



CORNUCOPIA

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Mormon musings

THE WEDDING RING

ON A SUMMER EVENING IN 2001, I GOT ON ONE knee in a park near my parents' home and asked a wonderful woman if she would marry me. She said yes, and in that moment, we were engaged. She intended to marry me, and I intended to marry her. I did not know what her preferences for a ring were, so I had not purchased one. I suggested that together we could pick something she liked. She said that would be fine.

The next day, she called several of her friends to tell them the news. A couple of friends asked, "Did he give you a ring?" She explained that we were going to purchase it later.

"Well, then, your engagement isn't official," they replied. "You *must* have a ring, or it doesn't count."

She told me about this conversation, and we were both confused about why her friends would take the ring so literally. We both knew our commitment to each other was genuine. Why did we need a ring to make it "official?"

I bought her an engagement ring with the traditional diamond. We picked out my wedding band, which she gave to me at our marriage ceremony. I chose a plain yellow gold band because it was essentially identical to the band my dad wears. I remember my dad taking his ring off to let me play with it when I was little. Even at that young age, I knew the ring meant my mom and dad were married.

My wife and I have been married just over nine years now, and I still wear my ring every day. As I type, I can see it on my finger. It reminds me of my wife and how much I love her. It reminds me of the commitment I made to her and our children. When I work in the garden, it would sometimes be a little easier if I took the ring off, but I typically leave it, just because I like it. One of the first times I scrubbed in for surgery, I forgot to take it off and caught an earful from the scrub tech and the surgeon. Now when I am in surgery, I tie the ring to the drawstring of my scrubs. Otherwise, it can be found on my left ring finger, just where my wife put it when we married.

As long as I can remember, I have known that the significance of the wedding ring is socially constructed. I imagine most people (some of my wife's friends excepted) recognize this. In the years since my marriage, I have learned that the

groom's ring and the addition of a diamond to the engagement ring are largely the result of successful marketing by the jewelry industry. I have also learned about the ugly way some diamonds are procured.

If I decide I do not want to wear my ring anymore, I am not worried that it will keep me out of heaven. I am not afraid that my marriage will end. God will not be angry if I stop wearing my ring. Nevertheless, I continue to enjoy the symbolism of my wedding band. I wear it for me.

The LDS Church has many rich and meaningful symbols. These are expressed through various media: scripture, meetings, commandments, ordinances, garments, and temples. I continue to enjoy many of these symbols; they provide meaning to my life. Yet, as with the wedding ring, I have learned that these symbols have many more roots in human culture than I had previously imagined. Also, I have come to realize that just as a beautiful diamond can have an ugly history, so there are some disconcerting aspects of the Church's origins and current practices. Instead of feeling a need to discard my faith tradition, however, these realizations have allowed me to enjoy the symbolism in the Church in new ways. I am not a slave to these symbols. I participate in the Church at the level that contributes the most meaning and joy to my life. I live the gospel for me.

I declare that the wedding ring is true. It is a symbol of commitment in marriage that is of benefit and meaning to me and many others. The Church is true in the same way.

GREG MOELLMER
Salt Lake City, Utah

Note: An earlier version of this essay appeared on the support forum: STAYLDS.COM.

Ward stories

IN DEFENSE OF POLYGAMY— WELL, SORT OF . . .

I WAS VERY SURPRISED. SISTER PRICE WAS KNOWN not only for her dynamic, superbly organized Relief Society lessons, she was also a voice of authority in the ward. People rarely questioned her on points of doctrine or opposed her opinions.

Sister Price meticulously prepared each lesson. Being a scriptionist and a Church history buff, she was an extremely confident instructor.

1886



2086?



Nonetheless, her lesson on the Church's earlier practice of polygamy wasn't going over well. Despite Sister Price's learned explanation that plural marriage had been sanctioned by God in Old and New Testament times as well as in the early days of this dispensation—and is perhaps destined to be part of the order of the hereafter—not one soul in our Relief Society seemed ready to embrace it today.

"Will is a good husband," Eliza announced to the class, "but he can barely keep up with *me*. Besides, on this point I'm selfish. I don't want to share him with anyone." Heads bobbed in agreement.

Normally, I shy away from controversy. Today, however, I sensed Sister Price was headed for trouble and decided to help her cause as best I could.

"This may surprise many of you," I offered, "but I can see some very good points to polygamy." Before the shocked silence evaporated, I rushed to explain. "Polygamy meant that

some wives were free to pursue careers while sister wives took care of the domestic responsibilities. And today single women in the Church far outnumber the men."

The silence was slowly dissolving into whispers of concern. Undaunted, I continued.

"But like you, I would hate to share a husband with another wife. What I'm really in favor of is polyandry—you know, multiple husbands."

"You see," I explained, "One of the reasons I'm still single is that I can't find the perfect man to marry. But if I had the option of marrying two half-perfect men, or four quarter-perfect . . . things would really open up."

"Polyandry would certainly help me," Kate said. "I just can't decide between Don, Roy, and Lee. If I could just marry all three. . . ."

The discomfort on Sister Price's face was beginning to soften. This was a topic on which she was prepared to shed light. "It isn't very well known," she said, "but polyandry was practiced in a limited fashion when the Saints were in Nauvoo."

"Several women who practiced polyandry remained with their first husband," she continued. "Many of these women were plural wives to their second husband. Mary Elizabeth Rollins became a plural wife to Joseph Smith while she was married to a non-member, Adam Lightner. Nancy Marinda Johnson was married to both Orson Hyde and Joseph Smith.

"Zina D. Huntington was married to both Henry B. Jacobs and Joseph Smith. Henry didn't mind too much as Zina continued to live with him. But on the way to Utah, Brigham Young sent Henry on a mission and decided Zina should join *his* plural wives. Henry was so heartbroken that I only hope he is with Zina in the hereafter. Sisters, can you imagine having a name as long as Zina's? Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young."

Sister Price's face saddened. "Overall, the practice of polyandry wasn't very successful. Henry Jacobs and others suffered great emotional turmoil over sharing their wives with another man. One polyandrous husband, Hector McLean, actually murdered his wife Elenore's other husband, Parley P. Pratt. It appears that Elenore intended to divorce Hector, but Hector took his anger out on Parley."

"It may have been a signaling problem," I suggested. "There needs to be a way for each husband to signal to the others that the home is occupied. I've read that in some Maserabi cultures, a husband leaves his spear outside the en-

trance to the dung hut.”

Jenny suddenly brightened up; she had recently taken an anthropology class on comparative marriage and family structure. “It’s true,” she said. “A spear or a shield outside the hut lets the other husbands know it’s best to find another place to sleep. In Central Asia, the Mimions tied their horse near the front door as a signal. The Htimsams simply tethered a goat to fend off the other husbands.”

“Thank you, Jenny, I had no idea. Perhaps my next undertaking will be anthropology,” Sister Price said, smiling. “Unfortunately, I don’t think many of our husbands have access to spears, shields, horses, or goats.”

“Perhaps they could leave their scriptures or priesthood manual on the porch,” Eliza suggested.

“What about a tie?” Kate offered.

Beth had the best idea. “Car keys would work well,” she said. “That way while one is home the other could use the car. A Porsche would keep everyone happy,” she beamed.

“I can see the possibilities,” said Sarah. “Dan is a terrific provider and father, but sometimes I feel like I could use another husband who would go with me to the opera and ballet.”

Sister Price started to make a list on the blackboard. “Okay, sisters. One husband to provide financially, one who is good with kids, one for the arts . . . don’t make me write this list alone.”

Hands shot up. Everyone had something to offer. The number of husbands “needed” varied with each woman’s interests and activities.

“Someone handy around the house,” said Susan. “Two husbands would be plenty for me.”

“One who likes to travel,” Linda urged. “Perhaps one for each continent. Hmm, I guess seven or eight for me.”

Shauna suggested one husband who cooks and another who cleans.

“Are there men who truly enjoy shopping?” asked Eliza.

“Don’t forget religion,” Carolyn said. “One husband to go to church with; the others could be non-Mormons.”

That’s one of the benefits of polyandry I hadn’t fully considered. I could marry one of the reluctant, commitment-cautious Mormon men I know, who might well prefer a part-time marriage, then add a more suitable all-season mate from the world.

Polyandry would also be beneficial for our same-sex-attracted brethren in search of an understanding woman to marry. They are men whose creativity and sensitivity I adore, but, for obvious reasons, would never consider for anything beyond friendship. A polyandrous marriage could ensure that the afflicted brother will qualify for exaltation without placing an undue burden on his wife.

By the time the lesson was over, it appeared that even though no one wanted another wife around the house, everyone recognized the advantages of having another husband or two. Especially if he were good at . . . aaah . . . uhh . . . umm . . .

Sister Price was radiant by the end of the lesson. “Sisters,

I usually claim to learn more preparing a lesson than receiving one. But today, I learned a great deal teaching this one. Just to end on a scriptural note, it might seem that verse 63 of section 132 in the Doctrine and Covenants is a prohibition against polyandry. But, don’t forget, we *do* believe in continuing revelation.”

The smile on Sister Price’s face made me wonder just who she had in mind for her plural husbands. Only time will tell.

MIRIAM A. SMITH
San Francisco, California

NOTE: All names have been changed to protect the innocent. In fact, this lesson never actually took place—really, Bishop, I promise.

Scripture notes

In this regular column, Michael Vinson, a master’s graduate of the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge and a frequent devotional speaker at Sunstone symposiums, delves into personal and scholarly aspects of scripture.

JESUS AND NIETZSCHE ON “BECOMING A CHILD”

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

—MATTHEW 18:1–3

WHEN I READ THIS VERSE, I MUST CONFESS that the disciples’ question reminds me of active Latter-day Saints who aspire to worldly success, whether it is buying a larger home in a more prestigious neighborhood, career advancement and recognition, or a more visible or higher Church calling. I know most Mormons claim to have no ambition for Church callings, but I think many secretly view leadership callings as a visible manifestation of God’s pleasure with how they have conducted their lives. But is this practice of measuring the results of an active life in the Church what Jesus was actually preaching against?

In order to understand why Jesus taught about becoming as little children, and what the disciples might have thought of his admonition, it is helpful to look at the question in the context of the Roman world. Nothing was more important in the first-century Mediterranean culture than social rank and standing.

A man’s rank and social standing were immediately obvious to everyone through the boots or sandals he could afford, and the robe or toga he was dressed in. Many mornings, especially when they needed a favor, men of minor

status would go to the homes of socially superior patrons, where they would wait in the foyer to be called in (the order of their turn determined by their social standing compared to the others who were waiting). In return for a man's political support, his patron might lend him money or help him obtain a position for a relative. Likewise, the seating arrangements in dining halls and banquets followed a strict order, the most privileged positions at the table closest to the host.

Even first-century Jews had rank and social standing in their religious world. Although we do not have any contemporary records from the Pharisees or Sadducees, we do have some from the Qumran sect, who left the Dead Sea Scrolls (and lived in the same century Jesus did). This sect annually re-evaluated the standing of each member, re-determining their rank in the congregation, their speaking order at meetings, and their hierarchy of seating in the banquet hall.

In this socially stratified world, it is no wonder that Jesus's disciples were confused about their standing. In contrast to everything they had observed in other social situations, Jesus seemed to treat strangers as old friends and didn't give any visible sign of recognizing rank among the disciples or indicating any favorites among them. It's no wonder they finally asked, in effect, how will we know who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven—another question likely lay beneath this one: Lord, please tell us how we are doing, and which of us pleases you the most.

How surprising to them, then, when Jesus seemed to ignore their question and called a child into their midst. A child was among the least of individuals in the Roman world; even among Jews, children had a very low status. A Roman father had ultimate power over a child's life. At birth, the midwife would pass the child to the father—if he declined to take it in his arms, it would be placed in the public market for anyone to take (many of these children, if they survived, became slaves). While Jews did not practice this—indeed their devotion to their children was something of a wonder to Romans—their children did not have any status or rank. Jesus tells the disciples that except they be converted and become as little children, they will not even enter into the kingdom, much less have any rank there.

Let us think for a moment about what Jesus meant by this use of “convert.” He is obviously not telling the disciples that they need to convert in the sense of accepting the gospel—they have already done that. The Greek word used here for *convert* is στρεφω, literally, *turned*. One early example of this usage is from Plato, who used this word after the parable of the cave, in which he called education a “turning” of the soul to the brightest good.

BEFORE CONSIDERING THE implications of what Jesus meant by telling the disciples to “turn” as children, I would like to bring into the conversation what another philosopher said about the child as a phase in the human life. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich

Nietzsche introduces the metaphor of “The Three Metamorphoses.” He speaks through the character of Zarathustra, named after the ancient Persian prophet. Nietzsche's prophet teaches that each individual will undergo three metamorphoses *en route* to discovering the meaning of his or her life. In the first part of life, the spirit desires embodiment and becomes a *camel*. As a camel, it is responsible for carrying loads and learning obedience. The comparison with our own lives seems obvious.

But at some point, the camel desires to be free, and when it realizes that desire, it becomes a *lion*. The lion has but one quest: to find a dragon on whose every scale are written the words: “Thou Shalt,” a metaphor for the social and religious obligations placed on us by others. The lion must kill this dragon.

As it slays the dragon, the lion is transformed into a *child*.

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion cannot do? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yes-saying.

Nietzsche explains that the sacred “Yes-saying” is needed because the spirit now can will its own will, which is a precursor to conquering his own world.

WHAT DOES ZARATHUSTRA'S child have in common with the child called by Jesus? I like to think that Jesus and Nietzsche both were trying to teach that we must become child-like not by abdicating responsibilities, but by abandoning our concern about the social expectations of others. We should learn to live our life according to our *own* expectations, not to attain social status or rank, and especially not to impress others.

Jesus taught his disciples, with a child as an object lesson, that instead of worrying about which calling we will advance to in the Church, and being secretly gratified that we have been chosen (thus giving us some earthly evidence of our heavenly rank), we need to “turn” from caring about our heavenly status. We need to abandon all desires for rank and social advancement, especially within the Church. Until we learn to be the child who can give the sacred “Yes” to life without caring about social position in the eyes of others, we will not even have a life worth living, much less be capable of attaining Jesus's kingdom in heaven.

MICHAEL VINSON
Star Valley, Wyoming

Mormon Musings

THE CORE OF THE MATTER

RECENTLY I HEARD A SPEAKER IN CHURCH SAY, “You can count the seeds in an apple, but you can't count the apples in a seed.” The remark got me

thinking way beyond the intent of the truism (a bad habit of mine).

The aphorism does say something nice about a person's potential and how big things can come from little ones. But after some thought, I realized that you *can* count the apples in most seeds: zero, nada. For one thing, seeds don't turn into trees if you try to count the apples in them. Once you've looked inside a seed, it is dead and will never have an apple "inside" it. Furthermore, not one in a million seeds ever makes an apple. The most perfect apples go to market and are eaten, their seeds going down the drain. Good apples rarely have a chance to seed; mostly the rotten ones on the ground do. And that happens only with great luck, since most seeds don't sprout, and those that do are often eaten by animals in the orchard or mowed or plucked out by the gardener who prefers to raise apple trees from grafts anyway. Even if you were to save an apple seed and try to grow it, you would need a great deal of luck, not to mention skill, to succeed. It would be an even longer shot to keep the tree alive long enough for it to produce apples.

Maybe that is why so few of us ever really reach our full potential. The chances against it are so great we can only get there by accepting assistance from the hand of God.

KIM BATEMAN
Spring City, Utah

Adventures of a Mormon Bookseller

In this regular *Cornucopia* column, Curt Bench, owner and operator of Benchmark Books (BENCHMARKBOOKS.COM), a specialty bookstore in Salt Lake City that focuses primarily on used and rare Mormon books, tells stories—both humorous and appalling—from his 35-plus years in the LDS book business.

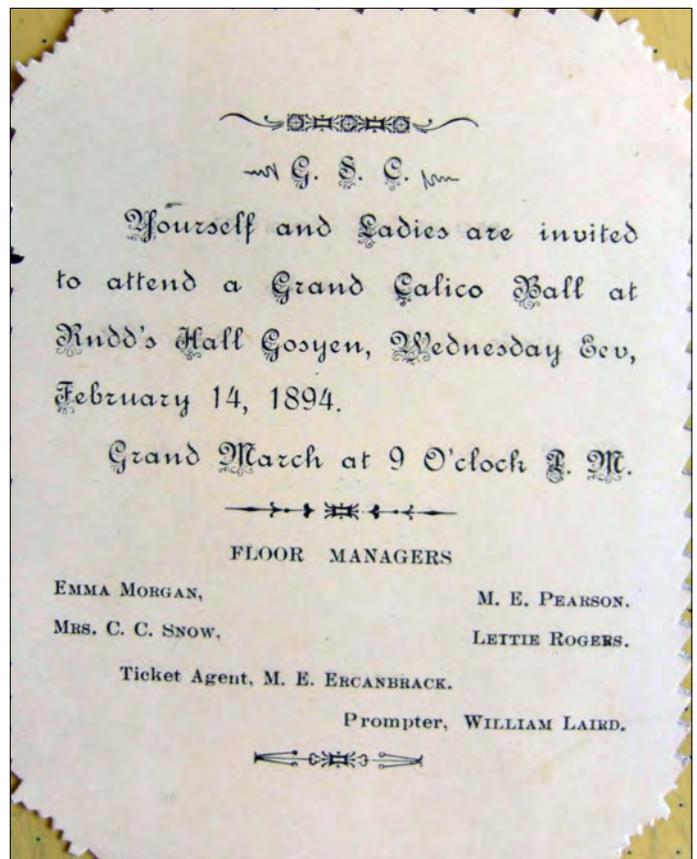
VERY SOCIAL LIVES!

BEING A MORMON BOOKSELLER MAY NOT MEAN I get regular paychecks, paid vacations, or a company-sponsored retirement plan, but I do get the ben-



efit of seeing some fascinating pieces of LDS history. Some of the most interesting of these involve the period of Mormon history when polygamy was practiced openly.

As you may recall, in 1852 the LDS Church publicly announced what many already knew: that the Church taught and practiced what it called the principle of "plural marriage," or simply "the Principle." This announcement generated a great deal of political and religious fallout, but not all was grim. "Far away, in the West" the Saints were at a relatively safe distance from their detractors and enemies (for a while, anyway) and were thus able to practice their religion and customs without outside interference. They carried on a fairly normal existence, with a robust social life—dances, balls, plays, picnics, parties, and socials. For the more formal affairs, the organizers would print and send out invitations, which often contained a unique feature: In addition to inviting a man and wife, they usually included wording such as: "Yourself and ladies are invited . . .," or "_____ and Ladies are invited to . . .," or "Tickets—\$2.50 per Couple, Each Additional Lady, \$1.00." One of the examples shown here was for a "Relief Society Party" in the Fifteenth Ward Hall in 1869. Admission was \$1.50 per couple, "additional lady, 75 cents"—a bargain. The other example shows an invitation to a "Grand Calico Ball" addressed to "yourself and ladies" in 1894, four years *after* the Manifesto. To be fair, the "ladies" mentioned here could have included daughters or women other than the man's plural wives, but speculating about what it meant is all part of the fun. I know of similar



invitations issued outside of Utah to a gentleman and “ladies,” but most read “and lady.”

One invitation (not pictured here) for a Mormon Battalion Anniversary Ball held in 1867 cost \$5.00 per couple, with each additional lady being \$1.00. The committee consisted of such polygamous luminaries as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, and Wilford Woodruff. The document advertises “refreshment saloons” that would be set up to furnish “tea, coffee, sandwiches, ice cream, pastry, &c. &c. to the guests.” Now *there’s* a Church party!

A place for every truth

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.”

CALLING AN APOSTLE

IT IS ALWAYS FASCINATING TO GET A PEEK BEHIND the scenes when a new member of the Twelve is called. What follows weaves together stories and reflections on the events leading to the 1919 call of Elder Melvin J. Ballard.

With the death of President Joseph F. Smith on 19 November 1918, Heber J. Grant became the seventh President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He soon called Anthon M. Lund and Charles W. Penrose as his counselors. One of President Grant’s other major tasks was filling the vacancy in the Quorum of Twelve left by President Smith’s death and Grant’s own elevation to prophet. According to President Grant’s biographer, Francis M. Gibbons, Grant intended to call General Richard Whitehead Young. Young was a distinguished military man, a grandson of Brigham Young, and a successful attorney who had served for a time as an Associate Justice of the Philippine Supreme Court. Young was a faithful Latter-day Saint and, by all accounts, worthy of consideration to this office.

According to Gibbons, President Grant spoke with his counselors, who also agreed with his choice. Grant wrote the name “Richard W. Young” on a piece of paper and intended to bring his name up for consideration in the 5 January 1919 meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. “But for a reason he could never fully explain,” Gibbons writes, “he was unable to do so; instead, he presented the name of Melvin J. Ballard, president of the Northwestern States Mission, a man with whom he had very little personal contact.”¹

Of Elder Ballard’s calling and ordination, Elder James E.

Talmage wrote the following in his journal entry for 7 January 1919:

At 10:30 a.m. the First Presidency and Twelve assembled in the Temple in their usual council room. In accordance with action taken on Sunday last [5 January], Elder Melvin Joseph Ballard, heretofore president of the Western States Mission, was or-



Elder Melvin J. Ballard

daind an Apostle and set apart as one of the Council of the Twelve. . . . President Heber J. Grant officiating in the ordination and setting apart.

We have a convincing testimony that Elder Ballard is the Lord’s choice for this place. He has been one of the best of our Mission Presidents, and the dominating theme in all his preaching has been that of the Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. His humility and affable personality have tended to endear him to the missionaries and resident saints in his Mission, as also to non-members of the Church. We are all profoundly grateful to have him numbered with us in the Council. His brief address of acceptance immediately prior to his ordination will not be forgotten by any one of those present.

One sad note that also perhaps reflects the wisdom of the choice of Melvin J. Ballard to this position is that Richard W. Young passed away from appendicitis less than a year later. Elder Melvin J. Ballard went on to serve in the Quorum for twenty-one years until his death on 30 July 1939. He is the grandfather of current apostle, M. Russell Ballard.

NOTE

1. Francis Gibbons, *Heber J. Grant: Man of Steel; Prophet of God*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 175.