

SUNSTONE

MORMON EXPERIENCE, SCHOLARSHIP, ISSUES, AND ART

The Plan



A Play by Eric Samuelsen

July 2009—\$7.50



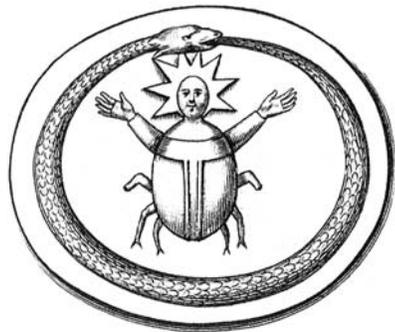
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SUNSTONE

MORMON EXPERIENCE, SCHOLARSHIP, ISSUES, & ART

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Pontius' Puddle



Cover art by Anna Waschke

TOUCHSTONES

STAYING / LEAVING

STAYING FOR
THE SACRED

I am well aware of most of the controversial issues in the church, including the Book of Abraham, DNA, Book of Mormon historicity, and polyandry. Church books lined the shelves of my childhood home: from Maxwell, Nibley, Quinn, and Compton to Will Bagley and Simon Southerton. Some issues bother me more than others. I could not support the Church on Prop. 8. I will probably never understand in this life why we are discouraged from praying to our Heavenly Mother, or why women are no longer allowed to bless the sick. I could go on.

I occasionally receive suggestions that if I have concerns or disagreements, I should leave the faith. Others may think I should try harder to procure answers for my questions. I have pondered the first option, and I tried out the second for a while. Neither has been even remotely satisfying.

I was raised by a saint of a mother and an intellectual yet very spiritual father. On hunting trips, my father would sometimes shoot his buffalo in the name of Allah (in Turkish) so our good Muslim friends could enjoy it with us. As bishop, he helped countless families regardless of legal status, blessed a neighbor's sick cat, and was a safe haven for gay members to turn to. My par-

ents left their ward a few years ago to attend a Hispanic branch where they can do a lot more than debate gospel minutiae in Sunday School. They taught me by word and example that serving and loving others always trumps theology.

As a priest, I loved blessing the sacrament. It was probably the first time I felt a significant sense of the sacred—it was intoxicating. Those intense feelings took me completely by surprise because, like many teenagers, I did not think I was worthy. I often felt a sense of awe watching the RMs come home. I wanted what they had. My father called it “spiritual muscle.” I didn't feel that strength when I began my mission, but talking with my parents when they came to pick me up two years later made me realize that by the end, it was pouring out of me. Scriptures rolled off my tongue, but I had also never felt more humble.

The Book of Mormon has a special place in my life. One experience reading King Benjamin started what became a small series of nearly indescribable positive spiritual experiences. I had been taught often in seminary that if you pray, you can find out for yourself. I had prayed, but didn't feel anything for a long time. Then one day, without asking, it came.

I enjoy the temple ordinances—I expect that they will continue to evolve, and I look forward to it. I see Christ and relationships in everything about the temple. It can be

different—even awkward—at first, but looking deeper provides inspiration and insight that stabilizes my life. My belief in Christ is very Mormon. He inspires me to goodness. He is my answer to the question of evil, tragedy, and suffering. He unconditionally loves everyone. His revelations are in the Church, in books, in the rocks, and I hope in my dissertation in a few years.

Some stuff about the Church bothers me, but more of it inspires me: eternal marriage, growth and progression, innate goodness in everyone—they give meaning to my life and family. They have been the source of experiences and growth that I cannot reject or ignore. So here I am, staying for the sacred—in the Church, good and bad, best and worst, awkward and inspiring.

ADAM FISHER
Spokane, Washington

ALL THAT IS
LEFT BEHIND

I have a rich family heritage of both leaving and staying. My thoughts often turn to that great-great-grandfather who left wife and two daughters in Sweden. Just left them behind because they wouldn't go with him to America to await the end of the world in a safe place among the Saints. There's a great-granduncle who left behind “a fallen prophet” to continue practicing “the Principle.” And a great-grandfather, grandson of Brigham, who, overcome with grief, just checked out—haunting the poolrooms and pubs of Salt Lake City. They still haunt my mind. Leaving seemed the right choice for them. It was a price they felt compelled to pay.

In the past, I have chosen to follow the example and admonitions of those who stay. They say staying is good; the price of leaving, too great. I was taught to always honor the sacrifices of those who leave the world to join the Church, as if the price of what was left behind is virtually inconsequential in comparison to the reward. It was a compelling value proposition. And so I agreed to let the mysteries of those who reject the reward remain in that box under the bed where dust bunnies play tricks.

But then fate and I pulled out the box, chased away the dust, and wept with those who left.

Of all the choices in life, leaving must be the hardest. By nature, we want to honor our people and traditions. We want to stay, and that wanting makes the choice easier. I

TOUCHSTONES is a SUNSTONE section that debuted in the December 2005 issue. It was inspired by “Readers Write” in The SUN magazine. TOUCHSTONES topics are intentionally broad in order to give room for personal expression. Writing style is not as important as the contributor's thoughtfulness, humor, and sincerity. SUNSTONE reserves the right to edit pieces, but contributors will have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication.

To submit a reflection, please send it typed and double-spaced to SUNSTONE, 343 North Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84103. Electronic submissions can be sent via email to Touchstones editor Cheryl Bruno at: clbruno@hotmail.com. Due to space limitations, submissions should be kept somewhere around 400 words, but we are willing to make exceptions for exceptional pieces. Please submit right away for upcoming topics.

Upcoming Topics: BIBLES
HE SAID/SHE SAID: POLITICS

wanted to please my parents, so I chose to attend church as a child. I wanted to honor the wishes and judgment of my elders, so I chose to be baptized. I wanted to be accepted by my people, to do what is right before my God, so I chose to serve a mission and to marry in the temple. I wanted to stay, and so for most of my life, I made the corresponding choices. And those choices were comforting.

Then the comfort went away. There's not much left at this point but to be true to the whole story. Leaving *and* staying. Because for every member not born into the Church, leaving is at least half of the story, the most traumatic, the price they have to pay for the flawed pearl they now hold. It's time for me to honor the memory of those who left and the full value of what they left behind. To hold it in my hands and contemplate: Were they right? Am I wrong?

Yes, I'm in the process of leaving. The threads of my faith have become as bare as the threads of my garments. Yet I still wear them. The last few threads are like steel that bind my heart to those who stay.

I have not found a reason sharp enough to cut these last threads. So I remain in the process of leaving, unwilling to pay the price asked by my great-great-grandfather's God.

MATT ELGGREN
Mercer Island, Washington

LEAVING TO STAY

I chose Palio's, a small Italian restaurant, to break the news to my dearest friend that my husband would soon be transferred to Hawaii and that we'd be leaving before the summer ended.

She'd been raised on Oahu, very near where we would be transferred. Over the years, she's told me stories of her growing up that made it very plain that those friendly Hawaiians who place a lei around your neck when your plane arrives are not the same Hawaiians who fill the public schools. Her worst story is of being encircled by native classmates who, because of her pale skin, brutally punched and kicked her and called her names while a teacher, an islander, walked past, chuckling. I knew that Kill Haole Day was a state "holiday" on which mainlanders should take cover.

I have a seven-year-old second-grader. A blond.

"Lisa," she began, "this is what you need to know." She began rattling off information I would need to protect my child. Survival advice.



I knew that my husband could refuse the transfer, but he'd been at his present duty station, a federal prison southeast of Dallas, for seventeen years and had had his fill. He reaches his retirement mark in a handful of months, but the mortgage on our home prevents him from separating from the Public Health Service. He thought a change of environment, especially to a beautiful setting, might make it easier for him to keep his shoulder to the wheel.

So I told myself I could home school. My son and I would hop the islands and have educational adventures at every turn. We'd bond. It'd be good for my husband and, therefore, my family.

But no matter how rosy a scenario I conned myself with, I always came back to the image of a knock-kneed Maryann being kicked and punched and ridiculed as a teacher walked away.

Then, one evening, I climbed as usual onto a chair so I could pray with my seven-year-old as he lay in his loft bed. He folded his arms, but before his hand rested above his elbow, he rolled his fingers, extending one at a time like an infant. And it struck me how fragile he is, how small. When we finished praying, he whispered, "Mom, I don't want to move to Hawaii. My friends are here."

That night in bed I prayed, "Father, I don't want to go to Hawaii. My friends are here."

I slept fitfully. Then around four a.m., I woke with a clear thought in my head.

Cash out. Sell the house with the mortgage and buy a smaller home that will leave you with little or no debt. Free your husband. Give your family their friends, their good schools, their security.

So I began to Google. When my husband woke up, I handed him MLS flyers for several homes within the boundary of my son's elementary school. He looked through them, then looked again, lingering each time over one particular home.

"I have a good feeling about this one," he said.

We drove by each house that night, saving that one for last. We were charmed by the home's exterior and arranged for our family to view it the next evening. No sooner had the door opened than our family issued a collective gasp. We were home. Within forty-eight hours of my son's post-prayer declaration, we had a contract on a house a mile away from where we live now. We close on it next week, and we will leave this place—yet stay right here at home.

LISA TORCASSO DOWNING
Heath, Texas



CORNUCOPIA

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

Department of Steinbeck allusions

OF BOOKS AND MEN

MY MUSCLES WERE NOT FULLY RESPONDING as I stumbled toward the light in the living room. Sitting quietly on the couch was a handsome man with a pleasant demeanor. I'm not sure why I noticed all the little details—a skinny black tie, a silk handkerchief in his front jacket pocket, spiffy black polished shoes that shone softly as he sat cross-legged. It must have been the just-after-midnight monochrome light that made him look as though he had jumped out of one of those 1950s black-and-white war movies that I used to watch with my folks as a kid. In the fog between waking and sleep, finding this man sitting on my couch in the middle of the night didn't seem to alarm me.

Cradled in his hand was one of the small antique books from my library. The fact that he was thumbing through the pages as though they were old friends seemed so natural that I felt immediately at ease. I stepped forward, catching his eye, and made my way to a seat across from him. The growing expression on his face made it clear that he longed to convey something, but no words passed between us. Yet despite our loss for words, there was not a hint of exasperation in his demeanor.

The man sitting across from me was a stranger only because somehow the rage, fear, and disappointment that had characterized his life had been stripped away. The simple fact is that I have always known this man. This is my father: the way all fathers want to be but can't. At peace with himself and his surroundings—not that angry pugilist, raised by his older siblings on violent Salt Lake City streets during the height of the Great Depression; or for that matter, the property owner who squabbled with delinquent tenants and was never up for a hike or fishing with his boys.

Some fathers and sons share something like baseball as a neutral ground for bonding. My father and I shared a small

JESUS CHRIST, BROADWAY STAR?

HOW DOES A MORMON WHO WAS ONCE the voice of Jesus in an LDS church film turn into a hippy ringleader in the controversial musical *Hair*? Ask Will Swenson, the 35-year-old actor who played in clean LDS comedies such as *The Singles Ward* and is the grandson of Utah community theater founders Ruth and Nathan Hale.

No longer active in the Church, Swenson has recently been sporting a scanty loincloth (and sometimes not even that) to play hippie George Berger in the 40th anniversary Broadway revival of *Hair*, the sacrilegious 1960s-era celebration of nudity, sex, and drugs which once prompted protests across the country and was censored in other parts of the world.

Even though the role garnered Swenson a nomination for a Tony Award, for many Mormon fans, his highest achievement may be the 2000 film *The Testaments*, for which he provided the voice of Jesus (as the actor selected for that part spoke with a Danish accent). Given that background, a certain irony results when on Broadway, the long-haired Swenson sings the song that gives the musical its name: "My hair like Jesus wore it/



Swenson in one of his more clothed dances in the recently revived musical, Hair.

Hallelujah, I adore it."

"If you go to Salt Lake to the big Mormon visitor's center, they play a big movie and I'm the voice of Jesus in that," Swenson recently told *New York* magazine. "Of course, they'll probably shut it down knowing I'm doing *Hair* on Broadway."

Mormon book collection in the hallway of our home. Unfortunately for us, books became yet another battleground. But all this was some time ago. Looking back at my father holding one of his old books, I'm comforted that our war over generation and culture is at last put to rest, and that our love for books, the great communicator across generations and cultures, are once again common ground.

I woke the next morning and stood in front of the books, genuinely missing my father.

TOM KIMBALL
Salt Lake City, Utah

A place for every truth

RESISTANCE TO THE READY REFERENCES

This regular Cornucopia column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as compiled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adopted from the statement inscribed on Elder Talmage's tombstone: "Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man or yet to be made known."

ELDERS JAMES E. TALMAGE AND JOSEPH Fielding Smith "acted as a committee" to produce the Ready References that were inserted into Bibles published for the LDS Church. The Ready References section was used by LDS members and missionaries for a number of years until 1981, when the Church published the new, cross-referenced scriptures with study aids.

The first sets of these Bibles were published by the Oxford and the Cambridge presses in 1917. On 20 June 1917, Elder Talmage wrote the following in his journal:

We all [the General Authorities] deem it a very great advantage to have our Ready References, which are classified quotations sustaining the principles of the Gospel, published in these two standard styles of Bibles. The initiative in the matter was taken by the Bible publishers themselves, and we have received assurances of appreciation from both of the houses. As was to be expected, however, oppositions have been raised by opponents of the Church. As the References are incorporated as a distinct insert between the Old and the New Testaments, with a title page bearing the imprint of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and on the reverse a copyright notice by Joseph F. Smith, Trustee-in-Trust of the Church, it is difficult to find justification for opposition, since every person is at liberty to purchase the style of Bible he chooses.

On this same date, Talmage received a letter from Oxford University Press that he felt "ought to be preserved."

My dear Sir,

We regret exceedingly that we must discontinue to make the line of Bibles we have been making for you with the Ready References inserted.

This arrangement has raised such a storm of criticism and denunciation from our customers, on the ground that we are using the Oxford Bible (whose freedom from sectarian bias recommends it for general use) to advance the propaganda of one faith.

We did not realize, when we accepted your manuscript of the Ready References, that the notes scattered among the references would have this effect, but so it is.

So for pure business reasons we are forced to this decision. The result of our continuing this book would be disastrous to us.

The stock on hand made for you we can send you, if you will kindly allow us to tip in a title page in the Bible with the imprint as in the Ready References, and also on the outside of the boxes.

We would strongly advise that you make your own book, as you are so well able to do. The Ready Reference plates and sheets we can turn over to you on a satisfactory basis.

We are deeply sorry for this unfortunate ending of our service to you, as we have never met with more courteous and considerate treatment in any business connection, than we have been privileged to enjoy from yours.

Yours very truly,
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Pontius' Puddle



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**IT'S FANTASTIC TO BE FREED FROM
EARTHLY FETTERS SUCH AS HUNGER, BUT
FRANKLY, I REALLY MISS THE POTLUCKS.**

THE PLAN

A PLAY

By Eric Samuelson

CHARACTERS

<i>Gaia</i>	<i>Rachel's Sister</i>
GAIA	LEAH
LUCIFER	JACOB
<i>Bathsheba</i>	<i>Outside Jericho</i>
DAVID	RAHAB
BATHSHEBA	JOSHUA
<i>Ruth in the House of Boaz</i>	<i>Eve, Dying</i>
RUTH	ADAM
BOAZ	EVE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I STARTED WRITING *THE PLAN* THREE YEARS AGO, after a challenge from my friend Marvin Payne. He asked me to write a play that could be a vehicle for the bearing of testimony. Actually, that's not what he said: he really challenged me to write a play that wouldn't make certain mutual friends of ours uncomfortable. Anyway, the result was *Eve, Dying*. We had a reading for those same friends, and after seeing their expressions of relief, Marvin suggested that I expand it to include some companion pieces.

Now I'm in the process of directing the play that resulted, and so I'm re-reading and re-working it. And I think I understand it better, because in the meantime, I got sick. In and out of hospitals, in a drug-induced-fog kind of sick. Now the play has a very different meaning to me. And I wonder, could I say, as Eve does, "Thank you"? I think the answer is still yes, but it's harder, to be honest. I do genuinely believe that we learn lessons from illness that we could not learn if we didn't get sick, but I won't pretend that learning those lessons is fun.

So this play is about testimony, and it's about the Plan, and it's about getting sick. And it's also, a little, about science. There was a time in our history when people thought that LDS doctrines could be reconciled with scientific views on

such matters as the age of the earth, pre-Adamic death, and organic evolution. Those scientific notions were an accepted part of our cultural conversation. Then John Widtsoe died.

What's essentially happened is that a Church-wide conversation on science-and-religion questions has turned into the monolithic presentation—in CES and Sunday School—of just one point of view, what we might call McConkie/Smith literalism. And that particular scriptural literalism lends itself to a simple, compelling, internally consistent narrative. The competing scientific narratives do not seem to fit our comforting and familiar Biblical narrative as neatly.

I'm a playwright; I'm not a scientist. I can do narrative. So I decided to create a series of short plays, based on stories and characters from the Bible, which were theologically speculative and which included perspectives drawn from science. So the play was in some respects an intellectual exercise.

But then I got sick. I'm more interested now in my characters, in their pain and their fear and loss and in how angry they get with each other. I am also no more an expert in feminist Bible scholarship than I am a scientist, but I have attempted to write from a feminist perspective. At least, I've gotten to write some really fascinating women.

ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., teaches playwriting at BYU, and until recently served as president of the Association for Mormon Letters. Others of his plays have been published in *SUNSTONE*, including *Accommodations*, *Gadianton*, and *Peculiarities*. *Sunstone* also co-produced a film version of *Peculiarities*. He is married, with four children.

I've also gotten to scratch some personal itches. I have always loathed the Book of Joshua, for example, which seems to me preposterous even when it's not actively promoting genocide. The requirements of drama forced me to take Joshua seriously as a dramatic character. I don't get polygamy and never will, but I did allow Leah to make a case for it. And at times, I've taken some liberties with the Bible. I figure, we might as well take full advantage of the 'translated correctly' loophole, which might just save us from the various absurdities of Bible inerrancy.

One final note: in general, I do not allow my plays to be published until they've gone through the crucible of re-

hearsal and performance. In the case of *The Plan*, the play has gone through multiple staged readings, and three of its pieces have been performed at the Covey Center Little Theatre and at the New Play Project in Provo. The entire play will be performed at the Covey Center sometime in the near future. I'm grateful to Scott Bronson for producing it. Above all, I'm grateful to Annette, my wife. She's been through a miserable four months with me, driving me to endless doctor's appointments, and keeping a semi-invalid fed, clothed, and amused. We've learned a lot, especially about the Great Plan of . . . what? Happiness, Salvation, Exaltation? I'll settle for Learning. To her, and to my Heavenly Father: Thank you.

NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

Each of these short plays can be performed on its own. But if the entire cycle is produced, it can be performed with two actors (1 M 1 F), or with any number up to eleven (5 F 6 M) Gaia and Eve must be played by the same actress.

GAIA

(LUCIFER stares down at a lagoon. GAIA enters, looks around, sees him.)

GAIA: Lucifer. We need to talk.

LUCIFER: Gaia. Look.

GAIA: Now.

LUCIFER: Right there!

GAIA: Lucifer, I finally found you. We have serious matters to discuss. I don't have time—.

LUCIFER: Quickly!

GAIA: Lucifer. . . . (Looks.) It's a lagoon, a coral reef.

LUCIFER: Yes! Life and light and mindless slaughter. Now, right . . . there.

GAIA: We don't have time to . . . fine. That fish?

LUCIFER: Yes, but what kind of fish?

GAIA: Taxonomy is Michael's department.

LUCIFER: I'm not talking to Michael. It's called a tang, a blue tang.

GAIA: She's hiding. Fine, that's what she does.

LUCIFER: That's all she can do. All night, all day, she looks for cover, a hiding place, some tiny hole or crack in a reef crawling with predators. She can't outswim anything, can't defend herself. She can hide. That's her only evolutionary advantage.

GAIA: Well, she also lays thousands of eggs. And her hatchlings are good at hiding too, and good at laying more eggs. I really don't see what—.

LUCIFER: Okay, now, next exhibit. Right there.

GAIA: That shark?

LUCIFER: The shark, yes! Gristle and cartilage and rows of teeth, a killing, feeding machine. The fish and the shark, they were both intelligences.

GAIA: I know the argument you're—.

LUCIFER: Sharks, big and stupid; lagoon fish, smaller but smarter. So which would you rather be?

GAIA: They get the same mortality.

LUCIFER: The same mortality, yes! They're intelligences, like we are. They need bodies, like we do! So how is this fair—how does one get to be a predator and the other one prey?

GAIA: So the reports we've heard are true.

LUCIFER: Engage with me! Talk to me; hear my arguments. Make arguments of your own.

GAIA: I am. (Intensely.) There's a plan; we've all agreed to it.

LUCIFER: So we can't change our minds? Look at that fish. An intelligence.

GAIA: A limited one. "I'm hungry." "I'm scared."

LUCIFER: Capable of growth, like me, like you.

GAIA: You're growing? Or just changing your mind?

LUCIFER: (Taken aback at this.) All I do is talk to people. All I do, all day long.

GAIA: Preaching against the plan.

LUCIFER; Not really. All the ways the plan doesn't work.

GAIA: It's beautiful.

LUCIFER: That's sick.

GAIA: To me, it is. My earth, it's beautiful.

LUCIFER: Yours? You helped, that's all.

GAIA: Helped, you're right. I was lead engineer; I have come to think of it as mine, as most of us have. I do love it so.

LUCIFER: I remember you down there, stirring the soup.

GAIA: I spent millennia gathering the elements, methane, ammonia, hydrogen.

LUCIFER: You wasted millennia.

GAIA: Look what we did, though. Amino acids to proteins to life! We filled a world with life!

LUCIFER: Disgusting, most of it. Mites and bacteria and slime molds.

GAIA: And fish. And sharks.

LUCIFER: Yes! Hail, Gaia, earth's mother! Creator of violence and death.

GAIA: Author of necessity.

LUCIFER: Well, I see your world. I see a shark and a fish. That's what it comes down to. Sharks and fish, predators and victims. Violent and bloody and so unfair.

GAIA: You don't really care about that fish. You care about how her life affects you.

LUCIFER: You didn't know her until I pointed her out.

GAIA: I know that she wanted a body. She wanted a chance to learn.

LUCIFER: And there. She's dead. She just died. That bigger fish just ate her.

GAIA: And the shark will eat the bigger fish. That's how it works.

LUCIFER: So which would you rather be?

GAIA: They're equal, Lucifer. Equally blessed, equally cherished.

LUCIFER: Cherished!

GAIA: You know that's true. HE loves them all.

LUCIFER: So HE sent them down to this horror show. Where we're going, right? Pain and sickness and violence and death.

GAIA: You're such a coward.

LUCIFER: Okay, if that's what you're reduced to—

GAIA: You're a crybaby, Lucifer. Whine whine. "Oh, I'm so scared. Oh, it's going to hurt! Oh, I'm going to get an owie on my pinkie!"

LUCIFER: You don't know what pain is.

GAIA: Nor do you! We're just these shapes, incorporeal. We can't actually feel much of anything.

LUCIFER: I like my shape.

GAIA: So why does every single intelligence, when they've died, when they get back here, why does every single one miss it? Because they do.

LUCIFER: They're stupid.

GAIA: Your shark friend will be back here soon enough. Say that to him; tell him how dumb he is. Let me know when; I wanna watch.

LUCIFER: He can't really hurt me. *(But he looks around uneasily.)*

GAIA: Wanna bet?

LUCIFER: You think I'm just afraid. Of pain and difficulty. I'm not. I just see what I see.

GAIA: We all can see the same world. We just don't dwell on the worst bits of it. *(Pause.)*

LUCIFER: When are you going?

GAIA: None of us know.

LUCIFER: Don't give me that. You're in the inner circle. No way you don't know.

GAIA: I've heard . . . soon.

LUCIFER: With Michael. Gaia and Michael, the first two. I knew that, see. I still know things, too.

GAIA: Fine, you know things. Good for you.

LUCIFER: It's almost ready, isn't it? After all these years, all that death and preparation. It's about time.

GAIA: Men. And women.

LUCIFER: Us. And it'll be comfortable at first. You and Michael in that garden. And then you'll get to choose, won't you? You'll leave your garden, and you'll suffer, and you'll think it was your idea.

GAIA: It will be.



LUCIFER: (*Shouts it.*) Sure! As long as HE gets to keep HIS hands clean!

GAIA: We agreed! We said we wanted this!

LUCIFER: We didn't know!

GAIA: We knew enough!

LUCIFER: *Not me!* (*Pause.*)

GAIA: It could have been you in the garden. It was between you and Michael.

LUCIFER: Not Yahweh?

GAIA: You know his role. You've become this great baby, so afraid of pain, and look at him. Look at what he'll suffer.

LUCIFER: More pain, the key to the plan.

GAIA: He agreed to it, and I honor him; I even think about him, and I wish I could weep, and you—.

LUCIFER: I'm important too! Don't talk about him, I'm just as important as he is! I'm in the inner circle!

GAIA: Yes. You are.

LUCIFER: I don't know what I'm going to be doing yet, but it's got to be important. People listen to me!

GAIA: Which is why it'd be nice if you talked sense.

LUCIFER: Maybe I'll even be with you, there, in that garden.

GAIA: It'll just be us two. To begin with.

LUCIFER: Three's a crowd. I'd be intruding. An unwelcome guest.

GAIA: Something like that.

LUCIFER: Sounds good. Sounds fun.

GAIA: I'm not going to argue anymore. (*She starts to go.*)

LUCIFER: Do you remember the meteor?

GAIA: Of course I do.

LUCIFER: Those poor dying creatures. Huge, lumbering; all that's left of them now is my shark.

GAIA: Lobsters. Alligators.

LUCIFER: They weren't all stupid; there were higher intelligences with some self-awareness, some sense of family and protecting the young and . . .

GAIA: Lucifer, I remember.

LUCIFER: Do you remember that how that felt, watching? Everywhere, creatures choking to death. They couldn't breathe; they could hardly move, and no idea why. There they were, feeding and propagating. Suddenly, smash. The air turning lethal. And they fell, by the millions, billions.

GAIA: Gabriel protected those he could.

LUCIFER: Gabriel. Mr. Cataclysm.

GAIA: That's his role. Once the dominant species reaches an evolutionary dead end . . .

LUCIFER: I've heard the lecture—.

GAIA: Other species with greater potential—.

LUCIFER: Those mammals, sure.

GAIA: They come under Gabriel's protection, and we, well, we . . .

LUCIFER: Allow something through.

GAIA: We allow something through. And in time, Gabriel's role will form the heart of a beautiful myth. A poet will celebrate it: a boat, a flood, a family. A true enough reflection of his function in earth history.

I see your world. I see a shark and a fish.
That's what it comes down to.



LUCIFER: And what of the brutality that poetry conceals, living souls choking out their lives in flood and firestorm?

GAIA: I trust HIM. HE's been right every time.

LUCIFER: The plan. Always the plan.

GAIA: It's beautiful.

LUCIFER: Yes, of course you think that, anything HE wants—.

GAIA: The plan has a kind of tragic beauty, yes. Somber and quiet and reverent.

LUCIFER: Words that shouldn't be spoken so glibly.

GAIA: We have all seen death. We don't all lose our perspective.

LUCIFER: Ah, yes, perspective, I certainly have that. (*Pause. She scrutinizes him.*)

GAIA: They say you won't go.

LUCIFER: Is that what they say?

GAIA: They say you're telling people that none of us should go.

LUCIFER: You have good sources.

GAIA: Lucifer, you're too *bright* for this. You've always been favored.

LUCIFER: Kill and be killed; eat and be eaten. Savage struggles for survival, enemies everywhere. That's what we face, right? Except it's different for us.

GAIA: For humans, more is expected.

LUCIFER: That's the heart of it; there's the rub. Every other species, every single one, essentially without exception, lives by instinct, survival and propagation. And then they die, and they get back here, right? Every single lesser intelligence. And what do they get? Pat on the back, good and faithful servant, you fulfilled the measure of your creation.

GAIA: Because they did.

LUCIFER: And then it's our turn. Michael first. And you. And the rest of us.

GAIA: Yes.

LUCIFER: And the rules will suddenly change! We'll still get instincts; we'll still want to protect ourselves; we'll still want to procreate. But we get an added twist, won't we?

GAIA: More will be expected of us.

LUCIFER: We'll have to think things through. We'll have to make decisions. We'll have to live by rules, rules that don't apply to *any other intelligence*. And we're going to be judged! Someone up here's going to be keeping tally on us!

GAIA: That's right. That's our test.

LUCIFER: And because we'll have bodies, we won't want to get hurt. We've seen it, how creatures stay away from danger. Except us, avoiding pain won't be enough for us. Sometimes, we'll be judged if we don't choose pain. We could even be expected to make choices that increase pain. How is that fair?

GAIA: If the test isn't difficult—.

LUCIFER: You're as smart as I am. Why can't you think this through? We're being set up to fail!

GAIA: Think it through. So we're to think for ourselves here, but not down there? We're to make decisions, and live by consequences here, but only here? Not down there.

LUCIFER: We can do it here.

GAIA: We can do it there, too.

LUCIFER: No, and here's why—.

GAIA: You've seen it a billion times! Having a body doesn't change the essential—.

LUCIFER: Here, no one's trying to kill us. Here, we're not suffering, or in danger.

GAIA: Well, pain is an experience we can't have right now. That's one of the reasons we need bodies.

LUCIFER: And to make choices.

GAIA: Some of us won't really have to face many choices. How many will die as children? And how about me?

LUCIFER: What about you?

GAIA: I'm a woman. Everything we've heard, our opportunities are going to be pretty limited, most of us, most of the time.

LUCIFER: You're not horrified by that thought?

GAIA: Horrified at being a woman?

LUCIFER: The unfairness of it.

GAIA: I'll still be free to choose. Maybe I won't be free to choose the contexts for those choices, but there will always be choices I can make.

LUCIFER: You think.

GAIA: I know.

LUCIFER: Well, fine. If the point is to have bodies, let's go down. We'll have a miserable few years, and soon enough we'll get eaten. Fine, if that's completely necessary.

GAIA: HE says it is.

LUCIFER: Well, HE should know. But I wanna be a shark.

GAIA: You would be so bored as a shark . . .

LUCIFER: Hey, it's a body. But it's a pretty awesome, scary body. Big, strong, lives longer, suffers less! Look at that body you're stuck with.

GAIA: I've seen them, early hominids are still evolving, but—
 LUCIFER: Hairless, clawless, almost toothless. Weak, sickly, scrawny, and you, you're a woman, once a month you're going to have to—
 GAIA: I've seen what our bodies are going to be. Shaped like my shape, more or less.
 LUCIFER: Well, not for me! Screw that!
 GAIA: Don't say things like—
 LUCIFER: Just let us be like the other animals. Live by instinct, kill or be killed, eat and be eaten. Don't make us choose things. Don't make us responsible.
 GAIA: And you'd be satisfied with that?
 LUCIFER: Hey, I think I'd do fine. Kill when I have to, and hide the rest of the time. Sounds good to me.
 GAIA: And what would you learn? *(Pause.)*
 LUCIFER: Are you going to tell me to stop talking to people?
 GAIA: I'll be talking to them afterwards.
 LUCIFER: Then do me a favor. Tell HIM something for me. Tell HIM I know.
 GAIA: What do you know?
 LUCIFER: What HIS was like. HIS probation. I've seen it.
 GAIA: That's not possible.
 LUCIFER: Hey, you said I was bright.
 GAIA: Show me.
 LUCIFER: You sure?
 GAIA: Show me!
 LUCIFER: HE was nothing special. I figured, you know, HE was probably a king, or an artist, or someone really important. But no. See for yourself. *(LUCIFER steps back. GAIA looks.)* HE's twenty, MOTHER was sixteen. They have two children. They sleep on some straw on a dirt floor. They eat with wooden forks. They're no one. They have nothing.
 GAIA: That's FATHER.
 LUCIFER: There HE is. This is as old as HE ever got. He married at seventeen, normal in that day. These guys came by. They had some dispute with HIS master, and they took it out on his slaves. There. *(GAIA recoils from the view in utter horror.)* HE fought back as best HE could. But you can see. It was over pretty quickly.
 GAIA: Why would you show me this?
 LUCIFER: To show you how hypocritical this all is! Look at HIM? HE did nothing! HE was nobody! Someone to be slaughtered.
 GAIA: HE loved HER. Look how HE fought for HER.
 LUCIFER: Yes, HE loved! But look at HIM. Worked half to death, with nothing to show for it. How could HE make any choices at all? How was HE judged? HE's sending us down as a test? To think, to grow, to learn? Well, what did HE ever learn? How was HE really human?
 GAIA: And you don't see that?
 LUCIFER: I see a peasant being bludgeoned to death.
 GAIA: No! A man, in love. A man who cared for his family! Powerless and weak, perhaps, but look at the choices HE made nonetheless!
 LUCIFER: I see an animal slaughtered. And I don't think it's

fair for me to have to live up to some higher standard than that.

GAIA: Is that all you can see? How unfair things are to you?
 LUCIFER: Fair's fair, and HE's not being fair. And I'm telling everyone, and some already believe me.
 GAIA: So it's true. When Yahweh told me—
 LUCIFER: Yahweh, what did he say about me?
 GAIA: He said there was a role in the plan for you. An important role, a necessary role. But a terrible one. And you had to choose it, and you could decide not to, but . . . *(She stops.)*
 LUCIFER: What? I could decide not to, but what?
 GAIA: But that you probably wouldn't.
 LUCIFER: Well. Now I am intrigued. What great role is this?
 GAIA: The tempter. The destroyer. The opposition.
 LUCIFER: That's what they've ordained for me?
 GAIA: It's not ordained! It's not something HE can ordain! But they see the way you're heading, and it makes . . . some sense.
 LUCIFER: So it looks like I'll be in the garden with you after all.
 GAIA: You don't have to! This is still something you can decide not to do!
 LUCIFER: Hey, this is great. For once, they're taking me seriously.
 GAIA: Lucifer, you've seen FATHER'S mortality! When you look at that life, that short, painful, loving life, you feel no compassion?
 LUCIFER: I feel nothing but contempt. And you still think HE's great, don't you?
 GAIA: More than ever.
 LUCIFER: What a sentimental weakling you are.
 GAIA: And I had no idea you'd fallen so far.
 LUCIFER: Fallen? You just said it, I'm essential! I'm needed!
 GAIA: I'm so sorry, Lucifer.
 LUCIFER: Hey, you tell 'em from me. I'll still go! If they want me to, I'll go. But on my terms!
 GAIA: Goodbye.
 LUCIFER: I want to be a shark! If I have to go, I'll go as a shark, big and strong and a predator! But no choices! None of this testing ground for me! No sir, I go as a shark, pure instinct, or I don't go at all! You tell them! That's my last offer! *(She exits.)* So unfair. So not right.
(Blackout.)

BATHSHEBA

(BATHSHEBA lays flat on her back in bed, fists clenched. DAVID plays the lyre, a mournful tune. He finishes. He waits for her response.)

DAVID: *(After a moment.)* Did you like it?
 BATHSHEBA: It's pretty.
 DAVID: I thought it would please you.
 BATHSHEBA: It does, then. Very much.

DAVID: I wrote it for you. In your praise.
 BATHSHEBA: Thoughtful.
 DAVID: You seem pale. Distracted.
 BATHSHEBA: Do I?
 DAVID: Is something wrong?
 BATHSHEBA: Is something wrong. (*Pause.*) I'm here, you're playing music for me, and I don't know anything. Outside this room, I'm completely . . . Can I even leave? Am I . . . free?
 DAVID: You're free.
 BATHSHEBA: Whatever you mean by that. Look, there are things I need to ask you, and I don't know how to except just to ask.
 DAVID: All right.
 BATHSHEBA: (*Taking the plunge.*) He's dead, isn't he?
 DAVID: Uriah. (*Pause.*) I'm sorry. I meant to break it gently. Yes. He's dead. (*She gives a great shuddering sigh of relief.*) I received word from Joab, just before dinner.
 BATHSHEBA: So I'm a widow.
 DAVID: (*Reaches to embrace her.*) I'm so very sorry.
 BATHSHEBA: (*Holding him off.*) I'm in mourning.
 DAVID: (*Stops.*) Of course.
 BATHSHEBA: I'm a widow. I'm his widow. Those are the facts now. Things have changed, and I need to know where we go from here.
 DAVID: You need time, I understand. I'll leave you to your thoughts.
 BATHSHEBA: No! Look, I'm pregnant, and I'm a widow, and everyone knows the child isn't his. So what now? What's the plan?
 DAVID: You're a widow; you go back to the home of your father. (*She laughs, close to hysterics.*) Most of our people don't find our law so amusing.
 BATHSHEBA: Back to my father? You'd rather not kill me yourself. You'd rather he took care of it?
 DAVID: You're distracted. Mourn: we'll talk tomorrow.
 BATHSHEBA: You had him killed. Uriah, you ordered his death.
 DAVID: He died in battle.
 BATHSHEBA: Yes, that would be the spin.
 DAVID: He died in battle. That's the truth. (*Starts to leave.*) I'm intruding.
 BATHSHEBA: My father arranged my marriage to Uriah when I was thirteen. I was informed of it the day before it took place. I met him for the first time under the wedding canopy. I had sex with him, a complete stranger to me, that night, as was required of me.
 DAVID: And then, in time, you grew to love him.
 BATHSHEBA: My father beat me when I displeased him. Uriah beat me as well; I displeased him more often. (*DAVID recoils at the thought.*) Nine years, nine years of barrenness, despite his best exertions. Of course, I displeased him.
 DAVID: I believe it shameful to strike a woman.
 BATHSHEBA: Well, you're the king. You might want to let that be known.
 DAVID: Perhaps in a psalm.

BATHSHEBA: Poetry! Yes, that will settle things. What do you want me to do?
 DAVID: Mourn first; then we'll—
 BATHSHEBA: Fine, I'll mourn, I'll sit shiva, I'll cover up the mirrors. I may even rend my dress, after I've changed into something I don't like as much.
 DAVID: He was a good man, a convert to our ways.
 BATHSHEBA: He embodied your ways. I existed to please him, and I didn't, and paid for it.
 DAVID: I could send for your friends, someone to sit with you.
 BATHSHEBA: I have no friends!
 DAVID: Women of your household, perhaps, or—
 BATHSHEBA: I have maidservants who fear me as much as I feared Uriah, and with as good cause. My sisters are married and gone; my mother is dead. I have sufficient status to bar the door to my father, and I do. And now, you're going to send me back to him?
 DAVID: Am I your friend?
 BATHSHEBA: Is that what you want?
 DAVID: Very much.
 BATHSHEBA: You don't want me in your bed?
 DAVID: Well, I do find you . . . alluring.
 BATHSHEBA: So which do you want? Friendship or sex?
 DAVID: Well . . . do I really need to choose between them? Given our circumstances. (*She laughs again.*) Again I amuse you.
 BATHSHEBA: Protect me! I'll do anything you tell me to!
 DAVID: I would rather serve you.
 BATHSHEBA: Serve me? You want to serve me? (*Her laugh has a panicky edge.*) David, I know you mean well, but you say things like that, and I don't know where I stand. (*Pause.*) He slept outside my door.
 DAVID: (*Pause.*) Yes.
 BATHSHEBA: I know you think I'm a fool. I'm a woman, and we're all fools. But I was barren until I knew you, and then I was barren no more. I know what I told you, and when I told it to you. I know when he came home, and I know what everyone knew, where he slept that night.
 DAVID: You have no real proof of any—
 BATHSHEBA: You had him murdered because your child was growing in my belly and everyone knew it couldn't possibly be his!
 DAVID: I did nothing of the—
 BATHSHEBA: And why you don't just kill me, too, I have no idea. It would make everything so—
 DAVID: Do you interrupt your king?
 BATHSHEBA: And now he's a king again. Friend, king, or murderous lover, which is it to be?
 DAVID: (*Stands.*) You will respect your king!
 BATHSHEBA: My king? Or the man who killed my husband? (*They glare at each other.*) If you're going to kill me, I'd rather you did it. Not my father. I have sisters.
 DAVID: Your father would never—
 BATHSHEBA: My father's a priest. We both know what he'll do the second I walk in the door.



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DAVID: You'll be under the king's protection.

BATHSHEBA: As was Uriah.

DAVID: You're a woman. Uriah was a soldier. It's a different . . .

BATHSHEBA: You told him to come home. And he did, but wasn't that just Uriah all over, ostentatiously sleeping outside the house to satisfy some niggling point of honor.

DAVID: I sent him home because I was worried what people would say. Wagging tongues—.

BATHSHEBA: Yes, I'm terrified of gossip.

DAVID: I wanted your reputation—.

BATHSHEBA: The penalty for an adulterous wife is death. By stoning. A law enforced by your priests, under your orders. *(A pause.)*

DAVID: You were not in any real jeopardy.

BATHSHEBA: Not in jeopardy! I couldn't hide it much longer, and my husband was at war! You send him home, he sleeps outside my house where everyone could see, and that was it. That was my death sentence!

DAVID: I would have protected you.

BATHSHEBA: You did protect me, you sent him to battle. No, not just to battle. To an assault, on a fortified city's walls.

BATHSHEBA: And that's another way to win a fight.

DAVID: What do you want from me? A confession? Yes, I ordered the assault.

BATHSHEBA: Led by Uriah.

DAVID: He's an able commander.

BATHSHEBA: With a wife pregnant by you. And so you had him killed. You gave the order, knowing Joab would carry it out. Good old Joab, so vicious and so necessary. You killed Uriah so you could have me to yourself. Admit that, at least.

DAVID: All right! *(Long pause.)* Yes. God forgive me. *(Pause.)* Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Out of a full heart, my God, take away my sin.

BATHSHEBA: You even do that beautifully.

DAVID: Repentance?

BATHSHEBA: Heroic noble suffering.

DAVID: And of course you don't want me in your bed, the man who killed your husband? You have every right to despise me.



Because Uriah was my husband,
given his position, I could
neither refuse nor accept your
invitation without forfeiting my life.



Right? You ordered Joab to send Uriah on a suicide mission.

DAVID: A gamble, hope for a breakthrough.

BATHSHEBA: Oh, it was a gamble, all right. What if it hadn't worked? What if he had taken the city? What would the story have been? The hero of the army, and his cheating tramp of a wife.

DAVID: Then I would have confessed my sin before the people.

BATHSHEBA: I'm just imagining it. This great public gesture, David the hero-warrior-poet-king, making some grandiose *mea culpa* in the public square. And who takes the blame? The slut. The harlot. The evil, evil temptress.

DAVID: I would have taken the blame entirely on myself.

BATHSHEBA: I swoon at your nobility. *(She turns on him.)* You gambled with my life! And what was at stake for you? A tiny blemish on the reputation of the ruddy shepherd boy who killed Goliath. Nothing! Nothing!

DAVID: You're distraught. Your husband is dead, and you're mad with grief. I'll leave you alone. *(He starts to go.)*

BATHSHEBA: I don't have time to despise you. But let me guess. In time, you hope I might grow to love you.

DAVID: Yes.

BATHSHEBA: See? Romantic clichés for every occasion.

DAVID: I love you.

BATHSHEBA: Fine, I love you too.

DAVID: Do you mean it?

BATHSHEBA: While my life . . . ? *(Catches herself.)* You bet I mean it. Absolutely. David loves Bathsheba, Bathsheba loves Da—.

DAVID: I don't understand you! Your husband is dead; I've just admitted killing him. You could be frantic with despair; you could fly at me in rage; you could angrily vow revenge. Or, as a lover might, throw yourself in my arms, kiss me in gratitude. But you, you—.

BATHSHEBA: I don't know how to react! One situation's resolved, but still I don't know where things stand.

DAVID: You helped create it. Let's not forget the choices you made.

BATHSHEBA: Choices?

DAVID: You chose to bathe on the roof. Knowing it could only be seen from my palace, you chose to disrobe, and bathe.

BATHSHEBA: I see, setting off a chain of events that would eventually force you to murder?

DAVID: If you're willing to look honestly at your role—.

BATHSHEBA: I took a bath!

DAVID: Hoping I would see you. Hoping I would desire you. You had influence. I know women, nagging and begging. For all I know, you even persuaded Uriah to purchase a house close enough to my palace—.

BATHSHEBA: Oh, don't flatter yourself. *(Pause.)*

DAVID: But you did bathe, and where only I could see you.

BATHSHEBA: Where only birds could see me! I never even considered your palace.

DAVID: Very well. But you also came to my bed, of your own free will. I didn't rape you. You chose to come to me.

BATHSHEBA: I chose not to die.

DAVID: When I invited you, you could have refused.

BATHSHEBA: From the moment I walked in your palace, no, earlier, from the second I received your invitation, my life was essentially over! Don't you see that?

DAVID: *(Pause.)* I had not considered it.

BATHSHEBA: A messenger, sent from the palace, heard by one servant, who told another servant, who told me. "Mistress! You've been sent for by the king!" And not just any king, David, loved by the people, our greatest warrior and poet and singer and prophet and hero. And my husband's commander! "But no," I say, "I don't think I want to, I think he may try to sleep with me. I have, after all, been bathing naked on the roof."

DAVID: You could have said, "No, I'm not free to come."

BATHSHEBA: The king commands, and I obey.

DAVID: No! I'm not that kind of monarch; people are free to turn down my invitations.

BATHSHEBA: Not me!

DAVID: No one would have thought—.

BATHSHEBA: They're Uriah's servants! Not mine. They tell him, "She was invited to the palace, but she refused to go. She chose to dishonor your king's invitation." Don't think I'm overstating this: he would kill me. He would beat me to death, or as close to it as he dared.

DAVID: But if you suspected that my reason for inviting you—.

BATHSHEBA: Then he would beat me for inspiring such thoughts in you. Uriah was not a brute by inclination, but I was his property and never allowed to forget it.

DAVID: Our law forbids—.

BATHSHEBA: Our law! Ask the women of your kingdom how much force your law has behind closed doors!

DAVID: I am trying to change things.

BATHSHEBA: I've noticed. Every new war against the Philistines, I think: yay! another blow for women!

DAVID: Still, no man should treat his wife—.

BATHSHEBA: What do you know of it? He never wanted to

hurt me and was gentle at times. But if I obeyed him too quickly, I was servile. If too slowly, I was impudent. If his bath was too warm, or his food too salty, it was I who was punished, though I neither drew his baths nor cooked his meals.

DAVID: I knew Uriah. I can't believe that he would ever—.

BATHSHEBA: He did as most men do. Better than some, worse than a few.

DAVID: No. Look at you here, so furious, so independent. How could your marriage—?

BATHSHEBA: I had to cling to something. All I had was me. *(Pause.)*

DAVID: I thought, perhaps, when you came to the palace that day, that it was because of love.

BATHSHEBA: When was I ever free to love?

DAVID: You're free now.

BATHSHEBA: I'm really not.

DAVID: You are. You could walk out that door tonight.

BATHSHEBA: After how many servants have seen me here?

DAVID: What do you want? Do you want me to marry you?

BATHSHEBA: Yes! There's safety in marriage!

DAVID: And a partner, a friend.

BATHSHEBA: More romantic nonsense.

DAVID: I am falling in love with you!

BATHSHEBA: And I'm just trying to survive. *(Pause.)*

DAVID: When we made love that first time, when we lay in each other's arms—.

BATHSHEBA: I know.

DAVID: I kissed away a tear.

BATHSHEBA: Yes.

DAVID: You're saying you felt nothing?

BATHSHEBA: You were very tender. Considerate. I'd never known that before.

DAVID: I sent for you. But even when we were alone together, you could have said no.

BATHSHEBA: You stood.

DAVID: When?

BATHSHEBA: When I came into the room. You were sitting, and you stood up, and looked at me. As a courtesy.

DAVID: I don't remember.

BATHSHEBA: I do. I had reached a moment of decision. Because Uriah was my husband, given his position, I could neither refuse nor accept your invitation without forfeiting my life. I had steeled myself to seduce you; I thought perhaps you might be sentimental enough to protect a lover. A desperate gamble, I know, but the only one open to me. But then you stood.

DAVID: So that first time, we really did make love.

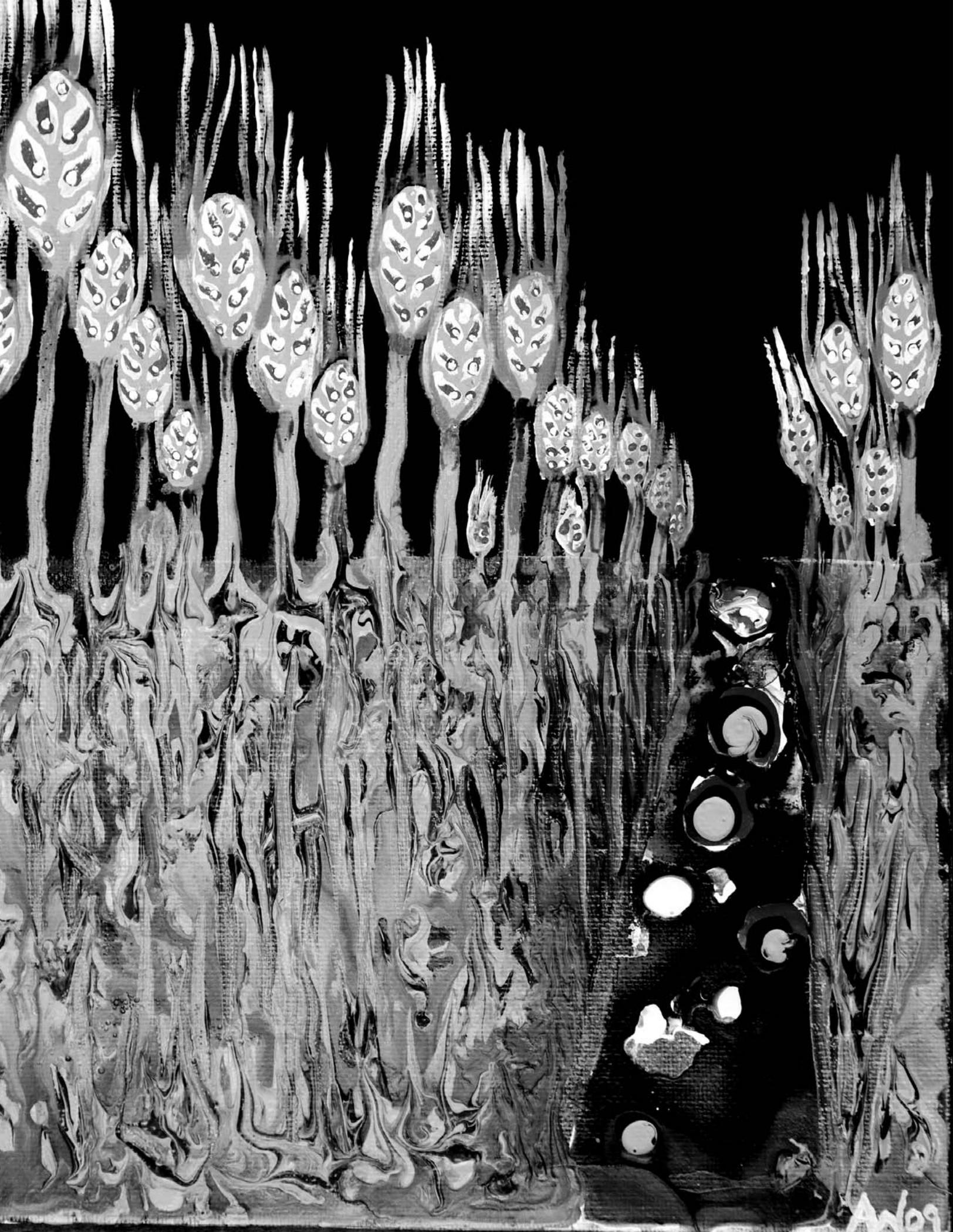
BATHSHEBA: Something close to it, perhaps. *(Pause.)* You'll really marry me? It's the only way I'll feel safe.

DAVID: First, I need to know: why did you bathe on your roof?

BATHSHEBA: First I need to know if you'll marry me.

DAVID: *(After a moment's consideration.)* All right.

BATHSHEBA: Then I'm free to tell you the truth. Ah, David, it was a perfect night. Uriah was off to war and would be



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RUTH IN THE HOUSE OF BOAZ

gone for weeks, perhaps. I had eaten well, not bread soaked in olive oil the way Uriah likes it, but warm and crusty and fresh, and a good goat's milk cheese. It had rained that morning, and the air was shimmering clear, and the sun was just going down. And on the roof, I could look out, I could see the sky and the clouds and the city fires. I thought of my room, my stuffy, cramped little room. I took a basin and some clean clothes. And felt free.

DAVID: That's all.

BATHSHEBA: That's all.

DAVID: But then you came to see me. You accepted my invitation.

BATHSHEBA: Yes, I made a choice. I did. I chose not to be beaten. If that choice damns me, then heaven must be out of all our reach.

DAVID: Yes.

BATHSHEBA: But one thing came of it I do not regret. It's given me a chance at love. Real love. To see what that feels like.

DAVID: With me!?

BATHSHEBA: No. Sorry.

DAVID: Then with who?

BATHSHEBA: I'm going to be a mother.

DAVID: So finally, I must ask. Did you know I was there? Did you know I could see you?

BATHSHEBA: *(Smiles at him.)* Things aren't always about you.

DAVID: I remember seeing you, though. You smiled, I remember. I looked at that smile. And I drew conclusions, and I made choices. I'll be damned for them, I think.

BATHSHEBA: We may both be damned.

DAVID: It might be worth it. If I knew you loved me.

BATHSHEBA: Eternal damnation? All for your love for me?

DAVID: Yes.

BATHSHEBA: Then it was never really love, was it? *(Pause. And suddenly DAVID realizes what damnation means.)* David. I'm not saying this to hurt your feelings. But you get to be king. You get to rule, absolute power, life-and-death power. And a palace and riches and fame and poetic talent and . . . you're even pretty good looking. You don't get all that, and also get to be loved by me. Not true love, not equal love. 'Cause if it's not equal, if it's just about a pretty body and who has power and who doesn't . . . it's not really love. Is it?

DAVID: Well, I just don't accept that.

BATHSHEBA: David. I wept. I wept, because in what we did, there was tenderness, and kindness and consideration, and those were all new to me. But what we did . . . it wasn't blessed. Was it?

DAVID: I don't know.

BATHSHEBA: And maybe that's why you wept too?

DAVID: *(Can't answer. Breaks down a little, controls himself.)* I'm sorry I killed your husband.

BATHSHEBA: I'm sorry, too.

(Slow blackout.)

(RUTH lies by the bed of BOAZ. She looks away from him as she speaks. As he wakes, they turn away from each other; their lines are their thoughts. Only when they look at each other do they speak to each other.)

RUTH: He's still asleep. I could just leave. I don't think anyone saw me come in, and if I'm very quiet, I could slip out and no one would know I was here. Yes. Yes.

(She starts to get up.)

RUTH: No. Don't lose your nerve, you're just scared. Naomi said it was okay. Besides, where would I go? Back to Naomi? She'll ask what happened, and I'll have to tell her what a coward I am. She won't despise me, I don't think. She never has, even when Mahlon married me, which I know disappointed her, her son with a Moabite, rejecting his own people and God, but no, never a word, she's been my great friend throughout. Oh! He's stirring! I don't like this! Leave! Run! *(She starts to get up.)* Calm yourself. Calm down. *(She stands, irresolute.)* What's the worst that could happen? He could misunderstand. He could laugh at me. Or he could kick me out and tell us we can't glean from his fields anymore. Or . . . *(An appalling possibility.)* He could understand all too well. I'm here, at his bedside, brazen like a harlot. He's a man, after all. He could . . . do as men do. Take his pleasure. And what could I do but consent? I am here, after all. I chose to sneak into his bedchamber, lay myself down, uncover his feet. Pretty much just inviting him to. . . *(She starts to go.)* This was foolishness. I trust Naomi. She knows the customs here. But customs are just customs, and men have their desires. And if the worst should happen, I'm no blushing virgin. I was married. But a widow is respectable; a widow can hold her head up. I'm a stranger, but I am an honorable woman. I am no strumpet. Some things are just wrong. *(Firmly preparing to leave.)* I must leave; I have no choice. And I suppose that probably means leaving Naomi, too, and returning, as Orpah did, home, to my own land and people. If my choices are poverty or dishonor, I know which I choose. Orpah will take me in. *(Considers it.)* Orpah. My sister. Who left poor Naomi to grieve alone, after losing her husband, losing two sons. After vowing to stay with her. That's who I want to be? Another Orpah? *(She sits.)* And what reason do I have to distrust Naomi? Or distrust the family of Elimelech? These are good people, caring and kind, and they've taught me so much, about the lovingkindness of Yahweh. Naomi said this was a right and proper act, though that seems quite impossible, and even terribly dangerous. But Naomi knows their ways. Besides . . . *(She looks down at BOAZ, still sleeping.)* Does he really seem so frightening? When he told his servants to let us glean his barley, he spoke so softly and kindly. Perhaps he is different from other men.

Maybe this will be all right. (*BOAZ stirs again.*) Oh! He's waking! Pretend to be asleep! (*She lies quickly down and feigns sleep. BOAZ wakes. He sees her.*)

BOAZ: What in the world? (*He looks her over.*) She shouldn't be here. (*Gently shakes her shoulder.*) Miss? Miss? (*RUTH continues to pretend she's asleep.*) Of all the strange situations . . . Do I know her? (*Looks her over carefully.*) I saw her gleaning from my fields. The Moabite. Daughter-in-law to the one who was gone and returned, Naomi. Yes, I remember. She's the one. We talked briefly; she spoke so softly and well. And the others wanted to make fun of her accent, and her looks and ways, but that wasn't right. She's a loyal friend to her mother-in-law, and they ought to have respected that. But what is she doing here? Could she have misunderstood? Could she have thought I was inviting her to be with me, as a woman and a man, together? Does she really think so little of me, to think I'd want her that way? A poor woman giving herself to me, a man of means? (*He looks her over again.*) But wait. Naomi, the one who left. The one she takes care of. She's kin to me, is she not? Distant kin, perhaps, but we share . . . an uncle, perhaps? Are we in some way cousins? So is this about my obligation to her? (*A little angry.*) So this is a demand, is it? An insolent ultimatum. The arrogance of it: support me, your kinswoman, or else. Or else what? What will she do to me; who can she turn to? I'll show her how power works in Israel. (*Shakes her again.*) Wake up! (*RUTH sits up, frightened, and turns away from him. HE turns away from her as well.*)

BOAZ: She certainly doesn't look insolent.

RUTH: He's going to hit me!

BOAZ: She looks frightened.

RUTH: (*Closes her eyes.*) Please! Don't!

BOAZ: She's cringing away from me.

RUTH: Please!

BOAZ: (*Backs away.*) She's afraid of me.

RUTH: Please! No!

BOAZ: What a terrible thought, that a poor widow would be afraid of me.

RUTH: He's so angry, he can't even speak. (*She dares to open her eyes, quickly glance at him and then away.*) He's moved away from me. In sheer disgust, from the look on his face. Who can blame him? An honorable man, finding a wanton woman in his bedchamber.

BOAZ: She's as frightened as a mouse. Of me.

RUTH: I'll just go. This can't get more humiliating. (*She starts to leave.*)

BOAZ: (*To her.*) Wait. (*She stops, surprised. He turns away again.*) Why did I do that? What can I possibly want with her?

RUTH: What does he want from me now?

BOAZ: I can at least feed her before she goes.

RUTH: What does he want me to do?

BOAZ: Wait, I said. And I know what she's thinking. She thinks I'm going to make her a proposition—an indecent one.

RUTH: He thinks he knows what I came here for.

BOAZ: She's a woman. I'm a man. Most men would take advantage of her, and even if she's the sort who has given in to them in the past, I can't see her as a harlot now. Not with the fear in those eyes. And look at how she holds herself. Not the strutting confidence of a woman of the night. I've seen them when I've done business in the cities, the brazenness of their stance, the way they advertise themselves. But not this one. She's cringing away from me. She can hardly bear to look my way.

RUTH: Why hasn't he spoken? If he wants what I think he wants, he would have made me an offer by now. I would think. Unless he's inexperienced in these matters. "These matters," as though I know anything of that kind of life. But still, he holds back. Almost as though he's unsure.

BOAZ: Could it be something else?

RUTH: Could he want something different?

BOAZ: I know how poor she is. She didn't speak of it yesterday, but I saw how ravenously she dug into her barley-cake, after she'd given the older woman something to eat. Perhaps I could give her some money. Perhaps this is simply a Moabite way to beg.

RUTH: He hasn't called in his servants. He could have me thrown out, could perhaps even have me flogged as an example. But if he were going to do that, he would have by now.

BOAZ: What coins do I have in my purse?

RUTH: He wants to pay me for it. So I was right after all. He's inexperienced, but he's still just a man.

BOAZ: But she asked for nothing yesterday. Except gleaning privileges, which the Law requires of me anyway.

RUTH: See how he fumbles with his purse.

BOAZ: If a beggar begs, I give alms. But what of a beggar who doesn't beg? Does the Law require me to give anyway, even when I'm not asked?

RUTH: Maybe he doesn't know how much to ask for. I'm certainly not going to help him with that.

BOAZ: No. I don't think that's what she wants.

RUTH: (*Straightens.*) I can still leave with my dignity intact. (*Starts to go.*)

BOAZ: Wait! (*She stops. He turns away in confusion.*) She's here for a purpose, she's made a decision, and she wants me to make one, too. And I don't know what she wants, and I don't know how to ask her.

RUTH: Why doesn't he speak? What does he want?

BOAZ: And something important will come from what we decide. I feel that, too, that we stand on the cusp of something larger than either of us.

RUTH: Why does this moment feel so huge?

BOAZ: So think. She wants me to live up to my obligations.

RUTH: Now what does he want?

BOAZ: She's my kinswoman, and a widow. She wants me to marry her? Could that be it?

RUTH: He's put away the purse. Does he finally understand why I'm here?

BOAZ: It's impossible, of course. I'm old, twenty years her senior, if not more. I'm a fusty old bachelor, set in my ways, the town eccentric. I can't share my life with a woman.

RUTH: He doesn't find me attractive, of course. Not with my Moabite complexion, my nose and chin.

BOAZ: What could she possibly see in me? Hair gray and thinning, losing most of my teeth, a paunchy middle and a limp. No woman has ever found me attractive, and look at this one, so vibrant and alive.

RUTH: He's disgusted by what he sees.

BOAZ: And no matchmaker ever found me a woman I could consider. No one with my love for Yahweh, no one with my taste for reading and thinking.

RUTH: Even if he has an obligation towards me, do I want that? A man who marries out of duty, a man who marries because it's expected of him?

BOAZ: I've been content enough, with my friends and my books and my farm and my businesses. I've had a full and rich life, alone. Why complicate things?

RUTH: A wealthy man can always find his way out of an obligation.

BOAZ: If I were to marry, it certainly wouldn't be to a widow, someone who once shared another man's bed. I will not be compared, especially when I'm certain to be found deficient.

RUTH: And still he hesitates. He's kind enough to not mistreat me, but he can't find the words to send me away. It's best if I just go. *(She starts to leave.)*

BOAZ: Wait! *(She stops again.)* What would Yahweh have me do?

RUTH: They worship Yahweh; they're kind to strangers.

BOAZ: When I spoke to her yesterday, she spoke of Yahweh with such devotion. The twilight lit up her face, her voice, soft and gentle.

RUTH: Could this be about their God?

BOAZ: What does the Law say?

RUTH: I've barely learned of their God; there's no place for me here.

BOAZ: I could ask my cousin to take her on. She'd be his

RUTH: Mahlon had the same kind smile.

BOAZ: Who is she? What does this mean?

RUTH: Why here? Why now?

BOAZ: Take a chance.

RUTH: Take a risk.

BOAZ: *(To her.)* I'm Boaz.

RUTH: *(To him.)* I'm Ruth.

(They look at each other, solemnly, seeing each other clearly for the first time. Slow blackout.)

RACHEL'S SISTER

(A tent. JACOB is pulling on his sandals, ad lib muttering to himself.)

LEAH: Okay, look. Where are you going? What's the matter?

JACOB: I need to talk to your father.

LEAH: Why do you need to talk to my father?

JACOB: Oh, like you don't know.

LEAH: I don't!

JACOB: Fine, you don't have any idea. I still have to talk to him.

LEAH: He's gone.

JACOB: Gone?

LEAH: He'll be back tomorrow, or the next day. How urgent can it be?

JACOB: Great. *(Sits grumpily.)*

LEAH: What's the big hurry?

JACOB: Oh, wow. You know, you're good, you really are, you sound so innocent, like you had nothing to do with—.

LEAH: What are you talking about?

JACOB: That wasn't you under that veil?

LEAH: Yeah, and here in your bed last night. We got married, remember?

JACOB: And how, exactly, was it you and I getting married?

LEAH: Seriously?

JACOB: I was marrying Rachel! I thought, last night, it was Rachel and I who—.



fourth wife, but she'd be out of my hair.

RUTH: If I could only guess what he's thinking.

BOAZ: And yet, remember yesterday. The loyalty she showed her mother-in-law. She converted to our ways, out of love, and also out of devotion. I mustn't forget that.

RUTH: We spoke, and he was so generous, far beyond what was required of him.

BOAZ: She's not like anyone I've ever met.

I know what she's thinking. She thinks I'm going to make her a proposition—an indecent one.

LEAH: I'm four inches taller than Rachel; I've got to have twenty pounds on her! You really thought I was her?!

JACOB: I worked seven years to marry her. Everyone knew that. I don't even understand how—.

LEAH: Well, gosh, I'm sorry. You married me instead. Get over it.

JACOB: Everyone knew who I was marrying!

LEAH: You signed the ketuvah!

JACOB: I signed a . . . no, no, no, to marry Rachel! Your sister! Not. . . . (*New horrible thought.*) Oh, man. So last night, it may not even have been—.

LEAH: Last night was . . . what it was, a wedding night. We're married, legally, lawfully. If I'm getting this right, you apparently didn't even bother to look at the marriage contract, which I sort of think would be the normal thing to do, to actually read over something before you sign your name to it, no, not you, couldn't be bothered, but if, if you had, you'd have seen my name. Which I thought you knew. Right there on top, big letters.

JACOB: (*Wincing.*) Leah, listen. Could you maybe keep it down a little?

LEAH: What? Why?

JACOB: My head's just sort of splitting in half, and—.

LEAH: Hungover. Great, that explains a lot.

JACOB: Look. It's tradition, people come up to you: "I'chaim," "I'chaim," someone hands you a drink. They toast you, you toast 'em back.

LEAH: So last night, then. Seriously. You had no idea?

JACOB: Sorry. I don't remember . . . much.

LEAH: Well, I wondered. Dad and I, we were sort of expecting a stronger reaction. But then you just signed your name, right there on the dotted line, so I figured, hey, he's okay with it. He's cooler than I thought.

JACOB: Sorry. (*New thought.*) Though, I'm not sure I'm the person who should be apologizing here.

LEAH: It was my father's idea. He was all ready to explain what the thinking was, but then you didn't even—.

JACOB: Ah, an explanation, yes, that would be great! I'd love to hear his explanation!

LEAH: He loves me.

JACOB: He's your father; of course he loves his—.

LEAH: He loves me. It's not totally impossible, you know.

JACOB: It's also not relevant. When I think about the way you two—.

LEAH: You want an explanation; every time I start, there you go, kvetching and moaning—.

JACOB: So explain.

LEAH: You ever give one thought to me, to my situation? My younger sister getting married first? My prospects not exactly brilliant, and then this public humiliation? Me, maid of honor to my younger sister.

JACOB: Okay, I admit—.

LEAH: Seven years you've waited for Rachel, and never once did you go, oh, wait, she's got an older unmarried sister. Boy, this could really be hard for her.

JACOB: We talked about it. Rachel and I.





LEAH: I bet you did.

JACOB: We did. Several times.

LEAH: And how did those conversations go? “Oh, gosh, poor Leah. Oh, well, that’s how things go, sometimes.”

JACOB: Look, you’re making us sound completely heartless. We were worried about you; we talked about it all the time. But you seemed content enough.

LEAH: Content. I didn’t have a fit. I didn’t weep and moan and throw myself a pity party. I promise you I wasn’t content.

JACOB: We did what we could. We talked to some people. Guys.

LEAH: Trying to find someone who would take even me?

JACOB: I have friends.

LEAH: Friends, you’re a stranger, working as a servant, who do you know?

JACOB: I’m your cousin.

LEAH: Which makes the whole thing even weirder. And it’s not like you have a brother or something.

JACOB: Well. . . .

LEAH: What?

JACOB: I do, actually, have a brother.

LEAH: You do.

JACOB: An older brother, yeah.

LEAH: Well, that would have been nice to know. Seven years you live here, and that’s the first any of us heard about any brother.

JACOB: You don’t want Esau, I promise. Last I saw him, he was trying to kill me.

LEAH: Can’t say I blame the man.

JACOB: It’s complicated.

LEAH: So, as your wife, I’d still like to know—

JACOB: Seriously, Leah, you don’t want Esau. It’s not a good situation. He thinks I tricked him, for one thing. Cheated him.

LEAH: You stole from him?

JACOB: Not really, more like a birthright sort of—

LEAH: You stole his birthright?!

JACOB: No! Well, maybe. Sort of.

LEAH: Sort of?

JACOB: Okay. I did. But my Mom put me up to it, and it was for a good reason.

LEAH: Fine, who cares. Point is, I would have liked to have known about a brother. Even if you were a jerk to him. And your Mom, seriously, your Mom? What in the world did your Mom—?

JACOB: You said you didn’t want to hear about it.

LEAH: No, you’re right. You said “‘complicated,’ so okay. It still can’t be as complicated as this.

JACOB: No.

LEAH: *(Pause, as they consider it.)* Anyway this wasn’t some plot to steal my sister’s boyfriend. *(He reacts.)* I mean it. I knew you were in love with Rachel. I was happy for you, both of you. I was.

JACOB: And you were my friend. Our friend.

LEAH: I tried to be. Remember that first dinner?

JACOB: Yeah.

LEAH: You didn't even see me. I don't think you took your eyes off Rachel for two seconds. I don't even know how you fed yourself, the way you were staring at her. Thought you were going to take a bite out of the salt cellar or the wine flask, or—

JACOB: (*A faraway look.*) She was so beautiful. There was a connection between us, right from the start.

LEAH: Not for her. You think that was something new for her, to have some guy go all googly eyes over her? I'll give you this, though, you did move fast, kissing her eight seconds after saying hello the first time you met her. That made an impression.

JACOB: She kissed me back, too.

LEAH: She kisses everybody back! She's Rachel!

JACOB: But she came to love me. I know that. It was mutual.

LEAH: Yes. She's in love. With you. She's with Dad right now, crying her eyes out.

JACOB: Oh my gosh. I've got to see her.

LEAH: Excuse me?

JACOB: I'm saying, I need to see Rachel—

LEAH: And I'm saying that maybe your wife might have some objections to you wanting to see another woman the day after the wedding!

JACOB: Your sister!

LEAH: But you want her!

JACOB: We're engaged!

LEAH: (*Gesturing, 'you and I.'*) Well, we're married!

JACOB: Which was not my idea!

LEAH: Well, it wasn't my idea either!

JACOB: (*Holds his head.*) Oh, man. Shouldn't shout like that, I can't have this conversation right now. (*Pause.*)

LEAH: Well, we have to have it sometime.

JACOB: So, where's your father?

LEAH: Gone, for now. He'll explain everything when you talk to him.

JACOB: Great, tomorrow, first thing.

LEAH: Or the next day—

JACOB: The next day!

LEAH: Okay, next month. We're newlyweds; he wanted to give us some privacy, okay!

JACOB: I've got to wait a month to sort this out?

LEAH: Sort it out?

JACOB: Yeah. Fix the mistake.

LEAH: Fix the mistake.

JACOB: Well, yeah. (*Pause.*)

LEAH: You're upset, fine. But there's no mistake. We're married.

JACOB: We're not supposed to be.

LEAH: But we are. Legally, lawfully. And there was last night.

JACOB: Another mistake.

LEAH: (*Bitterly.*) Oh, thank you very much.

JACOB: It was. It doesn't matter what happened. It matters what I thought was happening.

LEAH: To you, that's what matters. Either way, though, I'm not a virgin any more.

JACOB: What can I say? I didn't know it was you.

LEAH: There are times you can really be a bastard, you know that? (*Pause. She calms herself.*) You want to sort this out.

Fix the mistake. What exactly do you plan on doing?

JACOB: Like I know! I've known about this for ten minutes!

LEAH: Think it through. We're married. I'm your wife; you're my husband. You can set me aside. That is possible for you; you're a stranger; you could just go home to Canaan and risk your brother, whatever that's about. Forget you ever saw me. That's possible.

JACOB: But where would that leave you?

LEAH: Bad. Social-outcast-for-the-rest-of-my-life bad. Figure-of-pity, poor-Leah-what-a-shame sort of bad. No-possibility-of-any-decent-man, ever, ever, even-with-a-rich-daddy, ever, wanting-me-for-his-wife bad. That's how bad.

JACOB: Okay, but what are my alternatives? You deceived me.

LEAH: I did not!

JACOB: You did. You made the choice to deceive me.

LEAH: How, what? Deceived? My name right there on the ketubah?

JACOB: I'm sorry. (*Shaking his head, heading for the door.*) But I can't, I just can't—

I can settle for a marriage
step above slavery, or
Or, there's you.



LEAH: Leave me, and you'll never see Rachel again. (*This stops him.*)

JACOB: No.

LEAH: After you treat me so contemptibly, do you really think my father—

JACOB: No, he wouldn't. Of course he wouldn't.

LEAH: So you have it in your power, right now, to destroy three lives. Or . . .

JACOB: Or not.

LEAH: Exactly. (*A pause, as he thinks this over.*)

JACOB: How can you even want me? Knowing how I feel about Rachel.

LEAH: Well, it's not exactly what I would have chosen either. But there's a way you could have us both.

JACOB: I thought about that. We could just be married.

LEAH: That's right. And then you go to see my father again, when he's back, and at that point, he will agree to your marriage to Rachel. He'll ask for seven more year's service—

JACOB: What?!@&%\$@#%!

LEAH: And then he will agree to it.

JACOB: I've already given him seven years!

LEAH: Oh, so that's your concern!? Not the impossible logistics and questionable morality and dubious practicality of polygamy, no, not you, no, you're thinking "Seven more years, seven more years! I have to be a servant for seven more years!"

JACOB: Your father and I had a deal!

LEAH: And he's going to live up to it! His way!

JACOB: I've already worked for him for—

LEAH: For seven years, I know! That got you me!

JACOB: I can't believe this. *(Pause.)* Okay, look, I understand that I'm from another country. And you guys have customs that maybe I don't understand completely. And, okay, my grandfather Abraham had two wives, so I understand it's not totally impossible.

LEAH: All right.

JACOB: But seven years? What? Why?

LEAH: I told you. My father loves me.

JACOB: Oh. You said that before, and I didn't understand it.

But yeah, he loves you. Of course he does.

LEAH: Look, you told us about your grandfather, about

ge that's maybe a tiny baby
I can stay single all my life.

Abraham. We'd heard stories too, amazing stories, but you know, that whole thing about marriage? Wow. Marriage, as something sort of holy, something, like, eternal. A partnership of righteous equals. That's unbelievable. That's so amazing.

JACOB: Like I want with Rachel.

LEAH: Seriously, cut it out. Okay? I'm your wife, get used to it.

JACOB: Fine.

LEAH: Look. You told us those stories, both of us. I know you were mostly talking to Rachel, but the rest of the family was in the room. And, I mean, marriage, what's marriage? You said it yourself, a contract. A business deal.

JACOB: I don't want that.

LEAH: But that's what it is. Everywhere. Women, we're like sheep or goats or cattle, something our fathers barter. And so we're taught, hey, that's how it is, make the best of it. Bear his children, and don't complain.

JACOB: But my grandfather and my father, both, they had a better vision.

LEAH: Yes!

JACOB: Two partners, standing together, worshipping Yahweh as independent equals.

LEAH: And then it lasts! It doesn't just end when we die; we don't face judgment alone! I heard what you said, night after night, and it burned. It burned in my soul! That's what I want. That's what my father wants for me. For both his daughters. And there isn't anybody else; it's got to be with you. No else gets it.

JACOB: I've tried to tell other people, but you're right. Their minds are closed. Especially . . . guys.

LEAH: So that's why the seven years.

JACOB: So we can have time, just the two of us.

LEAH: So that I have a chance! You love Rachel, I know that. But I'm . . . I'm a person, too. Just because she's cuter and smaller and . . . pretty. And I know I'm not. It's okay. It's actually not okay; it stinks, but . . . I deserve a chance. To stand before Yahweh with someone who thinks of me as . . . a co-equal, a mate. I deserve that.

JACOB: You could have all that. With someone else. It's your father's job to make a good match for you.

LEAH: No. It had to be you.

JACOB: Good men are rare, that's true. But your father's a wealthy man. He could search far and wide.

LEAH: Looking for what?

JACOB: A decent man, a good husband. *(Stops to consider.)* Who worships Yahweh.

LEAH: That's it. That's the problem. You told us about Abraham's promise. "As numerous as grains of sand on a beach." I believe that; I think it's possible, the ideas your grandfather taught will spread. But we're at the beginning of that chain. No one else gets it.

JACOB: No one.

LEAH: No. So here you are. I can settle for a marriage that's maybe a tiny baby step above slavery, or I can stay single all my life. Or, there's you. The one truly eligible bachelor in the world. Promised to my sister and deeply in love with her.

JACOB: So your Dad tricked me.

LEAH: Runs in the family.

JACOB: Fair enough.

LEAH: My father bought us some time. Bought me some time. A chance to be together, to form a relationship. And bought you some time to actually see me, as me, as a person. And maybe even . . .

JACOB: Fall in love.

LEAH: Something like that.

JACOB: But after seven years, Rachel will also be my wife.

LEAH: And I'll have to share my marriage with Rachel. And I'm willing to do that. I really am. All I want is a chance. *(Pause.)* So what do you say?

JACOB: I . . . don't mean to hurt you. But I'm still in love with Rachel.

LEAH: And you're not in love with me.

JACOB: No. And that's what makes the whole thing possible, the whole partnership Yahweh wants us to have. And I'm not unwilling to, you know, give this a try. I do see you as

a person, Leah. I do admire you, and I see your good qualities. But there's another big factor. I'm in love with someone else.

LEAH: So what is it? Love. Something you fall into? Like falling off a cliff or falling in a lake?

JACOB: Love is the key.

LEAH: Doesn't make sense. Some force you can't control? It's like saying, hey, never mind all that talk about sin, the key to salvation is who trips the fewest times. Sorry, you're sort of clumsy. To Gehenna with you!

JACOB: But that is what happens. The first moment I saw Rachel, I knew. Love at first sight.

LEAH: Predestined, huh? Ordained by God?

JACOB: But . . . that's how it feels.

LEAH: So. I know that feeling. I've been in love. With someone else, not you.

JACOB: Your father refused him?

LEAH: I refused him. He worshipped Dagon. The fish god? You don't even want to know their worship rites. Plus there was the human sacrifice angle, plus plus plus.

JACOB: Oh.

LEAH: Not a bad man. Not a good vision.

JACOB: But you loved him.

LEAH: I thought so.

JACOB: All I know is how I feel. That first moment, I saw her, I barely even knew what I was doing. I walked up to her, and I took her face in my hands, and I kissed her. I hadn't even told her my name. Like I was holding the rarest, most precious, most delicate gift in the world in my arms.

LEAH: A gift from Yahweh.

JACOB: Yes!

LEAH: So He's given us another gift, you and me. One that might be even more precious.

JACOB: More precious than love?

LEAH: Time. And a chance.

JACOB: And what of our children?

LEAH: What about them?

JACOB: Will I favor Rachel over you? How can I not? Will I favor her children over yours?

LEAH: Our children!

JACOB: But I'll know. There's my son by Rachel; there's my son by Leah. I don't think I can do this.

LEAH: We have seven years to make it work for us.

JACOB: I don't know . . . if I can.

LEAH: Can't we at least try?

JACOB: I don't know. I've already served seven years, you know. And they seemed like no time at all, because of Rachel, because of my love for her. Now, seven more years?

LEAH: Try. Or leave. Those are your choices.

JACOB: This isn't fair to you.

LEAH: No, it isn't. And I know that the day you marry her, too, will hurt worse than anything I've ever experienced. At least I'm prepared.

JACOB: I'm sorry about that too.

LEAH: But I'm willing. Pain and all, I'll risk it.

JACOB: Let's be married, then. (*With a great breath, LEAH sighs in relief.*)

LEAH: All right.

(*She embraces him. He holds her. But on his face, we read his fear. Blackout.*)

OUTSIDE JERICHO

(*JOSHUA's tent outside JERICHO. RAHAB stands, trembling, before him.*)

JOSHUA: Rahab.

RAHAB: Rahab.

JOSHUA: The prostitute.

RAHAB: The woman who helped your men. In exchange for . . . look, I need to get back. Why am I here? What's this about?

JOSHUA: I haven't decided what to do with you.

RAHAB: We have a deal. I hid your men. I risked my life and the lives of my children—.

JOSHUA: I know.

RAHAB: Promises were made to me. I was given an assurance—.

JOSHUA: I have questions about that assurance.

RAHAB: Your men and I came to an agreement—.

JOSHUA: I question that agreement.

RAHAB: I see. Questions. What questions?

JOSHUA: Why?

RAHAB: Why what? What's the problem? We had an agreement!

JOSHUA: I'm just trying to make sense of it. You're a woman of Jericho. You have friends, neighbors, family—.

RAHAB: You have an army of six hundred thousand men! We're just a little city. Why shouldn't I save myself and my children?

JOSHUA: How do you know of my army?

RAHAB: Joshua's famous army! Everyone knows about it! We trade with Egypt. We knew about your escape, the great plagues, Pharaoh's army drowned in the waters of the reed sea.

JOSHUA: So Egyptians told you—?

RAHAB: We knew the old tales as well, how the Hebiru went south from Canaan. We expected you to show up sooner or later to attack us. Desert to the east, kingdoms of the Nubia west and south, Assyria and Babylon north and east. We've waited for forty years. At first we were frightened—so huge an army. Then, when no one appeared . . . You've been where? I'll wager: the Sinai, wilderness and mountain.

JOSHUA: Lost. We were lost.

RAHAB: Lost, yes. But you had to know where you were. Perhaps . . . you didn't know *who*?

JOSHUA: (*Surprised by this insight of hers.*) Yes.

RAHAB: Then your men arrived. It wasn't hard to work out. The exiled Hebiru, long gone from Canaan. Hebrew

spies. I'd never seen anyone like that before, though, that strange mutilation.

JOSHUA: You refer to the mark . . .

RAHAB: I am Rahab, the harlot.

JOSHUA: My men knew you? Carnally?

RAHAB: It's what I do.

JOSHUA: They say no.

RAHAB: Men lie with women and then lie to their friends about it.

JOSHUA: My men would not . . . *(He pauses.)*

RAHAB: Do things like that. Worship a golden calf, say?

JOSHUA: You know that story too?

RAHAB: They told me a great deal. And they worshipped a God without name, a God whose initials spell out something they won't pronounce. They had to be Hebiru.

JOSHUA: Who do you worship? If I may ask.

RAHAB: I'm not devout.

JOSHUA: Ashteroth, perhaps? Consort to Baal? Outside the door to your home, my men saw a kind of stand, more like a high seat. It had the figure of a naked goddess, guarded by lions. Ashteroth.

RAHAB: Astarte. We call her Astarte.

JOSHUA: So you worship the goddess.

RAHAB: It's a pretty statue.

JOSHUA: More evasions.

RAHAB: I like pretty things. Perhaps I could be said to worship it.

JOSHUA: Astarte.

RAHAB: Beauty.

JOSHUA: Here's my dilemma. It's possible that you are simply a harlot, a prostitute selling herself for money. If so, your very existence violates the Seventh of our Commandments, the most sacred laws of our God. The statutory my men saw likewise violates the Second Commandment. Preserving your life, promise or no promise, winks at sin.

RAHAB: I'm not a common—.

JOSHUA: On the other hand, you might be something even more sinister. A temple priestess, a religious harlot. A worshipper of the fertility goddess Ashteroth, and therefore one who lies with men who wish a boon from the goddess, swift planting, a good harvest. In which case, your very existence violates the First Commandment, the Second, the Third . . .

RAHAB: I hid your men!

JOSHUA: Apparently, you did more than just hide them. A sin for which their lives may well be forfeit.

RAHAB: You'll kill them?

JOSHUA: I would.

RAHAB: And me, despite their promises?

JOSHUA: That is the subject of this present conversation.

RAHAB: So your God allows you to lie, to murder?

JOSHUA: No—.

RAHAB: Break promises, promise falsely.

JOSHUA: When death is decreed by God, it's not counted as murder. When God commands deception, it doesn't count as a lie.

RAHAB: A convenient moral code, that.

JOSHUA: Hardly convenient. When God commands, we obey. His commandments are seldom . . . convenient.

RAHAB: Oh, please. Just tell me straight. I betrayed my people for no good purpose?

JOSHUA: I have not decided.

RAHAB: Can I argue my case? Or do I just wait for your God to give you a vision.

JOSHUA: It would be best, I think, if you told the truth.

RAHAB: Yes, I'm a priestess of Astarte! I was forced into her service as a child, forced to lie with men seeking blessing, impregnated, and forced to watch my children ripped from my arms fresh from the womb, and fed to Baal for sacrifice! I watched three sons roll down the brass slide to the fire in the belly of the God, I heard them scream. I smelled their flesh burn! I have two daughters who live, two more raised to be priestesses, a worse fate even than their brothers suffered!

JOSHUA: So you do not believe in Ashteroth?

RAHAB: Believe in?

JOSHUA: Worship.

RAHAB: I do what is required of me, or I will die. If that's what you mean by worship, then yes, I worship Astarte.

JOSHUA: All right.

RAHAB: Is that even the right answer?

JOSHUA: Your children died? Your sons died in the flames. That must have been terrible.

RAHAB: It was. Yes.

JOSHUA: So that helps explain . . .

RAHAB: My treason.

JOSHUA: I'm sorry. It aids us, so I shouldn't be ungrateful.

RAHAB: At least you admit I helped you.

JOSHUA: These plans are helpful.

RAHAB: I got them for you. It wasn't easy.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: So. You attack tomorrow?

JOSHUA: We attack when God commands it.

RAHAB: Six hundred thousand men sweeping across the plain of Jericho. A sight worth seeing.

JOSHUA: And you look forward to the destruction of your people?

RAHAB: My people. Whom I have more reason to hate than you could possibly understand. Destroy Jericho. It needs to be ruined!

JOSHUA: We plan to; we'll wipe it clean.

RAHAB: But not everyone! Not me, not mine! We were promised safe haven!

JOSHUA: And that, I have not forgotten. *(Pause, as he considers her.)*

RAHAB: Who are you?

JOSHUA: People who worship the one true God.

RAHAB: Who is He. What does He look like?

JOSHUA: His name, we hold sacred. What does He look like? We don't know. He's everywhere, in our hearts.

RAHAB: That's what your men said! The same answers, the same mystery!

JOSHUA: It's mysterious to us as well.

RAHAB: I'll tell you. I don't think you have so great an army.
 JOSHUA: Our army is indeed very great, six hundred thousand strong.
 RAHAB: Or six thousand? Or six hundred?
 JOSHUA: The men in this camp are only the vanguard. Across the river—
 RAHAB: Wilderness. We've seen nothing, heard nothing, no fires at night, no noise and commotion.
 JOSHUA: We are very well disciplined.
 RAHAB: I don't think so. I think your army is small, much smaller than the stories suggest. The Egyptians are great braggarts. They would not have it said they were defeated by a handful of escaping slaves.
 JOSHUA: For a Canaanite, you know Egypt.
 RAHAB: They come to town to trade, and they love the temple priestesses. (*Pause.*) This is your entire army, isn't it? This camp, these few tents.
 JOSHUA: I told you, across the river—
 RAHAB: Is nothing. No army, no chariots or horses. Your power comes from your God.
 JOSHUA: Yes.
 RAHAB: More mystery! Gods are just statuary, fat and ugly; we murder our children to feed them and sometimes good harvests result. But you, you really do rely on this nameless God.
 JOSHUA: Yes.
 RAHAB: One of your men told me something; I thought he was joking, but he wasn't, was he? Your plan is to march around the city, playing trumpets, until the walls fall down.
 JOSHUA: Until God knocks them down. (*Starts to go.*)
 RAHAB: And now you're going to kill me. I can see it in your face—you've decided.
 JOSHUA: Not . . . entirely.
 RAHAB: I have two daughters. I want them to live. I want to live myself. And you're going to kill me right now, and I can't prevent you, and your battle plan's nonsense, and if it fails, I'm just as dead, a traitor to my people. My only hope is in your God, nameless, statue-less.
 JOSHUA: The only hope any of us have. (*Again starts to leave.*)
 RAHAB: There's a truth here that must be said, and while it terrifies me to say it, I'm more scared not to.
 JOSHUA: (*Impressed, again.*) That's how it feels, sometimes.
 RAHAB: When your God speaks?
 JOSHUA: It's how I've felt Him.
 RAHAB: Your God works for you in ways no other god does.
 JOSHUA: Yes.
 RAHAB: And this. This isn't an ordinary war, is it? You didn't come here to conquer Canaan. You came to cleanse it.
 JOSHUA: Yes.
 RAHAB: Your God hates our gods. Hates our sacrifices, hates the rituals of temple priestesses.
 JOSHUA: Yes.
 RAHAB: To show your hatred of human sacrifice, you're

going to kill everyone who believes in it? Kill, to prevent human sacrifice?
 JOSHUA: And you scoff; you consider it absurd. I can only say that God requires it.
 RAHAB: You know that?
 JOSHUA: I know it.
 RAHAB: You absolutely know it? No doubt whatsoever.
 JOSHUA: None.
 RAHAB: And you can't spare anyone? Not a single soul?
 JOSHUA: I don't know. God hasn't spoken to me quite as clearly as I would prefer. I don't doubt, not for an instant, but . . . answers don't always come when or how we would like.
 RAHAB: You're certain, though, absolutely certain that you have to kill? Only when it comes to saving me and my daughters, there you have some tiny doubt.
 JOSHUA: I chose to serve my God. It was a free choice, made in the wilderness, the first free act of my life. I can't allow myself doubt.
 RAHAB: But you've got to.
 JOSHUA: Counsel, from a temple harlot.
 RAHAB: A messenger all the same. Here's what the voice in me says I must tell you: give room in your heart for doubt.
 JOSHUA: No.
 RAHAB: Hear me out.
 JOSHUA: I can't. I won't. I don't.
 RAHAB: You're a human being. You have to feel doubt.
 JOSHUA: I don't. I serve my God!
 RAHAB: And He hates my gods, and who can blame him? But let me tell you a story, a true one. My first time with a man was, I don't know, when I was a child, nine, maybe ten years old. He was a Mede, wanting a blessing from Astarte over some business transaction. The high priestess had been beating me all morning, preparing me, giving me a taste of what would happen if I didn't please the suppliant. He was in the inner temple. I was about to go in to him. I was desperately trying not to cry. And just before I went in, another priestess saw me, and quickly ran over to me, and gave me a hug. Just a little embrace. "It's awful," she whispered. "I know. But it'll soon be over." A tiny moment of kindness.
 JOSHUA: She was forcing a child—
 RAHAB: I know what she was doing! I don't defend her! I don't defend anything about Jericho!
 JOSHUA: It needs to be destroyed.
 RAHAB: And I agree! You're wiping out a way of worship that's horrible. No one knows better than I the cruelty of it. But that's not the entire story.
 JOSHUA: It is the entire story.
 RAHAB: No. Because part of that story is that hug. A little comfort for a terrified child, a moment of something, some humanity in the middle of—
 JOSHUA: One hug!
 RAHAB: A small thing. But it happened.
 JOSHUA: And then what? A nine-year-old temple priestess.

It seems to me there might be something harder than dying for what you believe ...



Carnal relations with every worshipper. Then you bore children, and they were sacrificed: brutal, inhuman—.

RAHAB: Yes!

JOSHUA: We need to cleanse this land, return to the worship of the one true God. And that priestess, if she's in the city tomorrow, she will die.

RAHAB: Necessary, yes! But isn't there a cost, a human cost? You have to consider it. It weakens your resolve, and it should. You've been commanded to do something terrible. It's going to change you. You need to be prepared. (*JOSHUA turns away from her. After a pause.*) You're going to attack my city tomorrow, and you're going to kill everyone. And we'll fight back, best we can, and some of your men may die. You may even die.

JOSHUA: I would happily die serving my God.

RAHAB: And that makes you a better person than I, I know, because you're willing to die for your people and I'm clearly not willing to die for mine. But it seems to me there might be something harder than dying for what you believe.

JOSHUA: Living for what I believe.

RAHAB: No. Killing for it. (*A long pause, as JOSHUA is struck by this thought.*) Your people were slaves. Your God gave you strength in captivity and eventually set you free.

JOSHUA: He did.

RAHAB: I'm a slave too. Most of us are slaves, really—between the temple and the military, hardly anyone in Jericho is free. So save us—save me and my children.

JOSHUA: Yes. All right, I can do that much.

RAHAB: And let me decide who my children are.

JOSHUA: You have two daughters.

RAHAB: There are children in Jericho, Joshua, hundreds of small children. There are women, decent to their neighbors and good mothers to their children. There are families, young men working a small garden plot. Do they worship Baal and Astarte? Do they keep a figurine by the hearth because it's expected of them and no harm done?

JOSHUA: I have to cleanse this land.

RAHAB: Then cleanse it! The fat priests who murder infants, the ferocious overlords who tax the poor, the old crone priestesses who terrify children. Yes, they're a scourge on the land. Your nameless God must be better than what we have.

JOSHUA: He is.

RAHAB: Let me join you. And my children. Just let me decide who my children are.

JOSHUA: It's not what I've been commanded to do.

RAHAB: Then make Him a deal.

JOSHUA: I can't make deals with God.

RAHAB: Seems to me you could start.

JOSHUA: I must give this some thought.

RAHAB: And prayer, of course.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: So while you think and pray. Can I just say one more, tiny, thing?

JOSHUA: I don't know. You unsettle me.

RAHAB: Well I've been a little unsettled lately myself.

JOSHUA: Go ahead.

RAHAB: When you attack tomorrow, remember that hug.

JOSHUA: Why?

RAHAB: Your war can't be like any other war ever fought. It can't be glorious, like all the other wars. It should be a war fought sadly, regretfully. You're killing your brothers and sisters. If my people were attacking you, they wouldn't see it that way, but you have to, you know better. Maybe this war is necessary; maybe God does require it. It's still terrible.

JOSHUA: It's easier, though, to glory in it. To trample every nagging doubt. Easier not to question.

RAHAB: It's easier to kill me than to let me go.

JOSHUA: True. I thought I wanted it, war and death and violence. I thought I would find it glorious, though all to God's glory.

RAHAB: But it's not.

... Killing for it.

JOSHUA: No. He has a plan for us, and somehow that plan requires not just death and pain, but slaughter.

RAHAB: I don't understand that either. And I'm frightened for you. People are going to hear of this. Your story is going to be told. Maybe even read about in books, generation after generation. Doesn't that thought make you shudder? (*JOSHUA turns away, disturbed.*) It's just so easy, people justifying to themselves, "Oh, God's on our side. Oh, those horrible people are vile and vicious. Let's wipe them all out." I worry about it, evil done in your name.

JOSHUA: (*A shocked pause, then an outburst.*) Why do you do this to me? I never even considered that until now.

RAHAB: I knew men. What you're doing tomorrow is the worst thing in the world. If God requires it, then maybe you have to obey, but it's awful, and I think it's going to be done again and again, and I think people are going to excuse themselves by saying God requires it, even when He doesn't. I think you're opening a door to horror and viciousness, and I know you have to open it, I'm even helping you open it, but please, while you do God's will, find room in your heart for doubt.

JOSHUA: I can't!

RAHAB: This can't be your doing. It has to be God working through you.

JOSHUA: Of course!

RAHAB: Not of course! They will be sure as well, those other killers, the ones who will come after you. They'll be just as sure as you are. And as wrong as you are right. Especially if you spare me. And everyone I declare to be family.

JOSHUA: And now I'm filled with doubt, I'm nothing but doubt!

RAHAB: But is that so bad?

JOSHUA: I don't know.

RAHAB: You're writing a terrible book. Perhaps the worst book ever written. A book that makes murder seem glorious. And perhaps it needs to be written that way. Perhaps a time will come when you've been conquered and your scribes decide your people need a heroic myth to keep them from despair. But it's not really what your God can possibly want of you. That's not really who Yahweh is.

JOSHUA: You speak his name!

RAHAB: Well I know his name, certainly. I can read, and I've heard of your Avraham.

JOSHUA: Abraham.

RAHAB: And God required of him a terrible sacrifice, did he not? But then . . . not really.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: So spare me. Spare my . . . family. And save yourself. From the worst excesses you think your God requires.

JOSHUA: Yes.

RAHAB: Yes?

JOSHUA: Yes. You are spared. And all those you declare family.

RAHAB: Thank you. (*Gets up.*) I've got to go back. I'll be missed, and my neighbors might become suspicious. And I want to say goodbye.

JOSHUA: You do?

RAHAB: Oh, yes. We're not all monsters, we people of Jericho. I'll say goodbye. I'll bring them some food. We'll talk as friends. I want to remember them kindly. And then tomorrow, I'll have to watch many of them die. I hate the thought, but I don't see any way around it.

JOSHUA: Goodbye, temple priestess.





RAHAB: Just call me a friend.

JOSHUA: I call you more than that. I call you blessed.

RAHAB: (*Laughs a little.*) Blessed. I like that. Blessed. Aren't we a pair? Genocide Joshua and the blessed traitor-whore.

JOSHUA: Doing what God commands us.

RAHAB: And trusting that maybe He knows what He's about.

(*She laughs.*) Trumpets. I'm trusting my life to trumpets!
(*Shaking her head, she exits. He waits, pensively, for the dawn.*)

Blackout.)

EVE, DYING

(*ADAM and EVE lie in bed next to each other. He's asleep; she lies awake, flat on her back, in terrible pain. She looks over at him. Finally, reluctantly, she speaks quietly.*)

EVE: Adam? Honey? (*ADAM stirs, awakens almost immediately.*) I'm so sorry, honey. The herb we use, for pain. I could really use it right now.

ADAM: Of course. (*Gets up, begins making a kind of tea.*)

EVE: I'm really sorry. I know you didn't get much sleep last night.

ADAM: You've been lying there, haven't you? Not wanting to disturb me.

EVE: Not for long.

ADAM: I told you to wake me if you needed anything.

EVE: And so I have.

ADAM: Good. (*Busies himself with tea things.*)

EVE: It's not really so bad this morning. Mostly, I just wanted to talk.

ADAM: That's fine.

EVE: I was just lying here, and I thought, I bet today is the day.

ADAM: (*Starts at this, decides to ignore her. Brings her tea.*) Here's your tea.

EVE: Thanks. (*Takes a sip, makes a face.*) So bitter.

ADAM: We have honey. I could sweeten it . . .

EVE: No, it's good. It's best when it's strong like this, really sharp. It seems to help more.

ADAM: Still, a drop of honey—

EVE: It's all right. (*Takes another sip.*) It's good that it's bitter. I tell myself that, anyway. I'll have some berries later, and they'll taste all the sweeter.

ADAM: That's the spirit.

EVE: Some berries. And perhaps some bread. If today is the day . . .

ADAM: (*Sharply.*) Don't say that.

EVE: So you did hear me. I thought perhaps you didn't the first time I said it.

ADAM: We can't think that way. You're going to get over this. You're going to be fine.

EVE: Adam . . .

ADAM: Let's not talk nonsense. Seth's coming by tomorrow; you'll want to see him.

EVE: I'd like to see Seth, yes.

ADAM: We'll give you a blessing. And before you know it—

EVE: I don't want you to give me a blessing.

ADAM: Fasting, and prayer, and faith—

EVE: Can lead to miracles. That's entirely true. But not this time.

ADAM: You don't know that.

EVE: I do. I'm so sorry. I know this is hard for you.

ADAM: Hard for me! You're the one suffering! No, this isn't about me. This is . . .

EVE: Please, let's not quarrel. Not today.

ADAM: Of course not.

EVE: Adam, really. I've accepted it. I'm sort of looking forward to it.

ADAM: To leaving me?

EVE: Ending this, the pain, the helplessness. It's going to happen, and sooner rather than later. And I want to go home. I want this to end.

ADAM: Sometimes you're better.

EVE: Not lately. I'm not. (*Pause.*) I would like to say my goodbyes, to Seth, to the grandchildren. But I don't think I'm going to have time, honestly. So that's a bit of a shame.

ADAM: I know you. You're a good deal stronger than you think.

EVE: You know, that's one of the things I've always loved about you. Your optimism.

ADAM: I'm glad I had some good qualities.

EVE: A few. (*A pause.*) You were restless last night. A dream?

ADAM: Not so bad.

EVE: I'd rather you just told me about it. You do this. You want to gloss over your own fears.

ADAM: All right. Yes, a bad one.

EVE: The grandchildren again?

ADAM: No, actually, not like that at all. Not about anyone we know, or anything we've experienced. It was strange, different. Just people, talking.

EVE: Really?

ADAM: They were dressed so strangely, their language harsh to my ears.

EVE: A prophecy perhaps?

ADAM: Possibly. It had that kind of clarity.

EVE: So tell me.

ADAM: It's something I've feared. They were just talking, that's all. Different times and places. But they were talking about . . . (*Hesitates.*)

EVE: They were talking about me, weren't they?

ADAM: You've had the same dream.

EVE: The same fear, perhaps.

ADAM: They were all suffering. All over the world, they were in pain, terrible pain. They'd hold their stomachs, or their heads. They'd moan and toss. From illness, accident. And worse than that, people in far worse kinds of pain. From the deaths of children, the suffering of loved ones.

EVE: How terrible.

ADAM: And . . . they cursed.

EVE: They cursed God, do you mean?

ADAM: No. I might understand that, when some unknown calamity strikes . . . how someone might shout curses at the unknown, the unknowable.

EVE: But these people, they cursed something . . . else.

ADAM: Eve. They cursed you. They shouted it, the curse of Eve.

EVE: "We could be happy. We could be in paradise. But the woman listened. The snake seduced her. And she ate."

ADAM: Those exact words.

EVE: Yes.

ADAM: You've seen the same vision.

EVE: I think so. It sounds like it. It was shown me.

ADAM: Shown you?

EVE: By the serpent.

ADAM: You never told me that!

EVE: No.

ADAM: So he gloated. Showed you what you'd done, rubbed your nose in it.

EVE: Oh, no. No, he showed it to me before I ate.

ADAM: So it's a false vision, another lie.

EVE: I doubt it. Why would he?

ADAM: He was the father of lies!

EVE: Not then, I don't think. At that moment. Call him, rather, the father of insufficient information.

ADAM: I don't understand. Why would he show you that?

EVE: I think . . . he was being fair.

ADAM: Fair!

EVE: He'd rather tell us the truth, you know. He'd rather we worshipped him for himself.

ADAM: He's a liar and a bully and a tyrant!

EVE: Yes, he is. But he did show me what my choice would really mean. And really, what did I know about fear and agony? What did I know about pain? I saw people, that's all, people different from me, people wearing strange garments and speaking strange tongues. They seemed to have heard of me, and apparently I was important. Perhaps that's all that registered.

ADAM: But we'd heard of suffering. We'd heard of death.

EVE: We'd heard of them, yes. Ah, Adam. Do you remember the garden?

ADAM: Barely, anymore.

EVE: Well, I do remember that fruit. The one we were supposed to avoid. It had a sharp taste to it, sour; I don't know that it was fully ripe, to be honest. And the taste of it . . . do you remember?

ADAM: I took one bite and then spat it out, horrified at what I'd done.

EVE: I think you were more embarrassed. The way you were dressed. Or rather . . .

ADAM: (*A small chuckle.*) I remember.

EVE: We'd been living in the garden, who knows how long. And we'd eaten our bellies full, day after day. But nothing tasted . . . do you remember? It wasn't that food was

bland, really. It wasn't anything, sweet or salty or . . . anything.

ADAM: I remember.

EVE: I stood there, savoring the taste of that fruit. And I felt something, a light breeze on my shoulder. Sunshine on my back. Those two sensations, a cool breeze, and the warmth of the sun. And I knew I was . . . different. Me, but not the same me. Do you remember?

ADAM: I was looking for some kind of large leaf to cover myself, and I stepped on a root. And it hurt. And that stopped me. "What's that feeling?" I remember thinking. "I don't like it." But mostly I was just mortified.

EVE: What did we do in there? We named the animals.

ADAM: It was something to do.

EVE: Busywork for small children. I've done that with my own, set them on a meaningless task to keep them occupied.

ADAM: Yes.

EVE: And right then, that moment, I saw an animal, and I remembered naming it. An alpaca. But it wasn't enough anymore to just know what it was called. I wanted the wool from it. I wondered how it would taste.

ADAM: We were content enough in the garden.

EVE: We didn't know not to be.

ADAM: No.

EVE: But you. Back then, we were partners. We named things together. But if you left, if you went to another part of the garden, say, it didn't matter. You were just there, like the trees and animals were there.

ADAM: Yes.

EVE: But now, Adam, I ache for you.

ADAM: I know.

EVE: I ache. Longing, and pain, and hunger and fulfillment and joy.

ADAM: I ache, too. And now . . .

EVE: Go on. Say it.

ADAM: I can't.

EVE: You can. I'm dying, Adam. I'm very close to death.

ADAM: I . . .

EVE: I know.

ADAM: I can't bear it. I can't stand the thought of it.

EVE: I know.

ADAM: And sometimes I feel . . .

EVE: Go ahead. Say it all.

ADAM: I didn't choose this. To come here, and feel like this, this emptiness and loss and . . .

EVE: I know.

ADAM: You didn't want it. I didn't ask for it. You chose it for me. You chose!

EVE: I chose for both of us.

ADAM: You chose! And now you're going. You're leaving me, and . . .

EVE: Say it all, darling. We haven't much time, and it's best to say everything.

ADAM: Eve, I . . .

EVE: Say it.

ADAM: Well. (*Gains some control over his emotions.*) There are times I do resent that you chose.

EVE: You have every reason to.

ADAM: And now you tell me you saw the vision! The same one I saw, but before you ate that fruit.

EVE: I did, yes.

ADAM: Men cursing your name, men and women in agony and desperation cursing your choice.

EVE: I saw it all. (*He hesitates.*) Keep going. It's for the best.

ADAM: I felt that way. I felt exactly the same.

EVE: When our son killed our son.

ADAM: Yes. Then. (*A pause, as both remember.*)

EVE: I had not thought such pain could exist. One of our children, utterly destroyed. The other gone and buried. I felt it, too. I cursed the name of Eve that day.

ADAM: And so did I.

EVE: Physical pain, I've known that, the pushing, stretching agony of childbirth. But I hadn't realized how much worse pain could become.

ADAM: And I'll feel it again tomorrow. Won't I? When you're gone.

EVE: Less than before, darling. We know more now.

ADAM: Knowing more doesn't help!

EVE: Doesn't it?

ADAM: All right! Yes, I take comfort in what I believe. In what I know.

EVE: But you'll be so terribly alone. And so will I.

ADAM: So I have to ask this.

EVE: Go ahead.

ADAM: Was it worth it? You saw the vision, and you ate the fruit. But you didn't really understand, not really, not then. Would you do it again?

EVE: It was sour. I think it perhaps was a little unripe. Some of the juice ran down my chin, and I could feel it, sort of sticky. And I could hear a bee buzzing nearby, and feel a twig under my left foot, and a breeze, and sunshine. And I think tomorrow, I'll see Father again. And what I say to you now, I'll say to him then. Just two words. Thank you. Thank you!

ADAM: It's better. Isn't it? It's better than what we had.

EVE: And worse than either of us ever imagined.

ADAM: And worth every moment.

EVE: Yes. (*A paroxysm of pain overcomes her for a moment.*)

ADAM: Eve!

EVE: It's all right. (*Another pain.*) It won't be much longer, I think.

ADAM: My darling, my love.

EVE: If you could do one more thing for me, love. It would be easier, I think, if you were holding me. When . . .

ADAM: Of course.

(*He holds her. Slow blackout.*)

END

Pillars of other people's faith

PAINFUL BUT NECESSARY

SIX DEVOUT MORMON INTELLECTUALS

SHARE THEIR CRISIS OF FAITH STORIES

By Matt Connelly

(An early version of this article was presented at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, August 2008.)

ON A DARK, COLD NIGHT IN 2002, I SAT LIMPLY at my desk, head hanging down. “What if there is no God?” I said to myself. “What if there is no afterlife? What if death really is the end?” Darkness engulfed me as I pondered the cold, hard implications of these possibilities. “Could it be that my entire theological paradigm is wrong?” “Is it possible that the cosmology I have embraced as a Mormon Christian is not, in fact, a reality?”

I had believed in Mormon theology my entire life. Of course I had experienced a few doubts from time to time, but nothing on this level. On the contrary, I had been a stalwart in the faith, a loyal advocate eager to take up the apologist's cause. I carried that fervent belief and religious excitement with me as I served a mission to Brazil, where I had preached my faith with passion, urgency, and, above all, heartfelt conviction. To think that my efforts and belief might have been misguided struck me with a pain greater than I had ever before felt. I had never lost a loved one, but I had observed the bereaved. I had marveled at the depth of their mourning, a pain I was never able to fully understand. But now I understood. That dark night I mourned. I mourned what I thought was the death of my faith.

Seven years have passed since that difficult night. During this time, I have spent countless hours rethinking my positions about God, faith, reason, religion, and, most importantly, how my views on these issues impact not only my

life, but also the lives of my family and closest friends. It has been hard work, perhaps the heaviest lifting I have ever done. But it could not be any other way. Religious contemplation raises high-stakes questions, and it would be irresponsible, even reckless, to give them anything but the most careful consideration.

This article is part of my effort to contemplate these questions. The bulk of its content comes from a paper I wrote in 2007 during my last year as a graduate student at the Harvard Divinity School. I was on the tail end of an intense crisis of faith at the time, and I suspected I could benefit from associating with Mormons who had passed through the crucible and chosen to remain faithful. So I decided to write a paper based on oral interviews with a group of six well-educated Mormons, each of whom chose to remain faithful even after passing through experiences that deeply challenged their faith and commitment to the Church. I specifically wanted to know their answers to one very complicated question: *How did they navigate their way through the cloudy waters of religious doubt to not only remain committed to the faith, but become even more committed?*

Interesting things happened to me as I spoke with these thoughtful, dedicated Mormons. To my delight, I discovered that most of them had struggled with challenges similar to my own, but had found a way, through hard work, to keep their intellectual integrity *and* remain faithful and committed to the Church. This was exactly what I had been looking for: different perspectives on how I could reinterpret my faith in the face of my changing worldview. This article will share the perspectives of these wonderful people. It allows you to hear, in their own words, how they tried (and still try) to strike the right balance between faith and reason.

My analysis of these interviews is textured with insights from my personal crisis of faith. I will briefly describe that experience and explain the important role the interview participants played in helping me deal with it more effectively. I



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will also briefly discuss the crisis of faith experience in terms of its relationship to theories of faith development and transformative experience.¹ Through it all, I hope to advance the idea that a crisis of faith experience is not a demon to be quickly and forcibly exorcised, but is rather a painful yet necessary step in the evolution of one's faith.

attend the Mormon Church. Each was baptized Mormon at age eight.² At the time of the interviews, all six described themselves as fully active in church activities and deeply committed to the Mormon faith. When choosing this interview group, I selected for the following traits: (1) committed membership in the Mormon Church, (2) high edu-



That dark night I mourned. I mourned what I thought was the death of my faith.

THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

THE SIX INTERVIEW participants cover a broad range of ages, from 27–86. All are Caucasian except one who is Asian-American. All were born and raised in the United States; five in the western United States and one in the northeastern United States. Four have earned doctorate degrees. One is progressing toward a doctorate degree. The other was progressing toward a master's degree at the time of the interviews and has since completed her degree. Each was raised by devout Mormon parents or by parents who strongly encouraged him or her to

cational level, and (3) at least one significant crisis of faith experienced as a Mormon.

This interview group is not large enough to produce the type of reliable patterns necessary for drawing well-supported conclusions about the broad contours and nuances of the crisis of faith experience. Still, as you will see, several important themes emerge throughout the interviews that appear to hint at the existence of reliable patterns.³ I will discuss each of these themes in this article. Some themes might be better described as stages or phases, but to keep things simpler, I will use the term “theme,” which seems more appropriate for the small size of my interview group.

THE INTERVIEWS

What Is a Crisis of Faith?

WHEN ASKED TO give his definition of a crisis of faith, John,⁴ a doctoral student in his thirties, said that it meant deciding whether one wants to continue being part of the Church. Similarly, Sasha, a master's student in her mid-twenties, implied that a crisis situation involves at least a consideration of separating from the Church. Tom, a fifty-something consultant, said the only option he would have considered had his crisis not been resolved was leaving the Church. Michael, a retired scientist in his eighties, expressed the same line of reasoning, saying that if he had been unable to resolve the dissonance, he would have looked elsewhere. Mark, an educator in his fifties, also believed that a crisis of faith meant to consider leaving the Church. However, he was the only participant to state that his crisis did not involve questioning the existence of God, but only the Mormon "packaging" of God.⁵ Helen, a self-described "DNA Mormon," shared a markedly different view from the others. An educator in her sixties, she dismissed the idea that a crisis of faith could be an event historically locatable in time. In her understanding, a crisis of faith is an *ongoing* phenomenon, experienced continually by all who believe in the supernatural.

Theme 1: Precipitating Events

ONE OF THE first questions I asked each participant was to recall any event or group of events that precipitated their crisis of faith. In most interviews, it seemed that certain events did in fact cause the crisis. However, other participants stated that they could not identify any one precipitating event. Thus, it is important to be careful about inferring causality and to instead focus on *how* the participant chose to answer this question.

John described three distinct crisis of faith experiences. The first came when he was a teenager. For no particular reason, he began to ask himself if he was committed to living the Mormon moral code. "Do I really want to do this? Does it make sense? Are these directives good for me?" He ultimately decided that these moral imperatives were good for him, and he later chose to serve as a missionary for the Church. His second precipitating experience came as an upperclassman in college, where his religion courses prompted him to look harder at his Mormon faith. "I knew I would be studying material that would contradict Mormon orthodoxy," he said, "So to better prepare myself, I decided to quickly rip off the band-aid." He did this by reading Fawn Brodie's controversial biography of Joseph Smith and two books employing historical critical methodology, one about Moses and the other on the historical Jesus. After reading this material, he said he felt "lonely in the Church" because he did not believe most Mormons understand the challenges these materials pose to orthodox interpretations of

Mormonism. John's third precipitating experience is an ongoing one in which he feels uncomfortable with the positions the Church takes on certain social issues. He implied that his continuing commitment to the Church might be contingent in part on whether these positions change.

Mark explained that his crisis of faith experience began as an undergraduate, after he had returned from his mission. He described an incident in which a long-time family acquaintance threatened to kill his father. This event led Mark to believe that he knew very little about how the real world worked. Subsequent correspondence with a friend about the intellectual underpinnings of Mormonism left him in a state of confusion in which he decided that the Mormon faith did not hold together from an intellectual standpoint. While stating that his concerns did not necessarily have anything to do with Mormon theology or history, Mark said that he decided to leave the Church.

Michael experienced his crisis of faith soon after graduating from college. He had been called as a ward missionary. Because he was nearing the point where he might be serving a mission, his local church leaders felt this calling would be good preparation. But when Michael accompanied the missionaries on their visits, he found he had difficulty expressing his belief in certain Mormon truth claims. He said he could not say for sure that he knew those things were true. This led him into a phase where he began to wonder if he had any religious convictions at all.

Sasha described her crisis of faith experience as beginning the day she took out her temple endowments in preparation for her mission. She said she was "disturbed" at first by what she saw at the temple. She found the clothing "strange" and was "shocked" by the ritualistic nature of the ceremony. She did not recognize it as her church. She said that she could not feel the Spirit of God at all. After that disappointing experience, she entered a period of despondency and doubt. Her doubts became serious enough that she considered not following through on her decision to serve a mission, for which her departure date was only two months away.

Tom was unable to pinpoint precisely what precipitated his crisis of faith experience. However, he suspects it was related to the dissonance he felt from living one area of his life contrary to Church teachings. In this state of dissonance, which he described as a "spiritually negative state," he felt confused and devoid of the Spirit of God. He said he was "self-absorbed" during this time and that this self-absorption led to a lack of spirituality, which in turn resurrected old doubts. Furthermore, he explained that in such a state, his doubts seemed to be "magnified."

Of all the participants, Helen was the only one who did not identify a single precipitating event or set of events as being at least partially responsible for her crisis of faith. This is likely due to her understanding, unique among interview participants, that a crisis of faith is an ongoing experience for all those who believe in the supernatural. She explained that this view probably derived from being raised in a Mormon home that constantly encouraged questioning of

conservative theological, historical, and political interpretations.

Theme 2: Doubts

ALL PARTICIPANTS EXCEPT Mark said that their crisis experiences involved doubting or questioning uniquely Mormon theological, historical, or cultural elements. Tom, for instance, felt uncomfortable with the practice of polygamy in the early Church. He specifically mentioned his confusion as to why Joseph Smith would “go after other men’s wives.” In addition, someone gave him a tract about Mormon polytheism, which confused him since he had always understood that Mormons were monotheists. Finally, he wondered about the validity of the Word of Wisdom. Under the weight of all these questions, Tom asked himself if he wanted to continue being part of this “strange” group, one that believed so differently from the rest of the world.

As mentioned previously, Sasha’s doubts had their beginnings in the discomfort she felt when she attended the temple for the first time. Her line of reasoning led her to believe that if the temple ceremony was not inspired, then everything else about the Church could be wrong too, and she wondered if she could remain a part of it.

John’s second crisis revolved primarily around theological concerns. He implied that one of his concerns during that period was the historicity of scripture. More specifically, he wondered when scripture ought to be interpreted symbolically rather than literally. John’s historical-critical studies of the New Testament exposed him to tensions between orthodox

Four of the interview participants were like fish, comfortable in the aquarium until some internal or external force caused them to leap out and experience life from a different perspective.

Mormon interpretations of the Bible and those of acclaimed biblical scholars, the latter of which seemed more appealing to him at times. John’s third crisis, an ongoing concern, is his discomfort with current Church policies and theological interpretations that in his opinion unjustly marginalize women and homosexuals.

Helen shares some of John’s concerns about the treatment of women in the Church. She believes that Mormon women sometimes feel inferior as a direct result of Church policies and cultural attitudes that tend to define a woman’s role

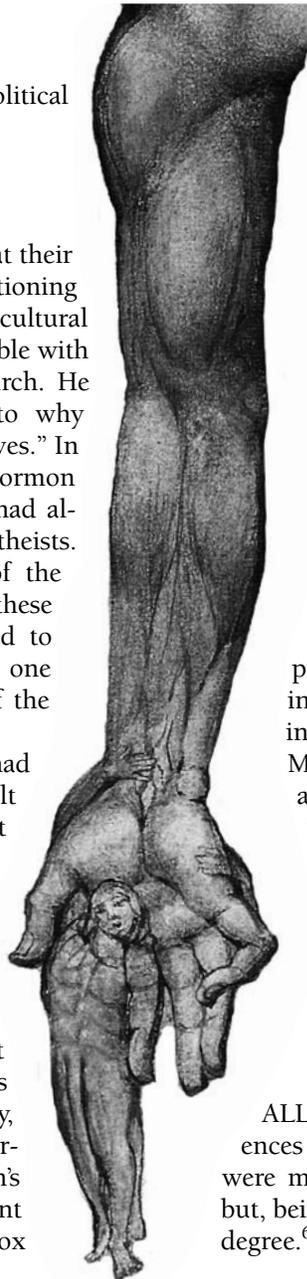
rather narrowly. She cited the all-male priesthood as one reason this occurs, explaining that since males occupy all major positions of authority, women can feel disenfranchised. For example, she said, the Relief Society once had complete control over its own budget and administrative decisions, but its ability to exercise that power was later taken away and placed under the supervision of the male leadership. In addition, she noted that because women do not hold the priesthood, they can feel in some instances that they must rely on men for a connection to God. She expressed her dismay at a woman in her ward who frequently laments “not having the priesthood in her home,” as if not having a priesthood-holding male in her life might actually prevent her from experiencing the fullness of God’s blessings.

Michael said that his crisis experience was compounded by certain popular Mormon cultural sayings, including one often heard at monthly testimony meetings: “I know the Church is true. I know the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I know Joseph Smith was a Prophet.” Michael said that the usage of this phrase “I know” bothered him, because he did not feel it was possible to really know these things, at least not in the modern understanding of the phrase. This was a particularly sensitive issue with him at the time because he felt a lot of pressure to express a similar conviction but did not have it.

Theme 3: Resolving the Crisis

ALL PARTICIPANTS SAID their crisis of faith experiences created varying degrees of internal dissonance. Some were more comfortable with this dissonance than others; but, being human, they all felt the need to resolve it to some degree.⁶ While the broad theme here is on resolving the crisis, it is helpful to describe it in terms of six sub-themes that naturally manifested themselves during the course of the interviews. These sub-themes are: “Aha!” Moments, Assumptions, Relationships, Spiritual Witnesses, Choices to Commit, and Personal Reflections.

“Aha!” Moments. In resolving their crisis of faith conflicts, three participants had what might best be described as an “Aha!” moment—a specific moment in time when a burst of inspiration entered their minds, suddenly helping them to make better sense of their conflicts. Mark’s “Aha!” moment took place the Sunday he decided he was attending church for the last time. When the last meeting finished and he got up to leave the building, presumably never to return, his home teacher stopped and asked if there was anything he could do to help him. Mark did not know what to say but deeply felt the sincere love his home teacher had



for him. However, he felt he had made his decision, so he continued toward the exit, only to be stopped again, this time by a woman he had served as a home teacher, who said, “Have you forgotten me?” As he pondered this turn of events, he began to wonder if God was trying to tell him something, and if leaving the Church might not be a wise decision. If he gave it up, he thought, he would be missing out on the opportunity, first, “to love someone” and, second, for “someone to love” him. He realized that love should be at the core of human life, and that the Mormon Church provided numerous opportunities for giving and receiving genuine love. After pondering this insight further, Mark resolved to put his intellectual doubts to rest and commit to a Mormon life.

Sasha told a touching story about a powerful “Aha!” moment of her own. One day she was at her parents’ house crying, pondering the implications of leaving her faith behind. She had left her bedroom and gone to do laundry in another room. While she waited for the laundry to finish, her mother came into the room and softly closed the door. Though Sasha had not yet said anything about her struggles, her mother seemed to sense something was wrong. She told Sasha that she loved her unconditionally and that she would support whatever decision was made. She then told Sasha that she wanted her to know that she deeply believed the principles taught in the Church and that she was firmly committed to it. This experience had a profound effect on Sasha. She said that her mother’s expression of love, together with her expression of commitment to the Mormon faith, calmed her fears significantly. She reasoned that if her mother could be so confident in her faith, then perhaps she could address her doubts in a way that would allow her to remain confidently in the Church.

Michael experienced his “Aha!” moment when he came across John 8:32, which reads: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” At that moment, Michael said, he realized that God “would never ask [him] to believe in anything that wasn’t true.” This insight liberated him, allowing him the freedom to accept everything within the Church that he found to be good and true, while also allowing him to give less credence to those things which did not resonate with him.

Assumptions. Closely related to “Aha!” moments are the set of assumptions that each participant developed before, during, and after his or her crisis of faith experience. I use the term “assumption” in its classic logical sense, as in evidence \Rightarrow assumption \Rightarrow conclusion. So in the context of this article, an assumption is the evidence-based interpretative mechanism that a person uses to arrive at a conclusion.

Helen stated that it was easier to deal with spiritual dissonance if she jettisoned the either/or assumption common in Mormon culture (i.e., *either* everything about the Church is true *or* the Church is not true at all). The either/or thinking can be dangerous, she said, because it does not allow for a more nuanced acceptance or rejection of various theolog-



Without exception, every participant credited at least one person with helping him or her get through these struggles: a family member, friend, teacher, Church leader, or writer.

ical, historical, or cultural interpretations. In Helen’s view, the most important thing is to embrace the “core of the gospel,” which she described as “faith in God, service to others, and faith in humanity.” Helen also embraces the assumption that the Church is a work in progress and that there is hope for improvement. This view, she said, helps her feel that she can have a voice in that improvement. “I love the Church,” she said, “and because I love the Church, I feel obligated to point out problems so that we can find solutions and make the Church better. I am willing to be patient.”

Like Helen, John is concerned with the status of women in the Church, but he also believes that the Church should be doing more to help homosexuals. He feels that current Church policy toward homosexuals could be modified to produce better outcomes. However, he shares Helen’s as-

sumption that things could very well improve down the road. He believes that every Church member has a role in “making Mormonism” and that the Church will look much different several years down the road from what it does now. John even used Helen’s same phraseology, saying that he is “willing to be patient” until desired changes come.

John described two other assumptions that have helped him get through his spiritual crises. First, he learned to not assume that scriptural narratives need be historical in order for him to accept them as normative. In other words, even if he is unsure of the historicity of certain narratives, he can still find deep meaning in them and thus accept them as an essential part of his faith. Second, he chooses not to see himself as a fixed entity. Especially at his relatively young age, he believes he does not have enough knowledge or experience to make a decision as critical as leaving the Church. “Let’s see how the Church looks in thirty years before I make any rash decisions,” he said.

Similarly, Tom has decided that it is dangerous to give up on his faith and other commitments unless he knows for certain that the alternative really will be better. In his view, the grass is not always greener on the other side. In fact, during the interview, Tom expressed strong caution about giving up on one’s religious commitments. “Be careful what you’re trading things in for,” he said. “The Spirit of God is an animator that gives us light. Would you really want to trade that for something less?”

Sasha takes a long-term view, believing she has eternity to figure out all the answers. This view, she said, helps her focus on enjoying the answers she does have while patiently waiting for those she does not.

Michael said that as he has gotten older, he has become more understanding of some aspects of Mormon culture that used to trouble him. For instance, he is no longer as bothered by the familiar “I know” phraseology uttered so often from Mormon pulpits. He now sees this unusual language as an acceptable way for people to express their feelings about those things they believe to be good, right, and true.

Relationships. An important factor, if not *the* most important factor, that helped participants successfully navigate their crisis experiences was the help they received from other people, particularly family, friends, teachers, church leaders, and writers. Each interviewee explicitly acknowledged this assistance. For Mark, the help came from his home teacher and the woman he had served as home teacher. For Sasha, it was her mother’s loving support and a church leader who helped her take the long view. For Tom, it was his wife, who lovingly helped him work through his problems, and a wise local church leader who assigned him a responsible ecclesiastical duty that kept him close to the Church. For Helen, it was her institute of religion teachers and her family and friends who demonstrated that one can remain faithful even while questioning some elements of Mormon orthodoxy. For Michael, it was the inspiration he drew from biblical authors. For John, it was the Mormon intellectual community

he encountered in college, a Mormon scholar who served as his mentor, and faithful Mormon apologists whose writings he described as a “gateway drug” that introduced him to a world of sophisticated Mormon thinkers.

Spiritual Witnesses. Some participants said that their personal relationships with God were partly responsible for helping them overcome their crisis experiences. Sasha, for instance, said that her initial discomfort with the temple ceremony gradually subsided as she returned to the temple regularly and received many spiritual confirmations there that helped her recommit to the Church. Tom likewise credited divine influence with his decision to remain committed to the faith. He spoke of the need to be true to one’s “conscience” or one’s “inner voice.” Tom said that, for him, it finally came down to his decision to follow that voice. He also said that in his darkest hours, he was greatly helped by the memory of *past* experiences in which he had received spiritual confirmations of truth. This prompted him to say that “the Spirit of God is the only reliable guide we have. Logic as we know it won’t get us there.” Helen also spoke of God’s influence in helping her remain committed to the faith. “Mormonism is a religion that encourages us to be truth seekers,” she said. “We are supposed to study things out in our minds and ask God for a spiritual confirmation of our decisions.” After describing some of her frustrations about the way the Church operates, she said that it was all far less significant than the spiritual nourishment available at church. “You feel the Spirit of God,” she said, “so you keep going back.”

Choices to Commit. For several participants, resolving their crises of faith involved a practical “choice,” as many of them called it. Sasha, for example, emphasized that one ultimately has to “choose” to make a commitment to the Church. She stressed that this commitment ought to be based on a witness from the Spirit of God, but that a major part of it is a “practical commitment.” “We can’t just focus on what feels right all the time,” she said, “Otherwise we might be embracing a new worldview every other week.” Tom shared a similar view. Likening religious commitment to marriage, he said that it requires an emotional component, but that it is also a “choice.” Finally, Helen stated that she has “decided” to make her faith work for her because she is committed to it. “But I’ve had to recommit myself over and over,” she said. Helen was raised to believe it is not a good idea to be a fence sitter and that a firm commitment is important. She said her family often quoted Revelation 3:16: “So then because though art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

Mark described a poignant moment that did not play a role in helping him resolve the acute phase of his crisis of faith but was still deeply influential in helping him confirm his commitment to the Mormon faith. He said that as an undergraduate, he had attended a ward where one of the church leaders happened to be a leading anthropologist at

one of the world's elite universities. During one conversation, this scholar told Mark that during his professional life he had studied many cultures and religions, each of which had its own story to help explain the meaning of life. And then he looked Mark in the eye and said, "But our story, the Mormon story, is the one I choose to believe." This perspective led Mark to believe that it made good sense to base his religious commitments, at least in part, on a practical choice.

Personal Reflections. When I asked the participants to reflect on their crisis of faith experiences, two things were immediately apparent. First, it was obvious that each of them had taken the time to carefully process their experiences intellectually and spiritually, arriving at a point where they truly *owned* their faith. Second, and most importantly, it was clear that despite the difficulties, all of them were deeply grateful for their crisis experiences. Even though they struggled and continue to struggle with their faith at times, they believe these challenges have made them spiritually stronger people—even stronger than they were before the crisis experience. Tellingly, John said, "I've had many crisis of faith experiences, and I hope to have many more." He said that difficult experiences of this type force one to stretch and learn important truths that might otherwise remain hidden from view. Tom expressed a similar sentiment, saying that it is not desirable that one should never have to struggle spiritually, for if one never experiences a "negative spiritual state," one cannot grow. Moreover, he said, if one does not experience spiritual struggle, one cannot have empathy for those who do. "Jesus descended below all things so he could understand all things," he said. Sasha also said that spiritual struggle was necessary for developing a strong faith commitment. "You have to pay the price," she said, later adding that struggling with her faith turned out to be a generous gift, because it gave her the opportunity to "embrace it on [her] own terms." Helen likewise believes that questioning religious issues can ultimately be an enriching experience if one allows it: "Exploration and faith should go together," she said, "even if it makes things difficult."

MY THOUGHTS ON THE INTERVIEWS

WHAT STRUCK ME most forcefully from these interviews was the gratitude the participants expressed for their crisis of faith experiences. None disparaged the experience, nor did they express regret that it happened to them. Rather, they each described their crisis as an *evolution*, a difficult but critically important step in helping them develop a stronger, more mature faith. Thinking about the crisis of faith experience as an evolution is helpful, because it takes what is typically perceived as a negative experience and turns it on its head, emphasizing the many positive benefits a crisis can offer.

The crisis of faith experience as an evolution is a well-known concept among moral and cognitive development researchers. Developmental psychologist James Fowler's stage-

based model of faith development does an excellent job describing how faith can and does evolve. Fowler's model includes six distinct stages. For most participants in this study, it seemed clear that the onset of their crisis occurred during the transition from stage three to stage four. A person in stage-three faith, which Fowler calls synthetic-conventional faith, is described as being "aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them, and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not [yet] made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection."⁷ In addition, stage three is characterized by a greater reliance on external authority rather than one's own critical thinking ability.

Stage-four faith, which Fowler calls individuative-reflexive faith, is characterized by two very different features: "the critical distancing from one's previous assumptive value system and the emergence of the executive ego" wherein authority is *relocated* within the individual.⁸ In stage four, the individual gives less credibility to the assumptions accepted and encouraged by others and more credibility to his or her privately-developed assumptions. Not surprisingly, four of the six interview participants (John, Mark, Sasha, and Michael), experienced their most serious crisis of faith experiences during or shortly after undergraduate or graduate school, a time of life when they were deeply embedded in educational environments that encouraged them to think critically and reexamine deeply held assumptions.

Fowler often cites philosopher George Santayana's famous fish metaphor: "We cannot know for certain who first discovered water," he said. "But we can be sure that it was not the fish."⁹ Extending the metaphor, Fowler compares the person in stage-three faith to a fish that has lived its entire life inside the same aquarium, never getting outside to see what life is like elsewhere. But if the fish were to somehow find its way out, it could look back at the aquarium that held it, examining it more objectively and realizing the limitations and other effects this setting had on its development. The point, of course, is that significant progress in the evolution of our faith is difficult, if not impossible, if we neglect to review and revise the assumptions formed during stage three.

Four of the interview participants were like this fish, comfortable in the aquarium until some internal or external force caused them to leap out and experience life from a different perspective. At first, they were very uncomfortable with this new perspective, but after a while they began to make sense of it, to the point where they can now leap back into the aquarium if they wish and swim contentedly, knowing full well that they are indeed back in the aquarium. The "Aha!" moments I have described in this article are a good example of the participants suddenly realizing how to accomplish this acrobatic act successfully.¹⁰

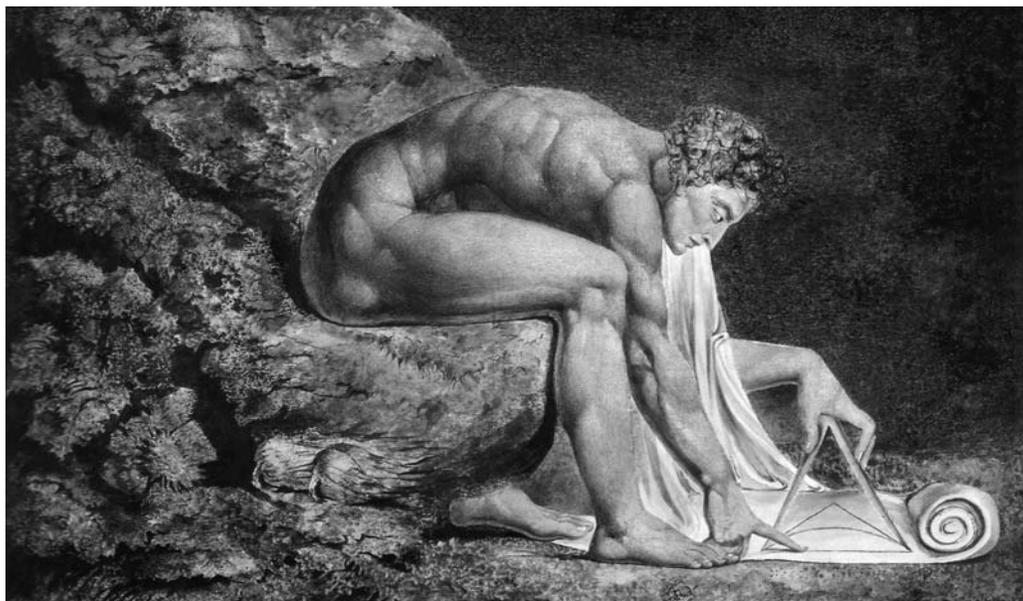
Fowler defines faith as our way of committing to "centers of value and power" that provide an *ordering* influence in our lives.¹¹ The interviews suggest that what caused participants the most pain during their crisis experiences was the

disorder they felt when they tried to make sense of new knowledge using old assumptions. It did not work. The assumptions were inadequate, poorly suited for the task, and destined to perpetuate the feeling of disorder. To make things work, to resolve the disorder, the participants had to adopt new assumptions—new ways of looking at things that brought a much-needed sense of order. These new assumptions replaced dissonance with consonance, allowing the participants to successfully reconcile new knowledge with old as they recommitted themselves to their faith and moved forward with a renewed sense of spiritual equilibrium.

It was fascinating to discover that the themes of the crisis experience I describe in this article seem to loosely follow

get through these struggles: a family member, friend, teacher, church leader, or writer. This fact suggests at least two things. First, struggling Mormons who do not have these relationships may be at greater risk for giving up on their faith. Second, it is highly likely that associating with others who have successfully navigated crisis experiences is necessary for helping people keep their faith and stay committed to the Church.

Based on these observations, I believe that our faith community could do more to facilitate relationships of this type for our good brothers and sisters who are undergoing crisis of faith experiences. Indeed almost all the people I know who have left the Church due to a crisis of faith have not had enough help from faithful mentors who could sincerely empathize with their struggles. Bishops, stake presidents, and other church leaders are ideal for this role if they are personally suited to it. However, if doubters perceive these leaders to be ill-equipped to resolve concerns of this sort, they may not be comfortable even raising the issue for fear of being misunderstood, chastised, or labeled (especially feared is the much misused “apostate” label).¹⁴ Indeed, I have heard some stake presidents and bishops quickly dismiss crisis experiences as an



the stages of transformative learning laid out by theologian James Loder. According to Loder, five distinct stages contribute to a major transformation in the way an individual perceives reality: (1) conflict (similar to the crisis of faith itself and resultant pain), (2) interlude for scanning (similar to a time for examining new assumptions in order to deal with the crisis of faith problem), (3) constructive act of imagination (similar to the “Aha!” moment or spiritual witness that confirms the validity of a particular assumption or group of assumptions),¹² (4) release (similar to replacing spiritual and intellectual dissonance with consonance), and (5) interpretation (similar to personal reflections that solidify meaning). I do not believe these similarities are coincidental. I thus give my enthusiastic support to Loder’s framework as an excellent tool for understanding the natural progression of a crisis of faith experience.¹³

One of the most intriguing insights to come from these interviews is the highly significant role that relationships played and continue to play in the resolution of crisis situations for these participants. Without exception, every participant credited at least one person with helping him or her

Even though they struggled and continue to struggle with their faith at times, they believe these challenges have made them spiritually stronger people.

obvious result of sin or by saying that the person just needs to read the scriptures more often, say better prayers, or have more faith. While I do not doubt that a lack of spiritual fortitude may have much to do with the crisis in some cases, I also know that many crisis situations are not so simple. In the more complicated cases, the concerns go far beyond a lack of spirituality. In these situations, doubters need more than counsel to live basic gospel principles. They need guidance from people who can help them reexamine their *approach* to Mormonism. They need mentoring from people who can help them explore new assumptions and reinterpret their faith accordingly. They need counsel from wise men and women who can show them how to keep their intellectual integrity *and* stay faithful to God and the Church.

In instances where church leaders do not feel they are personally suited to handling situations of this type, the solu-

tion may be as simple as identifying wise, mature individuals who have successfully navigated crisis situations and asking those individuals to serve as informal mentors to those struggling with their faith. In my opinion, the more informal the relationship is, the better. Otherwise the doubter may end up feeling like a charity case or may view the mentor with suspicion as a representative of church leadership. Making it an informal affair also eases the mind of the mentor, who will feel less pressure to say and do certain things and will be more inclined to offer inspired counsel. Of course this approach endorses the hope that faithful mentors will recognize the problem independently and approach the doubter privately, without being asked by a church leader. Most successful mentor relationships I have observed or participated in myself have developed in this manner.¹⁵

I have no doubt that helping those in crisis situations establish strong relationships with empathetic mentors would significantly reduce the number of our beloved brothers and sisters who leave the Church every year. This is a very serious matter. This is about the worth of a soul. It is about taking care of our own and keeping them close to our family. It is about allowing them to bless our faith community with their presence and talents. It is about helping them become stronger individuals and anchored mothers and fathers who have the spiritual strength to lead their children in righteousness. It is our duty and privilege to rally around these good people, to strengthen their spirits, calm their concerns, and assure them that we love them and want them to stay with us.

COMING TO TERMS WITH MY PERSONAL CRISIS OF FAITH

THE STORIES OF the interview participants resonated strongly with my personal crisis of faith experience. The most important lesson I learned from these outstanding people is that my crisis of faith could be a blessing in disguise—a grueling experience to be sure, but one that could ultimately help my faith evolve into something much stronger if I let it. Such a view caught me off guard in some respects because it was difficult, especially during my darkest hours, to see how my crisis could possibly be a positive thing. During those tumultuous years, my feelings were dominated by fear: fear that I was risking the loss of something precious; fear that I might become rudderless in the raging sea of life. I suppose I saw my crisis in terms of how it could *hurt me* rather than *help me*. It was not until my crisis began to settle down, and until I was able to carefully process the thoughts of these interview participants, that I began to see just how important my crisis could be in helping my faith evolve into something deeper and more meaningful than it was before.¹⁶

A critical factor in the evolution of my faith is the new assumptions I have adopted, some of which I developed on my own and some of which I borrowed from others, including the interview participants. Thankfully, these assumptions

help me view my faith through wider, more powerful lenses, allowing me to see that there are *many* ways to make Mormonism work for me.¹⁷ That I have benefitted so much from the people who helped me develop my new assumptions is yet further evidence that relationships with faithful, empathetic mentors are crucial.

Looking back on the acute phase of my crisis experience, I realize that my faith never really died. Rather, like many of the interview participants, I had unknowingly reached a critical transition point in the faith-development spectrum: the end of stage three and the beginning of stage four. At that point, I could have chosen to go either way. But I chose to stay in the Church. It was a conscious decision, a practical choice that ultimately seemed right to me. It resulted from my desire to make things work. I did not want to let go of the many beautiful elements of my Mormon faith. Nor did I want to explain away the many spiritual confirmations of truth I had received over the years. I was sure (and still am) that I would be happier with the Church in my life.

I now view my relationship with the Church similar to the way I see my relationship with my family and close friends. I love these wonderful people. I know them intimately. I am well acquainted with their amazing attributes. I am also well acquainted with their deficiencies and strange quirks. And yet my love for them remains strong. In fact, it grows even stronger as I mature and am better able to appreciate the power of their positive attributes on an even deeper level. And so I wonder why I instinctively want to hold the Church to a dramatically higher standard than I hold my family and dearest friends. If I am honest with myself, I have to admit that such an approach is not very fair. Sure, the Church may not be doing every single thing right, but it is doing so much that is right. I have been a beneficiary of those right things. In moments of quiet introspection, I am often overcome with gratitude for the many beautiful gifts the Church selflessly gives me.

I love my faith. I honor my Church. I treasure my faith community. All have helped me to become a better person. I am deeply grateful for the unique opportunity my crisis of faith has given me to understand each of these better. It has been a difficult but rewarding journey of self-discovery, a journey of searching for, and finding, evidence of God's love for me and for all people.

Unlike John, I would never hope for another crisis of faith, at least not one as far-reaching and painful as my first. But if life ever does see fit to lay that burden on my shoulders again, I will not shrug it off fearfully but rather will bear it with gratitude and foresight, knowing from cherished memory that if I am willing to endure it patiently—with hope as my partner—that my shoulders will strengthen and my faith will shine brighter than ever before.

NOTES

1. During my research for this project, I was saddened to discover that the crisis of faith is a severely under-studied human experience, particularly as it

relates to Mormon life. In my opinion, the crisis of faith experience is common enough and significant enough that it ought to receive at least a modicum of the attention we typically give to other powerful human experiences like birth, death, illness, religious conversion, or romantic love. Further studies probing the crisis of faith experience within the context of broadly examined moral and cognitive development theories would help us better understand this unique and deeply emotional experience, including how it compares to other important human experiences that researchers have explored in greater detail.

2. I was struck by the fact that every interview participant was baptized Mormon at age eight and was raised by faithful Mormon parents or by parents who strongly supported his or her involvement with the Church. I did not intentionally select for this trait. However as I considered the decision-making tendencies of the participants, I could not help but wonder if the deep Mormon roots shared by all of them had something to do with their choice to remain committed to the Church. Of course, this may not be a safe conclusion to draw from this small interview group. But it is possible that the more exposure one has to a certain religious orientation, the more likely one will be to hold on to that orientation when things get difficult. This raises the question of whether converts to the Church are more likely to leave the Church when a crisis of faith situation arises. This question can only be answered authoritatively by conducting additional studies. Personally, I have known many converts with deeper religious commitments than those of people who have been practicing Mormons their entire lives. However, I can also understand why one who was previously comfortable in a non-Mormon environment might naturally want to retreat back to that familiar environment as a way to resolve the dissonance brought about by a crisis of faith.

3. My hope is that the themes and sub-themes I identify and explore in this article can serve as a foundation for more extensive studies that probe the crisis of faith experience on a much deeper level and produce reliable patterns.

4. To preserve their privacy, I have disguised the real names of all interview participants.

5. Indeed, Mark was the only participant to emphasize that he has never doubted the existence of God, and the only one to mention the question of God's reality as central to his experience. as central to his crisis experience. It could easily be that the nature of God was critical for other participants too. But I unfortunately neglected to raise this issue as part of my interview questions. It would be interesting to know if others in the study drew a clear line of demarcation between leaving the Church and abandoning belief in God altogether.

6. I use the terms "resolve" and "resolution" throughout this article in a limited sense, acknowledging, as Helen does, that a crisis of faith may be an ongoing concern but recognizing that some crisis situations are so serious that they must resolve to a sufficient degree if an individual is to have any hope of maintaining belief in the supernatural, committing to a religious system, and achieving some sense of spiritual equilibrium.

7. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), 162.

8. *Ibid.*, 179.

9. *Ibid.*, 161.

10. Indeed, the interviews make it clear that some people are more willing than others to engage in the type of intellectual gymnastics required to believe in the supernatural and in the specific theological interpretations unique to orthodox Mormonism. I imagine the reasons for this are diverse and intriguing. It is outside the scope of this article to explore them, but I hope that someone will eventually do so.

11. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 4.

12. The spiritual witnesses received by the interview participants went beyond logic to give deeper meaning to their quests, something that Loder describes as necessary for producing a truly "convicting experience" James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment* (Colorado Springs, CO: Howard and Helmers, 1989), 12.

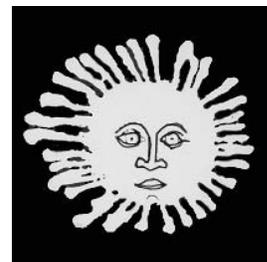
13. *Ibid.*, 40. I should note that the participants could have exactly followed each of the five stages and chosen not to remain committed Mormons. They could have become committed atheists, agnostics, or adherents of another faith. The critical difference is the type of new assumptions they adopted in stage four, which highlights how vital it is that individuals in stage four are surrounded by people and reading material that help them become more aware of their intellectual and spiritual options.

14. Such labels or chastisements seem misguided in many cases because, at least in my experience, a high percentage of those who pass through a crisis of faith experience do not cross that lonely land because they are against the Church, but because they deeply love the Church.

15. Of course the doubter must consent to working with a mentor. In highly sensitive situations like this, it is doubly important to respect free agency. I should emphasize that providing empathetic mentors, be they church leaders or informal mentors, is just one possibility among many for how we might more effectively address crises of faith in our community. Another idea is to provide doubters with a guide of faith-promoting resources that deal candidly with the crisis experience as it relates to uniquely Mormon concerns and to matters of faith and religion generally. Good resources already exist for this, and we could easily develop more.

16. Sadly, my personal crisis of faith experience and my discussions with the interview group led me to believe that people trained to think critically are naturally prone to look for the bad while too often ignoring the good. When it comes to faith, religion, and God, we are often quick to dismiss their validity because we cannot verify them using traditional scientific methods—this even when the powerful meaning and sustaining influence they bring to our lives is plain to see. Yet critical thinking does not have to be this way. There is no reason that fault-finding need always be the end goal. I blame the misuse of critical thinking on the way it is taught in our universities and colleges. We are taught to nitpick. But we do not hear often enough that we can nitpick without always picking the nit.

17. Some might contend that this talk of new assumptions is just a thinly veiled justification for employing the oft-criticized "cafeteria" approach to religion, the one where you pick and choose what you will believe. But I would argue that there is a big difference between the person who carefully and prayerfully considers what to believe and the person who lazily and without divine guidance chooses to believe some religious tenets while disregarding others.



POLAR ALIGNMENT

It might have been that many days passed—ere it swept so closely over me as to fan me with its acrid breath.

—Edgar Allan Poe
The Pit and the Pendulum

Sometimes you can hear the voices inside Polaris (before the enclosure of dusk), whispering from the skeletons revived from all their past days. There's an image of us, an expectation, hanging in the ancient light of white bone, a swinging hiss like Poe's razor-sharp pendulum, marking its descent through our bodies strapped to the earth's shadow,

its simple particles of sand and clay. And the drug that fills our lives is so strong we don't know if our conscience has slept on the edge of Hell's stoney precipice, or if it orbits like a soul one arc-minute away, fanning our dying lives with its breath.

—BARRY BALLARD

Do secular religion classes destroy faith?

SOULCRAFT 101

FAITH, DOUBT, AND THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

By Boyd Petersen

ON ONE OF OUR FIRST DATES, ZINA, MY SOON-to-be fiancée, took me to a BYU Honors Program devotional given by Eugene England. I had recently returned from a testimony-strengthening mission to France; was attending religion classes coupled with weekly temple attendance; and had mountains of zeal for spreading the gospel. I remember very distinctly sitting in that small auditorium in the Wilkinson Center as England began talking about how God seemed capricious by requiring Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, how Mormons had conspired to commit the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and how Church leaders had incorrectly prophesied that the Willie and Martin Handcart companies would get through to Utah without trouble. I felt a bit sick to my stomach as he approached these topics with such candor. "What kind of a devotional is this?" I thought.

But then, Brother England turned the discussion around and walked us slowly through each of these problems to find resolution—not a resolution that covered up, made light of, or ignored the facts, but a resolution that helped us come to a deeper faith while not ignoring or glossing over these facts. I spent that summer reading England's book *Dialogues with Myself*, which I still believe is one of the most important books on faith within Mormon thought. And after we were married, Zina and I ended up in the BYU 139th Ward, where England was our bishop. I now see Eugene England as a major influence on my life. Because of him, I began to explore the attics and cellars of Mormon history and thought, with a firm conviction that, with patience and sufficient

study, faith can deepen in spite of, perhaps even because of, encounters with doubt.

This and similar experiences during my college years at BYU in the 1980s led to both my love for studying religion and my respect for Mormonism's theological depth. My education was informed by teachers such as Eugene England, Hugh Nibley, Suzanne Lundquist, Donna Lee Bowen, and a host of others who engaged Mormon thought with a smorgasbord of ideas from other religions and cultures, from secular as well as religious thinkers. This exposure to a broad view of Mormonism was enhanced by a part-time job in a local used bookstore where I had long discussions with Mormons of every stripe: liberals and conservatives, orthodox and heterodox, feminists and fundamentalists, scholars and crackpots. I was also part of a flourishing "Mormon underground," trading photocopies of articles from writers such as Brigham Young, B. H. Roberts, D. Michael Quinn and Andy Ehat, each containing gems of history, theology, and sometimes wild speculation. I found Mormon thought a rich, provocative, and entertaining field for exploration.

When I went off to graduate school at the University of Maryland, I took classes in the Hebrew Bible from two Jewish scholars, Susan Handelman and Adele Berlin, where I confronted much faith-challenging knowledge. For example, learning of the Documentary Hypothesis challenged my understanding of the Genesis account of the creation story. Reading biblical criticism challenged me to reevaluate the authorship of Isaiah. And a literary reading of the Bible challenged my understanding of prophets and especially of Jesus. But I pursued my studies with that sincere belief—born of Eugene England's example and teachings—that struggling with doubts can deepen one's faith.

However, my own faith has been less challenged by my academic studies than by my personal life. My darkest nights of the soul came in moments when I felt the deepest



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need for God's comfort—homesickness in the early weeks of my mission, pain from marital conflicts, frustration with unemployment, grief after my father's death, a constant insecurity about finding my vocation in the world—and found instead distance and silence. I know now that I suffer from fairly chronic depression that can rise and fall like the tides but without warning or provocation, and I try to remember to seek medical help when I am heading into a low point. But I also know that these symptoms can cause one to doubt the existence of God. I understand the feeling that comes from praying and hearing only deafening silence.

Despite these very real moments of doubt and insecurity, I pursued my education—both at Maryland and at the University of Utah—and now teach religious studies classes at Utah Valley University. I have taught an introductory course in Western religions and two religious studies courses in the English department: “Literature of the Sacred” and “Mormon Literature.” Curiously, I find myself in the very position Eugene England was in when I first met him: I am an instigator of doubts, a provoker of cognitive dissonance. I have one disadvantage that England did not have when I knew him at BYU. Since I work at a state university, the law prohibits me from evangelizing or promoting any particular religious viewpoint. In fact, the law grants my students more freedom to express their personal views in my classrooms than it does me.

From time to time, students will visit me in my office and discuss their own faith. I always try to listen with respect and without confrontation. What I have gathered from these conversations is somewhat disturbing: while each of them shares my passion for religious studies, quite a few are leaving the Church. Initially, I wondered if the classes themselves were leading these students out of the Church. But what I have come to believe is that something damning in our Mormon culture is causing these students to leave: namely, the conception Mormon culture has about the relationship between faith and doubt.

Doubt is viewed as the enemy of faith, something to be

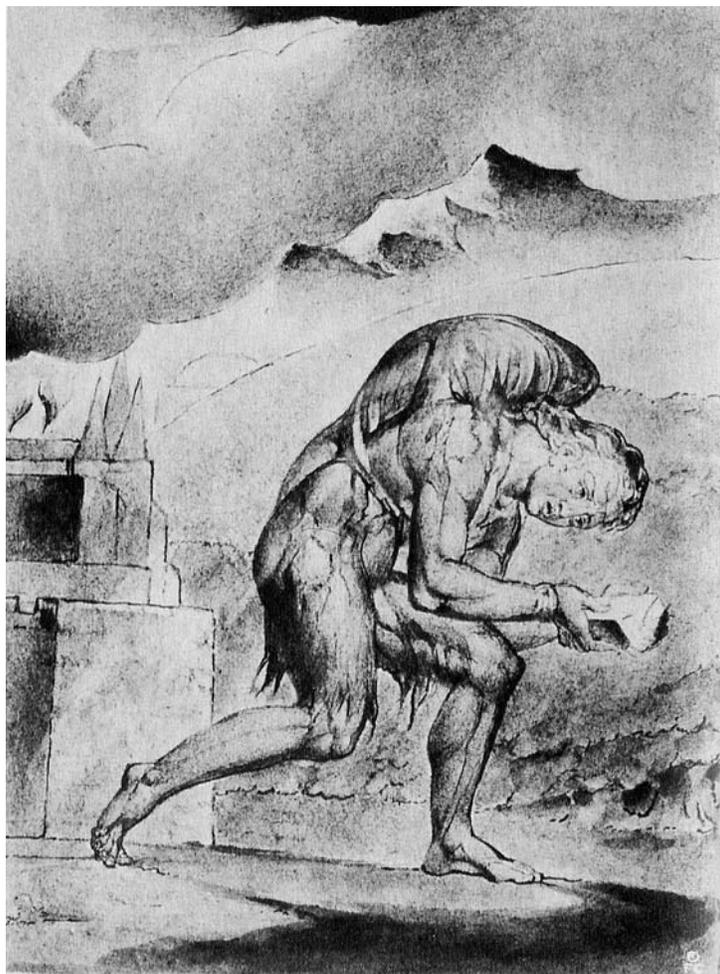
feared, repressed, and avoided at all costs. Too often our community offers an all-encompassing either/or argument about faith—either everything taught about the Church is true, or none of it is; either Joseph Smith was a flawless prophet, or he was a fraud; either the Book of Mormon is historically true, or it isn't. Such extremes and ultimatums may set these students up for a fall. When they encounter, as they surely will, problems in our history, theology, or scripture, the message they have been given since birth tells them

to reject the whole thing. They feel they must either deny the problems or renounce the Church, retain a naïve faith or adopt a sophisticated agnosticism. This simple, either/or view of faith seems not only unproductive but detrimental to true, abiding faith. It confuses the interplay that doubt and faith have in the development of the soul.

TO HELP ME better understand both my students and the concept of faith, I surveyed some of my current and former students about their faith and will share some of their thoughts. But first, I want to emphasize that this survey was not scientific in any sense: I have surveyed only some of my students. Many religious studies students at UVU never take my classes, and I have not tried to contact all of the students I have ever

taught. This is not a random sample, and it is clearly not sufficient to draw any major conclusions, even though I will attempt to draw some conclusions. Nevertheless, these are the voices of real 20- and 30-something students at a secular university who are taking religious studies classes. Their experiences are legitimate in and of themselves, and, after listening to their experiences, I have come to understand better where my students are coming from and what they are going through in negotiating issues of faith while pursuing academic knowledge.

What surprises me most is that all the students I interviewed have passed through periods of serious doubt and inactivity. Some have remained inactive. Only one has had his name removed from Church records (though, from informal



conversations with students besides those I have surveyed, I know many more have taken this step). However, the encouraging news is that most of these young people have come back to full activity, and all of them have some positive things to say about their religious heritage.

The reasons students begin to have doubts about the teachings of the Church are varied. For some, it is a result of their becoming more aware of social and political problems; they are often developing an emerging political activism that they perceive to be at odds with the Church's positions. Gay marriage, women's issues, the war in Iraq—all are concerns that students are dealing with in their other classes, so no wonder these same issues lead some to question their religious moorings. Those who start looking into Mormon history confront questions about Joseph Smith's prophetic authority, the moral and spiritual ramifications of polygamy, and the historicity of the Book of Mormon. These students often express the feeling that the Church has lied to them by covering up the facts about its history. For example, one student, a returned missionary who had grown up in a very devout family—his father teaches Institute—wrote, "My wife and I just found out this year that Joseph Smith had several wives while he was alive. I was never told that in church, seminary, my mission. I just don't know why the Church sometimes goes out of its way to not talk about some things."

For others, as they gain respect for other religious traditions, the Mormon position of being the "one and only true Church" seems, as one student put it, "arrogant." Still others have problems with Mormon theology. "I was struggling with [the] idea that God was just like us, but exalted, and that really bothered me. I did not want God to simply be a human being who had gone through his own trial and got a passing grade. I felt fairly devastated that that idea could be the truth." Some feel the culture of Mormonism is drifting from the teachings of Mormonism. One student laments the "unrelenting talk of obedience to Church leaders" which he sees as carrying over "into other aspects of human experience, such as politics and, locally, the administration of BYU." Still others feel the high expectations of Mormon practice interfere with spirituality. One writes, "My primary cause for leaving was the lack of closeness I felt with God while in the Church and my lack of emotional wholeness I felt in the light of the Church's un-meetable expectations (I mean expectations of perfection)."

I suppose it is not much of a surprise that all of the women I interviewed reported feelings of marginalization or harassment about their gender or marital status. One student writes, "I went through several periods [where] I was horrified by polygamy and the misogynistic behavior that I perceived in the administration and leadership structure of the Church and I had (and still have) a problem with singing 'Praise to the Man' in the chapel." Another wrote that if she could change one thing about the Church, "I would put the pictures of the female Church leadership on the wall with the general authorities." Yet another student wrote that she

feels like she is "treated like a leper at times because I am not married yet." And another stated, "I had one bishop tell me that the best thing I could ever do was to stop focusing on school and start focusing on marriage . . . I took that advice with a grain of salt and pushed forward with my college career!!"



All of these students did report confronting difficult questions in their studies, especially in their religious studies courses. A student who had encountered many sacred texts and had studied textual criticism in his religious studies courses commented that he came to see "the Book of Mormon [as] spiritually authentic but historically dubious." A student who was enrolled in my "Literature of the Sacred" class, in which we studied Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mysticism, reported that the class "broadened his worldview," but also caused him some cognitive dissonance:



As a philosophy told by LDS n testimony. Ev that I *should*

My experience in being raised Mormon gave me the world view of no revelation or visions, etc., previous to 1820 when the heavens were supposedly opened once again . . . This belief was destroyed when I began reading about the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mystics who were experiencing very similar visions and revelations [to those of Joseph Smith] as early as the 11th century. This was the main idea that caused me to look at my religion

more intensely and even more objectively.

He reports that this experience has led him to read other books and articles, which in turn has led him to have doubts about the origins of the LDS faith. He compares his religious reorientation to Plato's allegory of the cave. "I have just exited the cave and my eyes have been sore ever since . . . from



my student, I get frequently told by LDS members that I will lose my testimony. Eventually I got the feeling that I *should* lose my testimony. I lose my testimony."

been inactive in the Church, it was not the result of religious studies courses they have taken. Nor were their doubts and inactivity a result of a confrontation with ecclesiastical leaders or offense taken from another ward member. My perception from my youth has been that in previous generations, "taking offense" at something another ward member had said or done was one of the most common reasons for leaving full activity. However, these young people appear to have a more sophisticated view. Most have had some confrontation with an authority figure or have been bothered by something a member has said to them, but few consider these to be significant factors in their struggles with the Church. In general they have a forgiving attitude about Church leaders and members, recognizing them as human.

I found much to hope for in these interviews. First, even the most critical voices reported being deeply affected by the Book of Mormon; this goes even for those who no longer be-

looking at the sun for the first time."

I was surprised to find, however, that when my students reported being or having

lieve it is a true history of the ancient Americas. For example, one student who no longer accepts the literal historicity of the Book of Mormon states that he still feels "the Spirit moving in me when I read the Book of Mormon." While these students do not always find the Book of Mormon more important than other sacred texts, they do find it to be a source of power. Second, I am impressed that these students see that the position of denying the existence of God requires just as much faith as accepting His existence. As one student writes,

When I temporarily quit going [to Church], it was largely due to my doubts of God's existence. No God = No need to go to church. My return to church was partly because of a feeling that staunch atheism was just as arrogant and problematic as staunch theism. I also felt that the gospel (as found in the scriptures) was a largely untapped resource for doing a lot of good in the world.

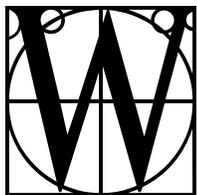
Another student writes,

I have serious issues with the term "closed-minded" and take particular offense when individuals use it in conjunction with Mormon or religious people in general. I have a completely different view. I could quite easily flip that around and ask someone, "Do you believe in God?" If they say "No," I could just as easily say, "Well, that's closed-minded." But I think it's become culturally acceptable to associate Mormons with closed-mindedness, especially by those who haven't taken the time to study Mormonism or its doctrine. I think if they took a sincere look at it, they would discover that Mormonism not only has an expansive world view, but an even more expansive eternal view.

ONE OF THE most important things I discovered in these interviews, however, caused me concern, and led me to rethink Mormonism's relationship with faith and doubt. Several students reported sensing within our culture that doubt is so bad, such a taboo, that they feel no room to remain in the Church with their doubts. As one student writes:

As a philosophy student, I get frequently told by LDS members that I will lose my testimony. Eventually I got the feeling that I *should* lose my testimony. This undoubtedly assisted in my agnosticism. There is also a big sense among many of my friends that there is little room for a progressive/liberal Mormon in the Church today, especially in Utah County. It feels like one must either constantly try to prove how good and spiritual he/she is, or [how] atheist and anti-religious he/she is. Those of us in the middle too often feel lost and alone.

Some students, it appears, feel trapped by both sides of a Mormon culture war—one must be either a complete believer or a complete doubter, a conservative Mormon or a progressive non-Mormon. I believe this is where our cul-



hat I have gathered from these conversations is somewhat disturbing: while each of them shares my passion for religious studies, quite a few are leaving the Church.

tural message hurts our students: we give them an either/or option, and as they gain new knowledge, encounter troubling things about their religion, and face doubts, they assume there is simply no room for them in the Church.

I believe the best thing we can do for these students—and for all of us, for that matter—is to rethink the relationship between doubt and faith. In a 2005 BYU Forum address, Terryl Givens defined faith in a radical new way: as a choice, one made when legitimate evidence supports each side of possibility. While some people, Givens believes, are simply born with faith or a gift for faith, more often faith is an acquired trait. And “among those who vigorously pursue the life of the mind in particular, who are committed to the scholarly pursuit of knowledge and rational inquiry, faith is as often a casualty as it is a product.”¹ In this setting, life becomes, as Givens maintains, a test of our own willful decision to choose faith over doubt. As Givens continues:

I am convinced that there must be grounds for doubt as well as belief, in order to render the choice more truly a choice, and therefore the more deliberate, and laden with personal vulnerability and investment. The option to believe must appear on one’s personal horizon like the fruit of paradise, perched precariously between sets of demands held in dynamic tension. One is, it would seem, always provided with sufficient materials out of which to fashion a life of credible conviction or dismissive denial. We are acted upon, in other words, by appeals to our personal values, our yearnings, our fears, our appetites and our ego. What we choose to embrace, to be responsive to, is the purest reflection of who we are and what we love. That is why faith, the choice to believe, is in the final analysis an action that is positively laden with moral significance.

For Givens, “the call to faith is a summons to engage the heart, to attune it to resonate in sympathy with principles and values and ideals that we devoutly hope are true, and have reasonable but not certain grounds for believing to be true.”² Describing faith as a real choice between two possible mindsets seems to me a superior source of nourishment for the soul.

I believe, however, that we must go even further. What might we change in the culture of Mormonism if we want to encourage bright young people to remain active members of the Church? First, we would decriminalize doubt. As one student put it, “I would let people know that it is okay to question your faith, because that is the only way to really strengthen it.” That seems like such a simple idea, but it is

really quite insightful. Doubt is not a moral weakness; it does not inexorably lead to agnosticism or atheism. It does not inevitably destroy faith. Rather it is a real, possible, and likely stage of faith development. James Fowler describes faith as a developmental process that requires doubts to activate its higher, most transcendent, stages. If faith involves “an alignment of the will, a resting of the heart, in accordance with transcendent value and power,”³ its opposite is not doubt but, first, nihilism, “the inability to image any transcendent environment and despair about the possibility of even negative meaning;”⁴ and, second, idolatry, an alignment of the will with transient or superfluous values.⁵ When faith is regarded as a developmental process, doubt can be seen as “a part of the life of faith,” for “only with the death of our previous image [of God] can a new and more adequate one arise.”⁶

It would be refreshing if as a culture we began to understand that there are legitimate reasons for people to have doubts and that doubts do not necessarily originate in some hidden sin. Too often, practicing Mormons look upon a person in the depths of a faith crisis and assume that this is the result of a sin that has not been repented of. This reaction most definitely alienates the doubter. It would also be refreshing if our culture could acknowledge that just because one has doubts, one can choose to have faith.

Years ago, a dear friend gave me a plaque engraved with a quotation from Brigham Young: “Think, Brethren, think, but do not think so far that you cannot think back again” (JD 3:243). While the quotation is taken out of context (Brigham was actually cautioning us to yoke body and mind, to be active mentally and physically), I’ve kept the plaque near my bookshelves and read it as a reminder that education is a process, that doubts are part of that process, and that God should be the center of my searching. The response to doubts is not less thinking, but more thinking. Just as one can be arrogantly certain about believing in God, one can be arrogantly certain about believing in no God. We should, I believe, acknowledge the legitimacy of doubt, that it is not evil. And that it can, with more thinking, lead to deeper, stronger faith.

For example, Levi Peterson has written about how his doubts have led him to a uniquely deep sense of worship. “I sense that my worship differs from that of many with whom I share a pew in sacrament meeting,” writes Peterson. “This difference arises, I think, from a difference in the focus of our fundamental human anxiety. . . . [M]y anxiety is focused not upon whether my immortal soul may suffer damnation but upon whether I have an immortal soul.”⁷ Yet Peterson’s

doubts about life after death do not lead him to nihilism but to a sense of wonder and hope. “It seems a pity to take one’s immortality for granted, to expect it and count on it. It seems a pity to be so sheltered from the terror of death that one’s gratitude for the resurrection is merely dutiful and perfunctory. Perhaps truly there are religious advantages to doubt. Perhaps only a doubter can appreciate the miracle of life without end.”⁸

In my own life, during my bouts of depression, the frustration of not getting immediate answers to prayers, and the loneliness of wondering if God is even there, I have been more deeply moved by Mormon scripture. I have developed a greater appreciation, for example, of Joseph Smith’s cry in Liberty Jail—“O God, where art thou?” (D&C 121:1). The words are all the more poignant and simultaneously comforting as they resonate with the state of my own fragile hope. I had a mission president who reminded me, as I described to him my feelings of complete loneliness, of Latter-day Saints’ theological notion that Christ himself went through a similar loneliness as he suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane, when God withdrew his comforting Spirit. My mission president stressed to me that these moments may help me understand Jesus better and urged me to see these moments as a blessing rather than a trial. I confess that I have not been very successful in changing my attitude, but I do know that these doubts I have experienced have, ironically, produced a deepened faith, more attuned to scripture and more aware of human suffering and striving. I can completely relate to Father Flynn’s homily at the beginning of John Patrick Shanley’s *Doubt*: “Doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty. When you are lost, you are not alone.”

I am haunted by the questions raised in Shanley’s film. Originally a Broadway play, the film stars Meryl Streep as the severely strict and utterly self-certain Sister Aloysius Beauvier, the principal at St. Nicholas, a Catholic school. Based on circumstantial evidence, she becomes convinced that Father Brendan Flynn (played by Philip Seymour Hoffman) has sexually abused one of the students in the school. While the film evokes the abuse scandal that has recently rocked the Catholic Church, its theme is really much more universal—the role doubt plays in preventing egregious acts of inhumanity. As Shanley stresses in an interview with the *New York Times*, “Doubt has gotten a bad reputation. People who are utterly certain are vulnerable to a brand of foolishness that people who maintain a level of doubt are not.”⁹

I believe wisdom is generally born of doubt. It is a potent corrective to vanity and self-righteousness and can put an end to disputations of all kinds, from ugly Sunday School classroom arguments to jihads and holy wars. One of our most loveable contemporary doubters, Garrison Keillor, has wisely stated, “Skepticism is a stimulant, not to be repressed. It is an antidote to smugness and the great glow of satisfaction one gains from being right.”¹⁰ As one of my wife’s students so aptly put it, “Smug is why people hate Mormons.”

In my Ph.D. work, I was drawn to Romanticism largely, I now believe, because of the Romantics’ love of paradox and perplexity. The Romantics did not shy away from confusion but reveled in it, recognizing that the word’s etymological root means “to mix together.” Confusion—that is mixing together philosophy, religion, poetry, science—is a central goal in Romantic texts. The result is a sort of mental overflow that produces new insights and new ideas. I think this is something Joseph Smith understood when he suggested that by “proving contraries, truth is made manifest.” Only when we bring together all the inconsistencies of our religious lives, fully exploring the paradoxes inherent in any belief system, can we begin fully to appreciate its richness.

Another concept that animates Romanticism is that of “imagination,” the mediator between “sensibility” and “understanding” in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. As James Fowler rightly notes, the word used for “imagination” in German is the compound word “Einbildungskraft,” which literally means “the power (Kraft) of forming (Bildung) into one (Ein).”¹¹ As I read Fowler, he seems to see faith as working in a Kantian way, mediating between our senses and our understanding. Faith, Fowler states, “grasps the ultimate conditions of our existence, unifying them into a comprehensive image in light of which we shape our responses and initiatives, our actions.”¹² Doubt is an integral part of that process. It acts as a corrective to help us recognize the “false gods,” or false images of God, that we have acquired and helps us shatter those images in order to discover a “more luminous, more inclusive and more true [image] than that to which we [were previously] devoted.”¹³ So perhaps we need a bit more confusion—a mixing together of faith and doubt—not less.

S ECOND, WE SHOULD not be afraid of the truth. Often we Mormons seem scared that if the truth somehow got out there—the truth about our history, our evolving theology, our fallible leaders—people would leave the Church in droves. But what tends to happen is just the opposite. We hide the truth, and then, when they discover it on their own, people feel like they have been lied to. Interestingly, William McGuire’s inoculation theory would postulate that our deeply held religious beliefs are, ironically, more vulnerable than less deeply held beliefs. According to McGuire’s theory, deeply held beliefs, such as a belief in God, are so fundamental to our sense of selfhood—who we are is completely tied up with these beliefs—that we actively avoid information that conflicts with these beliefs. Since we regard these beliefs as unassailable, we are left unprepared and unmotivated to respond when confronted with information that may contradict those beliefs. To overcome this vulnerability, McGuire suggests that people need to be informed in advance of the problems inherent in their beliefs—they need to be inoculated with knowledge of the vulnerability of their position and given information necessary to build a solid foundation.¹⁴ McGuire’s theory would suggest that people need more not less information in order

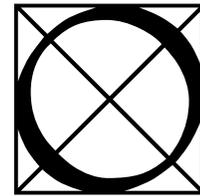
to develop a deeper faith. This is exactly what Eugene England did for me: he began by telling the truth—in all its perplexing and disturbing colors—and then offered ways for me to glimpse a more robust and deeper Mormonism than I had previously seen. In this, I believe, Eugene England was one of our strongest Mormon apologists (in the positive sense of building and advocating faith).

Third, we should come to think of faith not as a state of being, as many rigidly orthodox Mormons do, nor as a meandering journey without a destination, as some more New-Agey Mormons do, but as a quest. My wife is a medievalist, so I hear a lot about quests. In medieval literature, a quest is fraught with sore trials, great temptations, and serious doubts. But the goal is both very desirable and ideally attainable. However, for most knights, the reward of the quest often turns out to be something other than the original goal he had set out for. It is in searching for the Grail that the knight discovers himself. A unique individual is born as a result of the adventures and trials encountered on the journey. The quest becomes, then, a process of self-education, of self-development. The goal is to become whole and so become at one with God. That wholeness and at-one-ment is the Holy Grail. My former teacher Suzanne Lundquist pointed out to me that in English, our words “whole,” “health,” and “holy” come from the same root. “The notion of imperfection literally means to be ‘incomplete’ or ‘unfinished.’”¹⁵

The first step on this quest might be to find a faith mentor, someone who exhibits the deep, enlightened faith you aspire to. In the Mishna, it is written that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachia said, “Obtain a teacher for yourself, acquire a friend for yourself, and judge everyone favorably.” The importance of finding a spiritual mentor is a universal theme in religion. In Mormonism, we talk of being a good example but seldom talk about seeking a good example to

emulate. My teachers at BYU served this function for me. Anyone in a position to influence others, especially teachers, should not shy away from the inoculation function of educating. Eugene England, and so many others in my time at BYU, knew both the way into the conundrums and, more important, the paths out. They showed me the problems, but also taught me to search for answers; not easy answers that gloss over the problems, but answers that reveal a bigger sense of the sacred unaffected by the problems.

Finally, I believe that the cognitive dissonance that comes from studying religion—or from studying the contradictions and trials of life—can be positive, in fact fruitful, in producing deeper faith (or a higher stage of faith as James Fowler would put it) provided the faith community understands how faith develops: that it’s a developmental process rather than a state of being. In fact, my former teacher, Susan Handelman, has shown how in the Hebrew language the concepts of study and faith are etymologically tied together. The root of the Hebrew word *emunah*, or faith, contains the meanings of “to be strong, firm, or diligent.” Vocalized another way, the word becomes *ihmen*, which means “to train or educate.” From the same root comes the noun *amahn* which is an “artist, expert, or master craftsman.” The verbal forms of the word means “to foster, nurse, or bring up.” The word we use to end prayers, *amen*, also comes from this root and means “so be it, surely.” In the passive form, with a different set of vowels, the word means “to be found true, trustworthy, or firm.”



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Handelman reconnects faith with the academy, arguing “that *emunah*, faith, is connected to education and training in its very root. And education and faith both require much nursing and nurturing.”¹⁶ She goes on to say that “faith . . . is not a sentimental matter; it is a ‘craft,’ a ‘skill,’ and it needs to be educated, trained and nursed. It is not ‘blind.’ It is not [necessarily] something that people just seem to ‘have’ and others ‘just don’t.’”¹⁷ In sum, states Handelman, “*emunah*—or faith—is a long process of education. There will be times of abject frustration, disbelief and rebellion. But this comforts me, for it helps

me see that my skepticism and my faith are not necessarily opposites. They can accommodate each other, even though the relationship is going to be tempestuous.”¹⁸

In fact, I believe that a secular religious studies education can accomplish an important religious function, one that is an integral component of many traditions. In many aboriginal societies, the community purposefully brings up a child to reverence a sacred image and teaches that, in essence, the image and the sacred are the same. During initiation rituals, a fairly universal process occurs in which these sacred images are defamed in some way.¹⁹ For example, in Hopi culture, children are taught to reverence and fear the kachina dancers as gods visiting from the sacred San Francisco Mountains. During the rituals of initiation into



bring together all the inconsistencies of our lives, fully exploring the paradoxes of any belief system, can we begin fully to appreciate its richness.

adult society, renewed emphasis is placed on the kachina dancers: the neophytes are told many stories about the origin of the kachinas, and the kachinas appear to them numerous times both to entertain and to frighten. Finally, on the last night of the initiation:

The children are taken into a kiva to await a kachina dance—now a familiar event. They hear the kachinas calling as they approach the kiva. They witness the invitation extended from within the kiva for the dancing gods to enter. But to the children’s amazement, the kachinas enter without masks, and for the first time in their lives, the initiates discover that the kachinas are actually members of their own village impersonating the gods.²⁰

Once this ritual has taken place, the revered gods are dead for the initiate. The simple, one-dimensional world view of youth is forever gone, and the initiate is either confronted with a rejection of the Hopi ways or else finds a deeper meaning within the symbol. The initiates are forced to mature the original religious belief and begin “their religious life in a state of serious reflection and in quest of an understanding of the sacred profound enough to sustain

their new life.”²¹ The sacred object is symbolically killed, but there is a rebirth, a resurgence of meaning. This disenchantment process dramatically stresses to the neophyte that symbols, myths, and rituals are sacred only in that they are indicators of the divine, that they are not divine in and of themselves. A crude but useful parallel is our telling children about an intimidating, gift-bestowing, all-seeing, arctic-dwelling saint who visits their house at Christmas; however, in our secularization of Christmas, we tend to leave out the growth potential of the disillusionment in discovering the truth about Santa Claus. Another example of this process is found in the empty tomb scene in the Gospels, where the Marys go to find the dead body of a living God and must confront the death of their trust in Jesus the man and accept the Son of God for who he is. Disenchantment is clearly a necessary component of acquiring deeper faith.

I SEE THE possibility for a similar disenchantment process in the academic study of religion. The image of the sacred is shattered as the “initiate,” young scholars learn new information that cannot be accommodated by their previous understanding of their religion. They can then either choose to find deeper meaning or pass into a stage of unbelief—they can feel shattered by the non-existence of Santa and parental “lies” or energized by the tale’s parallels to God; can opt to stay, depressed, in the empty tomb, or realize the glorious reason for its emptiness. I see my role as one of helping students get past the either/or dichotomy presented to them by our culture (the “accept it as is or reject it entirely” mode of thought), of ushering them into the possibilities of deeper faith in a bigger God, and of helping them recognize the robust and unlimited nature of

Mormon thought. I do not mean to sound arrogant—I recognize I am no prophet or shaman. I seek only to do for others (i.e., my students) what others (i.e., my BYU professors) did for me.

Speaking about the crisis of positivist thought brought on by postmodernism, Paul Kugler has argued that we must at the same time “believe in our god term and use it as if it were the ultimate explanatory principle. But on a deeper level, we also know that it is not.”²² Kugler states that this “deeper level” of understanding prevents our ideologies from becoming secular religions. Perhaps Robert Bellah more clearly states it in an essay in which he calls into question the entire premise behind our modern secular universities. Stating that education in aboriginal societies has always been concerned with “initiation into reality with a capital ‘R’”—with an awareness of existence in a religious and secular sense—Bellah calls for what he terms a “new religious consciousness” or “second naïveté.”²³

The person who experiences new religious consciousness has passed through criticism, not avoided it . . . He knows that every interpretation of reality is finally only an interpretation, and not reality itself. And he cannot confuse his own words or the words of some creed or doctrine with ultimate reality. Second naïveté could be characterized in fairly traditional words as the final fulfillment of Biblical iconoclasm, which accepts nothing as a substitute for the Divine itself.²⁴

Bellah argues that the individual who has experienced this second naïveté will realize that religious symbols have “inexhaustible meaning” and will seek “every possible mode of interpretation.”²⁵ Faith and doubt must become partners in creating selfhood. Bellah concludes that “through iconoclasm of the most radical sort, there may not come nihilism but a new way of grasping religious meaning.”²⁶ In this light, I believe students who explore Mormonism do not necessarily face disbelief, but may, in fact, encounter deeper belief. For in exploring these paradoxes, we may encounter not nihilism but a reawakening of religious belief. After having torn down all the false gods of religion and tradition, we are free to seek and worship the Deity who remains undisturbed by the rubble.

NOTES

1. Terryl L. Givens, “Lightning out of Heaven: Joseph Smith and the Forging of Community,” forum address, Brigham Young University, 29 November 2005, <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=10924> (accessed 7 July 2009).

2. *Ibid.*

3. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 14.

4. *Ibid.*, 31.

5. *Ibid.*, 18.

6. *Ibid.*, 31.

7. Levi Peterson, “A Christian by Yearning: Pillars of My Faith,” *SUNSTONE*, September 1988, 20.

8. *Ibid.*, 22.

9. David Cote, “Filtering Priests’ Sins through Two Prisms,” *New York Times*, 20 November 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/20/theater/newsandfeatures/20prie.html?scp=1&sq=john%20patrick%20shanley%20david%20cote&st=cse> (accessed 11 June 2009).

10. Garrison Keillor, “Thinking Weaselish Thoughts at Eastertide,” *Salon.com*, 19 March 2008, <http://www.salon.com/opinion/keillor/2008/03/19/easter/> (accessed 11 June 2009).

11. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 24.

12. *Ibid.*, 24–25.

13. *Ibid.*, 31.

14. Mary John Smith, *Persuasion and Human Action: A Review and Critique of Social Influence Theories* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1982), 286.

15. Suzanne E. Lundquist, “The Repentance of Eve,” *As Women of Faith*, edited by Mary E. Stovall and Carol Cornwall Madsen (Salt Lake: Deseret, 1989), 99.

16. Susan Handelman, “Emunah: The Craft of Faith,” *Cross Currents* 42 (1992), 294.

17. *Ibid.*, 295.

18. *Ibid.*, 295.

19. Sam Gill, “Disenchantment,” *Parabola* 1, no. 3 (1976), 7.

20. *Ibid.*, 9.

21. *Ibid.*

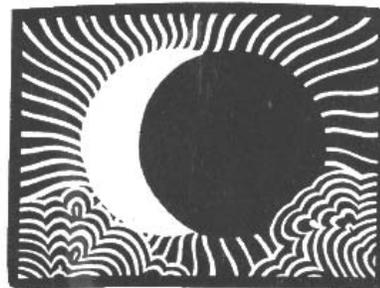
22. Paul Kugler, “The Unconscious in Post-Modern Depth Psychology,” *C.G. Jung and the Humanities: Towards a Hermeneutics of Culture*, edited by Karin Barnaby and Pellegrino D’Acierno (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 316.

23. Robert N. Bellah, “The New Religious Consciousness and the Secular University,” *Daedalus* 103 (1974), 111.

24. *Ibid.*, 114.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*



FOR A FRIEND STRUCK DOWN

Writhing arms of mountain mahogany,
wind through warping Jeffrey pine.
This granite boulder beside the trail,
this sage moraine—it all goes on.

A dog sits and pants for a space
in the shade of late afternoon,
ears pointed, alert to the doe
and spotted fawn that leap away,

the sudden quail. Each cloud
building in the sky is capable
of rain, of thunder. No one
ever opened a door for lightning.

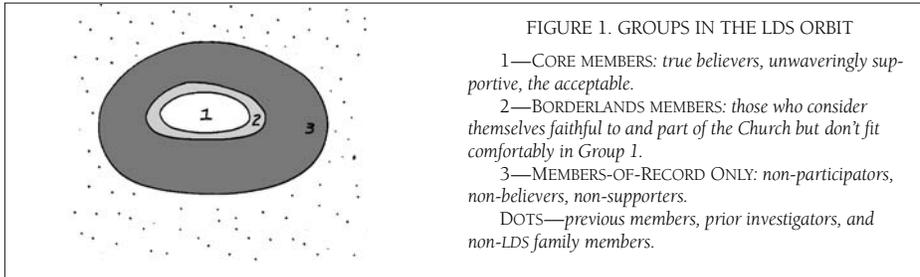
—Hoover Wilderness

—PAUL WILLIS

BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

RECONNECTING WITH
A FORMER FAITH?

by D. Jeff Burton



OVER RECENT WEEKS, I have exchanged the following edited emails with “Katherine” (not her real name). After her story, I’ve included an update from Jared, one of our previous Borderlands story tellers.

KATHERINE, PART I

KATHERINE: I definitely consider myself a Borderlander. I joined the Mormon Church fourteen years ago after nearly three years of investigation. I was born and raised a good active Catholic and had quite a difficult time leaving that church. During a service mission as a teenage camp counselor with her Missionaries of Charity in the Bronx, I even met Mother Teresa.

But in college, I fell in love with a wonderful Mormon true-believer, Edward [not his real name], and that provided the motivation for me to keep venturing into the uncomfortable. After a considerable struggle, I felt I was being led by God towards LDS baptism. About this time, I wrote to Mother Teresa about something and she responded, “Let us all welcome Jesus into our lives in whatever form and whenever He wants to come . . .” Her message made it easier for me, and I felt the Lord was directing me. But, on the other hand, to this day, I can hardly talk about my baptism with my family—they were so upset. The difficulties started right after my baptism and included an LDS woman telling me that Edward deserved a life-long member for his wife (her, I suppose?). Then I was

denied my patriarchal blessing recommend because I could not say that I knew the Book of Mormon was “true.” (I may be the only person who ever failed her first patriarchal blessing interview.)

Now, fourteen years, a Mormon husband, and three Mormon children later, I am a suburban, stay-at-home mother. Edward and I are active temple recommend holders. I quilt. I cook dinner nearly every night. I volunteer at my children’s school. (I will even admit, I have scrapbooked—let’s keep that quiet, though!) My life looks so conservative, sometimes I hardly even recognize myself. Despite outer appearances, I am a liberal who envisions a day when women can receive the priesthood, wants to see Christianity take the lead in saving this precious planet we profess our God created, and longs for a church anxiously engaged in seeing that there are no more poor among us.

However, I am filled with doubts and questions about my decision to join the Church. I no longer seem to be able to simply push them aside and press on. I now wonder if I wasn’t wrong to have taken this giant leap of faith. I have begun to long for the impossible comfort of the faith of my youth. (My family is Catholic back to Peter, but Edward’s family is Mormon back to Joseph.)

I am also the Young Women’s president in our ward. Though the time I spend serving in my calling is about the only time I feel relief from the constant and oppressive pain, I am still wracked with guilt. Our

bishop is a rather simple and judgmental fellow. I have struggled with whether to be honest with him about my doubts. My husband and close friends all feel if I were to be honest, I would immediately be released from my calling. Complicating matters, my 11-year-old daughter is excited to be welcomed into the YW program in a few short months, with her mother as president.

While being supportive, my husband feels as if I have given up, that I am refusing to see the good in the Church. In tears yesterday, I told him I just don’t know if I can go back to church. He told me he thinks I’m not trying anymore. He said it seems like I’ve made my decision and I won’t hear of anything else. I asked what he thinks I should be doing that I’m not. He said he didn’t know. It’s been fourteen years of my hanging on by a thread, and I am tired. I just desperately want to go to a church on a Sunday and leave feeling nourished, not wiped out. Is it wrong to ask for that?

JEFF: Yours is a sad but not unusual experience for some converts. A few things came to mind as I read your story:

- You have spent fourteen years in commitment to your husband, your children, the Church, and your current lifestyle. You can probably take a few more months (or even years) to decide what to do. Don’t make any hurried decisions.

- As your husband says, there is a lot of good in being involved in the Church. Try to concentrate for the moment on those “good things.”

- You’re not a true believer, but that’s okay. You might reconcile with yourself that you simply don’t believe everything Mormon, and probably never will, short of having a divine revelation. But only a small minority of baptized Mormons worldwide believe everything, although those who remain active generally keep their doubts to themselves. Perhaps at some future point (maybe after your daughter is over the excitement of YW), you could begin the process of “coming out.” It is possible to be an active, “faithful” member of the Church and acknowledge that you’re not a true believer. Yes, some will treat you differently, but some will treat you better. You may not have the leadership positions, but that puts you in a good place to do more hands-on service like you once did with Mother Teresa’s order. You can choose to do more things that are simply “good,” those things Edward was referring to. And you will have that sense of freedom that comes with honesty and openness. But there is no hurry.

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a former member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.

KATHERINE: I have actually been talking with a Catholic priest friend and others for more than six months now. It really isn't my style to make rash decisions. But I must admit that I have been feeling a bit overwhelmed lately, and the reminder to breathe deeply and be mindful of the bigger picture is helpful. And, yes, there is much good in the Mormon Church. I love the people too much to not see that.

I was startled by your statement about my not being a "true believer." That makes me sad. Am I really destined to a life in a church where I don't believe many of its basic claims? It seems like there ought to be something more satisfying than that. Could I be a true believer somewhere else, or is that just the sad reality for those of us who wonder?

I just fear that if I allow this to go on too long, I will end up growing even more resentful than I am now. I am in a book group with a bunch of LDS women, all dear friends. One night after the book discussion, the topic moved to the Church. I didn't think I was being all that critical, but one of my closest friends got very defensive of the Church, and I found myself growing angry with her. My reaction was very uncharacteristic, and I left that night thinking that I needed to not let this happen again. I don't want to end up feeling like a caged animal by staying in this Church. That's why I have allowed myself a little more freedom to ask questions and wonder about the future. This approach has been helpful. It seems to be allowing me to let go of some of the anger. But it has been a long time.

JEFF: Your approach to your problems so far looks thoughtful. Yes, it may be troublesome for a long time. But you will eventually have peace and understanding.

Over the years, I have been struck by three statements: "The Church is true from the ward down." "All religion is local." "Our world is our family and our ward." I take these to mean that the various personal religions of all the good people in our wards are "true," and that we as individuals can't save the entire world but we can "save" our families and friends, or whatever that world is that God has placed us in.

KATHERINE: I hear what you are saying about the good people at church. I recently read the SUNSTONE article, "Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates: Perspectives from the Sociology of Knowledge," by John-Charles Duffy. One of the more striking sentences was, "You will tend to

believe what the people closest to you believe, and the more time you spend conversing with other people about their beliefs, the more plausible their beliefs will become to you."¹ I had been willing to accept *a lot* because of my social commitments to the ward (and I have received many rewards from these commitments), but now I am no longer comfortable with just serving the needs of the group—thus the crisis of faith. But why this is difficult for me to figure out is that my strongest ties—those to my husband and children—will bind me to the Church. What to do?

JEFF: One thought strikes me. When you married Edward, did you not at the same time marry Mormonism? Edward's ties to Mormonism since his youth are similar to the ties you feel to the faith of your youth, and similar to the ties your children are creating now to the Mormon Church. This issue needs to be dealt with in your decision-making process.

Another thought: could you (at least in your heart) be both Catholic and Mormon? Maybe choosing the best of both will work best for your family and marriage. I could see you, for example, telling your husband, children, and ward members, "I have roots in Catholicism, and my heart is there as well as with my family and friends in Mormonism. I don't mean that I'm rejecting Mormonism or any of you; I'm just trying to make my life fuller and happier." And to your family, "You don't have to participate with me unless you want to."

KATHERINE: Catholics and Mormons do have a lot in common. And in the areas where they differ, they really don't cause too much conflict. For instance, one can appreciate the saints of Catholicism or pray the Our Father without really coming into conflict with Mormonism. One time when I was feeling particularly glum about how much I missed the Ave Maria, I attended a meeting in the temple where a very talented musician played the Bach-Gounod "Prelude in C" (my favorite version of the Ave Maria). So, there can be overlap. And as painful as leaving Catholicism has been for me, I have felt the loving touch of the Savior reassuring me that all good things belong to Him. And that He is mindful of me and all that I love, even as a Mormon.

But it gets tricky where doctrines collide. Can I hold a temple recommend if I actually accept the doctrine of the Trinity? How can I really be Catholic if I reject the Eucharist? I suppose I could find a way to

juggle and not really commit totally to either religion, but I just don't know how to do it. And I don't know how ultimately satisfying it would be.

KATHERINE (about a week later): A new development! A few weeks ago, the husband of one of my counselors in the YW presidency was called to be a counselor to the stake president and now must sit on the stand, go to other wards, and so forth. They have four very young children (ages 2–8). I pulled her aside right after this happened to tell her it's OK if their family can't handle all this, and I could talk to the bishop about having her released. I didn't want her to feel as if I were forcing her out, but I wanted to make it as easy as possible for her to ask. She didn't respond one way or the other. She's just one of those who won't ask to be released. The next Sunday was awful for my counselor. After the third or fourth time she had to leave the chapel with an unruly child, I followed them into a classroom to find her in tears. I insisted she let me take her toddler. (Little did she know how relieved I was to have an excuse to leave the meeting and how my time with my little friend looking at pictures of Jesus hanging on the walls was far better for my soul than what was going on in the chapel.)

Shortly thereafter, I explained the situation to the bishop, suggesting that she might be released. He responded, "Well, I'll call her in my office and talk to her." I warned, "I'm not sure she will be able to be totally honest with you about how she's feeling." To which he told me, "Well, I'll talk to her, I have the power to discern these things."

The bishop didn't get back to me until I cornered him a few days ago and asked if he had discussed any of this with his counselors. He responded, "Yes, we hope to have it taken care of in a few weeks." So I asked, "Are you going to fill me in?" So then he reluctantly said, "You were right; your counselor is overwhelmed. So we are going to release all of you."

Wow! I was furious. I was thinking, "There goes my daughter's and my vision of our future together in YW. There goes my major source of relief and service." While I ranted to my husband, he said something that really upset me. My response absolutely startled both of us. In my anger, I spit out, "Well, the bishop is going to be surprised when I leave and take our children with me, because I sure as hell don't intend on leaving them behind!" Now, I usually am pretty good at self-editing. And

until that point, I hadn't really been thinking about my leaving in terms of pulling the children out as well. But as soon as I said it, I realized that I couldn't leave without in some way bringing my children with me. And I don't think my husband would be willing to let me pull them out of church.

When I blurted out that comment, he went silent. So I've been pretty much a mess since. The last thing I want to do is rip my family apart, but if I continue to pursue my doubts and unsettledness, I am not sure how to avoid it.

JEFF: My goodness, these are very troubling developments. My initial suggestions to you, in our first emails, not to make any hasty decisions about the Church and your role in it are even more important now.

Your family and your marriage are more important than the Church, your bishop, his insensitivity, and your frustrations with them. You don't want the Church and your current connections to it to damage the critical relationships with your family.

You might consider sitting down with your husband and telling him that he, your marriage, and your family come first, no matter what, and that you will not be making any big moves anytime soon because you don't want to surprise or damage anyone. If that calms him, perhaps he will be willing to spend two or three hours per week with you discussing the issues, where you might go from here, and how you could mutually work out some plans. Hopefully, he will be willing and able to work with you.

Many men and women have been through this. Some have simply decided to stay, keeping silent, but making the best of it. That is one extreme. The other is rushing off, arms flailing, screaming, but usually falling off a cliff. In the middle is figuring out how to be a good Mormon Catholic, or a happy Mormon Christian, or something that works for you and everyone.

Again, quiet times and careful thinking, reflection, prayer, and maybe professional counseling are in order for you for the next few months or even longer.

KATHERINE: Thank you again for your calming voice. I especially enjoyed the image of a screaming, arms-flailing woman jumping off a cliff!

I have asked my husband to fill out the questionnaire you sent me; when he is done, I thought we could talk about our responses. I shared with him our earlier email

exchanges (at least the first few), but he hasn't seen the last exchange. We have now talked several times since my "outburst." Our conversations had been getting increasingly frustrating until a few nights ago when I was able to tell him that I love him and really need his support, that I don't want to do anything to destroy this marriage, but that I am suffering immensely and need to share that with him and have him listen. He told me he is fearful that I am beginning to direct my anger at him. I tried to assure him that I am not angry with him, but that I want to be able to be honest with him and share when I am angry and not feel as if he would prefer just to keep his head in the sand and wait for this storm to blow over. I think he has made an effort over the last couple of days to allow me to express myself and seems willing to work with me.

KATHERINE (just recently): I received the latest SUNSTONE, and the first thing I read was the Borderlands article, "Why We Stay."² I have been thinking about making my list of "Why I should—or should not—stay." I haven't actually started to write it yet. I am a little nervous to actually put it on paper, but I have been putting quite a bit of thought into it. When I do eventually set about writing it out, I will let you know how it goes.

Edward and I seem to be relating a little better with one another lately, although, admittedly, I am mostly keeping quiet. Not sure if that is good.

JEFF: Sometimes it is wise to be quiet. But eventually you'll need to rely on mature, adult, respectful, and loving communication with Edward. You two might need to get some counseling to make it happen, though. We all know how to talk. Some of us know how to listen, but few of us know how to really communicate effectively and consistently with our spouses. It is a skill set that one must learn. Some counselors teach couple communication skills. Look for someone who will do that for you both.

I'm glad you're taking your time. Time is the great teacher and healer, as they say. My guess is that when you've looked at all the factors very thoughtfully, you'll find a compromising way to meet the needs of your family, Edward, and yourself.

Keep in mind, too, that "staying" and "going" aren't your only two options. (We generally don't like absolutes here in the Borderlands.) There are ways of staying and

going at the same time. Many of us do that although we may not be aware of it.

(I will keep readers updated with Part II of Katherine's story as it unfolds.)

AN UPDATE FROM JARED

JARED has been struggling for years with how to deal with doubts and questions and his future in the Church.³ I will close the column with this update on his story.

JARED: I believe I have finally found my course. My wife and I have quit the intellectual thrashing about, trying to find what truth and reality are. We've prayed earnestly and tearfully for help from "above" in learning just what this life is all about, what we should do for the future of our children, and the course we should take to optimize our eternal destinies together.

For me, the answer partly came after I had decided not to go to church the next day and be subjected to boring, repetitious talks. As I lay in bed, semi-awake, some strange knowledge came to me just after I thought, "I am not going to go to church tomorrow." This something said, "Yes, you will! You will go and sit with your family and enjoy it!" I then thought, "OK, I promised." And so I did. And the more I did, the more often and more definitely that prompting came to me.

Both my wife and I (and our daughter) are now convinced that life as a good member of the LDS church is what is best for us. It certainly is not for everyone, but it works for us. Mainly, it gives us an opportunity to serve others, and that is what life is all about.

For the first time in more than twelve years, we went to the temple just last week. And yes, we had answered the temple recommend questions honestly. When asked the questions, we said, "We *choose* to believe; we *choose* to accept, and so forth." There is no dishonesty or hypocrisy in that, as some have suggested.

NOTES

1. John-Charles Duffy, "Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates—Part II: Perspectives from the Sociology of Knowledge" (SUNSTONE, December 2008), 49.

2. D. Jeff Burton, "Why We Stay," (SUNSTONE, May 2009), 50–51.

3. Jared's story can be found in the May 2005, September 2005, and December 2006 issues of SUNSTONE.

UPDATE

MEDIA ZOOMS IN ON
MORMONS, PROP 8

EIGHT MONTHS AFTER IT WAS REVEALED THAT Mormons contributed an estimated \$20 million to help pass California's Proposition 8, three well-known publications, *Time* magazine, *The Washington Post*, and *The Nation*, published stories scrutinizing the LDS Church's political strategies and spotlighting the continuing opposition the Church faces as the debate over same-sex marriage continues across the country. *The New Yorker* took a jab as well.

MISUNDERSTOOD MORMONS?

INCORPORATING QUOTATIONS FROM Apostle M. Russell Ballard, LDS political scientist David Campbell, and SUNSTONE editor Stephen Carter, *Time* magazine published in its June 22 issue a story titled, "The Church and Gay Marriage: Are Mormons Misunderstood?" The story focuses on Jay Pimentel, a bishop and lawyer from Alameda, California, who became the object of a neighborhood "blacklisting" because of the \$1,500 he and his wife donated in support of Proposition 8.

"Dear Neighbor," the anonymous letter began, "our neighbors, Colleen and Jay Pimentel"—the letter then gave the couple's address—"contributed \$1,500.00 to the Yes on Proposition 8 campaign. NEIGHBORS SHOULD BE AWARE OF THEIR NEIGHBORS' CHOICES." The note accused the Pimentels of "obsessing about same-sex marriage" and suggested a number of local causes that recipients should support—"unlike the Pimentels."

David Van Biema, author of the *Time* story, notes that the growth of the LDS Church, now the fourth largest denomination in the United States, is coming at a cost. "Even as Mormons have become more prominent, they have struggled to overcome lingering prejudices and misrepresentations about the sources of their beliefs," Van Biema writes. "Polls suggest that up to half of Americans would be uncomfortable with a Mormon president. And though the Prop 8 victory was a high-water mark for Mormon political advocacy, it also sparked a vicious backlash from gay-rights activists, some of whom accused Mormons of bigotry and blind religious obedience."

Van Biema notes that "there are two radical Mormon theological deviations from conventional Christianity, both of which have at least some bearing on the gay-marriage battle": the doctrine of eternal progression and belief in a living prophet. "Prophets have even more authority than Popes do in Catholicism," claims Van Biema. He added that even if the push for Proposition 8 had a rational

basis, "belief in [President Thomas S.] Monson's supernatural connection also played a big role."

Van Biema notes that the LDS Church has not declared publically what role it would play in upcoming campaigns for and against same-sex marriage in Iowa and New England. David Campbell, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, told Van Biema: "If it appeared that the church sat out next time because it was criticized this time, there might be a credibility question." But Campbell wondered, given the current push towards same-sex marriage, "Does the church want the public to identify it primarily as a political body opposing an issue that comes back again and again?"

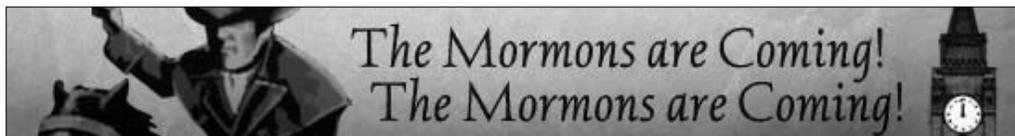
"THE MORMONS ARE COMING!"

IN A STORY titled "The Mormons Are Coming!" *Washington Post* writer Karl Vick looks at the role Mormons and gay activists may play in the future as the campaign for same-sex marriage moves to the eastern states.

"With the battle moving east," Vick writes, "some advocates are shouting that fact in the streets, calculating that on an issue that eventually comes down to comfort levels, more people harbor apprehensions about Mormons than about homosexuality." A case in point is the ad titled "The Mormons Are Coming! The Mormons Are Coming!" which the group Californians Against Hate ran on the websites of newspapers along the East Coast.

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church) has been leading the national crusade against same-sex marriage since President Gordon B. Hinckley issued such a proclamation in 1988," Californians Against Hate proclaims on the group's website, MORMONGATE.COM. "The Church showed just how effective it could be beginning in Hawaii in the mid-nineties all the way through to California's Proposition 8 in 2008. They were involved to some degree with all 30 state elections outlawing same-sex marriage."

In his analysis, Vick concludes that the tactics used by Californians Against Hate are based on demographics: while nearly 80% of Americans know someone who is gay, only 48% know a Mormon. "I'm not intending it to harm the religion," protested Fred Karger, founder of Californians Against Hate, in an interview with Vick. "I think they do wonderful things. Nicest people. My single goal is to get them out of the same-sex marriage business



An ad run on the websites of some newspapers on the East Coast.

and back to helping hurricane victims.”

“Mormon officials have tried to stay out of the controversy that followed the California vote, when the church’s prominent role in the marriage fight became clear,” Vick reported. “A spokeswoman in Salt Lake City declined to say whether the church is involved in debates going on in states such as New Jersey and New York, except to say that leaders remain intent on preserving the ‘divine institution’ of marriage between man and woman.”

Suspicions that the Church is working secretly to fight same-sex marriage are encouraged, Vick proposes, by the way the Church fought same-sex marriage in Hawaii during the 1990s. Californians Against Hate has leaked ten memos from the Hawaii campaign which appear to have been written by the late Loren C. Dunn, who was then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. “We have organized things so the Church contribution was used in an area of coalition activity that does not have to be reported,” Dunn allegedly wrote. The Church has not disputed the memos.

Gary C. Lawrence, who helped organize the California campaign against same-sex marriage and recently wrote a book about the Mormon image, lamented to Vick that “we’re upside down on our image. People have misperceptions of us because of ignorance, because of the history of polygamy, and because we organize quickly, which scares some people. The collection of negatives they are willing to apply to us suggests that they view us as a growing threat.”

GAYS FIND INSPIRATION IN . . . UTAH?

WHILE THE *TIME* and *Washington Post* stories focus on the situation in California and on the East Coast, an article published in *The Nation* pointed to the ironies experienced by gays and lesbians living in Utah—an ardent red state with a Mormon governor who recently came out in favor of civil unions for same-sex couples.

Author Lisa Duggan, a professor of cultural studies at New York University, and a lesbian, describes her time living in Salt Lake City last fall, writing that she was “repeatedly blown away by the progressive politics and outright queerness of the capital city, which is about 40 percent Mormon.”

Duggan’s article focused on the Common Ground Initiative, a campaign launched by gay organizations in Utah to push for health care, workplace protections, and nondiscrimination in housing. The campaign was a response to LDS leaders’ statements that the Church does not oppose civil rights for gay and lesbian people—only same-sex marriage.

The Common Ground Initiative advocates rights not only for same-sex couples, but for any two people living under the same roof. That strategy, according to Duggan, put conservative opponents on the defensive because it broadened the scope of concern to include the needs of people living in non-conjugal households regardless of their sexual orientation.

“My months in the Beehive State have taught me that a

COLBERT WEIGHS IN



Screenshot from an ad parody produced by The Colbert Report.

AS REPORTERS AND BLOGGERS FIX THEIR eyes on Mormon involvement in the movement to halt same-sex marriage, Comedy Central’s mock-news commentary *The Colbert Report* targets the LDS Church in a spoof of the “There’s a Storm Gathering” ad produced by the National Organization for Marriage (NOM). In the original ad, somber individuals standing against a backdrop of dark storm clouds warn viewers that legalizing same-sex marriage would take away personal freedoms (such as the freedom of parents to control what their children learn about homosexuality) and would pressure professionals such as doctors and pastors to violate their conscience.

To introduce the spoof on his Comedy Central show, Stephen Colbert replayed the original ad with the comment, “I love that ad. It’s like watching *The 700 Club* and *The Weather Channel* at the same time.” Colbert then ran his spoof in which, among other comedic jabs, a purportedly heterosexual husband becomes infatuated with another man as the rain from the “gathering storm” begins to fall, clinging to the man’s muscular body. At the end of the spoof, a voiceover announces, “Paid for by generous donations from an anonymous group that may or may not be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

Colbert’s spoof spawned a number of copycat parodies which are now making the rounds on YouTube and similar video-sharing sites. But Colbert’s joking insinuation that the LDS Church may have been behind the NOM ad may turn out to have hit the truth. Chino Blanco, a blogger who has been tracking the relationship between the LDS Church and the National Organization for Marriage, has claimed at CHINOBLANCO.COM that at least seven of the actors featured in either the NOM ad or the audition reels (which Blanco claims to have obtained) are Mormons from the Gilbert, Arizona, area.

call for basic fairness and full civil equality, made in terms that include queers but are not limited to them, can rally progressive action in even the most arid conditions,” Duggan reflects. “Such outside-the-box strategy, focusing on concrete material benefits that cut across constituencies, can help sidestep the polarizing ferocity of gay-marriage politics, which engulfed California last year.”

Duggan concludes that advocates of equal civil rights for all “might do something truly weird and definitely queer: look to Utah for inspiration.”

ON THE ROAD TO MASSACHUSETTS

MEANWHILE, THE 22 June 2009 issue of *The New Yorker* got in a jab of its own, publishing a brief piece of humor by Paul Rudnick that sends a fictional Mormon family to Massachusetts, which legalized gay marriage in 2004.

The family finds that the state has become completely gay: erecting a statue to Rachel Maddow, engraving Barney Frank’s profile on the quarter, requiring a fifty percent “gay discount” (which, driven by Mormon frugality, the family takes advantage of by referring to the dad as Sharon), and refusing to deliver mail to mailboxes without rainbows painted on them.

The family tries to take refuge in an LDS chapel, but the sacrament meeting opens with songs from *Billy Elliot*, a musical about a boy aspiring to the ballet.

(However, it is entirely possible that the Mormon family accidentally stumbled into the chapel of another faith, as the hymns were led by a “minister” and a collection plate was passed.)

RETURNED MISSIONARIES WANT COMPASSION FOR IMMIGRANTS

A GROUP OF RETURNED MISSIONARIES HAS launched Missionaries for Compassion Towards Immigrants, an advocacy group aiming at “demonstrat[ing] our opposition to excessively punitive laws, not commensurate with the gravity of the offenses,” affecting Utah’s undocumented population.

The group was formed shortly before the Utah legislature passed Utah State Senate Bill 81. Under the new law, county sheriffs are required to “make a reasonable effort” to determine the legal status of anyone jailed for a felony or for DUI. The bill makes hiding or transporting an undocumented immigrant more than 100 miles a class A misdemeanor and prevents companies contracting or subcontracting with a government employer from hiring undocumented workers.

Missionaries for Compassion Towards Immigrants oppose SB 81. The bill “show[s] nothing but a lack of compassion and likely will discourage people from receiving the Gospel who [are] already here, may have come for economic reasons, but as we know, so often truly come for spiritual reasons,” the group wrote on their website at

MISSIONARIESFORCOMPASSION.WORDPRESS.COM. “They didn’t know what we know about Article of Faith 12 when they came over, but they are looking for saving ordinances, and if they are working to deal with their documentation status, we know that’s enough to faithfully pass a baptismal interview. Let us not be hypocrites.”

Ron Mortensen, a returned missionary himself and a supporter of SB 81, says the group’s stance is hypocritical. “You can be baptized if you’re an illegal alien using stolen documents and someone else’s identity and committing perjury on a I-19 form, but they couldn’t be baptized for drinking a cup of tea,” Mortensen told the *Salt Lake Tribune*. “If [Missionaries for Compassion] are so concerned about these individuals, are they willing to give them their names, Social Security number and dates of birth so they can limit the damage [undocumented immigrants] are doing to other people in order to get jobs?”

While LDS leaders did not announce an official position on the bill, the Church actively proselytizes among immigrants across the U.S. regardless of their legal status. In a 2008 event at Westminster College, Elder Marlin Jensen of the First Quorum of the Seventy asked Utah lawmakers to “slow down, step back, and assess the implications and human costs involved” in legislation regarding undocumented immigrants (See SUNSTONE, April 2008: 76-77).

PARENTS ASKED TO DROP MISSIONARIES CURBSIDE

AFTER THREE MISSIONARIES-IN-TRAINING AT THE Provo MTC were diagnosed with the H1N1 (swine flu) virus, Church officials announced a change in the missionary drop-off policy. Rather than escort the new missionary inside for a farewell devotional, parents and family members are now asked to say their goodbyes outside.

“We’ll do something to mitigate that,” promised Elder Richard G. Hinckley, executive director of the missionary department. “We hope to produce a nice little DVD that we can send out with the call package showing the MTC and what we do there . . . without the cumbersome logistics of having them actually come into the building.”

The former policy brought an additional 1,100 people into the facility each week.

FOUNDATION FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY LAUNCHES LDS CHAPTER

THE FOUNDATION FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY announced in April the formation of a Mormon chapter. Dedicated to “decreasing disrespect and ill will between people who adhere to different religious or ideological beliefs and practices,” the Foundation was started in 2001 by Charles Randall Paul and is guided by a multi-religious board of advisors. Former SUNSTONE editor Dan Wotherspoon is the Foundation’s director of operations.

The official launching of the Mormon chapter took place on 20 June at a retreat held at the cabin of the England family in Provo Canyon. The retreat was attended by more than twenty LDS authors and scholars, including Brian Birch, Sharon Adams, Claudia and Richard Bushman, James Faulconer, Roger Keller, Terryl and Fiona Givens, Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, Daniel C. Peterson, Jana K. Riess, J. Bonner Ritchie, and Sterling Van Wagenen. Among the topics discussed at the retreat were proposals for fellowships

designed to offer opportunities for Mormons to become “religiously bi-lingual.”

The Foundation intends to include chapters from a wide spectrum of religious traditions, as well as from non-religious ideological groups such as those who embrace secular humanist perspectives. The evangelical Christian chapter may be ready to be launched at the end of the summer.

More information about the Foundation can be found at FIDWEB.ORG.

People

Deceased. Salt Lake City bookseller Sam Weller, 88, of causes incident to old age. Born in Germany, Weller immigrated to the U.S. after World War I, worked for years in his father’s Zion’s Book Store in Salt Lake City and in 1946, began to run the store on his own. Renowned for its vast collection of new and used Mormon books, Sam Weller’s Zion Bookstore has been located at 254 S. Main for almost five decades, but plans are underway to move the iconic store to a location where it might better compete with chain bookstores.



Shaken. But safe, Apostle Russell M. Nelson, 84, after being assaulted by armed robbers at the mission home in Maputo, Mozambique, last May. Also attacked were his wife Wendy Watson Nelson, William and Shanna Parmley of the Africa Southeast Area Presidency, and hosts Blair and Cindy Packard. The group suffered cuts and bruises, and Cindy Packard suffered a broken arm during the attack.

Deceased. *Fascinating Womanhood* author Helen B. Andelin, 89, who rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s for urging women to embrace traditional gender roles as mothers and wives. Andelin, who unapologetically asked wives to have a “girlish trust” in their husbands and to express themselves through “childlike sauciness” when mistreated, coined the expression “domestic goddess,” which comic Roseanne Barr, a Salt Lake native, later incorporated into her standup routine.



Hosted. At the BYU Jerusalem Center, five administrative staff members to Pope Benedict XVI, during a papal visit to the Holy Land. According to the center’s assistant director, S. Kent Brown, the LDS church has a good relationship with Apostolic Nuncio Antonio Franco, whose official residence is next door to the center.

Arrested. Returning missionary Jose Calzadillas, 24, a foreign-born U.S. resident, for attempting to board a plane with

improper documentation after serving a mission in Ohio. The story brought media attention to the work of the LDS Church among undocumented immigrants. “We’re not agents of the immigration service and we don’t pretend to be,” LDS apostle Jeffrey R. Holland recently told the *Salt Lake Tribune*, “and we also won’t break the law.” The LDS Church supported a 2005 federal law that gives churches legal immunity for having undocumented immigrants do volunteer service, including serving missions.

Laid off. RONALD E. ROMIG, 60, from his position as archivist for the Community of Christ, a victim of budgetary cuts. At the church’s headquarters in Independence, Missouri, Romig curated a collection which includes priceless items such as the original manuscript of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. A Sunstone friend and symposium participant, Romig has helped scores of researchers from all branches of the Latter Day Saint movement and has helped build bridges between LDS and RLDS scholars. “It’s been a great privilege working in this position,” Romig told the AP. “I’ve developed great respect for the different ecclesiastical expressions of Mormonism. I find that each perspective brings something important.”



Indicted. LDS businessman, radio show host, and blogger Rick Koerber, after being accused of running a \$50 million Ponzi scheme. Koerber, who has often stated that “God is a capitalist” and declared that “capitalism is the foundation of celestial law,” is believed to have duped scores of his Utah County neighbors into taking out second mortgages on their homes and investing the proceeds with him in a scheme that has led many to lose their life savings.



Appointed. Chhay Leang Suy, a high councilor in the Church’s Phnom Penh Cambodia South District, to be an adviser to the President of the National Assembly of Cambodia. Suy, who converted in 1995 and served a mission in the U.S. from 1997 to 1999, will be responsible for advising on city infrastructure, public health services and educational improvement.