes opened. Before he could speak, I roared, “Out! All of you!” I shot my gaze around the room. “Move it! Out!”

They all stood up and filed out. I looked down at the wounded elder. Closer inspection revealed that the bleeding must have slowed since soaking his shirt and the floor. A dime-sized hole lay in the hollow of his throat. Bits of white cartilage showed through the bright red blood welling up. His eyes were open, and he whimpered. Blood flecked his lips and teeth. I spoke to him.

“Elder. Tell me your name.” My mind raced as I tried to think of everything you were supposed to do in these situations. I didn’t dare apply pressure to his throat. I could only try to keep him awake until the paramedics arrived.

The bleeding boy whimpered his reply to my question, “Elder George.” He began to buck and jerk, “Help me! Oh my gosh! Help me! Is that mine?” His eyes found the blood on the floor and his shirt. “I’ve got to go home. Got to go home! *Oh! My gosh!*”

I put my hands on his chest to hold him still, repeating the words, “Calm down, Elder. Calm down.” He tried to control his breathing by holding his breath. When he did, air bubbled and hissed out the hole in his throat. I keyed my mike again. “Dispatch from 408. The elder has a punctured throat and windpipe. He is still conscious. External bleeding is sluggish.”

“Copy 408.”

I said to the wild-eyed youth under my hands, “Elder, I don’t see any more significant bleeding. You’re gonna be alright. The ambulance is already on the way.” Comprehension glimmered in his eyes as he hoarsely said, “OK.”

“Elder, tell me what happened. How did you get hurt?”

He answered in a frantic whine, “I don’t know! I was asleep, and I guess I heard a knock at the door, so I got up and answered it. I guess the guy standing there stabbed me, and ran away or something. I started calling for help. Then I guess they turned the lights on, and . . .”

There lay the knife and the wound to go with it. Maybe the elder sounded unsure of himself due to shock. I kept him talking, asked him about his hometown, his family. . . .

About a minute after the elder told me he had been stabbed, Officer 27 arrived. His name was Aaron, a young, full-time, BYU police officer, and a friend of mine.

He knelt down next to the elder and said to me, "What's the story?"

"I've been talking to him, trying to keep him awake. You better ask him what happened, though."

Aaron held my gaze for a moment before he turned back to the elder, "What happened to you, Elder?"

"I think I was asleep, and I . . . I heard a knock on the door. I think I tried to answer it, but I fell out of bed onto that knife there." He waved a limp hand towards the knife at his feet.

I caught Aaron's eye and shook my head. Aaron stood up and stepped away while muttering something into his radio.

The paramedics arrived a minute or so later along with the watch commander and a forensics team. After a moment, Aaron asked me what was up. I told him, "When I asked him, he told me he answered the door and someone stabbed him."

Aaron pulled the watch commander, a tall gray-haired gentleman, aside and spoke to him for a few moments. As the paramedics worked, the watch commander knelt and again asked the elder what had happened. The elder told him he had gotten up for some unknown reason, tripped in the dark, and had fallen on the knife.

A minute later, the watch commander motioned me outside the room and said, leaning close with folded arms, "Do you think someone stabbed this young man?"

I thought about it for a minute, "No, sir. I don't. I don't know what happened, but I don't think he was stabbed." He nodded and went back into the room. I looked up and down the hall. Aaron was interviewing the elders standing around, one at a time. I recognized one of them as the elder who had stayed inside the fence, Yellow Shirt's companion. He had his head in his hands and didn't see me.

I stepped back into the room in time to hear the watch commander ask the elder what had really happened to him, no crap this time.

The elder started sobbing. He grabbed onto the commander's arm, "Oh geez. Please don't tell my parents; I want to go home. I did this. Please don't tell my parents. Please . . . can I go home now?"

The watch commander put his hand over the elder's and said something I couldn't hear. The elder nodded and seemed to relax as the paramedics lifted him up in the stretcher.

I followed them. Just as I was stepping outside after them, an elder brushed past me. I started to tell him to get back inside the building but stopped.

It was Elder Smith, still wearing his yellow shirt. Tears ran down his face, and his nose was running. He stood next to the stretcher as they lifted it up into the ambulance and said, in a startlingly clear strong voice, like an angel might sound, "Hey Elder George, we'll be praying for you. We'll see you in the mission, OK? You just get better."

I heard Elder George croak, "OK, Elder Smith, I will."

Elder Smith raised his hand in a wave as the ambulance doors shut, "Keep the Spirit!" he yelled.

Elder Smith turned around to go back into the building but paused when he saw me. Before he could speak, I said, "How do you know Elder George?"

He brushed his tears away, stood a little straighter, and said, "He's in my district. I've been trying to get him to stay, but . . . I guess he just didn't want to be here." His voice trailed off, and he seemed to slump a little bit. He looked at me and opened his mouth to speak.

I knew he was going to mention the incident at the fence, probably apologize or something. I cut him off. "Have a good mission, Elder." He hesitated, nodded, and went inside.

**T**HE NEXT MORNING when Erica came to pick me up in our little, beat-up Geo, I slumped heavily into the passenger seat.

"Awww, you poor man," she said sardonically. Then more seriously, "Long night, honey? Did you turn very many missionaries in to the mission president?"

"No." I said, closing my eyes. "Not one." ☹




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## A VENTURE

*She could see now that an individual life is, in the end, nothing more than . . . a shifting of light*

—Harriet Doerr

All of my days lead to this: one woman standing and backlit by a setting sun, a silhouette that gives no hint of sharp detail, or if she'll be standing there tomorrow. And I face her with my hand shading the best I can make of this, one long draw as my history spills like an arc of solar wind swirling in the atmosphere.

And I know before I decide that most love comes to this: a night's deep sea, a venture into shadows, or simply a slight shift of precious light (where the ghost-like image of what this will be is pressed to the lips in a sun-lit stream that's limitless).

—BARRY BALLARD

## MOONSTONE

EXPLORATIONS IN  
FEMININE THEOLOGY

By Maxine Hanks

*The light of the moon shall be as the  
light of the sun. —Isaiah 30:26*

**M**OONSTONE IS A NEW COLUMN in SUNSTONE's pages that will address a long-standing need—the exploration and inclusion of the divine feminine in Mormon theology and religious studies. This column will be a place where the feminine side of theology can be expressed.

Theology is the study of god and our relationship to deity; thus, this column will address aspects of the divine feminine and women's relationship to theology and priesthood. It will feature a variety of women writers, scholars, mystics, or theologians (as well as men).

What do I mean by the divine feminine? Perhaps simply, it is the feminine aspect of the divine—whether speaking of god or of the divine within us (both men and women). It's also the divine expressing itself in the feminine voice (or in women themselves). We explore the divine feminine simply by seeking it, finding and expressing it, via images, symbols, insights, wisdom, words, song, voices.

As Mormon theology emerged in the 1820s to 1840s, it contained faint hints of a feminine god. Yet little about her was canonized; and in the years since, nothing of her has been added to the canon. Masculine imagery has overwhelmed the feminine, nearly erasing it from Mormon culture. How long should a religion wait for manifestations of the divine mother? How long can the human soul stay silent or afraid to express the divine from within?

Without some focus on the feminine side of theology, we may never see it or integrate it. Before an idea can be fully realized, it has to be expressed, take form; otherwise a con-

cept remains abstract, nebulous. The feminine god is revealed in images and descriptions and approached via symbols.

## MOON AS DIVINE FEMININE

**A** PRIMARY symbol of the divine feminine is the moon, which has a long precedent in human history and culture as a sign of the mother god. From the ancient Venus of Laussel carving to Isis of the Egyptians and Diana of the Ephesians, the divine feminine archetype has been associated with the moon.

Wearing the crescent was a 'visible worship' of the Goddess. That was why the prophet Isaiah denounced the women of Zion for wearing lunar amulets (Isaiah 3:18). The crescent moon worn by Diana and used in the worship of other goddesses is said to be the Ark or vessel of boat-like shape, symbol of fertility, the Container of the Germ of all life.<sup>1</sup>

Across the ancient world, the moon was associated with the feminine.

Half moon, and star in crescent are astral symbols referring to the Great Goddess as queen of the sky and particularly of the night sky, with which the planet Venus and the moon are archetypally correlated both in Europe and America . . . Over and over again we find . . . woman connected with the symbols . . . of night and moon.<sup>2</sup>

The moon was an obvious natural symbol for a female god, mirroring the sun as a masculine god. "In classical philosophy both lunar and earth principles were considered receptive or 'feminine,' while the solar principle was understood to be the active, 'posi-

tive' energy of the masculine."<sup>3</sup>

The moon offered visible proof of the dual nature of life. Nature made the day and night equal partners. Viewed from the earth, the sun and moon had the same apparent size or diameter, traveling along the same path across the sky.

## SUN/MOON AS DYAD

**H**ERMETIC tradition used the sun and moon symbols as a dyad or joined pair, denoting the dual nature of human existence—the dance of opposite forces. Neither symbol eclipses the other, both are necessary partners.

Sun and moon are archetypal symbols representing duality, which when married produce a wholeness or higher order of being. Sun and moon are king and queen, the archetypal couple, dual principals of the cosmos. They represent conscious and unconscious aspects of humanity, both essential to the process of human transformation.

The moon as an icon is an archetypal image of one polarity. It symbolizes the subordinated aspects of culture, history, theology, cosmology, or psychology. It is a symbol of what is forgotten, ignored, denied, or underestimated.

The moon also signifies inclusion, integration, impending restoration. The moon represents entering our spiritual, emotional, or psychological depths in hopes of gaining insight. The moon evokes an image of the deeper self, a sense of potential, latent possibility or power, a longing to reclaim the "other." The lunar orb is a light that shines in the darkness of night, unconquered, representing hope and redemption of the soul.

The sun and moon as an hermetic dyad suggest integration and healing of separated or fractured aspects of our own psyche. This is also the Jungian approach to human and social problems—integrating the subverted or unconscious aspects of the psyche into consciousness. Wholeness or health require working actively with both aspects.

We have before us two systems, the latter of which (sun, patriarchy, consciousness) cannot exist without the earlier (moon, matriarchy, unconscious) and neither of which exhausts the ultimate possibilities of transformation.<sup>4</sup>

Some feminist theologians urge this same integrating process for religion, as the only way to wellness.

The solar principle must be "wedded" to its natural opposite, the feminine energy. . . . Worship of



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an exclusively male image of God is destructive . . . without its feminine counterbalance, the lunar. . . . But the feminine principle alone . . . is just as dangerous as the masculine principle without its partner. . . . The formula for the promised kingdom of heaven on earth is the harmonious balance of masculine and feminine.<sup>5</sup>

#### MOONSTONE AS SYMBOL

ONE tangible form of moon imagery is the moonstone—a gemstone of pale white shimmering quality that resembles the full moon. A moonstone symbolizes the mysterious, ethereal, or spiritual realms; it is a symbol of the seer and mystic; it also symbolizes the “white stone” or purified matter, a transformation to higher form.

Mormonism has a unique moonstone of its own in early church history and theology. The crescent moon symbol of the female god is the very image that was carved onto the stone pedestals of the Nauvoo temple. Known as the “moonstone,” it was a white limestone base for each temple pillar (pilaster), which was topped by the sunstone capital. The moonstone was a foundation upon which each pilaster and sunstone rested.

The moon itself was an important icon in early Mormon cosmology, where vivid mythic symbols for the divine and supernatural were plentiful (ranging from the all-seeing-eye to angel Moroni, from pentagrams and talismans to clasped hands, from seerstones to sunstones). The sun and moon represented two realms of heaven inhabited by resurrected human beings—the sun denoting the highest or celestial glory, the moon a secondary glory or terrestrial heaven.

Yet, the moon also represented a feminine aspect of cosmology. As Joseph Smith once commented, “General Law asked why the sun was called by a masculine name and the moon by a feminine one. I replied that the root of masculine is stronger, and of the feminine weaker . . . the moon borrows her light from the sun.”<sup>6</sup> This imagery, though overtly sexist, evokes the ancient tradition of the lunar as feminine, which is “espousing concepts ultimately derived . . . from the optimistic gnosis of the hermetic tradition.”<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the temple moonstone had a feminine quality about it, while the sunstone was masculine. Simple and serene compared to the elaborate and animated sunstone, the moonstone was merely an outline of the crescent moon, face down in horizontal or prone

position, with smiling lips, a nose and one eye. This moon image was faint in form, like a blueprint, waiting to be finished or fully realized.

The moonstone with its undeveloped moon offers a perfect symbol for the preliminary, sketchy, unfinished nature of feminine theology. After 175 years, the crescent moon still waits for a sculpted image, a raised relief.

The creation of the temple moonstones actually corresponded to the rise of women’s religious authority in Mormon history. For as workers carved and set the moonstones of the Nauvoo temple into place in 1842 and 1843, Mormon women were being organized as a “kingdom of priests” in both the Relief Society and in the “anointed quorum” or priesthood endowment.<sup>8</sup>

The alchemical-hermetic term of *coniunctio* powerfully summarizes the resolution that Smith had achieved at Nauvoo by the summer of 1844. He had established a theology of the conjunction—the unification—of the living and the dead, of men and women, of material and spiritual.<sup>9</sup>

This joining of opposites or dualities is hermetic philosophy, which Mormon theology invokes. Hermeticism’s two chief symbols are sun and moon. Thus, the moonstone was a monument to hermetic balance (whether coincidental, intuitive, or intentional)—a balance between Mormon men and women, sun and moon icons, and capital and pedestal linked together as one unified pillar.

The sun on high linked to moon below simulates heaven and earth joined. While this celestial and terrestrial hierarchy can imply a superior/inferior relationship or hegemony, the hermetic joining of the two as a dyad actually implies a dance or marriage, a reversal or deconstruction that creates balance, union, and renewal. This marriage continues in the tension between masculine and feminine, in heaven and on earth, in culture and in church. Sun and moon are always in motion, shifting position, in cosmic dance.

The sunstone and moonstone of the Nauvoo Temple signify hermetic union, transformation. They also evoke an apocalyptic image. The crescent moons at the foot of temple pilasters, with suns at the top and stars hovering above, resemble the female image in Revelation 12:1, as one early church member testified:

The order of architecture was . . . a representation of the Church, the Bride, the Lamb’s Wife. . . . “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet,

and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” This is portrayed in the beautifully cut stone of this grand temple.<sup>10</sup>

This image implies a forthcoming feminine, resulting in hermetic balance or union. Likewise, “feminist Mormons . . . are advocating the central hermetic ideal of a dual divinity, comprising both male and female genders.”<sup>11</sup>

#### MOONSTONE AS COLUMN

LIKE the sunstone as a symbol for theology and Mormon studies, the moonstone offers a symbol for theological inquiry into the feminine and women’s studies. When theology revolves around the sun, its natural focus is masculinity; thus the moon moves us beyond masculine images. Yet moonstone imagery does not suggest that feminists worship the moon nor that women are equated with the lunar orb.

The moon is simply a symbol to remind us to include the feminine or “other” in our theology and culture. The moon provides a needed focus for inquiry into the feminine, the divine, and the unconscious. Transcendence comes only by uniting both sides of reality, the known and unknown, the privileged and subverted.

The Moonstone column in *SUNSTONE* magazine creates balance between masculine and feminine theology. And the moonstone icon signifies a long-awaited return of the divine feminine in Mormonism. ☽

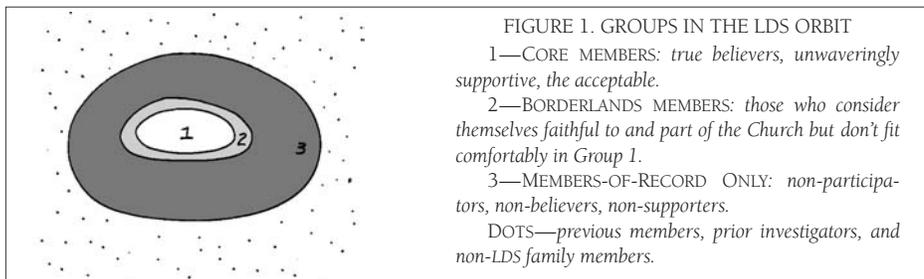
#### NOTES

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## BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

JESSICA'S STORY—  
UPDATE AND RESPONSES

By D. Jeff Burton



IN THE MARCH 2004 “Braving the Borderlands” column, I related the difficult experiences of “Jessica” (a pseudonym), a long-time Borderlander with serious questions and doubts about the origins of the Church plus a troubled relationship with her husband. After thirty years of struggle, she could be considered a “closet-doubter-at-the-end-of-her-rope.” You might also recall that Jessica is a very bright, mature housewife living in Utah County and married in the temple to a staunch Group 1 member. She is the mother of four grown children and was a convert to the Church during her teens. (Certain details were altered to protect her identity.)

## UPDATE

JUDGING from recent phone and email communications, Jessica's life seems to have greatly improved over the past few months. Following are some of our recent exchanges (edited for brevity and clarity).

JEFF: It's good to know you're in such good spirits! How have you been dealing with your problems?

JESSICA: *I have let my problems, questions, and doubts have a lower priority in my life—just “letting them go.” Other things have taken higher priority: family, staying healthy, and so forth. It's weird—I'm feeling very calm and peaceful.*

JEFF: Have you honestly shared your concerns and problems with anyone?

JESSICA: *Yes, amazingly, I had very unthreatening visits with both my stake president and bishop. They were very understanding and cordial. Both asked some questions to determine my level of “belief,” and I think they were reassured that, sans the Joseph Smith story and a few other church-related testimony issues, my faith and belief in God and Jesus are pretty strong. There are other mitigating factors, i.e., never having had a real understanding between my husband and me, never really feeling like I have him to fall back on. The only soft place I've had to fall back on was on Jesus Christ. Hence, I've developed a very strong testimony of him. And they seemed to go along with the idea that what I believe is more important than what I don't believe.*

So my decision to “let it all go” was likely inspired by Jesus. As you have said, Church history has no real application in my life today. If I don't let the ninety-nine miles of bad road with my husband go, it will only hurt me further. And the Savior makes it abundantly clear that if we forgive not, we can't expect to be forgiven.

JEFF: So how are you and your ward members getting along?

JESSICA: *I am comfortable at church and have some very good friends there. I think it is easier to be converted to the people sometimes, because they are surely some of the nicest anywhere.*

JEFF: What do you see in the future for you and the Church?

JESSICA: *The visiting teaching message this month actually sums up the way I expect to proceed with the rest of my life. It is centered on Moroni 7:47. “Charity is the pure love of Christ*

*and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.”*

## RESPONSES FROM CHURCH LEADERS

IN the previous column, Jessica had asked about Elder Jeffrey Holland's April 2003 conference talk, “A Prayer for the Children,” which, she worried, “essentially repudiates any skepticism, calling negative attention to ‘those who pitch their tents out on the periphery of religious faith’ (as though, if you don't embrace Mormonism, per se, then you have no faith at all).” I told her that Elder Holland's talk left me with a few questions, too, and that I wasn't sure how he would treat those who don't have the gift of “knowing”—people like Jessica and me who are willing to be faithful members of the Church without a Church-specific “testimony.”

I wrote to Elder Holland and several other General Authorities asking whether someone who is a non-testimony-bearing, “faithful-only” member is acceptable in the Church. I enclosed my bishop's address and telephone number in the letters. Last month, my bishop called me to relate two very positive phone calls and a letter he had received from Elder Neal A. Maxwell, President Boyd K. Packer, and F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency. Among other positive responses, the letter stated, “You may assure Brother Burton that ‘faithful’ members like [him] are acceptable to the Church.”

Those are encouraging responses and give those of us who are willing to behave faithfully some real hope for the future.

## RESPONSE FROM READERS

TOM Coppin shared with me the following thoughtful comments about the Jessica column (edited for brevity):

I reflected on Jessica carefully. Off the top of my head, I think her husband could be more understanding. His stance seemed sort of domineering. You can't force your mate to comply and believe as you believe. Jessica needs a comfort zone and the right kind of friend (someone who could understand). Through love from her friends and husband, she could work things out from within rather than without. I feel she is trying to achieve too much, and when she can't make the leap from faith to

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## “They seemed to go along with the idea that what I believe is more important than what I don’t believe.”

“knowledge,” she feels guilty. Jessica worries about being a closet doubter and probably doesn’t know how many closet doubters there are who get along pretty well.

Dan Pascavage offered the following thoughts and personal experiences (also edited for brevity):

Ah, my heart goes out to Jessica. I am not optimistic about the future of her marriage—primarily because I was in a similar situation and we just could not keep it together. I was, of course, in Jessica’s position. But I was totally traumatized by the reaction of my returned-missionary daughter, which was just like the one Jessica describes. I don’t know how much of this you want to tell Jessica—I don’t want to discourage her. But perhaps something I say here will help.

My home teacher recently challenged my wife and I to get temple recommends again. We are planning to do so, but not for the reasons he puts forth (our eternal exaltation). Mainly, we want to participate with our children, who are becoming good members, and go to the temple with them, and so forth.

Fortunately, we have a new bishop who is my kind of guy. And our friend, a former stake president, put in a good word to the new stake president for me. So I think we will be able to get the temple recommends, being tactfully honest as you have suggested. It feels so good being in the fellowship of Saints. (I get to help people move, etc.) Is this hypocritical? I don’t know. Is it hypocritical to give a placebo to a sick person who thinks it helps him?

Michael Barrett sent an email to SUNSTONE’S editor, part of which directly relates to the Jessica column:

Brother Burton advises Jessica that, when faced with probing questions about her beliefs during her temple recommend interviews,

the proper response is to be “tactfully honest,” a method which he helpfully explains so we may also use this splendid solution to a vexing problem. Hey, this will work! Thank you! Now I know how we should reassure our bishops, friends, and families that we support all the Church’s policies and teachings—and do it with a clear conscience. I’ll simply apply the new standard of “tactful honesty.” And I could kick myself for not having figured this out on my own. After all, people back here in Washington, D.C., do it all the time. It’s just that here they have a different name for it. *Lying*. Are you sure you want to be giving out advice like that?

After being forwarded the letter (the editor hoped that I might respond to it in the “Letters to the Editor” section), I chose to write Michael directly. Following is part of my response to him:

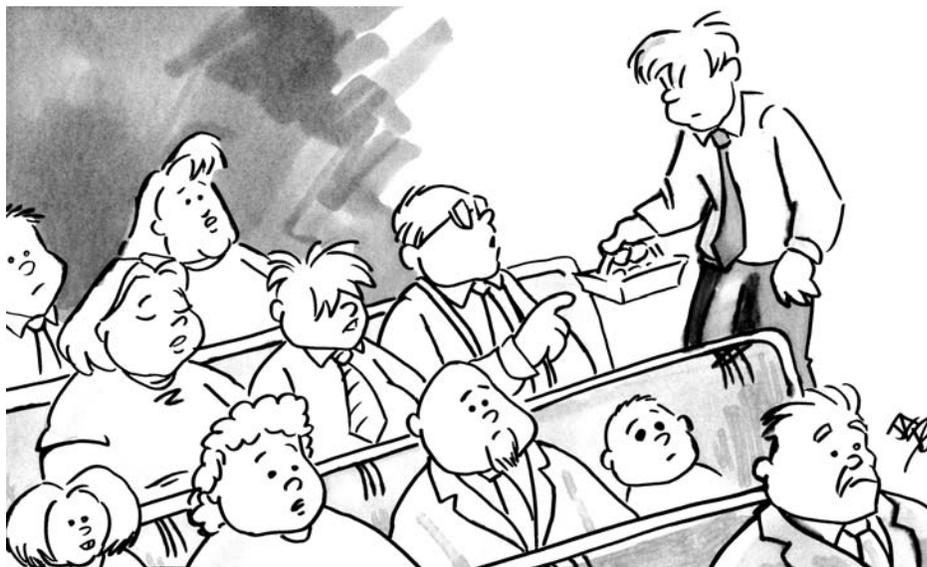
My very first LDS-related paper (SUNSTONE, September-October 1982) dealt with the “phenomenon of the closet doubter.” The definition of being “in the closet” includes a certain amount of dishonesty . . . up to and including

lying (e.g., lying in a temple recommend interview: “Yes, I know the Church is true . . .”). I have heard many stories of closet doubters who “lie” to maintain the illusion or appearance of being “a good Mormon,” or of “having a testimony.”

In urging doubters/questioners to “live by faith,” I mean to help them avoid lying. Faith is the bridge between what we know/believe and what we are willing to accept (or do) in the absence of a “testimony.” Unfortunately, we as a people have come to regard “testimony” as all-important, and “living by faith” (or “acting through faith”) as something less, even suspect. Coming out of the closet and staying active, while being honest, is possible when faith becomes one’s central driver (if testimony is lacking).

In response to this, Mike Barrett replied:

Thank you for the reply. Yes, I think your approach is fine in addressing the issue in your column. My primary concern is that we have so many docile sheep out there in LDS clothing, willing to lie (yes, *lie*) in order to avoid con-



“Can you super-size that?”

fronting the truth. They'll lie to keep peace with their spouses, bishops, families, and friends. They'll lie to keep their jobs. It's a good way to cope, if you can sweep your integrity under the carpet.

[I believe you are a kind person] but that you're an enabler. Actually, I think you're worse than an enabler. I think you're a liar. I don't believe, from what I've read, that you really have faith in all those doctrines and historical facts that you question. I think you actually seriously doubt them but that you're willing to lie and say you'll "accept them on faith." And you encourage others to do the same. If you're going to lie about "having faith in" a misguided Church policy or false historical claim, you should at least have the dignity (we can't call it "integrity," can we? . . .) to admit to yourself that that's what you're doing.

Yikes!

I don't know whether Michael Barrett was serving up an easy pitch right over the plate, but I think the disagreement between Michael and me centers around our different definitions of the words "faith," "accepting," and "having faith in." If one equates "faith" or "acceptance" with "belief," which occurs regularly in both old and modern scripture, then problems arise. Obviously, in my reply to him, I had not clearly stated what I meant.

In order for two people to communicate effectively, both have to speak the same language and understand one another. In an earlier column (SUNSTONE, October 2003), I explain how I use these key terms. The next few paragraphs of review might help us bridge the gaps that exist in the ways different people use these terms.

As I use them, belief, knowledge, and testimony relate to the mind, what we think. Faith relates to behavior, what we are willing to do in the face of doubts or lack of knowledge.

For me, acceptance, as it relates to faith, is the willingness to go along, to behave accordingly, to act as if it were true, not necessarily to believe.

Robert Browning probably said it best:

You call for faith; I show you doubt  
To prove that faith exists.  
The more of doubt, the stronger  
faith, I say,  
If faith o'ercomes doubt.

As I see it, it is because of our questions, wonderings, concerns, and doubts that we

can fall back on faith to manage our religious questions, wonderings, and doubts.

Once we all have a meeting of the minds on the faith vs. belief vs. testimony definitions, it is then possible for me to urge people to be honest about their "doubts" (and, as many have pointed out, almost everyone has these) and then let "faith" bridge the behavioral gap—"I don't know . . . or I doubt . . . or I don't agree . . . but I will follow (or adhere, or act, or behave) using faith."

As regards "having faith in misguided church policies or false historical claims," such judgments ("misguided" and "false") are the opinions and conclusions of those making the judgments. We are not required to draw the same conclusions, but even when we do, they don't have to impact our faithful behaviors. Church members should be able to disagree with policies and historical conclusions and yet still remain faithful to the principles of Christ's teachings. Jessica's current thinking suggests that possibility.

Finally, yes, I hope to be an enabler, but not in the negative pop-psychology sense that "enables" people to perform self-destructive behaviors. Rather, I want members who are silently struggling, questioning, or doubting to be enabled, or empowered, to be honest as well as faithful, responsible Latter-day Saints, if that works for them. And, additionally, I hope for them to be accepted in the Church as full-fledged and worthy members.

This is a two-pronged religious quest for me. I'm working on both problems simultaneously—helping "doubters" be open and honest (and faithful, if they choose to be) and when they are faithful, having the Church (and its true believers) embrace them as fully acceptable members of the Church. The encouraging calls by two apostles to my bishop and the letter from F. Michael Watson seem to suggest that the latter is possible.

These two simple motivations are enough for me to be a faithful supporter of the Church and its wonderful but sometimes-struggling people. ☺

Please send me any of your  
thoughts, experiences, or tales  
from life in the Borderlands.

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## THE BLAME SEEKERS

stiffen their bony fingers  
to point at a ghost,  
as if to dismiss it,  
then squint for angels  
through the fog  
of their city,  
the whoosh of hot air  
through the grids in the streets  
where the bundled men who knew work  
cluster for heat.

The blame seekers read books about  
how to make work,  
as though it were made  
and not, of course, the maker.

At home, under covers,  
their guilt shines like a flashlight  
inside a childlike tent,  
they scrutinize Marx  
and puzzle over production:  
read Deming, irate  
at his dismissal  
of so crucial a thing  
as evaluations of a single worker.  
They close their eyes  
and dream of golden pyramids.

Beneath the city, workers  
sing with the ants,  
and in the light  
of their mutual presence  
they are gilded with sweat,  
wipe it with their hands,  
know how to spend it.

—ROBERT PARHAM

## BOOK REVIEW

## A STORY OF VIOLENT DEFENSIVENESS

UNDER THE BANNER OF HEAVEN:  
A STORY OF VIOLENT FAITH

by Jon Krakauer  
Doubleday, 2003  
372 pages, \$26.00

Reviewed by Greg Matis

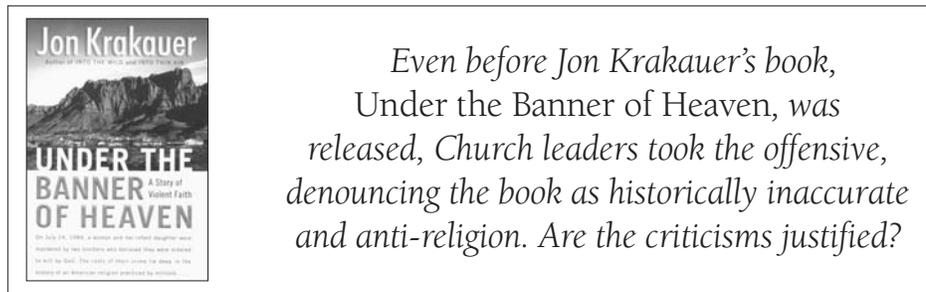
same breath, Krakauer adds that this “daunting exercise” is useful “for what might be learned about the nature of faith” (xxiii). Here he falls short of the mark, never pursuing the interesting questions about the nature of faith that arise along the way.

## INTO HOT WATER

KRKAUER might have kept to his prior title formula—catchy three-word prepositional phrases beginning with “Into”—and named this book *Into Hot Water*.<sup>2</sup> As would be expected of the latest effort from any best-selling author, *Under the Banner of Heaven* was reviewed widely, with mixed results. But the harshest blows were delivered by a most unusual literary critic, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In a news release issued several weeks before the book’s publication, the Church took dead aim at both the book and Krakauer, with two separate “responses” from Mike Otterson, the Church’s Director of Media Relations, and Richard Turley, managing director of the Family and Church History Department. A third response followed later from Robert Millet, who holds BYU’s Richard L. Evans Chair in Religious Understanding.<sup>3</sup>

Otterson’s short piece presents his personal (very negative) reaction to the book; Turley’s and Millet’s responses focus on more substantive historical and doctrinal issues. Collectively, these writers accuse Krakauer of bias, unfair generalizations, gross exaggerations, and bad history. Otterson calls Krakauer a “storyteller who cuts corners to make the story sound good.” Millet labels the book “not only a slap in the face of modern Latter-day Saints, but also a misrepresentation of religion in general.” And Turley warns that, “[a]lthough the book may appeal to gullible persons who rise to such bait like trout to a fly hook, serious readers who want to understand Latter-day Saints and their history need not waste their time on it.”

Predictably, the early free publicity had a decidedly different effect than intended: the book ended up on the national bestseller lists and was a particularly hot commodity in Utah last summer. I was among the many who immediately bought a copy—largely on the strength of Krakauer’s earlier work. To be sure, *Under the Banner of Heaven* has its flaws, including various factual inaccuracies, many of which easily could have been corrected by any knowledgeable Latter-day Saint had Krakauer bothered to ask one to review the manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, I find the Church’s criticism unduly harsh and overly defensive. Much of it just doesn’t stick.



*Even before Jon Krakauer’s book, Under the Banner of Heaven, was released, Church leaders took the offensive, denouncing the book as historically inaccurate and anti-religion. Are the criticisms justified?*

IT IS A pity if *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* is your introduction to author Jon Krakauer. Not because his latest book isn’t worthwhile, but because it means you haven’t had the pleasure of reading his other outstanding books, most notably *Into the Wild* and *Into Thin Air*.<sup>1</sup> *Into the Wild* is the intriguing story of Chris McCandless, a young college graduate who donated his \$25,000 in savings to charity, torched his car, and then hitchhiked around the West before making a fatal attempt to live off the land in the Alaskan wilderness. *Into Thin Air* is Krakauer’s gripping personal account of the 1996 tragedy on Mount Everest that claimed the lives of five of his climbing companions. Krakauer is a superb writer, with a gift for telling compelling stories that tend to stay with you long after you finish one of his books.

His latest is no exception. As the title suggests, in *Under the Banner of Heaven* Krakauer makes an ambitious leap from the wilderness to religion, using the 1984 Lafferty murders

in Utah County as a springboard for examining the nature of religious fanaticism—in this case, Mormon fanaticism. Although he makes it clear that he’s talking about religion in general, Mormonism is his case study. As part of a detailed examination of Ron and Dan Lafferty’s murder of their sister-in-law Brenda Lafferty and her fifteen-month-old daughter, Erica, Krakauer takes a critical look at unflattering aspects of Mormon history, particularly violence and polygamy. He also looks beyond the Lafferty brothers to other extremists and offshoots, including members of various Mormon Fundamentalist polygamous communities and Brian David Mitchell, the man charged with kidnapping Elizabeth Smart.

In the prologue, Krakauer states that the book’s purpose is “to cast some light on [Dan] Lafferty and his ilk” (xxiii). Krakauer deftly achieves that goal. *Under the Banner of Heaven* opens the shades on a very dark cast of characters, effectively telling a series of chilling stories that need to be told. In the



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## WHO'S GENERALIZING?

ACCORDING to all three official responders, one of the book's most damning faults is that Krakauer extrapolates the behavior of zealots and extremists—in Otterson's words, "tar[ring] every Mormon with the same brush."<sup>5</sup> According to Otterson, a reader "could be forgiven for concluding that every Latter-day Saint, including your friendly Mormon neighbor, has a tendency to violence," which places Krakauer "in the same camp as those who believe every German is a Nazi, every Japanese a fanatic, and every Arab a terrorist." Otterson doesn't provide any evidence to support this inflammatory and unfair accusation. Nor is there any.

Millet, whose treatment of the book is generally more balanced than the other two, does offer an example of these alleged generalizations by citing the following passage from the book:

To comprehend Brian David Mitchell—or to comprehend Dan Lafferty, or Tom Green, or the polygamous inhabitants of Bountiful and Colorado City—one must first understand the faith these people have in common, a faith that gives shape and purpose to every facet of their lives. And any such understanding must begin with the aforementioned Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (53)

Then Millet analogizes:

This is like asking someone: "Would you like to understand Catholicism today? Then study carefully the atrocities of the Crusades and the horrors of the Inquisition." Or "Would you like to gain a better insight into the minds and feelings of German people today? Then read *Mein Kampf* and become a serious student of Adolf Hitler."<sup>6</sup>

But Krakauer's statement is nothing of the kind. He doesn't say that those who want to understand Mormonism today should study Brian David Mitchell, Dan Lafferty, or Tom Green. He makes the opposite, seemingly inoffensive, observation that any attempt to understand a Brian David Mitchell, Dan Lafferty, or Tom Green should involve an understanding of Mormonism in general and Joseph Smith, Jr. in particular<sup>7</sup>—an obviously good idea, given that all three have attempted to justify their wrongdoing based on

radicalized or outdated versions of Mormon doctrine and the teachings of Joseph Smith.<sup>8</sup>

The persuasiveness of these official critiques is further weakened by their dogged determination to dispute virtually everything Krakauer says, no matter how harmless or inconsequential. Krakauer opens a chapter with a humorously good-natured account, from an outsider's perspective, of attending the Hill Cumorah Pageant. He describes it as having "all the energy of a Phish concert, but without the drunkenness, outlandish hairdos (Brother Richard's comb-over notwithstanding) or clouds of marijuana smoke"

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Why the excessive  
defensiveness?

(65). Turley quotes this passage and then seizes on a sentence early in the same chapter as proof that Krakauer "stretches the truth in writing about modern Church events":

Without citing a source, he [Krakauer] exaggeratingly asserts that "sooner or later most Latter-day Saints make a pilgrimage there." Although the pageant is popular, most Latter-day Saints have never attended it, and most never will.<sup>9</sup>

In the face of such attacks by the official Church critics, one can only imagine Krakauer scratching his head in bewilderment. Why the excessive defensiveness? The charge of generalization is very likely a reflection of what appears to be their main concern with Krakauer's book: that people will

read the disturbing accounts of the bad apple fanatics and unfairly conclude that they are representative of the whole bunch. Such fears assume the worst about readers and aren't likely to materialize when the average reader stacks these stories up against her experience with her "friendly Mormon neighbor." This book isn't about all Mormons, or even all Mormon Fundamentalists.

## THE WRONG HISTORIANS

ANOTHER, related charge of the official detractors is leveled by Otterson: "This book is not history," he chides, "and Krakauer is no historian."<sup>14</sup> But Krakauer doesn't claim to be a historian, nor to have written a history book, nor even to have conducted any original historical research. Like any journalist, he is presenting the findings and opinions of others, who he readily lists in end notes and who do include respected historians such as D. Michael Quinn, Fawn Brodie, Juanita Brooks, Will Bagley and Todd Compton. Krakauer doesn't offer a single historical assertion that hasn't already been made elsewhere. More to the point is Otterson's subsequent observation that Krakauer has been "heavily influenced" by the wrong historians, i.e., those who are "unsympathetic to the Church."

Unfortunately, all this only underscores Krakauer's typically pithy, if also unoriginal, observation that the Church "happens to be exceedingly prickly about its short, uncommonly rich history" (5). It leaves Turley, for example, in the unenviable position of having to insist, in an official response whose very existence argues the opposite, that the Church isn't protective of its history.<sup>10</sup>

Consider the Church's opposition, reiterated by Millet, to the term "Mormon Fundamentalists."<sup>11</sup> The point is well taken that none who openly espouse a Fundamentalist agenda remain members of the LDS Church. No one could blame the Church for wanting to emphasize the distinction, which Krakauer acknowledges (4–5). But the Church's position seems to go beyond that, to suggest that the word "Mormon" can be used only to indicate membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (Krakauer rightly reminds us that there are other organized religions who believe in the Book of Mormon and the teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith.) This desire to control the word Mormon is emblematic of the Church's approach to Mormon history: like the subject of a modern merchandising contract, there is but

# KRAKAUER'S FUNDAMENTALISTS

By Ken Driggs

FOR ME, THE MOST STRIKING FLAW of *Under the Banner of Heaven* reveals itself in the disconnect I feel between his descriptions of Fundamentalist Mormons and my own experiences among them. I have had intimate contact with a variety of Fundamentalist Mormons since 1988, and I simply have not seen or heard what Krakauer—or Utah Attorney General Shurtleff, for that matter—holds out as the norm. I first visited Colorado City, Arizona, in January 1988. Within a couple years, I had extended my circle of contacts into the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB) group presently led by eighty-eight-year-old Owen Allred, and to a number of unaffiliated “independents.”

It is important to appreciate that Mormon Fundamentalism is no more monolithic than the larger Christian or Islamic communities are homogenous. Fundamentalist Mormons are very diverse groups whose collective membership numbers in the thousands. (Any time you have that many people, you will have some bad actors.) The largest organizations trace their religious authority to a seven-member priesthood council organized by Lorin C. Woolley in 1929. The group led by this council divided into two in the early 1950s. Those two groups are generally known as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS), headquartered in the Short Creek area (Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona), and the AUB, headquartered in Bluffdale, Utah. There are no formal ties between these two groups and others, although there are sometimes sympathies and occasionally intermarriage.

Other Fundamentalist Mormon groups include the recently formed Centennial Park, or Second Ward, community located near Short Creek and consisting of break-away members; the Davis County Cooperative group founded by Charles W. Kingston in 1943 and still dominated by his family; the tiny and sometimes lethal, but now almost extinct, Lambs of God, built around the LeBaron family; and many “independents” who do not affiliate with any single group. These would include the late

Alex Joseph of Big Water, the late author Ogden Kraut and his widow Anne Wilde, the unsavory Tom Green, and many others. I have also observed a good many conservative Mormons with one foot in the LDS Church and the other in the Fundamentalist world. Among other things, the various groups have different attitudes toward the source of priesthood authority, the centrality of plural marriage, United Order-style communalism, Mormon sacred ordinances and religious garments, Adam-God theology,

I have seen aberrations and a few bad characters, but they were always the exceptions.

blacks and the priesthood, and other doctrinal matters.

I'll admit that until reading *Under the Banner of Heaven*, I was completely unfamiliar with the tiny sliver of Fundamentalism that the Laffertys had first affiliated with—that of Robert Crossfield, an obscure “prophet” without a discernable following. If Fundamentalist Mormons are on the religious margins, the Lafferty community of faith was the fringe of the fringe. Given the way Krakauer describes them, I doubt they would have been tolerated in the major Fundamentalist groups.

For years, I have enjoyed a wide circle of friendships with Fundamentalists in both polygamous and monogamous families. I have visited Fundamentalist Mormon communities perhaps fifty times. I have attended many dozens of religious meetings and funerals, stayed in the homes of polygamous families, played with their kids, eaten at their dinner tables, attended and photographed their community events, and patronized their businesses. I earned a Master of Laws from the University of Wisconsin Law School with a thesis about the parental rights of polygamous Utah parents,<sup>1</sup> published several scholarly articles about them,<sup>2</sup> and have been retained as a courtroom expert witness about Colorado City three times. Most important, I have en-

joyed hundreds of hours of informal talk with people at all levels of social rank and commitment in these communities, including people who have left. I am now well into writing a serious book about Mormon Fundamentalism, which I started some months before Krakauer's book was released. I am admittedly sympathetic to my many friends in that community, but those friendships have brought me extraordinary access to their physical world and mindset. In the words of sociologist

Thomas F. O'Dea, “I have striven throughout to combine intellectual objectivity with intelligent human sympathy.”<sup>3</sup>

I simply do not see what Krakauer holds out as truth. I have seen aberrations and a few bad characters, but they were always the exceptions.

That isn't to say that I agree with the choices of my Fundamentalist friends, nor do I want them making my choices for me. But I am sympathetic to them and believe they should be left to find happiness and salvation as they see fit. 🙏

## NOTES

1. My 139-page thesis was entitled “There Must Be No Compromise With Evil: A History and Analysis of the Utah Supreme Court's 1955 Decision in *In Re Black*, 283 P.2d 897 (Utah 1955).” A part of the thesis was published at “Who Shall Raise The Children? Vera Black and the Rights of Polygamous Utah Parents,” *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 60 (Winter 1992): 27–46.

2. See: “Fundamentalist Mormon Attitudes Toward the Church as Reflected in the Sermons of the Late Leroy S. Johnson,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 38–60; “One Hundred Years After the Manifesto: Polygamy in Southern Utah Today,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 24, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 44–58; “Utah Supreme Court Decides Polygamist Adoption Case,” *SUNSTONE*, September 1991, 67–68; “After the Manifesto: Modern Polygamy and Fundamentalist Mormons,” *Journal of Church and State*, 32 (Spring 1990): 367–389; and “This Will Someday Be the Head and Not the Tail of the Church: A History of the Mormon Fundamentalists at Short Creek,” *Journal of Church and State*, 43 (Winter 2001): 49–80.

3. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), vii.

one authorized version. The particularly vigorous official Church response to *Under the Banner of Heaven* may stem mostly from surprise—from the amazing degree to which the Church has grown accustomed to having its way with the mainstream media. We are not used to seeing unauthorized versions of Mormon history.

One of Krakauer's valuable contributions is to summarize for us a broader, outside perspective on our past. Yes, Krakauer's take is often more negative than official accounts, but it is strangely welcome nonetheless because of the paucity of any other viewpoints. Krakauer helps provide balance. Let's face it: because of the nature of their respective audiences, Krakauer's second telling of D. Michael Quinn's painstaking research will reach a hundred times the audience of the original. Which, perhaps, is precisely the Church's concern.

#### STORYTELLERS AND CUTTING CORNERS

As previously noted, Otterson calls Krakauer "a storyteller who cuts corners to make the story sound good." But all stories are unavoidably shaped by their tellers . . . and then again by the teller's editor. The reporting of the same news event sounds rather different on the Fox News Channel than on National Public Radio. Every story comes with a perspective. Otterson, for example, intent on describing Krakauer's promulgation of negative "old stereotypes," fails to mention this quite positive passage describing the Mormon Tabernacle Choir:

Its impeccably rendered harmonies are emblematic of the Mormons as a people: chaste, optimistic, outgoing, dutiful. When Dan Lafferty quotes Mormon scripture to justify murder, the juxtaposition is so incongruous as to seem surreal. (4)

In a July 2003 essay responding to the Church's criticism, Krakauer pointed out that the 1997 manual *Teaching of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* portrays the second Church president as monogamous. Krakauer called it a "disturbing sanitization of the historical record."<sup>12</sup> But there's a much less sinister explanation: the manual's authors legitimately chose not to get into the complicated story of polygamy because a full treatment of the subject would have detracted from the manual's narrative thrust, which focuses on basic gospel principles. In short, polygamy was omitted because it wasn't good storytelling. The lesson manual doesn't have to be an ex-

haustive historical account of the life of Brigham Young—it serves a different purpose. So it is with *Under the Banner of Heaven*: the book doesn't purport to be an exhaustive examination of Mormonism or Mormon history or doctrine. Instead, Krakauer's avowed purpose is to poke around in uncomfortable places, to cast light on dark corners.

Which is, in my opinion, the main contribution of the book: it gives us a harrowing glimpse into the often secretive world of Mormon Fundamentalist fringe groups and fanatics. Krakauer introduces us, for example, to Debbie Palmer, a woman so desperate from years of sexual and psychological abuse in her Fundamentalist community in Bountiful, British Columbia, that she ultimately tried to burn down her house while she and her children were still in it.<sup>13</sup> We hear the heartbreaking story of Evangeline Blackmore, a young girl whose deluded Fundamentalist father received and acted on a "revelation" that he was the last prophet before the Second Coming, and that "Jesus would come back to earth in the form of a child born of [his] pure seed and her virgin womb" (274). And these are Debbie's and Evangeline's own accounts, told in their own shattered voices.

Krakauer documents the disturbing extent to which federal dollars enable Fundamentalist communities. A third of Colorado City's residents receive food stamps—the Arizona state average is 4.7 percent (12–13). All told, the community receives over six million dollars a year in federal funds, much of it in welfare assistance for polygamous wives who claim to be single mothers. For every dollar that the residents of Colorado City pay in federal taxes, they receive eight dollars in government services (13). The records of Utah prosecutors show that Tom Green's family alone received nearly \$650,000 in governmental assistance over a ten-year period (20).

For too long, we have simply ignored Mormon extremists, hoping they might go away or at least stay out of the news. Krakauer appropriately lauds the politically brave decisions of former Juab County attorney David Leavitt and Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff to aggressively prosecute their illegal behavior. I am a strong proponent of the First Amendment, including the right of consenting adults to engage in polygamy as a matter of religious belief. Polygamy isn't the problem. We must not allow anyone to hide behind the First Amendment to justify child abuse and welfare fraud.<sup>14</sup>

#### FAITH AND REVELATION

THIS subject matter raises a host of important, challenging issues about the nature of faith and revelation that Krakauer acknowledges but then never really addresses. He is perfectly content, for example, to report the existence of the seamy underside of the commitment to individual revelation that fueled the Restoration and also to report on the comparatively rigid status of the modern, buttoned-down, correlation era of the Church, without ever exploring the tension between these two phenomena.<sup>15</sup> A tradition that cultivates and encourages personal revelation is going to get it, and it should hardly come as a surprise when the ensuing revelations are as unique as the individuals who receive them. This phenomenon is readily apparent in fast and testimony meeting where those in attendance are often treated to some very woolly ideas, along with a travelogue or two.

So how can the Church harness the power of personal revelation inherent in Moroni's challenge, its most effective conversion tool, and still rein in excessive revelatory individualism? On this front, and on several of the other substantive issues *Under the Banner of Heaven* raises, Millet deserves credit for engaging Krakauer with a thoughtful response.<sup>16</sup> And that, in the end, is another reason why the book is worthwhile. Even if we disagree with Krakauer's answers, *Under the Banner of Heaven* asks some very interesting questions—questions that have the potential to encourage valuable dialogue and expand our understanding of what it means to be Mormon.

If we could just be a little less defensive. ☹

#### NOTES

1. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Villard, 1996); Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* (New York: Villard, 1997).

2. Instead, he went with a different prepositional phrase, based on a John Taylor quotation in the 6 January 1880 *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, in which the third Church president vigorously defends polygamy:

We believe in honesty, morality, and purity; but when they enact tyrannical laws, forbidding us the free exercise of our religion, we cannot submit. God is greater than the United States, and when the Government conflicts with heaven, we will be ranged under the banner of heaven and against the Government. . . . I defy the United States; I will obey God.

3. The responses are in a document titled "Church response to Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*," located on the Church's website at <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/extra/0,15505,4028-1->

--2-748,00.html. Hereafter cited as "Church response."

4. He refers, for example, to Apostle Mark E. Peterson as having been president of the Church (p. 53) and he implies that the law of chastity is contained in Section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

5. "Church response."

6. "Church response."

7. As it is, through the structure of his analogy, Millet is unwittingly comparing Joseph Smith (instead of Dan Lafferty) to Adolf Hitler.

8. In the same passage from which Millet drew his quotation, Dan Lafferty specifically mentions Smith as the person he most admires. The end of the paragraph reads: "More than a century and a half after his passing, the sheer force of Joseph's personality still holds extraordinary sway over Mormons and Mormon Fundamentalists alike. 'I admire Joseph Smith, affirms Dan Lafferty, his eyes burning. 'I admire nobody else as much'"(53).

9. "Church response." Similarly, Millet feels obligated to refute, in some detail, the seemingly straightforward statement that "Mormonism is a patriarchal religion, rooted firmly in the traditions of the Old Testament. Dissent isn't tolerated" (31).

10. Turley disputes Krakauer's assertion that the Church attempted to keep Mark Hoffman's forgeries from the public eye. "Church response."

11. Millet asks: "If one really wants to better understand present-day Mormonism, why study those who have distorted and perverted the tenets of the faith? Why make repetitive use of the misleading phrase 'Mormon Fundamentalists' to describe apostates from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?" "Church response."

12. *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 13, 2003. See: <http://www.sltrib.com/2003/Jul/07132003/commentary/74671.asp> (accessed 24 June 2004). A copy of this response can also be found at: <http://www.bookbrowse.com/index.cfm?page=author&authorID=123&view=Interview>.

13. Debbie was sexually assaulted at the age of six (33). At fifteen, she became the sixth wife of the community's fifty-seven-year-old leader. In so doing, she became a stepmother to her own stepmother, in effect, her own step-grandmother (32). When this first husband died three years later, she was forced to become the fifth wife of an abusive fifty-four-year-old.

14. Consider Tom Green. Although Linda Kunz, whom he impregnated when she was thirteen, received most of the media's attention, seven of Tom Green's ten wives were the children of his other wives, and all of these seven were age sixteen or under when he married them (21). *Under the Banner of Heaven* documents numerous such instances of underage marriage. Krakauer quotes an editorial from the *St. George Spectrum*: "Without the context of spiritual marriage, there would be no debate that these are acts of pedophilia" (23).

15. Perhaps he feels no need to, given his personal solution of rejecting faith as irrational. Again, this shouldn't necessarily be read as an attack. Consider the following critique that he aimed squarely at himself in *Into Thin Air*: "[A]ttempting to climb Everest is an intrinsically irrational act—a triumph of desire over sensibility. Any person who would seriously consider it is almost by definition beyond the sway of reasoned argument." *Into Thin Air*, xiii.

16. "Church response."

## BOOK REVIEW

# FINDING A GIRL, PROMOTING A CHURCH

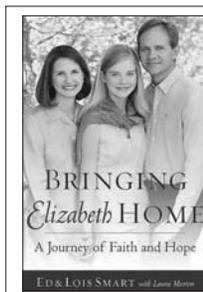
BRINGING ELIZABETH HOME

by Ed Smart, Lois Smart, and Laura Morton

Doubleday, 2003

240 pages, \$22.95

Reviewed by Margot Anderson



*Although far too many other children go missing each year, Elizabeth Smart's ordeal captured the nation's attention like no other. In Bringing Elizabeth Home, her parents tell their story—and promote their religious faith.*

**I**N THEIR MEMOIR, *Bringing Elizabeth Home: A Journey of Faith and Hope*, Ed and Lois Smart, together with best-selling author Laura Morton, set out to "gain some control over the information and misinformation that has been circulating" about their daughter's abduction and subsequent resurfacing last year. Their objective is to provide readers with "the genuine facts of what actually happened" (10).

The Smarts' book is written in a protective spirit: to protect their daughter, their family, and their religion. They produce a narrative that often distracts the reader with its transparent agenda and instances of insipidity (for instance, in its descriptions of the Smarts' "beautiful and amazing children"[4]). In the end, however, the Smarts cannot fully suppress the inherent strangeness of this tale.

The book presents only a broad sketch of what Elizabeth endured during the nine months she was captive. Her parents make very clear that they "will not share the terri-

fying details of her captivity" (8). That is her story, and she may tell it sometime in the future if she chooses. However, one element of Elizabeth's experience they do discuss is Stockholm syndrome—a theory that describes how, as a survival mechanism, captives sometimes come to sympathize with their captors. The most famous example of Stockholm syndrome is probably the story of Patricia Hearst, who, following her violent abduction by the Symbionese Liberation Army, was manipulated into changing her name to Tania and participating in armed robbery.

According to the Smarts' account, "unlike most victims [Elizabeth] never bonded with her kidnappers. . . . She was never fooled by their diabolical and distorted views" (99). This may be somewhat difficult to swallow, as most followers of this story are aware that Elizabeth and her captors were hiding in plain sight for much of the nine months she was missing, and that even when Sandy po-



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lice did finally find her, it took some extensive questioning to get her to admit that she was really Elizabeth Smart and not “Augustine,” the name given her by her abductor, Brian Mitchell.

However, the family emphasizes that Elizabeth feared for her life and her family’s life—that she had been convinced by Mitchell that he had followers who were watching her family’s home, ready to kill them if she disobeyed. It has been argued that Elizabeth’s strict Mormon upbringing with its emphasis on obedience and respect for elders may have made her more susceptible to brainwashing. But the Smarts certainly do not make this argument. In fact, as if in answer, they make a point of noting that their religion “emphasizes freedom of choice” (19) and that Elizabeth had been raised with “the ability to think freely, make good choices, and believe in a loving Heavenly Father” (21).

THE struggles of the family during this ordeal are dizzying in their ups and downs. Each new episode, from the “utter disbelief and shock” of finding their daughter missing (2), to feeling “resentful of the [investigation’s] focus on the extended Smart family” (91), to the confusion over several false leads, is given lengthy explanation, with both criticism and praise of the police and media meted out.

The picture painted of the Salt Lake City Police Department is often unflattering. We learn that in the early hours of the investigation, the police assumed that either Elizabeth was a runaway or that the perpetrator was a family member; therefore, a vigorous search of the surrounding canyon (which might well have found Elizabeth and her captor, who were at the time fleeing on foot) was not initiated until much later that day. Ed writes:

I remember feeling as if the police didn’t have control over the situation. It was as if they were waiting for something to happen or for someone to come and tell them what to do. I was bothered that they weren’t out there looking for my daughter. . . . The house had not yet been sealed as a crime scene, which was confusing and troubling to us. Looking back, this turned out to be a huge oversight on the part of the police. (49–50)

The Smarts express understanding for the need to investigate family members, noting that “forty-eight percent of the time a child goes missing . . . the culprit is a close family member or friend” (54), but they are under-

standably pained when male family members, including Elizabeth’s older brother, are repeatedly questioned about the possibility of their involvement in the crime.

One cannot in fairness fault the Smarts for their desire to defend their family. However, they make a point of certain facts that now seem irrelevant (that Ed really did call 911 before he called his brother—phone records show this!). They describe Ed’s hospitalization for a “mild nervous breakdown” (73—a

The most interesting aspect of this book is the way it serves as promotional material for the Mormon Church. One cannot help but get the message that the Smarts got their daughter back because of their exemplary faith.

term with an accepted meaning among laypeople, but no specific medical meaning), which no doubt was deeply embarrassing at the time.

The Smarts do officially thank the police in the book. But we are left to understand that without the pressure exerted by Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson, whom the Smarts roundly praise, Police Chief Rick Dinse and the Salt Lake force might never have followed the leads necessary to eventually find Elizabeth.

Throughout the book, the news media play both hero and villain. Leading the good guys is the host of *America’s Most Wanted*, John Walsh, who (although it is not noted in the book) himself lost a son to kidnapping and murder. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine this story’s being resolved successfully without Walsh’s help. A couple of months

after the abduction, media interest had dropped significantly. Without Walsh’s willingness to air possible new leads, one of which eventually led to Mitchell, it is possible Elizabeth wouldn’t have been found as quickly as she was or at all. As it happened, photographs of Mitchell and Barzee were provided by Barzee’s family members after they saw Walsh’s show. “Aside from God’s help, the media was the most important instrument in bringing our daughter home,” the Smarts attest (9).

The Smarts mention the infamous *National Inquirer* story; however, they “declined to acknowledge the scandalous report” (100) at the time of its printing and decline to include the headline in their book.<sup>1</sup> They do note that they have received a retraction and settlement from the *Inquirer*. They only allude to the debacle that followed at the *Salt Lake Tribune*, in which two reporters (who had provided the *Inquirer* with information) were fired and the editor resigned.

AS their story drags on for nine months, there are several false leads that at one point or another were pursued vigorously. It is in the detailed account of one particular false lead that the narrators appear the coldest. Richard Ricci was the focus of many months of investigative effort by the Salt Lake police. As is obvious now, he did not abduct Elizabeth. But for many months—both before and after his death from a brain aneurysm while he was being held in a local jail—he was the police’s prime suspect. The family’s involvement with Ricci is an odd story. We learn that the Smart family generously hired this eager but not very able worker and that he spent about three months working in their home. We learn that the Smarts agreed to sell him their old Jeep in exchange for some of his work. He repays their kindness by attempting to take off with the Jeep before finishing the work and then stealing some of the family’s jewelry. All this takes place many months prior to Elizabeth’s disappearance.

When the police take Ricci in for questioning about the kidnapping, he adamantly denies involvement but does end up admitting to the theft and is also indicted for an armed bank robbery he had been involved with much earlier. There is evidence that he took a long car trip around the time of Elizabeth’s abduction, but he adamantly refused to provide an alibi. “Police had hoped that leaving him in solitary confinement would prompt a confession about Elizabeth, but Ricci never admitted to any involvement”

(107). When Ricci dies in custody, leaving a grieving wife, the Smarts' only regret is that "[the police] did a lot of work, but at the end of the day, it would be all for naught" (109).

This seeming lack of empathy perhaps stems from what Lois describes as her religion's concept of free agency. "Though they have the ability to freely choose their actions, [people] are not free from the consequences . . . we are all accountable for our own actions, right and wrong" (20).

In fact, the most interesting aspect of this book is the way it serves as promotional material for the Mormon Church. Although the authors explicitly state, "We don't believe that the Lord answered our prayers because we are special, righteous, chosen, or because we are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (13), the content of the book belies this assertion. In fact they do appear to believe that they are special and righteous and that the Church was instrumental in Elizabeth's return.

Each parent takes a chapter to give some personal family history, and these consist mainly of a recounting of earlier family miracles: a grandmother who survived a rattlesnake bite through her parents' faithful prayer; a tank of gas that appeared in the desert when it was desperately needed ("God heard our prayer"); a lost boat in danger that returned safely home through abandoning navigation and turning to prayer; and several more such tales. The Smarts state, "The Lord makes it very clear that faith is not developed by miracles, but that miracles are a result of great faith" (24). A book they gain strength from is Spencer W. Kimball's *Faith Precedes the Miracle*. One cannot help but get the message that the Smarts got their daughter back because of their exemplary faith.

Throughout the ordeal of searching for Elizabeth, both Lois and Ed receive personal messages of comfort from the Lord. The Lord speaks to Ed during a blessing from his bishop, instructing him to return from the hospital to his family (73). "Be of good cheer," the Lord tells Lois (84). However, it is unlikely that these somewhat mystical moments would set the Smarts' faith apart from that of many other churchgoers in America today.

The authors offer to teach readers some of the "language that is specific to our beliefs" (16). We are told about home teachers, wards, and the Book of Mormon. The Smarts also give their own overview of the distinctive point-of-view shared by members of the Mormon Church:

As Church members we are taught

to study things in our own minds and to rely on personal revelation. We are given commandments and basic guidelines of conduct by the Lord but the details of how we interpret and carry out those principles are between us, our families, and the Lord (16).

To a non-Mormon (such as this writer), the Smarts' depiction of Mormonism is perplexing. The Smarts claim that their faith values free will, but rumors abound in some circles about how difficult it can be to leave the Mormon Church. The Smarts describe a Church that leaves the "details" up to the individual; but this description conflicts with the common perception of a church which contains very detailed proscriptions on members' behavior, including dress, drink, and sexual activity, and where a church hierarchy actively delves into these matters with each member, handing out either sanctions or rewards (e.g. temple recommends).

The Smarts set out to demystify Mormonism, perhaps because they fear that Mitchell will dominate the public's perception of Mormonism. Their fear is somewhat misplaced, for the vast majority of the general public does not blame Mormonism for Mitchell any more than it blames Christianity for mentally ill criminals who think they are Jesus Christ.

In their book, the Smarts ably highlight the most mainstream aspects of their faith. But interestingly, they do not emphasize enough the element of Mormonism that was likely their most important asset during their ordeal (and to many outsiders, the most impressive thing about the Mormon Church): the scale and complexity of the Church's organization. It was organization (along with the family's persistence, money, and personal influence) that got Elizabeth back. Church members provided much practical assistance to the Smarts, such as search parties and poster printing, as

well as the collective political will to keep Elizabeth's story alive long enough for her to be found.

For this reader, someone who began with both admiration for and unease about the Mormon Church and its elaborate social order, *Bringing Elizabeth Home* provided nothing particularly revelatory. The book, however, is a readable telling of an astounding and moving family saga for those willing to look past its obvious self-serving and Church-serving motives. ☐

#### NOTE

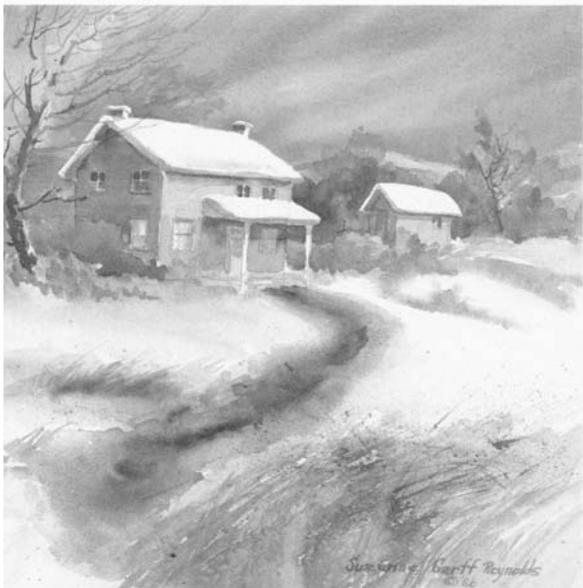
1. The *Inquirer* headline in question is now rather laughable, "Utah Cops: Secret Diary Exposes Family Sex Ring." But it is understandable that the family, the subjects of so much suspicion and wild-running rumor, would be adamant about not acknowledging a headline with "family sex ring" in its title.

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

TIMELY WARNINGS OR EROTOPHOBIA?  
LDS RHETORIC ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY

By Hugo Olaiž

**I**N RECENT YEARS, LDS leaders have re-emphasized the dangers of pornography. In a review of some five hundred articles and speeches, social psychologist Marvin Rytting shows that LDS statements against pornography rose markedly between 1954 and 1979.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary statements suggest that the trend has continued. President Gordon B. Hinckley has called pornography “enticing and habit forming”<sup>2</sup> and President James E. Faust suggests it is “as addictive as cocaine or any illegal drug.”<sup>3</sup> A recent *Church News* issue published a three-page alert about the “enslavement of pornography.”<sup>4</sup> A 2004 LDS book about marriage contains a chapter on “the plague of pornography,” written by a social worker who specializes in pornography and cybersex.<sup>5</sup>

At a time when Internet users are bombarded with unwanted sexual messages, this emphasis on the evils of pornography is doubtless seen by many Latter-day Saints as a timely prophetic warning. But is it more than mere hyperbole to call pornography “a vicious brew of slime and sleaze, the partaking of which only leads to misery, degradation, and regret”?<sup>6</sup> Does scientific research support characterizing pornography as enslavement and addiction? Or is this another example of what some authors have dubbed “Mormon erotophobia”?<sup>7</sup>

## PORNOGRAPHY AS ADDICTION

LDS LEADERS HAVE decried “exhibitions of nakedness, of obscenity, of vulgarity” at least since 1911,<sup>8</sup> but it was in 1959 that Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of the Twelve first connected pornography and drug abuse. “There is a peculiar resemblance to narcotics addiction in exposure of juveniles to pornography,” he said in the October 1959 General Conference, quoting from a Senate subcommittee report. “There is the same pattern of progression. Once initiated into a knowledge of the unnatural, the impressionable young mind with the insatiable curiosity characteristic of those reaching for maturity inevitably

hunts for something stronger, something with more ‘jolt,’ something imparting a greater thrill.”<sup>9</sup>

Dormant for decades, the pornography and drugs connection resurfaced in Mormon discourse with the 1990 publication of *Breaking the Cycle of Compulsive Behavior*. The authors state, “The physical nature of a compulsive cycle is perhaps most obvious in substance abuse, where a recognizable chemical addiction exists, but we found close parallels to this type of addiction in behaviors as diverse as shoplifting and looking at pornography.”<sup>10</sup> Two years later, during a General Conference priesthood session, President Gordon B. Hinckley read a letter from a convert who described his use of pornography as an addiction. “For most of my adult life I have been addicted to pornography,” the letter read. “I am ashamed to admit this. My addiction is as real as that of an alcoholic or a drug addict.”<sup>11</sup>

LDS leaders also depict pornography as a gateway to horrible violent acts—even to sex crimes and murder. In 1990, LDS authors Blaine and Brenton Yorgason published a book in which they included Ted Bundy’s claims that his career as a serial killer started as a twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy, on the day he happened across soft-core pornography.<sup>12</sup> A 1995 *Church News* story asserts not only that pornography is as addictive as narcotics, but also that “it leads to other victims through the sick actions of the addict as he or she tries to act out his or her addiction through sexual abuse, rape or even murder.”<sup>13</sup>

## SCIENTISTS WEIGH IN

“FOR SOME PEOPLE, pornography can be an addiction,” asserts Romel W. Mackelprang, professor of social sciences at Eastern Washington University. “But I would caution against overdramatizing it. I have seen pornography as an addiction, and I have seen it destroy people’s lives; but I become afraid if we send the message that anyone who uses it will become addicted.”<sup>14</sup>

To define addiction, Mackelprang uses a model based on substance abuse, “We can only say there is addiction when (1) it causes some kind of problem to a person or to interpersonal relationships, and (2) when the person does not have one hundred percent control over the situation (e.g., they can’t really control when to stop).” Addiction does tend to become progressive, i.e., the person tends to use it more and more.

For Mackelprang, more dangerous than the possibility of addiction are the distorted messages that pornography sends: “It connects violence with sex. It objectifies people, and it creates a ‘myth of perpetual readiness,’ according to which women are always ready to have sex.”

“The majority of people who look at pornography probably don’t have any kind of psychiatric illness,” affirms Louis Moench, professor of clinical psychiatry at the University of Utah. “The large, large majority of those who watch pornography never become criminals, but some of them do.”<sup>15</sup>

When talking about those who abuse pornography, Moench rejects the term addiction on the grounds that pornography has not been shown to produce effects that can be seen in CT or MRI scans. He prefers instead to talk about compulsion, i.e., a type of behavior that the person engages in repeatedly as an anxiety-reducer mechanism. According to Moench, “Many sex criminals are compulsive pornography watchers, but not all of them are. And you cannot say that they would not have become criminals had they not started watching pornography. That probably wouldn’t be a testable hypothesis.”

## PORNOGRAPHY OR EROTICA?

MANY HEALTH PROFESSIONALS believe looking at erotic magazines or watching adult movies is normal and innocuous. Some suggest contexts in which pornography could be beneficial. Even bishops and stakes presidents have sometimes advised LDS marrieds to try using adult films and magazines as an aid in solving sexual dysfunctions.

Mark and Lisa (not their real names) are an active LDS couple who married in the temple more than twenty years ago. They say the adult movies they occasionally watch do not qualify as pornography, because “they do not depict violence toward women.” They prefer the term erotica, and they see this as a small part “in a wide range of things we have in our [sexual] menu.”<sup>16</sup>

“We use adult videos within the confines of our monogamous marriage, and neither of us feels a conflict with Church teachings,”

says Lisa. "Growing up, Mark was very much damaged by his parents' and the Church's attitudes toward sex. But early in our marriage, we discovered that we did have sexually adventurous personalities, which made it very easy for us to decide to try different things. Watching erotica is one of them."

Mark and Lisa believe that watching adult films together has actually strengthened their relationship as a couple. "If one of us had to hide our desires and curiosity, that would have put a huge wall between us. The fact that we feel safe exploring our sexuality together has made a happy marriage."

#### PORNOGRAPHY AND CENSORSHIP

THERE IS AN important corollary to the LDS characterization of pornography as an addiction: If pornography is as dangerous as cocaine, as President Faust maintains, then it follows that it should be dealt with as a controlled substance—a view many Saints are eager to support. In a 1994 *This People* report on immorality in the media, BYU political science professor Ralph Hancock argues that the First Amendment doesn't prohibit limiting freedom of speech in order to protect the moral standards of a community. Hancock notes that "the majority of the [U.S. Supreme Court] has never failed to acknowledge the necessity to 'balance' [free speech] against other legitimate public interests."<sup>17</sup>

Mormons have supported many anti-pornography laws but have also been ridiculed for their penchant for censoring anything that could be perceived as immodest—even world-renowned works of art. Brigham Young University made international news when it censored Rodin's celebrated sculpture *The Kiss*.<sup>18</sup> In 2001, during a "scorn porn" rally at the Utah state capitol, an Orem, Utah, high school sophomore cited Michelangelo's *David* as a prototype of pornography.<sup>19</sup>

How far can Mormon repression go? In his poem, "Negative Space," Paul Swenson describes real-life efforts by two LDS-owned companies (ZCMI and the *Deseret News*) to censor nipples of mannequins and Tarzan comics, respectively. Swenson reflects on how deeply sexual self-repression is ingrained in the Mormon psyche: "Mormon mind regards nipples/ as purely negative space./ including male nipples."<sup>20</sup> While it wouldn't be hard to come up with examples of Mormon literature that convey a sense of repressed or frustrated sexuality, rarely do we find Mormon artists and writers willing to celebrate the beauty of the naked body.

One of the few exceptions is Mormon artist Trevor Southey. The Spring 1993 issue

of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* featured on its front and back covers a Southey painting entitled *Prodigal*, a triptych of male nudes. Controversy ensued, and editors Martha Sonntag Bradley and Alan Dale Roberts felt compelled to explain. Beauty, they reminded their readers, is in the eye of the beholder. Bradley and Roberts wrote of an occasion when a member of the Quorum of the Twelve criticized a "Days of '47" Parade beauty queen for wearing only a bathing suit; President David O. McKay reportedly responded, "I don't see anything that is not beautiful. Do you?"<sup>21</sup>

LDS scholar Levi Peterson believes in a distinct difference between pornography and erotica. He advises Mormon writers: "Don't be paralyzed by prudery. Don't fall into the opposite excess of pornography . . . There is vitality in sexual imagery and obscenities. Shaped proportionally, they do not corrupt and vitiate a work of literature. Like a tributary river, they add to the swelling current of ideas, images, and emotions that makes the reading of good book a consummate experience."<sup>22</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Marvin Rytting, "Exhortations for Chastity: A Content Analysis of Church Literature," in Brent Corcoran (ed.), *Multiply and Replenish: Mormon Essays on Sex and Family* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 91.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children," *Ensign*, November 2000, 51.

3. James E. Faust, "The Enemy Within," *Ensign*, November 2000, 45.

4. Sarah Jane Weaver, "The Silent Sin: Enslavement of Pornography," *LDS Church News*, 29 November 2003, 4–5, 7.

5. Rory C. Reid, "The Plague of Pornography," in Douglas E. Brinley and Daniel K Judd, eds., *Living a Covenant Marriage: Practical Advice from Thirteen Experts Who've Walked in Your Shoes* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 228–52. Reid calls pornography a "plague," echoing Elder Boyd K. Packer, who dubbed pornography a "plague of biblical proportion"; see Boyd K. Packer, "Our Moral Environment," *Ensign*, May 1992, 66.

6. "Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign*, July 1997, 73.

7. Terence L. Day, "A Parents Guide: Sex Education or Erotophobia?" *SUNSTONE*, March 1988, 8–14.

8. President Joseph F. Smith used these words to condemn vaudeville theater during a General Conference address. *LDS Conference Report*, April 1911, 4–5.

9. *LDS Conference Report*, October 1959, 114.

10. Martha Nibley Beck and John C. Beck, *Breaking the Cycle of Compulsive Behavior* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 26–27.

11. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Building Your Tabernacle," *Ensign*, November 1992, 51.

12. Blaine and Brenton Yorgason, *Spiritual Survival in the Last Days* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book,



PAT BAGLEY, SUNSTONE, DECEMBER 1997

1990), 145.

13. "How To Protect Yourself and Loved Ones from Pornography," *LDS Church News*, 4 November 1995, 15. For additional statements connecting pornography and sex crimes, see Reid, "The Plague of Pornography," 228, and "A Similar Warning: 'It's Quicksand,'" *LDS Church News*, 29 November 2003, 7.

14. Telephone interview, 4 December 2003.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Telephone interview, 6 December 2003.

17. Ralph Hancock, "The First Amendment and Freedom of Speech," *This People*, 15, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 44.

18. "BYU Bans Rodin Nudes," *SUNSTONE*, December 1997, 76–77; Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 432–36.

19. Kevin Cantera, "Youths Unified in Effort to Stamp out Smut, but Divided over What It Is," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 February 2001, B-1. For a more recent example of LDS-sponsored youth initiatives against pornography, see "Youth Pledge to Remain Free of Pornography," *LDS Church News*, 16 December 2000, 7.

20. Paul Swenson, "Negative Space," *Iced at the Ward, Burned at the Stake* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 44.

21. "Editor's Note," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1993), ix–x.

22. Levi S. Peterson, "In Defense of Mormon Erotica," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 127.

## UPDATE

PRESIDENT HINCKLEY AWARDED  
MEDAL OF FREEDOM

ON 23 JUNE, President Gordon B. Hinckley celebrated his 94th birthday in Washington, D.C., where he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush.



President Hinckley is congratulated  
by President Bush

During the White House ceremony, Bush stated that President Hinckley “inspired millions and led efforts to improve humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and education funding across the globe. His tireless efforts to spread the word of God and promote

goodwill have strengthened his faith, his community, and our nation.”

Other 2004 Medal of Freedom recipients include Pope John Paul II (who received his medal in the Vatican), golfer Arnold Palmer, and actresses Rita Moreno and Doris Day.

FIRST PRESIDENCY DISCOURAGES  
CIRCULATION OF STATEMENTS

WEEKS AFTER A report of remarks by Elder L. Tom Perry at an Idaho stake conference received wide Internet circulation, the First Presidency issued a letter read from ward pulpits discouraging members from passing to others statements they hear from General Authorities or notes they take during conferences.

“From time to time statements are circulated among members which are inaccurately attributed to leaders of the Church,” reads the letter, as published in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. “We encourage members of the Church to never teach or pass on such statements without verifying that they are from approved Church sources such as official statements, communications, and publications.”

The letter also addresses notes that members take of addresses by General Authorities: “Any notes made . . . should not be distributed without the consent of the speaker. Personal notes are for individual use only. True spiritual growth is based on studying the scriptures, the teachings of the Brethren, and Church publications.”

People

**Exposed.** JAY S. BYBEE, at the center of controversy surrounding prisoner abuse by U.S. troops in Iraq. Bybee, a Latter-day Saint and BYU law school graduate confirmed in 2003 for a lifetime appointment to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, is the author of an August 2002 document, now often referred to

as the “Bybee memo,” advising the federal government that it could authorize a wide variety of extreme techniques to extract information from prisoners without violating federal torture law or international treaties. The narrow definition of torture in Bybee’s memo has been latched on to by some as evidence that soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison may have felt emboldened in their abuse, thinking it was encouraged by those at the highest levels of command.

**Under deliberation.** The future of GLENN TAYLOR HELZER, the charismatic leader of a California cult group accused of killing and dismembering five people and dumping the remains into the Sacramento River. According to court testimony, Helzer planned to hasten the Second Coming by sending South American orphans to Salt Lake City to kill the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. Helzer, who had been excommunicated from the LDS Church in 1998, planned to then become Church president himself.

**Crowned.** KEN JENNINGS, an elders quorum president from Murray, Utah, the longest consecutive running champ in *Jeopardy!* history. At SUNSTONE press time, Jennings was still

champion with a seventeen-day cumulative winnings total of \$552,959. Naturally well-prepared in categories such as religion or the Bible, Ken admits to having studied arduously in preparation for liquor-themed categories. “I guess I should tell my bishop just how much I know about bartending,” he quips.



**Honored.** OMAR M. KADER, a Palestinian-American Latter-day Saint and former Brigham Young University professor was awarded an honorary doctorate from Weber State University for his peace advocacy and long-time service as a voice for the Palestinian people. Kader also delivered Weber’s commencement address, in which he shared the story of his father’s immigration to the United States and discussed the importance of taking risks.

**Named.** ROBERT KIRBY, “Favorite Columnist” for the sixth consecutive year in the *City Weekly’s* survey of Utahns’ favorite people and places. Kirby is well-known to many SUNSTONE readers for his regular column in the Saturday edition of the *Salt Lake Tribune* in which he frequently discusses Mormon-related issues in a light-hearted yet serious way. Kirby has also recently become a member of the Sunstone Foundation board of directors.



In his 21 March visit to the Kuna Idaho stake, Elder Perry reportedly told the audience that the Twelve even eat chocolates and go through doors in order of seniority. He also allegedly stated that although President Boyd K. Packer is the most inspirational of men, when the president occasionally gets irate, Elder Perry has taken on the job of kicking him in the shins. A CES memorandum repudiated a widely circulated email version of the remarks, but members of the Kuna Stake say the email justly summarizes Elder Perry's statements (see SUNSTONE, May 2004, pp. 76-77).

### MANHATTAN STAKE CENTER GETS "CELESTIAL MAKEOVER"



Artist's rendering of the Manhattan Temple with steeple and Angel Moroni addition; inset, the temple today

FOLLOWING EXTENSIVE RENOVATION, three floors of the New York New York Stake Center were dedicated 13 June as the Manhattan Temple. The edifice stands on Columbus Avenue, a block from Central Park.

The exterior, still under renovation, will include a corner spire that will give the building a mosque-like appearance. A similar multi-purpose building stands today in equally crowded Hong Kong, where, as President Gordon

B. Hinckley quipped, \$10 million will buy a piece of property the size of a postage stamp.

### CHURCH ISSUES NEW POLICY FOR SELLING GARMENTS

LDS LEADERS ARE taking steps to ensure that those who buy

temple garments are LDS. According to a 1 June letter issued by the First Presidency, beginning on 1 August, members purchasing garments will be asked to provide either a temple recommend or their ID and date of birth so Beehive clothing personnel can verify their "endowment status."

Some observers believe the new policy reflects an effort to prevent Temple Square protesters from desecrating garments during general conference and to stem the recent surge in the sale of garments through online auctions such as eBay

The purchase of ceremonial clothing has already been restricted for some time to current temple recommend holders.

### FLDS BUILD COMPOUND IN TEXAS

WHEN DAVID S. Allred began to build several residences on a 1,300-acre ranch just outside the small, west Texas town of Eldorado, he told neighbors the com-



compound would be a corporate hunting retreat. But the truth is now out—the outpost will be home to many members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the secretive polygamist sect on the Utah-Arizona border.

During a 28 April meeting with Sheriff David Doran, FLDS leaders apologized for their initial deception about the nature of their building project. They said they had done so to avoid negative news media and to not overburden local officials. FLDS leaders say the new compound will consist initially of five buildings and will house some two hundred of prophet Warren Jeffs's followers.

Texas has no law banning polygamy, but according to Doran, consummating a marriage with a girl sixteen years of age or younger would be a felony.

### Solar Flare

**Golden Questions for the Golden Tanned.** While through the years many missionaries have been reprimanded for letting their hair grow too long, some elders from the Salt Lake South Mission have recently been chastised for getting theirs cut. According to a recent *Salt Lake Tribune* story, a group of LDS missionaries had become regulars at Bikini Cuts, a new Sandy, Utah, salon staffed by beautiful young women whose year-round cosmetologist uniform consists of a skimpy bikini.

"I'll tell you what, [the missionaries] were doing their work," says store owner Bethany Prince. "They were actually trying to convert the girls."

Other Sandy Mormons are also patronizing the establishment. According to Prince, an LDS woman who originally intended to chastise the stylists found the service so professional that she left with a stack of business cards and a bumper sticker announcing, "My Stylist Is Hotter Than Yours!"

In a November 2003 column about this new-to-Utah business, the *Tribune's* Robert Kirby quipped, "My wife doesn't care if I get my hair cut by a scantily clad woman. She knows I would only give myself a migraine trying to see without my glasses."



CAL GRONDAHL, FREEWAY TO PERFECTION

## AN OLIVE LEAF

GOD MUST BE HIS  
OWN INTERPRETER

By B. H. Roberts

When President Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto in September 1890, B. H. Roberts was stranded on a train in central Utah, waiting for tracks ahead to be repaired. Newspapers proclaiming Woodruff's declaration made their way to the passengers, provoking mixed, but strong, reactions. Roberts recorded his feelings and struggles two-and-a-half years later in his journal, reprinted in the just-released volume, *Historian's Apprentice: The Diaries of B. H. Roberts, 1880–1898*, edited by John Sillito (Signature Books). Despite Roberts's sacrifices for polygamy (he was imprisoned for the practice), he learned to see "the flashes of light" through the blackness. (SUNSTONE has corrected spelling and punctuation in order to make the following excerpt [from pages 225–27] as readable as possible.)



I WAS LINGERING ABOUT ON THE OUTSIDE TALKING with the [train] passengers, found the Salt Lake papers containing Pres. Woodruff's Manifesto. As soon as I entered the car, [Apostle John W. Taylor] called to me and showed me the papers containing the document, the head lines of which I read with astonishment. But no sooner had I read them, than like a flash of light all through my soul the Spirit said—"That is all right," so it passed. Then I began to reflect upon the matter. I thought of all the Saints who had suffered to sustain that doctrine; I remembered my own exile, my own imprisonment; I thought of that of others. I remembered what sacrifices my wives had made for it; what others had made for it. We had preached it, sustained its divinity from the pulpit, in the press, from the lecture platform. Our community had endured every kind of reproach from the world for the sake of it—and was this to be the end? I had learned to expect that God would sustain both that principle and his Saints who carried it out, and to lay down like this was a kind of cowardly proceeding, so that the more I thought of it, the less I liked it. I thought of Martin Luther, of Ulrich Zwingli, of Philipp Melancthon and hosts of other men who only having fragments of the truth risked all their fortune and their lives in support of them and won the admiration and respect of all the world; while we having a fulness of the truth must needs fly from it like a skittish jade at a windmill because, forsooth, we

are threatened with imprisonment, disfranchisement, and the confiscation of our property. Such is a specimen of the reflection which passed thro[ugh] my mind. . . .

Well, as I was saying, this matter continued to be a trial to me through the year 1891, and plagued me much, but I said but little about it; and by and by I began to remember the flash of light that first came to me when first I heard of it, and at last my feelings became reconciled to it. Perhaps I had transgressed in pushing from me the first testimony I received in relation to it, and allowing my own prejudices, and my own shortsighted, human

reason to stand against the inspiration of God and the testimony it bore that the manifesto was alright. When this fact began to dawn on my mind, I repented of my wrong and courted most earnestly the spirit of God for a testimony and gradually it came. I did not understand the purposes for which the Manifesto was issued . . . but sure I am that it is all right; that God has a purpose in it I feel assured, and in due time it will be manifest. The principle of plurality of wives is true, I know, and in connection with all other truth will eventually prevail and be established on the earth; but I do not pretend to say what God's purpose is or what is to be accomplished by it. It is a matter in which I trust the divine wisdom implicit. God must be his own interpreter and in time will make it plain.

THIS YEAR, FOR some unaccountable reason, has been a year of deep sorrow to me, and peculiar temptations. The flashes of light—heavenly light—have been startlingly bright, made to appear so to me, perhaps, by the thick blackness that was gathered about my horizon. But if my sorrows have been many, my joys have been correspondingly keen, and there have been bright moments of joy and ecstasy such as few mortals encompass; and if these bright drops of joy cannot be possessed only by drinking the draughts of ill between—then fill sorrow's cup to the brim and I'll drain it dry even to the dregs and never murmur. Give me the gleams of sunshine amid these renewing storms and I will stand uncovered to receive the latter in all their fury without a word of protestation. ☪

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*“Upcoming activities: The Young Men will be going bungee jumping, getting ready for their river rafting trip as well as horseback riding and working on their cliff diving and archery merit badges. The Young Women will be tying a quilt.”*

