

MORMON
EXPERIENCE
SCHOLARSHIP
ISSUES & ART

SUNSTONE

**SEEING JOSEPH
SMITH: THE
CHANGING
IMAGE OF THE
MORMON
PROPHET** by
Robert A. Rees
(p.18)

**TRACKING THE
SINCERE
BELIEVER**
Laurie F. Maffly-
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obsession with
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undergoes surgery;
Utah's "Origins of
life" debate; film
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more! (p.74)

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SUBMITTING PROPOSALS

Those interested in being a part of the program this year should submit a proposal which includes a session title, 100-word abstract, a separate summary of the topic's relevance and importance to Mormon studies, and the name and a brief vita for all proposed presenters.

DEADLINE

In order to receive first-round consideration, **PROPOSALS SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY 1 MAY 2006**. Sessions will be accepted according to standards of excellence in scholarship, thought, and expression. All subjects, ideas, and persons to be discussed must be treated with respect and intelligent discourse; proposals with a sarcastic or belittling tone will be rejected.

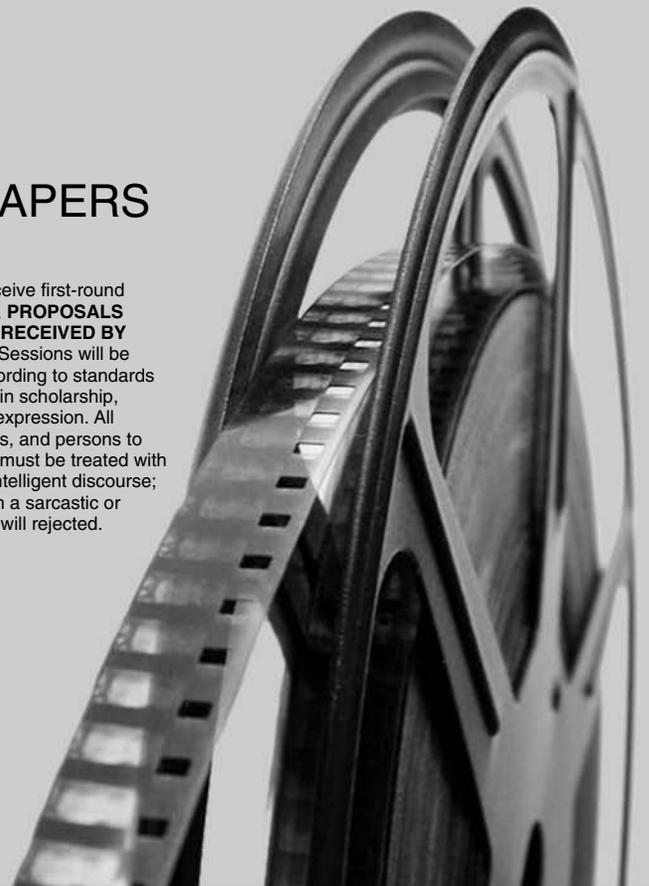
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SUNSTONE

MORMON EXPERIENCE, SCHOLARSHIP, ISSUES, & ART

DECEMBER 2005

Issue 140



SUNSTONE (ISSN 0363-1370) is published by The Sunstone Education Foundation, Inc., a non-profit corporation with no official ties to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Articles represent the opinions of the writers only.

SUNSTONE is indexed in the *Index to Book Reviews in Religion and Religion Indexes: RIO/RIT/IBBR 1975—on CD-ROM*.

Submissions may be on IBM-PC compatible computer discs (MS Word or WordPerfect format), or by e-mail attachment. Submissions should not exceed 8,000 words and must be accompanied by a signed letter giving permission for the manuscript to be filed in the Sunstone Collection at the University of Utah Marriott Library (all literary rights are retained by authors). Manuscripts will not be returned; authors will be notified concerning acceptance within ninety days.

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343 N. Third West
Salt Lake City, UT 84103-1215
(801) 355-5926
fax: (801) 355-4043
email: info@sunstoneonline.com
website: www.sunstoneonline.com

United States subscriptions to SUNSTONE are \$36 for 6 issues, \$65 for 12 issues, and \$90 for 18 issues. International subscriptions are \$48 for 6 issues; \$89 for 12 issues; \$126 for 18 issues. All payments must be in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank. All international subscriptions will be sent via surface mail. Bona fide student and missionary subscriptions are \$10 less than the above rates. A \$10 service charge will be deducted from refund amount on cancellations.

Printed by **MOORE WALLACE**
AN RR DONNELLEY COMPANY

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Front Cover Art by J. Mark Inman; Back Cover Art by Brian Kubarycz

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The mission of The Sunstone Education Foundation is to sponsor open forums of Mormon thought and experience. Under the motto, "Faith Seeking Understanding," we examine and express the rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life. We encourage humanitarian service, honest inquiry, and responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people and what they hold sacred.

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YEA, YEA  NAY, NAY



MANY subscribers contacted us at the office about their receiving a second copy of the November 2005 issue several weeks after the first one. For those who wondered but didn't call, the second issue, as stated on the table of contents page of that second copy, is a replacement for the first, which had several printing defects that we at SUNSTONE deemed unacceptable. The second edition represents the way the magazine was designed to look.

Again, we express our thanks to the press representatives we worked with in Salt Lake City as well as at the Las Vegas printing facility who responded to our concerns in a very forthright and professional way.

UNFETTERED ACCESS

BLAKE OSTLER REMINDS ME OF THE loveable, well-meaning brother who sits in the back of my Sunday School class and tells us the latest word from scientists about life, the universe, and everything—and all of it based on what he's read in the newspaper. Sunstone is the indulgent teacher who lets him hold forth.

For the past several issues, we've seen Ostler's speculations achieve seemingly unfettered access to SUNSTONE's pages. In the most recent issue, Ostler's letter, "Simon Says, But That Doesn't Make It So" (SUNSTONE, November 2005, 4), misrepresents the character, intent, and writing of the only molecular geneticist to write a book-length study of DNA and its relevance to the LDS Church. Yet SUNSTONE has not allowed Dr. Southerton the same courtesy of being able to respond immediately to critiques that Ostler has enjoyed for the past year.

The Sunstone Education Foundation's mission statement pledges to encourage "responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people." And yet Ostler disparages everyone. He continually disrespects other people's approaches to these complex issues and even writes negatively about SUNSTONE itself (Times and Seasons blog). I have a hard time understanding why SUNSTONE has allowed Ostler fifteen pages over the last year to pontificate on a topic he holds no expertise in—nor has he, according to his own statement to me last year, even read Southerton's book.

Clearly Ostler's agenda is not to enlighten but to perpetuate scientifically untenable notions in order to continue to muddy the issues related to DNA studies and their

relevance to traditional LDS claims about the Book of Mormon. I encourage SUNSTONE to carefully consider its responsibility to readers and not allow its pages to be a venue for irresponsible, mean-spirited personal attacks or a place where the non-specialist is given the last word, as entertaining as Ostler may be. I look forward to a reasoned response to Southerton's conclusions but have yet to find it in SUNSTONE.

TOM KIMBALL
American Fork, Utah

Editor's Note: As announced in the November 2005 SUNSTONE, discussions about specific issues related to Book of Mormon historicity, including the relevance of DNA findings, have been moved to www.SunstoneBlog.com. We welcome all interested persons to continue the discussion of these issues there.

UNFAIR REPRESENTATION

AS ALWAYS, MARK D. THOMAS shows himself in the November 2005 issue to be a thoughtful, articulate writer. However, his review of Richard Bushman's and Dan Vogel's recent biographies of Joseph Smith makes me wonder if Thomas's long-standing public disagreements with Vogel (evident in past issues of SUNSTONE and *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*), negatively impacted his ability to fairly represent and evaluate Vogel's book.

For example, Thomas clearly shares—and embraces—Bushman's approach as a believer to Joseph Smith's life. On the other hand, Thomas does not share Vogel's skepticism, and hence is considerably harsher in his judgments of Vogel's analysis. Thomas also—regrettably, in my opinion—presents

hearsay when he summarizes the opinions he solicited from a dozen anonymous reviewers of Vogel's book. Because Thomas does not identify them, we are unable to consider their qualifications. This is especially unfortunate because most of the comments he reports are critical to dismissive. This failure is compounded even more by Thomas's failing to mention that Vogel's biography won best book awards from both the Mormon History Association and the John Whitmer Historical Association. SUNSTONE's readers would have been better served by a more balanced, less prejudiced review.

GARY J. BERGERA
Salt Lake City, Utah

OBJECTIVITY QUESTIONED

THERE ARE MANY FINE ESSAYS IN the November 2005 SUNSTONE. Unfortunately, Mark D. Thomas's review of the biographies of Joseph Smith by Richard Bushman and Dan Vogel is not one of them. Having recently read the books and participated in a forum at an academic conference on Bushman's book, I was surprised to find that the review depicted Bushman's book as "objective." Both in the session in which his biography was reviewed and in the introduction to the book itself, Bushman stated that the biography is *not* objective. Bushman admits he wrote the book from the perspective of a believing Mormon—primarily because he can write from no other perspective on this topic. He is a believing Mormon. How Thomas can come to a conclusion of objectivity is befuddling.

Bushman is to be applauded for touching on some of the grittier details of Smith's life and even candidly depicting him as a man with issues, particularly his caustic personality and penchant for verbally abusing people. But the book presents as fact every supernatural event Joseph Smith ever claimed to have witnessed. No "objective" scholar would write from that perspective.

I don't argue that Vogel's book is a better biography than is Bushman's; clearly both are problematic. Vogel's would have been better received had he left out the speculation and toned down his reliance on psychology. Even so, to consider Bushman's book "more balanced" and "the standard for the future" is to give it far more credit than I believe it deserves.

Frankly, I think a review by a non-Mormon historian expert on the early 1800s in the U.S., particularly in the upstate New York area, would make for much better reading than what Thomas provides. His review

basically reads like a believing Mormon comparing two books, one favorable toward his views, the other not, with the reviewer siding with the book that favors his views. The review has virtually no critique at the historical level.

I intend no offense to Thomas; I just don't believe he is qualified to provide an objective, scholarly review of the books. His non-random, completely biased mini-sample of "experts" aside, I would really like to know what leading historians in the field are saying about Bushman's book (Vogel's too). I know what sociologists are saying, and it isn't in line with Thomas's review.

RYAN CRAGUN
Cincinnati, Ohio

HISTORICAL QUIBBLE

I READ L. KAY GILLESPIE'S ARTICLE ON being a "Santa dissenter" with much interest (SUNSTONE, November 2005). However much I may agree with his article and reasoning, he makes one mistake in his sidebar. Up until the early twentieth century, white, not black, was the color of clothing worn by mourners. It is one of the greatest mistakes made by people that Queen Victoria wore black clothing because she was in mourning for Prince Albert. At that time, just as in the

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1990s, black clothing was the color of fashion. Her display of mourning took the form of a brooch she wore called a "mourning brooch."

Also up to that same time, in most countries and cultures, brides wore red. This is why in the story and movie *Jezebel*, it was scandalous that she wanted to wear a red dress to the coming-out ball.

RICKY GILBERT
West Hollywood, California

LEGITIMATE REACTIONS

JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY HAS DONE IT again! His "The New Missionary Discussions and the Future of Correlation" (SUNSTONE, September 2005), is another finely researched, analyzed, and written masterpiece.

In light of the 1961 origins of Church

correlation and *Dialogue's* origin in 1966 and SUNSTONE's 1975 start, I'll bet Duffy could make a historical case that the latter two "liberal," LDS-related (non-official) publications were created (at least in part) expressly in response to the correlation movement with its strictures upon theological speculation.

If in the future Duffy expands his well-written article to include this aspect, he might serve further to "legitimate" *Dialogue* and SUNSTONE as "normal," rational (even if occasionally excessive) media for unconventional as well as cutting-edge LDS ideas. These publications deserve to exist despite their alleged fomenting of "liberal" (some would say "apostate") LDS notions. We can't all be white-hot apologists in the style of FARMS. Can we?

GERRY L. ENSLEY
Los Alamitos, California



ESSENCE CAPTURED

JUST A NOTE TO TELL YOU HOW MUCH I enjoy the cover of the May 2005 SUNSTONE



The Sunstone Education Foundation is pleased to announce:
THE 2006 R. L. "BUZZ" CAPENER MEMORIAL WRITING CONTEST IN COMPARATIVE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

THE SUNSTONE EDUCATION FOUNDATION invites submissions of papers to the inaugural R. L. "Buzz" Capener Memorial Writing Contest in Comparative Religious Studies.

The contest originates in the conviction that the study of Mormon theology and doctrine can greatly benefit from examination in a comparative context with other Christian and non-Christian traditions. The contest encourages entries that bring LDS concepts and practices into discussion with the worldviews, doctrines, and rituals of other faiths, trusting that the comparative act will enrich the understanding of each. Papers should exhibit sound scholarship but also be accessible to a broad, non-specialist readership.

The papers, without author identification, will be judged by qualified scholars of Mormonism and religious studies. The winners will be invited to give their papers at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, held 9-12 August, and their papers will be published in a future issue of SUNSTONE magazine. Only the winners will be notified personally of the results. After the judging is complete, all non-winning entrants will be free to submit their essays elsewhere.

The contest is sponsored by the family of R. L. "Buzz" Capener to honor the memory of his life of faith, acceptance of diversity, and the pursuit of truth.

PRIZES: A total of \$1,000.00 will be awarded:
\$750.00 for the best submission
\$250 for the runner-up

RULES:

1. Only one entry may be submitted by any author or team of authors. Four copies must be postmarked or reach the Sunstone offices before or on 30 APRIL 2006. Entries will not be returned.
2. Each entry must be 8,000 words or fewer (exclusive of footnotes). Entries must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of white paper, paginated, and stapled in the upper left corner. Author names should not appear on any page of the entry.
3. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter that states the essay's title and the author's (or authors') name, address, telephone number, and email address. Each cover letter must be signed and attest that the entry is the person or team's work, that it has not been previously published, that it is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere, will not be submitted to other forums until after the contest, and that, if the entry wins, SUNSTONE magazine has one-time, first-publication rights.
4. Winners will be selected by anonymous evaluations supplied by judges appointed by the Sunstone Education Foundation and the R. L. "Buzz" Capener Memorial Writing Contest organizing committee. Sunstone will announce the winners at www.sunstoneonline.com and in SUNSTONE magazine.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THESE RULES WILL RESULT IN DISQUALIFICATION.



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SUNSTONE

featuring the late Hugh Nibley. It is still sitting on my desk because I haven't yet been able to figure out what to do with it. I don't want to file it with the rest of my SUNSTONES where it most likely will never see the light of day again.

I took a couple of graduate religion classes from Brother Nibley when I was an undergraduate at the "Y," and I treasure the experience. He introduced me to a whole new dimension of scholarship and religious inquiry. This photo by Brent Orton captures so much of what I love to remember about Hugh: a bit of slyness in his sideways glance, a twinkle in his eye, and a bit of mischievousness in his smile, all wrapped up with his hat, suit coat, and plaid shirt. My compliments to Orton for capturing so much of Hugh's essence in one photo, and my compliments to SUNSTONE for selecting it for the cover.

I think this issue of SUNSTONE will have to go beside my collection of Hugh Nibley books, where at least I'll occasionally have to move it and in the process be reminded of his extraordinary personality.

STEVE HAMMER
Santa Monica, California

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THE 2006 BROOKIE & D.K. BROWN

FICTION CONTEST

THE SUNSTONE EDUCATION FOUNDATION invites writers to enter its annual fiction contest, which is made possible by a grant from the Brookie and D. K. Brown family. All entries must relate to adult Latter-day Saint experience, theology, or worldview. All varieties of form are welcome.

Stories, sans author identification, will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of literature. Winners will be announced in SUNSTONE and on the foundation's website, www.sunstoneonline.com; winners only will be notified by mail. After the announcement, all other entrants will be free to submit their stories elsewhere. Winning stories will be published in SUNSTONE magazine.

PRIZES will be awarded in two categories: short-short story—fewer than 1,500 words; short story—fewer than 6,000 words.

RULES: 1. Up to three entries may be submitted by any one author. Five copies of each entry must be delivered (or postmarked) to Sunstone by 30 JUNE 2006. Entries will not be returned. A \$5 fee must accompany each entry. No email submissions will be accepted.

2. Each story must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of white paper and be stapled in the upper left corner. The author's name must

NOT appear on any page of the manuscript.

3. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter that states the story's title and the author's name, address, telephone number, and email (if available). This cover letter must be signed by the author and attest that the entry is her or his own work, that it has not been previously published, that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere, and that it will not be submitted to other publishers until after the contest. If the entry wins, SUNSTONE magazine

has one-time, first-publication rights. Cover letters must also grant permission for the manuscript to be filed in the Sunstone Collection at the Marriott Library of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The author retains all literary rights. Sunstone discourages the use of pseudonyms; if used, the author must identify the real and pen names and the reasons for writing under the pseudonym.

Failure to comply with rules will result in disqualification.

SUNSTONE Podcast update:

SUNSTONE Podcast



4. **GOD'S ARMY 2: STATES OF GRACE**
Interview with Richard Dutcher
5. **GODWRESTLING: PHYSICALITY, CONFLICT, AND REDEMPTION IN MORMON DOCTRINE**

Interview with Rick Jepson

6. **CONFESSIONS OF A MORMON BOY ARRIVES OFF-BROADWAY**

Interview with Steven Fales

7. **"COOL MORMONS EVERYONE DESERVES TO MEET," PART I**

Interview with Jana Riess

8. **TOWARD A MORE AUTHENTIC SISTERHOOD**

Interview with Julie Hawker

SUNSTONE *Classic*



4. **OSTRACIZE, CONDOLE, OR CONGRATULATE?**
2002 Salt Lake Symposium panel

on missionaries who return home early

SUNSTONE *Lit*



1. **BACKSLIDER FESTSCHRIFT**
2005 Salt Lake Symposium panel on a Festschrift

project for Levi Peterson's *The Backslider*

2. **WINTER LIGHT**

Author Stephen Carter reads his award-winning essay

3. **MARK BROWN**

Interview with and poetry reading by Mark Brown

4. **LISA DOWNING**

Interview with author Lisa Downing

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TOUCHSTONES

Grace



WHEN I WAS twelve, I was boy-crazy. Sometimes I even kissed boys in the halls at school. Enjoying the power that the promise of such kisses held. Imagining myself a winsome beauty. Relishing the whispers of girls who gossiped about such things. Knowing that I was the center of scandal.

When I was thirteen and was diagnosed with bone cancer, I started to feel guilty about my boy-craziness. When someone

suggested that my cancer was God's way of punishing me for kissing boys during my lunch hour, I believed them. I knew I was supposed to wait for such things until I was sixteen or until I was engaged to a good Mormon boy. Maybe God knew that the only way for me to ever end up worthy for the temple was to make me so sick that I no longer thought about boys.

Now, with that temple marriage behind me and more than twenty years since my di-

agnosis, I still wonder why I got cancer. But I have given up believing that my cancer was God's doing. He and I have talked about that. And I now know that it was as hard on him as it was on me.

JANA BOUCK REMY
Irvine, California

MY MISSIONARY COMPANION AND I had ordered some gyoza in what was a small, dark, considerably less-than-two-star cafe in Yamagata, Japan. He suggested we say grace, so we bowed our heads slightly and I said a quick but typical Mormon food thing: "... and bless this food to nourish and strengthen our bodies."

About a minute later, a cat slunk across the dirt floor with a rat weakly squirming in its jaws. Cats with rats are not entirely unusual in Japan, so we chuckled and turned back to our appointment book. A few minutes later, I went to use the restroom and happened to glance into the kitchen where I saw the cook filleting the rat into our gyoza.

We got the heck out of there. I wonder, if we'd stayed, whether God would have graced us with the nourishment and strengthening of our bodies.

D. JEFF BURTON
Bountiful, Utah

SUNSTONE IS NOW ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR TOUCHSTONES, A NEW section inspired by "Readers Write" in The SUN magazine. SUNSTONE readers are invited to submit their own short memoirs on a theme selected by the editors. The next topic to be featured in the magazine is WEALTH. Upcoming topics include SMALL MIRACLES and LETTERS HOME.

Differing from the letters to the editor section, topics and their corresponding deadline for submissions will be decided by SUNSTONE's staff prior to publication and announced in forthcoming issues. Topics will be intentionally broad in order to give room for personal expression. Writing style will not be as important as the contributor's thoughtfulness, humor, and sincerity.

Because of space limitations, we will be unable to print all the submissions we receive. We will edit pieces, but contributors will have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication.

We will be publishing only nonfiction pieces in TOUCHSTONES. If it allows you to feel less inhibited, you are free to submit your memoirs under "Name Withheld"—but be sure to include your name and mailing address so we can send you a complimentary magazine if we use your work. Occasionally we might choose not to publish a name mentioned in your reflection, or will use only a first name and last initial. If SUNSTONE chooses to do this, it is not intended to appear as if we're questioning the truthfulness of the writing but is out of sensitivity to privacy issues. Please let us know if you've already changed the names of the people involved in your accounts.

To submit a reflection, please send it typed and double-spaced to SUNSTONE, 343 North Third West, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84103. If you cannot type, please print clearly. Electronic submissions can be sent via email to TOUCHSTONES editor Allen Hill at: allen@sunstoneonline.com. Again, due to space limitations, submissions should be kept somewhere around 400 words at most, but we are willing to make exceptions for exceptional pieces. We're thankful for all submissions we receive and look forward to reading your TOUCHSTONES.

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS ON WEALTH IS 10 MARCH

Upcoming Topics and Deadlines

SMALL MIRACLES: 30 APRIL
LETTERS HOME: 30 JUNE



ONE SUNDAY, THE priest handed out large, gold-painted crucifixes to my catechism class. As he rambled, like many Irish priests do, I caressed the small figure of the impaled Christ. Suddenly Father John stood before me, his green eyes drinking me like a glass of ice water. He asked, "What would you do, lass, should you chance upon a man lying in the street, dying now, and there's no time to find him a priest to perform the sacrament of the last rite?"

His gaze held on to me a moment longer, then moved to other faces.

"He cannot speak." Father John walked toward the back of the room. We turned in our chairs. "Does this unfortunate man know Christ?"

No one answered. Father John smiled as though we were playing along perfectly, then raised his crucifix to his lips. "A kiss . . . is testimony enough. Absolution, children, follows such faith."

I eyed my new gold cross as it lay flat in my palm.

A five-inch crucifix is a difficult item to hide. "Lisa, take off that jacket. It's ninety degrees!" You can't tie a string around it and wear it under your blouse. "The paint's rubbing off!" You can't fit it in your shoe, and it falls out of your notebook onto the linoleum



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while your mother scrambles eggs. “Jesus, Lisa. Father doesn’t expect you to carry that thing everywhere you go!”

Mother finally yanked the cross from my hands—threw it away, hid it in the attic, I’m not sure. I rushed to school, too terrified to glance at the gutter, certain that I’d find Father John’s dying man lying there.

Turns out the imperiled man was actually three women and a child. The squeal of tires, the incongruous crunch of steel, and then that blessed last vestige of peace before chaos. Mother broke ice out of trays. Father grabbed blankets off our beds and shoved one in my arms as he shoved me out the back door toward the place of screaming. I planted my feet. Father moved on.

That day I learned that people face death differently: Some wail against death. Others whimper and twitch, making little more noise than does a trickle of blood down a forehead or out a nose. Still others pass unnoticed, like the little one who lay broken, undiscovered, between the front and back seats.

Father left the gate wide open, but I turned away, faced the white stucco wall of our garage. I didn’t carry the cross. I prayed.

Hail Mary full of . . . but words somehow failed this little Catholic girl. I closed my eyes against the wall’s expanse, squeezed my thoughts, my words, my soul, until finally, a first real prayer emerged like a single droplet of blood. “Dear God,” I trembled, “grace, please. I’m frightened.”

LISA TORCASSO DOWNING
Heath, Texas

*“From angels bending near the earth to
touch their harps of gold”*

CHRISTMAS WAS ONCE my favorite time of year—long, long ago when someone else did the holiday work. I do have some truly tender memories of Christmas, but they mostly make me frustrated at my inability to recreate for my own family the Christmas Eves I remember from my childhood: the candle-lit living room deepening the mood as the family sings carols and listens to Christmas stories, our reverent connection to each other and to the redeemed world unfolding anew.

Planning for a meaningful holiday was especially tough this year. I spent the week before Christmas across the country with our

oldest son and his wife (enjoying their new baby), then spent another day with my parents before returning home on Christmas Eve. When he picked me up from the airport, Bill warned me that he’d been reminding the kids that we were having a family Christmas Eve that evening and that some of the kids weren’t thrilled.

Oh, well, I thought, once they see we’re having a “real” Christmas Eve, they’ll warm up to the idea. Who could resist the cozy, spiritual Christmas Eve I was envisioning for them? I was still basking in appreciation and marveling that my Mom had saved (and shared with me during my visit) some of the notes from one of our family Christmas Eve programs when I was a teenager, complete with each family member’s scripture reading. I could feel the Christmas spirit oozing off those handwritten pages.

After an impromptu Christmas Eve dinner, we gathered for our family’s Christmas Eve. We were missing the candlelight and about half our family members, but we were together and would soon be singing and acting out yet another Christmas story. But then, as the first song began, one daughter sang a deliberate monotone. The

message was clear, "I don't wanna be doing this!"

The absurdity of my daughter opposing the ambience of our "real" Christmas Eve stopped me cold. I couldn't say another word or sing another song. Even after Bill read to the children from *Jesus the Christ* and they all went uneventfully to sleep, I couldn't move. I couldn't fill stockings or set out presents. I couldn't create any more of Christmas. Just couldn't.

Christmas morning dawned, and the kids woke up. But there was no Christmas to wake up to. Bill and I had been talking since about 4:00 a.m. At 7:00, we gathered the kids for a family meeting at which I told them how stupid I felt, but that I couldn't do Christmas without the Christmas Eve. I told them about my frustrations over not being able to give them the kind of meaningful Christmas Eves I'd known growing up and how I didn't feel I could give them presents after the ruined Christmas Eve. I felt really stupid—and selfish.

In response, the previous night's monotone-singing daughter announced, "Well, I didn't know it was supposed to be *meaningful*! I thought it was something we did just to be doing it!" She suggested we all watch a spiritual Christmas video and sing carols. The ensuing vote was unanimous. As we watched the video, the children reached out to each other for morning leg-tickles and back-scratches. Nobody complained. Nobody fought. Then the same daughter played carol after carol on the piano and shouted out the words to the less familiar

ones so the family could join in. Our fifteen-year-old son took turns shouting out upcoming words on the carols that were trickier to play.

It wasn't anything like my childhood Christmases, but in that living room, angels truly were bending near my earth.

LISA TENSMEYER HANSEN
Payson, Utah

CHRISTMAS, 1982. THE five of us—Mom, my two sisters, my brother, and I—are together in the living room around a coffee table piled high with opened presents, including a lot of rain-related gear that has been prompted by my recent call to the Washington Seattle Mission. We are goofing on this and that, as easy together as I can ever remember us being.

They don't remember the often-mean, defeated Dan who had haunted this house just a year ago. They *really* don't.

DAN WOTHERSPOON
Tooele, Utah

GROWING UP IN the Japanese countryside, I would often find myself face to face with the bodhisattva Jizō. Almost every day I passed little stone statues of Jizō next to flooded rice paddies, in cemeteries, off mountain paths, at crossroads. His bald head was often covered with moss or snow, but his serene smile always shone through his weather-beaten features. Sometimes I'd find that someone had knitted a bright red shawl or pink bonnet for him, or

had placed some toys and candy at his feet.

I heard stories about him as well. Standing at the threshold of nirvana, he looked back and saw the suffering of all living beings. He then vowed not to become a buddha until the multitude of hells was emptied and all former prisoners had achieved bliss ahead of him. Again and again, he descended into hell and freed humans from the most horrific torments imaginable, always offering his body to appease the demons.

When I have trouble envisioning the connection between my sins and Christ's suffering, I'm grateful for my encounters with Jizō.

JOHN DEWEY REMY
Irvine, California



GLIMPSE

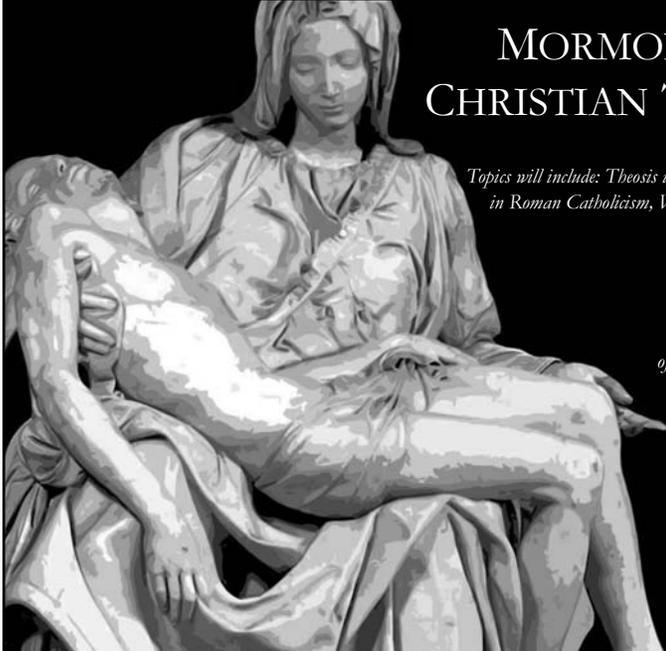
The trail curved out of black walnuts' flickering shade, led to creek bank, narrowed, dropped straight down. There, worn by coon, skunk, cat, it entered still water, mirror-clear and deep, speared by sunlight.

Particles pulsed in beams shot up from the sandy bottom until my eyes were starbursts, each flash a face from the album I'd quit imagining, the task grown too great.

Parents, friends, and pets death had put out. Others too: child staring through barbed wire, seated monk curling inward, having chosen flames, soldiers carrying a bag.

All on a journey revealed to me in a bead of time so bright my eyes were glass, fears seared. Then a fish passed, and calling from the woods a mourning dove.

—EDWARD BEATTY



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FROM THE EDITOR

A LONG WAY JUST TO SIT

By Dan Wotherspoon

SUNSTONE ARIZONA!

A huge vote of thanks to all those who organized, sponsored, hosted, volunteered, spoke at, and attended the 2006 Sunstone Arizona Symposium! We can't wait to do it again next year!

The inaugural Sunstone Symposium Arizona was held 14 January on the Arizona State University campus. The program, which featured fourteen sessions and more than thirty participants, was co-organized by the dedicated and talented team of DOE DAUGHTREY and LAURA L. BUSH. All symposium expenses were underwritten by extremely generous donations from Arizonans H. MICHEAL WRIGHT and the KENNETH E. AND BECKY L. JOHNSON FOUNDATION, which allowed Sunstone to bring in several additional speakers and offer FREE admission to all attendees—a wonderful boon, and something that more than one hundred people greatly enjoyed! The symposium enjoyed tremendous support from the start from the ASU religious studies faculty, especially department chair JOEL GEREBOFF and administrative assistants PAT HUTTON and SARAH MACIAS. Symposium attendees were warmly welcomed in remarks by professor KENNETH MORRISON, who also participated in several sessions. The symposium was also graced by a handful of volunteers who quietly did all the things that keep events like this running, most especially TOM KIMBALL of Signature Books, who worked feverishly at the book table and in any other capacity needed while still being his usual likeable self, and JOHN DEHLIN, who was the indispensable guru of all things audio-visual.



Tom Kimball, Newell Bringham, and Eduardo Pagán discuss recent biographies of Joseph Smith



Audience during one of the Sunstone Arizona plenary sessions

MY TRIP TO Arizona and interactions with members of the ASU faculty during the Arizona symposium were very nostalgic for me. I'm a 1990 graduate from Arizona State's M.A. program in religious studies, and my experiences there represent an important crossroads in my life. It marks the period when I took my first stumbling steps as a scholar. Even more than that, however, it marks (if I can borrow language from ritual studies, my main focus at ASU) my entrance into what I have come to regard as a sustained immersion in *liminality*.

"Liminality" is a term brought into the ritual studies lexicon some forty years ago by

Victor Turner, an anthropologist whose groundbreaking work on the individual and social dynamics of ritual processes is still widely studied. Turner draws the term from "liminal," the label that French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep gives to the middle phase of what he calls *rites de passage*, the rituals that "accompany every change of place, state, social position and age." "Liminal" has its roots in the Latin *limen*, which means "threshold."¹

For Turner, liminality designates the state of being for "threshold people," those who are in transition between two worlds. In rites of passage, these are often the initiates—the

ones a society has deemed ready to move from the world of childhood into adulthood and who accordingly must undergo testing, as well as receive training in the *gnosis* associated with their new social roles.² This they receive at the hands of societal elders, shamans, or others recognized as instructors in the ways of being, knowing, and acting in the realm into which the initiates are to enter.

Turner describes initiates during this transition time as being "neither here nor there," "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, [and] convention." Because it lacks official status (and is therefore not bound by traditional rules), this threshold space between worlds is often viewed as dangerous. It is a space of refashioning, where an initiate's persona is "reduced or ground down" in preparation for its being "fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers." It is a state of potentiality, sometimes likened to being in the womb, in darkness, in the wilderness.³

In many ways, graduate school in and of itself is a liminal state. To be in graduate school is to be in a threshold stage between typical schooling and one's entering the "real world." It is a place and time in which one learns the deeper gnosis of her or his chosen discipline—instruction often involving a great deal of deconstruction and the unlearning of much that had been taught in earlier stages of instruction. Here one learns to access and understand the very foundations and theoretical underpinnings of a discipline and its branches, without which one could never do genuinely creative work advancing knowledge in that field.

My Arizona State experience thrust me into liminality in those ways, to be sure. But even more than initiating the threshold time before my full-blown, adultish, breadwinning-type career had to begin, my choice to study religion placed me abruptly into a strange no-man's land within Mormonism.

My faculty guides inducted me skillfully into the secrets of the academic study of religion, and some also modeled for me the religious life of a scholar who is also a committed member of her or his own religious tradition. But I felt very alone as a Mormon. Where were my tribe's elders and shamans? By virtue of the new tools I was gaining and the new light in which I was coming to see certain ideas and commitments that uphold my tradition, I was suddenly neither here nor there, floating betwixt and between recognized LDS social structures. Whose journey could model for me a refashioned, reintegrated life at the other end of this rite of passage?

IN two recent editorials, I've written at some length about the "complexity" that developmental theorists and others claim one must pass through before matters of faith begin to look and feel "simple" again. There is much in Turner's analysis of the statuslessness and the undoing and refashioning that characterize liminality which could shed light on the nature of this complexity (as well as the reasons it is considered so dangerous). But there's another aspect of Turner's work in unpacking the richness of liminal existence that I'd like to focus on here: his concept of "communitas."

Through his studies of rites of passage, Turner noticed that the initiates undergoing the processes together developed a strong bond with each other. Stripped of all previous demarcations of status, "ground down to a uniform condition" through the processes deemed necessary to prepare them for reintegration into society in their new roles, those sharing the trials of liminality tended to develop an "intense comradeship." By their very nature, societal roles create hierarchy and ranks; they divide us from each other and subtly work against our awareness of shared humanity with those around us. Turner's thesis is that because such divisions disappear during the threshold state, liminality makes possible a natural state in which feelings of deep affinity for each other resur-

face: a bond he labels "communitas."⁴

My experiences at Arizona State were my first immersion into the liminal realm (what Jeff Burton would call "the Borderlands") with regard to Mormonism. Initially, it was a very scary, very lonely place to be. Not until I was introduced to the conversations taking place in the pages of *SUNSTONE* and *Dialogue* and began connecting with fellow liminoid persons at Sunstone symposiums did I begin to feel connected to the vitality of Mormonism again. At Sunstone, I felt my first hints of communitas, a connection and sense of a fellowship with others undergoing similar de- and re-constructions. For me, at least, it was also through Sunstone that I first found tribal elders and shamans who modeled the kind of deep spirituality and openness to wonder that I came to recognize as characterizing the new being I hoped to become at the end of my passage.

Sunstone symposiums as gatherings, and *SUNSTONE* and *Dialogue* as magazines, are in no way cleanly captured by Turner's insights. Unlike a clearly delineated cohort of initiates who take part in rites of passage as a group, those of us whose journeys bring us into and out of orbit around Sunstone and *Dialogue* come and go at different times. We enter our liminality with different histories and temperaments and with different expectations of what the simplicity (or faith) we desire will

look like. Though all are welcome to share their insights and journeys, the symposiums and magazines we produce and read do not serve to level all social differences nor create a perfect atmosphere in which deep comradeship will spontaneously appear. But amidst the chaos and the chatter—and even the voices whose journeys make them skeptical of ever emerging from the confusion with a sense of peace about their life and home within Mormonism—*some* communitas does arise. Out of shared liminality, notwithstanding the diverse shapes it takes, deep and abiding bonds *do* form.

ON a few occasions, I've told the story of something my then-ten-year-old daughter Hope said while helping put together pre-registration packets the night before one of our Salt Lake symposiums. As she had been working to separate name badges from the sheets they're printed on, she'd been quietly noticing how many people were coming in from out of state to attend. Finally, upon encountering the badge for Cornelis Van Ree, a symposium regular who lives in the Netherlands, she exclaimed, "Boy, people sure come a long way just to sit!"

I'm sure that to a ten-year-old, Sunstone symposiums do look an awful lot like just sitting. And what could be more boring than that? But those of us who attend know better.

Although a great deal of sitting is involved, so very much more is going on. We've heard a personal story that goes right to our heart, telling us we're not alone. We've come to understand a new way of framing our daughter's early return from her mission. We've glimpsed new ways we might reconnect with the Savior and begin thinking about the Atonement again. We've laughed affectionately at our tradition's idiosyncracies and mourned with those who have been deeply wounded by certain institutional actions. We've learned that there was once a fourteenth article of faith, that black men held the priesthood long before 1978, that LDS women once blessed the sick and that their administrations often worked better for "the sisters had more faith than the brethren." We've met a joyous soul whose life and way of being is a testimony that faith and mind can be truly and



"Maybe we'd better lay off the Old Testament for a while . . ."

happily integrated; it is a testimony of experience that carries with it a gravitas that makes it unforgettable, something that will work deeply upon us during times we feel like throwing our hands in the air and giving up on ever again finding meaning in our life and peace with God.

THIS year's Arizona symposium has come and gone. Dallas and Southern California are on the horizon. Our four-day Salt Lake gathering is less than six months away. Seattle will follow a few months after that. Contact us. Let's organize others!

NOTES

1. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 94. Originally published, Aldine Publishing, 1969.
2. Rites of passage that accompany the onset of puberty are very common in certain cultures, but they in no way exhaust the category. Rituals that surround marriage (the transition from being single to a new life as a couple), death, and menopause are also common and can be classed as rites of passage. So can ceremonies that celebrate the elevation of persons to leadership positions or the transition to other new roles (such as missionary or military service).
3. Turner, 95.
4. *Ibid.*, 96-97.

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TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

John Bernhard

YOU, JACK, AND PETER

THREE YEARS SINCE you set foot in a chapel. You are hundreds of miles and light years down the path of the prodigal. The problem is, it is still in you. It still resonates in your heart. There you are: Chatting up the missionaries at the front door, talking very familiarly with them, as if you have been friends forever; giving them hope, giving them an idea that you could be their golden prospect, their story for the books, their treasured memory to take with them to the grave, their “when I baptized so-and-so and the finger of God touched the water in the baptismal font and made it glow, that was when I knew why I served my mission!” moment.

And then you're:

Avoiding their phone calls, hiding out from their house calls, not answering the door. They must feel so bad standing out there in the cold, tapping on the door once, twice, three times, waiting and waiting, hoping forever that you'll let them in so they can talk about their Book of Mormon, wishing you'd give them a chance to show how dedicated they are to their Lord. They want so badly to be enthusiastic and congenial and warm and welcoming. And you're making them wait out there in the dark.

Then you're:

Daydreaming about eternity and life together with your wife and daughter and how wonderful that would really be—and you know these Mormons believe in this hopeful message, however loosey goosey and ridiculous the logistics are. How do you explain to your Gentile wife that you once believed you can be a family with your wife and kids, even though she logically states that it would mean every one of us are brothers, fathers, sons, and sisters, and wives, and . . . you get the picture, you know? Even with all the loosey goosey logic, though, you still secretly wish it could all be true.

Then you're:

Gadmouthing the Church's legendary propensity for spiriting away troubling facts and historical documents from its followers. In a cave. In a vault. Ten miles below the ground. Only tunnels get you in, as long as you have enough hole punches in your temple recommend.

HERE'S no recommend, not anymore. All you care about is finding out why a Church that swears in holy ceremony to be the One and Only True Church in the Universe thinks it is perfectly normal to maintain a secret vault full of historical records and letters and meaningful postcards and court rulings and journals kept by its highest-ranking leaders.

When you're through worrying about secret papers and vaults, you really have only a simple wish:

That your six-month old daughter could have an experience like Primary. It is a wonderful enterprise, an astonishingly humble and amazing little socialization program for children; even little babies that are a mere eighteen-months old are given an opportunity to be together with other kids, even if it means being herded into a room for two hours each Sunday and being cared for by three grim, single women and the newly married couple living in the cheap apartments on the other side of the ward boundaries. You think about Mormonism and the faith that left you behind, and you ache suddenly to share Primary with your daughter. The Sunbeams. The seven-year-olds. Ah, the eight-year-olds, the ones getting baptized that year. Then you have the hip and sassy ten-year-olds, and the can't-wait-to-escape-this-hell eleven-year-olds. Not seeing your new daughter be a part of this Sabbath morning scene . . . it hurts more than you expect.

So you take the discussions, you give 'em a shot. Those young boys are so excited

you let them in.

Deep down, though, you know you can't go back, not after what happened, not after the High Council heard your mistakes, listened to your testimony, and mistakenly failed to see the context, the surrounding scenery, the pool of blood at the crime scene, the drunk bus driver in a big, messy metaphorical bus crash up on the highway. They failed to recognize any of your family's complete failure as a group, the facts surrounding your dad, your mom, your sisters, you, and your brothers. They didn't see a bit of it when they threw the Mormon bible at you on the way out the door.

The final eviction notice came from the High Council. Fifteen men—all of them clad in suits from Mr. Mac, each of them possessing a varying intensity of Old Mormon Guy breath (which, as any well-heeled member knows is a dry, stale, pungent reek that results after mornings of prayer, offering blessings and ordinations, meetings, scripture discussions, along with the requisite backslapping and glad-handing and smiling at freaks and friends in the name of the Lord.) They had to have been upset because of the long day they'd endured; maybe they knew they needed a Tic Tac (badly). But you've gone and disrupted their late-Sunday evening by making a stupid mistake that no one understands. You can't go back to them, not after all of that, not after they gave you the pink slip twice, not after you pleaded with them not to, not after they prayed and lamented and debated your merits and then decided . . . you didn't belong.

BUT you still entertain the missionaries, keep them at the end of that rope, keep them dangling just a little, hoping someday your gentile wife will someday, somehow figure out a way to rationalize the crazy logic and want to join.

You don't tell her that, though, because even after everything, how can you still want to go back? You could never tell your wife you secretly still believe, the residue may never wear away.

So there you are, Peter Priesthood and Jack Mormon in a messy human package. You still stare at cloud formations and think how cool and elegant and orderly and traditional the hierarchy of Mormon priesthood power is to you. Then you realize there are tenets and beliefs and illogical what-ifs that will likely keep you away forever. Still, you've gotten to become friends with both of them, Peter and Jack. At least you'll have some good company along the way. You hope. ☺

JOHN BERNHARD was excommunicated from the Church in 2002. Since then, he's enjoyed hearing his voice echo in a hollow room, spent many sleepless nights wondering what it's all for, and praising God in heaven for his lovely new bride and beautiful baby daughter. He resides in Los Angeles.



CORNUCOPIA

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

Righteous Dominion

NOTE: *Righteous Dominion* presents stories of leaders and others who are true exemplars of the love of Christ, who have touched lives through their flexibility or their understanding that people are more important than programs. Please email your stories to column editors Alan and Vickie Eastman at: StewartSLC@aol.com.

WALKING TOGETHER

WHEN WE LIVED IN VALLEY FORGE WARD SOME years ago, I attended a New Beginnings evening with my teenaged daughters. Our bishop had been called just a short time before and was giving what I believe was his first talk to the young women. He was a thoughtful, reflective person with a teenaged daughter of his own, and so I was somewhat surprised that he spoke to the girls in a way that portrayed them mostly in terms of having a secondary position to men in the Church. That is, he described their spiritual life in terms of preparing themselves to be married in the temple and to support a husband in his priesthood. In fact, his talk sounded exactly like the talk I had heard in Carol Lynn Pearson's Sunstone symposium presentation, "A Walk in Pink Moccasins." Her gender-role-reversal parody took an all-too-typical "talk to young women" and showed how patronizing—and ridiculous—the concepts sounded when addressed to boys.

Although I didn't know him well, I perceived the bishop to be a "teachable" person, willing to consider new ideas and perspectives. Within a few days, I gave him the audio tape of Pearson's "Pink Moccasins" presentation, cueing it to the start of the parody. Hearing it was a transformative experience for him. He told me it gave him a new perspective on the young women he had been interviewing. He had been surprised to have a number of the girls tell him that they were feeling depressed. The tape helped him realize that perhaps the Young Women's organization should devote more efforts to helping the girls realize their personal potential. Within a few weeks, he called Lou Chandler, a professional working woman as YW president—definitely a new kind of role model for the girls!

When I wrote to Lou recently to ask permission to include her name in telling this story, she wrote back: "I can't claim to

have been a model YW president back then, but this bishop was, indeed, a model of 'righteous dominion.' He exhibited kind and caring service, intelligent leadership, good humor in all things, a zeal and humility for continued learning, and tremendous spiritual strength. His example was inspiring. Alas, his tenure ended all too soon as his work required moving his family to Washington, D.C. To this day, I still consider his example when I find myself in leadership positions."

—KAY GAISFORD
Gilbert, Arizona

Margin Notes

NOTE: *Margin Notes* invites brief commentaries on passages from scripture, fiction or non-fiction works, films, plays, or any other text. As the title indicates, authors could use their literal margin notes as a springboard toward a brief discussion of their experience with or views on the passage. Submissions should begin with a reiteration of the excerpt and be no longer than 500 words. Please send your Margin Notes to column editor, Alison Takenaka, at: <alisontakenaka@hotmail.com>.

THE MELTING POT MELT-DOWN

*Community is the place where the person you
least want to live with always lives.*

—HENRI NOUWEN

MY MOST-VALUED SPIRITUAL MENTORS HAVE taught me that God is to be found in a vast number of faces and faiths, so when I fail to see God reflected in the ranks of local Mormonism, I tend to seek Him elsewhere. During a particularly trying episode, I sank my nose into a book by John Ortberg, a popular evangelical author, who includes the Henri Nouwen quote printed above in his book, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. After reading only twenty pages of Ortberg's text, I felt myself unclenching and exhaling in relief that the Mormophobia that I had been experiencing had less to do with the failings of Mormons and more to do with my lofty notions of normalcy and community.

It used to be easier for me to stand and deliver great lessons and talks about the imperative of unity and "perfect harmony" within our LDS faith. But that was when I was living in wards where so many of the members were just like me, or were openly supportive of the choices I was making as a student,

Treasures on Earth

FROM STICK-PULLER TO NUTCRACKER

WE MAY NEVER KNOW EXACTLY HOW MANY ETERNAL mysteries Joseph Smith cracked wide open. But this Joseph Smith nutcracker, a popular item at Salt Lake's Mount Olympus Clock Shop, cracks at least one nugget of truth: Mormon merchandise sells well.

The novelty is handmade by Christian Ulbricht, one of Germany's top nutcracker makers. The item sells for \$239 and has been seen by President Gordon B. Hinckley. According to the store owners, President Thomas S. Monson twice visited the Salt Lake City shop to admire the Joseph Smith nutcracker—together with the Brigham Young nutcracker commissioned in 1997 for the pioneer sesquicentennial.

Neither Ulbricht nor the Mormon prophets go without competition.

For \$90 more, Christian Steinbach, Germany's other renowned nutcracker maker, will sell you nutcrackers in the shape of a Mormon missionary companionship. Or, should you change religion, nutcrackers fashioned after John Paul II and Benedict XVI.



LDS Missionaries



Brigham Young



Pope John Paul II

mother, wife, church member, and independent thinker. In retrospect, unity felt easier because I felt more normal and more acceptable to the members of my local unit.

But after my most recent move (now nearly five years ago), I'm beginning to believe that the grand ideal of perfect unity with the greater multitude of Mormonism may not hinge on notions of normalcy or acceptability. In fact, given the apparent and, I believe, God-given diversity within the ranks of our faith, the drive toward a "normal" LDS lifestyle now seems to me an unnecessary, artificial, and even self-defeating cultural phenomenon. Granted, we humans tend to feel more comfortable when we think we are surrounded by like-minded folks. But sameness is not the reality of Mormonism, and comfort doesn't necessarily signal rightness. Forcing a homogeneous model for the sake of building a unified "Zion people" may produce a feeling of loving community for some but,

ironically, generate a feeling of alienation and disunity for many others.

When I consider the reasons Mormons have problems "living" with each other as a "household of God," the list includes things like career choice, family planning, ideas about gender, parenting styles, domestic routines, artistic temperament, public speaking and administrative skills, scriptural interpretation, fashion preference, intellect and intelligence, political philosophies, psychological profiles, and economic aptitude. And in all of these (and other) areas, we often hold ourselves and others to some vague but persistent gauge of "normal" or "abnormal," "acceptable" or "unacceptable," while failing to recognize that diversity of choices may be what gives the pool of human resources in our church its strength.

For the more socially oriented among us, the level of acceptance and respect that we feel from other Mormons may seem

like the crux of Christian ethics and may act as a major influence on our activity in the Church. Certainly, a Christ-led, all-inclusive community is the ultimate goal. But it may be that the immediate future of unity within our religion will finally hinge less upon whether we feel acceptance, respect, or comfort from the like-minded multitude, and more upon whether we will fulfill our altruistic commitment to be useful to others in all ways that we can.

Perhaps that is what will transform enemies into friends in the end. Perhaps that will be the final test of our Christian devotion.

—ALISON TAKENAKA
Essex Junction, Vermont

In the Belly of the Whale

I'M A MORMON, MISTER

In this column, "In the Belly of the Whale," humorist Todd Robert Petersen investigates Mormon culture, art, and politics from the perspective of a baptized outsider. This is Part One of a two-part reflection on Mormon portrayals in pop culture.

THE MOVIE *DONNIE BRASCO* FEATURES A SCENE in which FBI-agent Brasco (played by Johnny Depp) is going over details of his deep-cover assignment with his superior. Brasco has successfully infiltrated the Mafia, and is—we imagine because of his immersion in organized crime—speaking the *lingua franca* of the organization, complete with HBO-level use of the f-word. In the middle of Brasco's expletive-peppered report, he says, "Hey, I need a boat for this f***ing sit down."

His boss, an avowed Latter-day Saint, responds with a line, which despite being so wooden and badly written, might be for many people the most accurate line of Mormon dialogue to come out of Hollywood. This ranking FBI agent, so tough in so many ways, yet still so sensitive to the vicissitudes of the Holy Spirit, says to Brasco in a clipped, almost impatient voice: "I'm a Mormon, mister. Now clean it up."

That line always makes me cringe. Because however stilted and one-dimensional that dialogue seems on an aesthetic level, I know dozens of people who would have said the exact same thing when hearing an f-bomb from someone who, though posing as a member of an organized crime operation, should still know that he can't have the Spirit of the Lord with him when he is using "that kind of language." Interestingly enough, however, the thematic purpose of that moment is to counterpoint what we know from earlier in the film: that this Mormon FBI boss—Blandford is his name—is a hypocrite, a person willing to bend some rules in order to keep others. And we know how the Savior has weighed in on hypocrites.

In my life, the overall effect of a character like Blandford throws a wrench in my attempts to help the Church grow in the eyes of certain groups of people: *Donny Brasco* watchers, for example, but others, too. When a Blandford comes on screen saying something like that, audiences snicker because (Mormon or not) they know someone who would say some-

thing like Blandford, and more often than not, they think people like that are stupid—further evidence that religion is for saps and phonies.

LD'S PRESENCE IN popular media is a strange one. A few years back, the Church came to life on the airwaves with Julie Stoffer from *Real World*. She was tossed out of BYU for co-habiting on the show, an Honor Code violation, which showed BYU to be an organization of subtlety and intelligence. The Rodin exhibit imbroglio did likewise. The Lord of *Jeopardy!*, Ken Jennings, was buzzworthy for a few weeks but overall had a neutral effect (only confirming many people's suspicions that Mormons are nerds). The most continual fountain of Mormon popularity on television has come from *Survivor*, which brought us Kelly Wigglesworth, Neleh Dennis, and Rafe Judkins—Kelly and Neleh without much controversy; Rafe, on the other hand, made waves by identifying himself as a gay Mormon, which instigated all kinds of murmurings, some of which allowed me to proclaim the gospel, some of which did not.

Mormons have not always fared as well in the media as has President Hinckley. From the early days, we were villains for Sherlock Holmes or the protagonists in mesmerist Mormon "zombie-snatcher" films such as *Trapped by the Mormons* and Zane Gray's *New Riders of the Purple Sage*. More recently, Mormons have appeared as part of the criminal element in *Fletch* and *Ocean's Eleven* (and its sequel). My favorite moment of Mormon infamy, however, is in the novel *Suttree* by Cormac McCarthy, who has his protagonist, Cornelius Suttree, find and read through a copy of the Book of Mormon in a bus station. Suttree's response is a good one (in fact the same as mine before I was baptized). He notes that it is perhaps the strangest book he'd ever read.

Moments like that help, but when I hear banalities like, "I'm a Mormon, mister. Clean it up," I cringe. It's the same response I have when the Larry H. Millers of the world make public spectacles of themselves by purging their multiplexes of films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (see story, page 78). Every time someone like that puts him- or herself in the media spotlight, it becomes harder for me to maintain my respectability in the liberal world as an "out of the closet" Mormon who actually goes to church.

As far as doing good in the liberal world goes, I know lots of Mormon people would ask, "Why bother?" But I'm not the kind of guy who, while flying, will interrupt someone's reading of *Skymall* in order to pass along a message about the gospel. I'm working the missionary thing from a different angle. My wife says I'm like a Frequently Asked Questions page, where the people I work with come to ask about Mormonism—things like: Do Mormons believe in Christ? How come Joseph Smith chose to include the Native Americans in his theology? Why didn't blacks have the priesthood in your church? Do Mormon people believe in the Trinity? Those questions usually give me a good chance to talk about the gospel with people who very likely wouldn't sit down with the missionaries and a flipchart.

All-seeing eye

IS THIS BODY A TEMPLE—OR A VISITORS' CENTER?



LDS PHOTOGRAPHY aficionados were amused by the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane they encountered in the December issue of the trade magazine *American Photo*. The main cover depicts the naked, though not quite altogether exposed, body of Pamela Anderson; the cover of that month's supplement features an LDS bride and groom across the street from the Salt Lake Temple. The supplement, on wedding photography, featured the work of Bry Cox, who has photographed LDS couples in Utah and Arizona.

If the body is a temple, then Anderson, whom the cover calls a “modern goddess,” appears to be inviting the public to something of an open house. Oh yes—and she’s wearing a tattoo.

Our thanks to American Photo and SUNSTONE subscriber, Christian K. Anderson, of State College, Pennsylvania, for alerting us to this story.

When *Donny Brasco* or Larry Miller moments come up, I am forced to become an apologist. I stop fielding doctrinal questions and find myself issuing statements like, “Yeah, but according to the per-screen averages, Utah ranks twelfth in the nation for audiences of *Brokeback Mountain*.” “Larry Miller, yeah, he owns a basketball team, so what can you expect?” “As far as I know, the Eagle Forum is not part of the Mormon Church.” “Jon Krakauer probably should have taken more care to clarify that he wasn’t writing about mainstream Mormonism.”

It seems sometimes that the work of an unofficial Church apologist is never over—like being Bill Clinton’s press secretary during Lewinskygate. It seems as if I’m forever explaining that the Church, in fact, sends around a letter before every election saying it does not endorse or support any particular party or candidate. And I’m forever explaining that one of our apostles, Elder Ballard himself, coined the phrase, “The Doctrine of Inclusion.” Did you all hear that last word: *inclusion*?

My reactions are similar to the way I imagine plenty of good open-hearted Christian folks in the South feel every time some nutcase rises from his knees and gets his deer rifle and drives into town so he can shoot an abortion doctor in the back. I imagine them thinking, “How am I ever going to be Christian

in public again?” When things like the Larry Miller incident happen, I wonder how I am ever going to convince anyone that the gospel does something more than create people who think that banning a film about bisexual cowboys is going to net even one more temple marriage, is going to keep one more priesthood holder from downloading porn from the internet, is going to make my job as a member missionary even one iota easier than before.

It’s hard enough to build enough trust that my neighbors could entertain the notion there might be room for them in my church without these media mavericks pretending to speak for my church. In some cases, it’s not their fault. I understand that they just do what they think is right and the news media turns them into a synecdoche, either with or without their consent. But if you listen to enough responses to scriptural application questions in Sunday School, you’ll find that more than a few Mormons think this is how you keep yourself in the world but not of it—that the only way to move the gospel forward is to stand up and walk out of that R-rated movie or to refuse that cocktail or cup of coffee with the phrase, “I’m Mormon,” instead of simply saying, “No thanks.”

—TODD ROBERT PETERSEN
Cedar City, Utah



The Sugar Beet

“All the Mormon News That’s Fit to Print”

HOME TEACHER’S REPROOF GRATEFULLY RECEIVED

By Paul Allen

RUPERT, ID—Riley Hamilton’s sharp criticisms of the inactive family that he home teaches were met with tears of gratitude, despite the concerns of his 17-year-old companion. According to Blayne Thompson, a priest in the Rupert 12th Ward, the entire Meyers family will be back in full fellowship in no time as a direct result of the Spirit-induced rebuke offered by his companion.

“I have to admit, I was pretty scared when Brother Hamilton started raking Brother Meyers over the coals for neglecting his priesthood responsibilities,” reports Thompson. “And I thought for sure he crossed the line when he called Sister Meyers a whore in Babylon for pursuing her career as an anesthesiologist and neglecting her duty to raise up righteous children instead.”

Thompson’s fears were apparently unfounded, as both Meyerses insist that their lives have changed for the better as a result of a caring home teacher who loved them enough to correct their evil ways.

“We had lost sight of the important things in life,” says Rob Meyers, a CPA with Meyers, Murdock, and Harris. “Like tithing, for instance. I haven’t paid a dime since my mission, but when Brother Hamilton condemned me to hell for holding back that which rightfully belonged to Heavenly Father, I knew it was time to reprioritize. He was shouting at me, spittle flying everywhere, the very things I needed to hear most. Scary, wet, and necessary.”

According to Hamilton, he had not intended to offer such a strong rebuke when he left that evening to meet with the Meyers family. However, when he arrived at the house and observed the new boat in the driveway, he realized that this was a couple that had strayed. At that point, the Spirit began to work at him, and once he had been seated, he unleashed his concerns with righteous indignation.

Sister Meyers reflects fondly on that evening. “I have been unable to have children,” she said, “and as a medical doctor, I was trained to believe that it was due to endometriosis. Brother Hamilton’s chastisement that evening helped me realize that it was more likely my lack of faith that was preventing me from having children. I think his exact words

were, ‘If you weren’t a slut before the Lord, whoring after material possessions as Satan would have you, your womb would not be barren, but would yield fruit. I promise you that if you repent of your wicked ways, the Lord will release your ovaries from the grasp of the Adversary!’ Something like that. I so appreciate his concern on my behalf!”

Bishop Thayne D. Hanson of the 12th Ward is delighted with Brother Hamilton’s success in bringing the Meyerses back to Church. “It’s brethren like this who make the home teaching program the huge success that it is. Brother Hamilton may not have been able to keep his job as a delivery driver for Pizza Hut, but he knows how to deliver the right message at the right time.” The Bishop hopes that Brother Hamilton will show an “increase in love afterward,” now that the sharp reproof has been delivered with such deadly accuracy.

Referring to himself as “The Howitzer of the Lord,” Brother Hamilton responded to the bishop’s comment by saying, “Increased love is for sissies—or the Relief Society. I’m an arrow in the Lord’s quiver, not a casserole.”

Views from the Street

Our prophet counseled us to read the Book of Mormon by the end of 2005. Why didn’t you finish?



I downloaded it onto my iPod Shuffle, and I think it played all the chapters, but they weren’t in order, so I can’t be sure.



I avoid all reading material that features gratuitous violence, as our prophet has advised.



I am serving as Primary President. This gives me an automatic exemption from all other Church duties.



Every time I tried to read, the ghost of Mark Twain appeared, held a chemical-smelling handkerchief over my nose, and made me pass out.



I distinctly heard him say to read David Foster Wallace’s Consider the Lobster, but even my wife says I’m wrong.



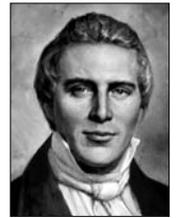
What? The Book of Mormon movie covers only the first two books? It seemed a lot longer than that.

Conflicting visual renditions, the persistence of inaccurate popular images, and the propensity of many artists to idealize the Prophet present challenges to knowing what Joseph Smith looked like. If we are to have any chance of knowing him, we must learn to see him fairly and fully.

SEEING JOSEPH SMITH

THE CHANGING IMAGE OF THE MORMON PROPHET

By Robert A. Rees



WHAT DID JOSEPH SMITH LOOK LIKE? Despite numerous first-hand verbal descriptions, a significant number of artistic renditions, including some done in his lifetime, and possibly one photographic image, we really don't know. At the beginning of his exploration, *Joseph Smith Portraits: A Search for the Prophet's Likeness*, Ephraim Hatch explains:

Existing artistic likenesses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, both old and new, provide a wide variety of images, creating confusion. After his untimely death, . . . paintings, sculptures, and photographic copies were manufactured, all based on a scant few likenesses thought to have been made during his lifetime. Written descriptions of the Prophet left in newspapers, journals, and letters by people who knew him only add to the confusion.

Hatch suggests that part of the problem lies in the fact that some [images] have proven to be incorrect representations, but they are still significant because they have been and are still very popular. Some others have not been popular and have even been ridiculed.

Conflicting visual renditions, the persistence of inaccurate

popular images, and the propensity of Latter-day Saint artists to idealize the Prophet—each presents a challenge. This isn't to say there is no constructive purpose for idealized images of heroes and prophets.

For example, while bearing little resemblance to the actual event, Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's painting, *George Washington Crossing the Delaware*, nevertheless inspires patriotism, just as heroic portrayals of the Saints crossing the Rocky Mountains inspire devotion.

While idealization has legitimate purposes, it also exacts costs. At times, it is crucial to confront the world in its stark and even horrifying reality. Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, is as un-idealistic a statement about war as one could imagine. Both anti-romantic and anti-realistic, it has been called "modern art's most powerful anti-war statement."²

I contend that we are best served by having a range of renditions. The idealistic can inspire but also blind, just as the too-realistic may cause us to withdraw emotionally. Thus I believe that the increasingly idealized and romanticized portraits of Joseph Smith by Mormon artists may not serve the requirements of an increasingly diverse church nor the demands of a mature faith facing the realities of a twenty-first century world.



ROBERT A. REES is the editor of *Proving Contraries: A Collection of Writings in Honor of Eugene England* (Signature Books, 2005) and a collection of essays on the *Book of Mormon* to be published in 2007. He is currently finishing a play on the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

IN HIS *WAYS OF SEEING*, a provocative book and film on how we read paintings and other graphic images, John Berger suggests that how we see a painting depends less on the painting itself than on what we bring to it:

The relation between what we see and what we know

is never settled. . . . The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. . . . We never look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. . . . Yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing.³

Thus, how we regard Joseph Smith—for example, whether we see him as a prophet or as an imposter—will influence how we respond to graphic representations of him.

One of Berger's arguments is that our culture prejudices the way in which we view paintings or other graphic images. Another of his arguments is that we sometimes see what we are conditioned or told to see, that we are influenced by others' ways of seeing. In short, Berger's work illustrates the highly subjective nature of our ocular perception.

Let's put this to a test. Stop for a moment and respond to the Joseph Smith image on this page (Figure 1). Now, analyze your reaction. If you knew nothing of the graphic artist who rendered this image and were told it was designed for an anti-Mormon website, would you see it differently than you did? Would your reaction change if you were told the Church had commissioned the image for its new Joseph Smith website?

Actually, it is neither. If you recognized this graphic from the cover of Dan Vogel's biography of Joseph Smith,⁴ then your response to it will, to some extent, be influenced by whether you feel Vogel's treatment of the prophet is fair and balanced or biased and distorted. Personally, I see this image in a neutral way and feel it is an apt metaphor for the challenge of seeing Joseph Smith, reasons for which I will share in my conclusion.

HOW WAS JOSEPH Smith seen by his contemporaries? Two eyewitness reports suggest that even the perceptions of those who saw him in person were colored by the same polarized attitudes that dominate representations of the Prophet in our own time. The first eyewitness report comes from the 1 February 1831 *Palmyra Reflector*:

In his person he is tall and slender—thin favored—having but little expression of countenance, other than that of dullness; his mental powers appear to be extremely limited, and from the small opportunity he has had at school, he made little or no proficiency. . . .⁵

The second is from Lydia Bailey Knight, an early convert:

Next morning many were the curious glances that I cast at this strange man who dared to call himself a prophet. I saw a tall, well-built form, with the carriage of an Apollo; brown hair, handsome blue eyes, which seemed to dive down to the innermost thoughts with their sharp penetrating gaze; a striking countenance, and with manners at once majestic yet gentle, dignified yet exceedingly pleasant.⁶

Divergent views of the prophet continue in our day. Contemporary literature (as well as a wealth of information on the Internet) is full of verbal images of Joseph Smith as charlatan, deceiver, devil-possessed, and emotionally disturbed. One critic labels him, "The Ego-maniacal prophet";⁷ another, "Joseph Smith, a Warlock."⁸ Lynn Ridenhour, a Southern Baptist minister and Mormon sympathizer, wrote to one hundred Evangelical Christians from a cross section of denomina-

tions to solicit their views of Joseph Smith. He found that "none were favorable toward the man. . . . All of them considered Joseph Smith to be either—an imposter, egoist, plagiarist, or fanatic."⁹

Contrast this with what one reads and sees on the Church's new Joseph Smith website. There, Joseph is presented in idealized terms—"an example to all." He "is the greatest of prophets, after Jesus Christ Himself," possessing the "spirit and power of all the prophets." This portrait tends to place Joseph Smith in a cosmic context. His story begins before Creation, when he was "foreordained by God to restore His work from all previous dispensations," and points forward to the end of history, the Lord having called him "to prepare the way for

His coming in glory." The new website even moves toward suggesting that the Prophet transcended human nature. Quoting from D&C 121, the site explains that "it is the nature and disposition of almost all men. . . to exercise unrighteous dominion." But, the text continues, this was not the nature and disposition of Joseph Smith, who "chose *instead* to lead 'by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned'" (emphasis added).¹⁰

The history of art suggests that it is a common human tendency to idealize great figures. Take Jesus, for example. Isaiah said that "He should have no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2), and yet, except for some representations by certain medieval artists, he is generally portrayed as beautiful



FIGURE 1:

How you respond to this image most likely depends on the ideas about Joseph Smith that you bring to it.

CREATED BY JISK DESIGN



GUERNICA, PABLO PICASSO, 1937

Both anti-romantic and anti-realistic, Guernica has been called “modern art’s most powerful anti-war statement.”

or handsome, as a kind of ideal male figure (although at times he is also shown with highly feminine characteristics). What did Jesus really look like? We don’t know. As Edgar Snow observes:

The earliest known depictions of Jesus show him as a young, smooth-shaven shepherd. . . . Later artists showed Jesus wearing a beard, the model for our current pictures, presenting him as a sage or philosopher. Yet, for all we know, Jesus may have in fact been balding, less than muscular, short and otherwise non-descript.¹¹

As to what Joseph Smith actually (or approximately) looked like, we have a number of descriptions from his mainly sympathetic contemporaries. Ephraim Hatch, who did extensive research on both verbal and visual portrayals of the Prophet, presents the following composite portrait:

People say that he was a good-looking man, at least six feet tall, with a youthful appearance. He weighed between 180–220 pounds. He had a broad, muscular chest and shoulders which, in later years, were slightly round. He had small hands, large feet, and long legs. His head was large, oblong oval in shape. His hair was fine, not curly, and light brown, changing to auburn in later years. His eyes, light hazel or blue, were set far apart deep in the head, and were shaded by long, thick lashes and bushy brows. His nose was long and prominent. His face had a pleasant expression with an unconscious smile. His upper lip was full and a little protruding. His chin was broad and square with very little beard. His forehead was sloping and unfurrowed. His complexion was light, sometimes called pale. He was unusually well-dressed, generally in black with a white necktie.¹²

After considering various artistic depictions and what is re-



FIGURE 2: JOSEPH SMITH DEATH MASK

The mask has been used to measure the accuracy of portraits.

vealed by the Prophet’s death mask (Figure 2), Hatch concludes that the images which “possess the most essential elements of his true likeness” are those created by Sutcliffe Maudsley, a “profilist and contemporary of Joseph Smith.”¹³ Chief among these, according to Hatch, is a full-length profile rendered by Maudsley in Nauvoo in 1842 (Figure 3) and a profile drawing of the same period (Figure 4). (For the cover of his book, Hatch used another image, not by Maudsley, that Hatch believes likewise closely approximates

the Prophet’s physical likeness and which he therefore hopes will “find extensive acceptance.” This image is a 1996 oil painting by William Whitaker. See Figure 5.)¹⁴

Maudsley, a British convert who emigrated to Nauvoo, did other representations of the Prophet as well as several of Joseph and his brother Hyrum. Showing an early proclivity to present the Prophet in an idealized manner (Figure 6), Maudsley casts Joseph in a more favorable light compared to his brother. In Maudsley’s portrait, Hyrum’s buttoned coat, his more reserved stance, and the fact that his hands are clasped and his walking stick touching the ground, all suggest a more conservative nature, perhaps one given to following rather than leading. By contrast, Maudsley’s Joseph appears with open coat, hand on hip, a more open, slightly *contrapposto* stance, and a walking stick that disappears at an angle behind his right leg. Even though contemporaries report that Hyrum

was some two to three inches taller than Joseph, here Joseph is taller and his entire physique larger and more boldly presented than his brother's, suggesting the difference between prophet and disciple.

Continuing his design of presenting Joseph in an idealized manner, Maudsley (or an imitator) portrays the Prophet in another portrait with a halo-like aura around his head, suggestive of prophetic power (Figure 7).

Maudsley's portraits influenced a number of artists and illustrators in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Figures 8 through 14). These early portraits, done in the style of the time, present Joseph as a rather static personality. Variations on a theme, they seem to capture some of the Prophet's distinctive physical characteristics—his prominent nose, his muscular chest, and, in some, his almost feminine features—but they reveal little of his inner personality. Of course, most of the Saints in the mid-nineteenth century were personally acquainted with Joseph Smith and had their own memories of what he looked like and therefore didn't need other representations.

The other dominant portrait of the Prophet made in his own lifetime is an oil painting “dating back from the 1840s or even the 1830s”¹⁵ (Figure 15) in the possession of the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). Most scholars believe this is a portrait which Joseph, in his journal, reports having sat for,¹⁶ from which it would follow that it most closely resembles him. However, Hatch is skeptical about the portrait's accuracy, especially when it is compared with the death mask taken of Joseph shortly after his martyrdom:

The artist may have consciously or unconsciously portrayed Joseph's face as different than it actually was in keeping with artistic fashion of the mid-nineteenth century. He may have altered Joseph's portrait because he saw some distracting features in his face and was attempting to ‘correct’ them.¹⁷

The most significant indication that this portrait bears little resemblance to the Prophet is his own comment on it as reported by Emma (in whose house the painting hung) to Junius F. Wells in 1875–76: “Emma that is a nice painting of a silly boy, but it don't look much like a prophet of the Lord.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, artists used this portrait to create additional likenesses of the Prophet. Charles W. Carter's (Figure 16) is an example.

Recently a possible daguerreotype of the Prophet has surfaced. It is in the possession of the Community of Christ and is now being analyzed for authenticity. Called the “Scannel daguerreotype,” it is unlike any of the other images we have of Joseph Smith. However, it bears enough of a resemblance to the Prophet's death mask to suggest at least the possibility that this is a photographic image of him. Until the photograph is authenticated, however, the Community of Christ is not making it available for reproduction.

In 1910, Lewis A. Ramsey created an oil painting of the Prophet (Figure 17) using a drawing of a Maudsley portrait, a photograph of the Reorganized Church's oil painting, and the

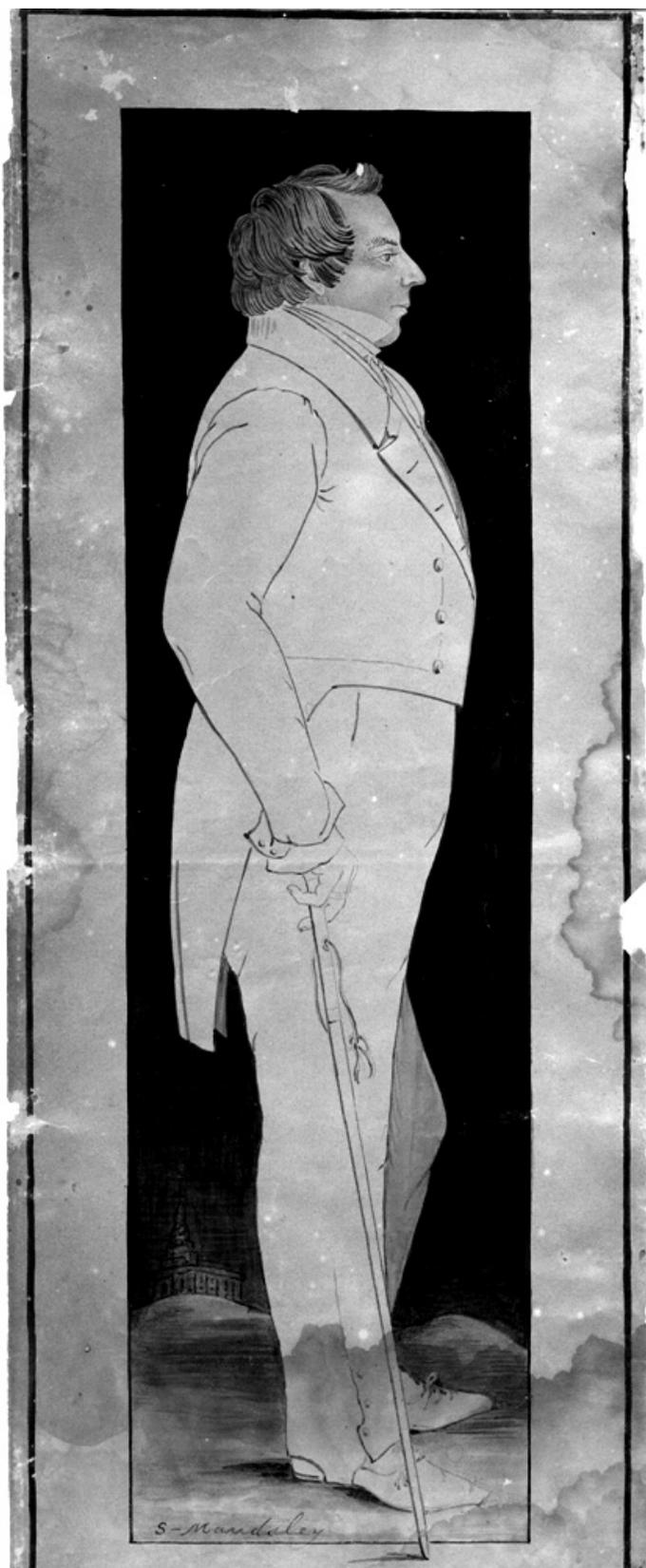


FIGURE 3: SUTCLIFFE MAUDSLEY, 1842
Maudsley's renderings of Joseph Smith, like this one done in Nauvoo, have been said to contain “the essential elements of his true likeness.”



FIGURE 4:
SUTCLIFFE MAUDSLEY (42–44?)



FIGURE 5:
WILLIAM WHITAKER, 1996



FIGURE 7:
SUTCLIFFE MAUDSLEY?,
(1842–44?)

Prophet's death mask. One observer of Ramsey's painting reported that "many people, alive today, and who knew him, declare [this] to be more life-like than any previous painting of the Prophet."¹⁹

Other portraits before the mid-twentieth century that seem inspired to some extent by Ramsey's rendition include those by W. Brown in 1915 (Figure 18), Peter Kamps in 1930 (Figure 19), and, the most interesting, Richard Burde in 1946 (Figure 20).

Burde's visualization, with its sideways glance directed at the viewer, suggests something of the Prophet's enigmatic nature.

IN THE LATTER half of the twentieth century, we begin to see Joseph transformed. Increasingly, some of the more prominent physical features of the prophet, especially those that might be considered less attractive, begin to disappear and are replaced with features that are both more heroic and, in some instances, more romantic. This trend begins with Alvin Gittins's 1959 portrait commissioned by the LDS First Presidency (Figure 21). According to a report in the *Church News*, Gittins said of his painting:

I decided that rather than be influenced by other paintings, I would go to whatever original sources I could find describing the Prophet, then form my own concept of his likeness. . . . I read whatever I could find describing him, then worked from the death mask.

The article continues,

Mr. Gittins pointed out that both those who were

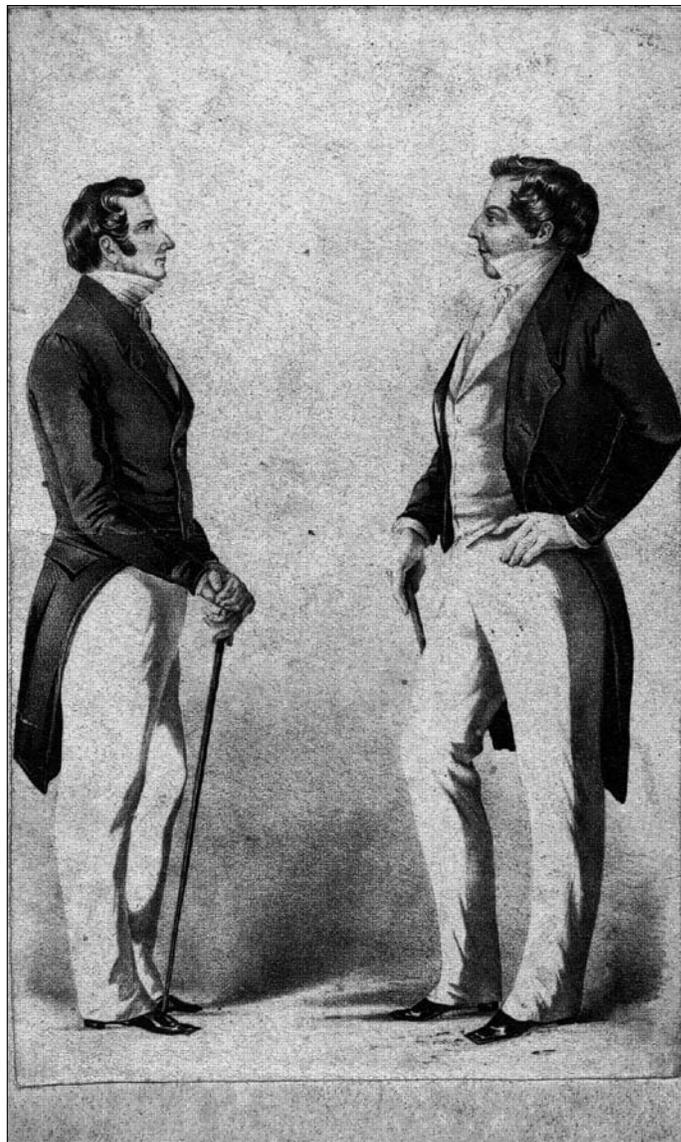


FIGURE 6: SUTCLIFFE MAUDSLEY, (1842–44?)
An early attempt to present Joseph Smith in an idealized manner, Maudsley renders him taller and with a more dominant stance than his brother.

friendly and unfriendly with the Prophet agreed that he was a very striking man in appearance. He was unusually tall and was muscular, yet sensitive. Many observers commented on the unusually magnetic quality of his eyes. The artist said he attempted to embody all of these elements in the portrait.²⁰

Gittins's portrait, the most popular rendition in the twentieth century, shows a highly idealized prophet. Gittins has regularized the Prophet's hooked nose, made his hairstyle less extreme, reduced his barrel chest, and generally smoothed and softened his physical contours. Overall, the Prophet is seen as a handsome, striking figure. More significant than these physical details is the Prophet's stance: his right hand rests firmly on his hip (with the fan-like pattern of Joseph's fingers echoed by a sheaf of papers in his left hand) and his confident, assured



FIGURE 8:
attrib.
DAVID ROGERS



FIGURE 9:
UNKNOWN
ARTIST



FIGURE 10:
OLIVER PELTON
(1842–44)



FIGURE 11:
UNKNOWN
ENGRAVER



FIGURE 12:
UNKNOWN
ENGRAVER



FIGURE 13:
DANQUART A.
WEGGELAND, 1875



FIGURE 14:
DANQUART A.
WEGGELAND, 1875

FIGURES 8–14 (left to right): Figure 8, possibly Maudsley or David Rogers; Figure 9, etching for Samuel Brannon's *New Messenger*; Figure 10, engraving by OLIVER PELTON (1842–44); Figure 11, made by H.B. Hall & Sons, 1878; Figure 12, steel engraving from a sketch made by FREDERICK PIERCY, 1855; Figure 13, DANQUART A. WEGGELAND, 1875; Figure 14, DANQUART A. WEGGELAND, 1875.



FIGURE 15: UNKNOWN ARTIST, 1830s or 1840s



FIGURE 16: CHARLES WILLIAM CARTER, 1886

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST MUSEUM

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST ARCHIVES



FIGURE 17:
LEWIS A. RAMSEY, 1910



FIGURE 18:
W. BROWN, 1915



FIGURE 19:
PETER KAMPS, 1930



FIGURE 20:
RICHARD BURDE, 1946

gaze surveys, as it were, the world. This portrait reminds us more of those done of Lorenzo de Medici and other Renaissance figures than of homespun nineteenth-century Americans.

An image more reflective of Joseph's time and place is that done by Theodore Gorka in 1981 (Figures 22 and 23). Although Joseph is here clothed as a frontiersman who has been laboring with his hands, his placement at the center of the painting, his stark white shirt and confident gaze set him apart from all those who surround him, including the apparently skeptical man to his left. Here he seems to embody the Yankee competence and confidence necessary to conquer the American frontier.

The end of the twentieth century saw portraits of the Prophet that were more idealized, almost hagiographic visualizations. These include those by David Lindsay, 1998 (Figure 25); Liz Lemon Swindle, 1998 (Figure 26); Kenneth Corbett, 1999 (Figure 27); and Del Parson, 1999 (Figure 29).

Parson's portrait shows Joseph Smith as almost transcendent. One observer suggests that the similarity of Parson's portrait of Joseph to his most famous portrait of Jesus (Figure 28) represents a conscious or unconscious desire to link the two.²¹ Both Joseph and Jesus are portrayed with light hair and eyes, and the shape and contour of their faces are remarkably alike. The similarity is even more striking when one compares the shape of the figures' noses, lips, chins, and foreheads. I find similar, although less dramatic, correspondence between Joseph and Parson's later painting of Jesus (Figure 30). The illuminating light behind all of these figures as well as their respective white shirt/robe highlight the similarities.

Of the trend toward idealized portrayals, Peggy Fletcher Stack observes,

As he gets closer to his 200th birthday, Joseph Smith has grown more handsome. In modern portraits and films, the Mormon church founder's large nose, Napoleonic hairstyle, and stout belly have given way

to the leaner, tanner look of a California surfer. He seems less remote and more like us.²²

While this is certainly true, in another way, the Prophet has become more remote. That is, the more we idealize and romanticize him, the more we smooth over his rough edges, the more we edit out or explain away his weaknesses and failures, the less he is like us—and, therefore, the less we can identify with him.

A departure from the trend to represent Joseph as heroic or angelic is the rendition by recent Mormon convert Mark Inman shown on the front cover of this SUNSTONE issue. Commenting on his portrait, Inman states:

The reason I painted the prophet the way I did was to help bring the culture of the Church into today's world. I believe that many depictions of the prophet don't show his real humanity, that they are merely propaganda pieces or that they depict him only at his greatest moments. But Smith was human, and I wanted to bring him to a place people can relate to him.

Of his choice to do a modernist portrayal of Joseph, fragmenting his face and using different color tones in each fragment, Inman says:

I saw so many open-minded people in the Church, but at the same time, no one was doing anything of much interest to me artistically. So I wanted to change that.

Will I ever do another portrait of him? I don't know. I don't have an answer as to why there are so few modernist portrayals of Joseph Smith. But I do know that my portrayal was done with the deepest respect for the Prophet and speaks to many in the Church that Mormon culture is changing and entering the real world.²³

I view Inman's portrait and his explanation of his intentions positively, and I am pleased by SUNSTONE's decision to use this



FIGURE 21: ALVIN GITTINS, 1959

Both heroic and romantic features begin to appear in the Prophet's portraits.



portrait on the cover. At the same time, I do not mean to suggest that Inman's rendition is the best contemporary portrait or that his style should be emulated. What I do propose is that we as a church, as well as the broader culture, deserve to have a wide range of images of this important figure in religious, national, and world history, including images that are bold, experimental, and challenging. I hope that some such images will come from artists in the developing world who may help us to see Joseph Smith with fresh eyes.

Images of Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century tended to be repetitive variations on Maudsley's renditions from life, while those of the twentieth century tended toward idealization and romanticization. I hope the twenty-first century will present to us a more varied gallery of images of the Prophet.

A HALF CENTURY ago, Joseph Fielding Smith stated categorically, "[Joseph Smith] was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds the world has ever seen; there is no middle ground."²⁴

Today, many of us do not see the need to make such a stark



FIGURES 22 AND 23:
THEODORE GORKA, 1981

choice. With the availability of previously unknown documents and the advent of the "new Mormon history," we know much more about Joseph Smith than did Latter-day Saints of any previous generation, perhaps including even his own. We know more about his origins, more about the dynamics of the family in which he grew up, more about his psychological profile, and more about his role in the unfolding of the new religion he established. In short, we know the Prophet to be a much more complex personality than is presented in either anti-Mormon or official Church sources.

In a 2005 Sunstone symposium panel, "Seeing the Seer with New Eyes: Revisioning Joseph Smith," Lance Owens said:

A prophet's history flows from two springs, one above and one below, both melding in currents of his life. What story from above the prophet may have heard will remain his secret, the history no man knows. But by turning to the larger realm of prophetic history and its occult legacy, the record of its aspirations, its symbols and lore, and the enigmatic histories of the women and men who have been caught in this unique human

remain his secret, the history no man knows. But by turning to the larger realm of prophetic history and its occult legacy, the record of its aspirations, its symbols and lore, and the enigmatic histories of the women and men who have been caught in this unique human



FIGURE 25:
DAVID LINDSAY, 1998



FIGURE 26:
LIZ LEMON SWINDLE, 1998



FIGURE 27:
KENNETH CORBETT, 1999

As he got closer to his 200th birthday, Joseph Smith grew handsomer.

experience, we may begin to find a methodology that leads us with new wonder into the unknown history of Joseph Smith.²⁵

In spite of the fact that some will continue to insist on seeing Joseph Smith in extreme terms, as either holy man or fraud, it seems likely that some moderation of those polar positions will increasingly inform our views of him. If, as he said, “no man knows my history,” he will continue to defy stereotyping and easy categorization. Emerson said that “every great institution is the lengthened shadow of a single man. His character determines the character of the organization.” It is clear that for Mormonism, that lengthened shadow belongs to Emerson’s contemporary, Joseph Smith. That it is *lengthened* suggests something about the power of Joseph Smith’s personality; that it is a *shadow* suggests something about the difficulty we may have in seeing him with his amazing gifts and accomplishments, as well as his contradictions and complexities.

While perhaps necessary in the early stages of spiritual and moral development, an ennobled, hagiographic portrait of Joseph Smith will not serve us well as we move into the more challenging and complex kinds of discipleship to which we are called. It is easy to dismiss Joseph Smith as a charlatan or imposter; it is equally easy to see him as a prophet without faults or failings. It requires a more mature faith to accept as prophet a man who, in spite of his enormous accomplishments, may have had some of the same weaknesses and failings we have.

There is little doubt that Joseph Smith was an extraordinary figure, one possessed of unusual gifts and powerful charisma. But if we indeed desire, in the words of the hymn, to “know Brother Joseph again,” then we must see him in his full humanity as well as in the holiness of his prophetic calling. Only thus can Brother Joseph truly be known. As Richard

Bushman’s excellent new biography of the Prophet attests, Joseph Smith did not see himself in the elevated terms that many of his followers see him. He knew himself well enough to know that he was a “rough stone.” Undoubtedly he would have been embarrassed to see how we try to polish him.²⁶

I RETURN TO the image of the prophet with which I began (Figure 1). As this Janus-headed image suggests through its left-right profiles, contrasting light-dark imagery, and echoing shadows, it is difficult to achieve consensus about Joseph Smith. The image we see here is literally positive and negative, facing the past as well as the future. We see Joseph Smith in the echo of shadow as well as light. His double image is encompassed by the circle, which symbolizes the heart and the imagination, and the square, which symbolizes the mind and rational processes. Just as Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* is defined by both circle and square, so we can know Joseph Smith, see him in our mind’s eye and our heart’s eye, only if we, believers and non-believers alike, see him fairly and fully.

At this two-hundredth anniversary of his birth, Joseph Smith remains a complex, enigmatic, and elusive figure. And it is likely that he will remain so. ☞

NOTES

AUTHOR’S NOTE: I express appreciation to those who were helpful in gathering the images included in this article. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Natalie Overson of the Church Historian’s Office and Ron Romig of the Community of Christ.

1. Ephraim Hatch, *Joseph Smith Portraits: A Search for the Prophet’s Likeness* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 1, 31.
2. Quoted in “Guernica: Testimony of War,” at www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/guernica/gmain.html, accessed 8 December 2005.
3. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1972), 7, 10.

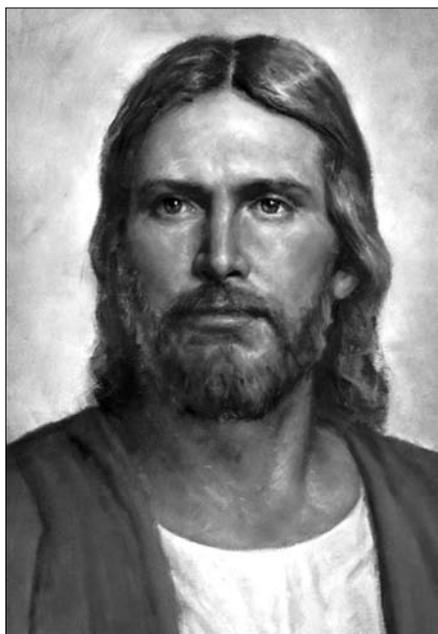


FIGURE 28:
DEL PARSON, 1983

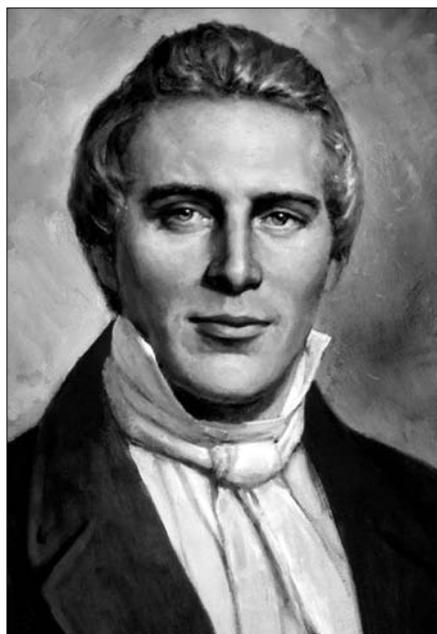


FIGURE 29:
DEL PARSON, 1999

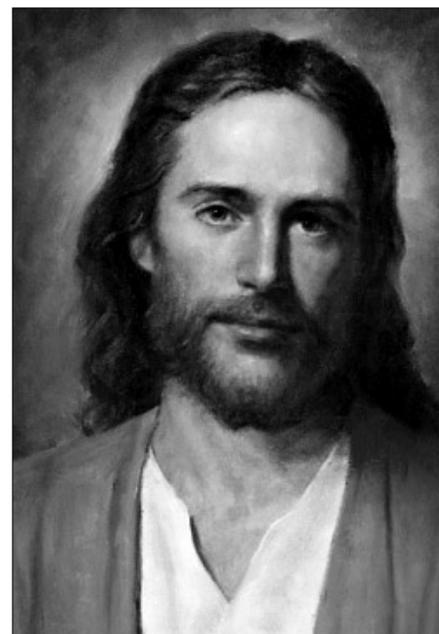


FIGURE 30:
DEL PARSON, 1999

Do the similarities between Parson's portraits of Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ represent an unconscious desire to link the two?

4. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: the Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

5. Cited in *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 241.

6. Cited in Hyrum L. and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Saw the Prophet* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2004), 41.

7. See <http://www.lambllion.com/articles/doctrinal/Cults/Cults-12.php>, accessed 22 July 2005.

8. See <http://www.luciferlink.org/mwarlock.htm>, accessed 22 July 2005.

9. See "What Do You Think of Joseph Smith?" at http://www.greaterthings.com/Ridenhour/me_in_restoration/JosephSmith.htm, accessed 22 July 2005.

10. See www.josephsmith.net, accessed 9 December 2005.

11. Edgar Snow, "No Ma'am, That's Not My Image," commentary on Ephraim Hatch's *Joseph Smith Portraits: A Search for the Prophet's Likeness*, found at <http://www.aml-online.org/reviews/b/B199863.html>, accessed 9 December 2005.

12. Ephraim Hatch, "What Did Joseph Look Like?" *Ensign*, March 1981, 65–73.

13. Hatch, *Portraits*, 107. Some, including the Prophet's own son, Joseph Smith III, felt that Maudsley's renditions were "caricatures." Hatch disagrees: "[Maudsley's] profiles have been misjudged and sometimes not accepted. Nevertheless, I find his profile outlines of the Prophet's face, head, and body to be very accurate when compared to the death mask, family physical traits, and written descriptions left to us by Joseph's contemporaries."

14. *Ibid.*, 105. Hatch notes that Whitaker based his rendition on the RLDS oil (Figure 15 in the text) "not only because of its popularity, but because the artist of this early work was skilled in many ways, and there is reason to believe he painted from life. To make a true likeness, it was necessary that he correct some of the dimensional errors of the face. This he has done, using the death mask, family traits, and written descriptions as his primary sources. . . . I find this to be an outstanding portrait of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and I hope it will find extensive acceptance."

15. *Ibid.*, 48.

16. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–96), 2:391, 482.

17. Hatch, *Portraits*, 52.

18. Cited in Hatch, *Portraits*, 50.

19. *Juvenile Instructor*, April 1910, 153; cited in Hatch, *Portraits*, 85.

20. Cited in Hatch, *Portraits*, 89. Note the exaggeration in this description ("He was unusually tall"). As noted earlier, Joseph was approximately six feet tall, not an unusual height for his time.

21. "I mentioned the likeness between Joseph Smith and the painting of the

Lord Jesus Christ that the LDS Church commissioned back in 1983 by Mr. Parson. I have had people call me a fool, and tell me I have too much time on my hands or say, I should never have asked in the first place just accepted that the Lord had blond hair and blue eyes. My question was two fold. Why is it when you make one 75–100 percent opacity then overlay the two pictures that it is a match" (original punctuation retained). Cited on Voy Forums, www.voy.com/142570/5.html, accessed 9 December 2005.

Another Internet critic commenting on Parson's portrait of Joseph Smith observes, "Apparently the artist, Del Parsons [sic], although wildly talented as an artist, believes that Jesus had enough time to fit in at least two hours of gym time a day between performing miracles and saving humanity from their depravity. From his broad shoulders to his cascading beard, he was all man." Cited on "The Jesus Page," www.juicygibbs.4t.com/photo3.html, accessed 30 July 2005.

This particular portrait, Figure 28, has been the subject of a Mormon urban legend. According to stories circulating on the Internet and elsewhere, Parson was commissioned by the Church to do a new portrait of the Savior and, after submitting several sketches, was instructed as to how to make it more in keeping with how the Savior actually looks. Related stories have to do with miraculous appearances of a stranger to protect a little girl whose parents had been killed in an automobile accident who later recognized the person as Jesus from Parson's portrait. Parson has disavowed all of these stories. See http://www.shields-research.org/Hoaxes/LDSWorld_Internet_Hoaxes_and_Mormon_Urban_Legends.htm, accessed 15 January 2006.

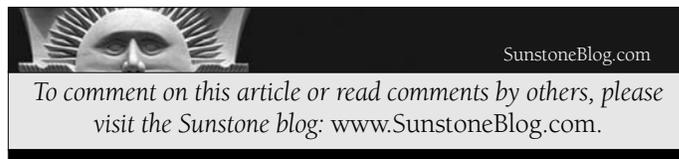
22. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Joseph's Year," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 May 2005, C1.

23. Personal correspondence, e-mail from Mark Inman to Robert Rees, July 2005.

24. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 1:188.

25. Lance Owens, from the panel discussion, "Seeing the Seer with New Eyes: Revisiting Joseph Smith," 2005 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, 29 July 2005 (Tape SL05–271); see also Owens' website: <http://www.gnosis.org/jskabb1.htm>.

26. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).



*Are the eternal truths of Mormonism dependent on the sincerity of Joseph Smith?
Does contemporary Mormon faith rest on the intentions of the first prophet?*

TRACKING THE SINCERE BELIEVER

“AUTHENTIC” RELIGION AND THE ENDURING LEGACY OF JOSEPH SMITH JR.

By Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp

I N 1902, WILLIAM A. LINN PUBLISHED A HISTORICAL work entitled *The Story of the Mormons*. That book became the most-often-cited treatment of the LDS Church written by a non-Mormon in the early twentieth century. Linn's exhaustive work includes more than 600 pages of text, multiple appendices, and copious citations of the works of Joseph Smith Jr., Lucy Mack Smith, and Parley P. Pratt, as well as pro- and anti-Mormon materials Linn gathered while conducting his research in the New York Public Library. In many respects, Linn's volume is a typical anti-Mormon exposé. Like other Gentiles who'd written before him, Linn sees Mormonism as a phenomenon of inviting surfaces that glosses the evils lurking beneath. The job of the historian—his job—is to unveil the deceptions, to show Mormonism for what it really is: a web of deceit spun by power-hungry leaders to ensnare the easily duped American public.

The centerpiece of Linn's debunking enterprise is his exposure of Joseph Smith as a fraud. At the very opening of his history, Linn explains that people in every time and place have been fooled by religious impostors. However, there is something particular about Joseph Smith's deceptions. Linn writes:

It is true that the effrontery which has characterized Mormonism from the start has been most daring. Its founder a lad of low birth, very limited education, and uncertain morals; its beginnings so near burlesque that they drew down upon its originators the

scoff of their neighbors,—the organization increased its membership as it was driven from one state to another, building up at last in an untried wilderness a population that has steadily augmented its wealth and numbers; doggedly defending its right to practise its peculiar beliefs and obey only the officers of the Church.¹

Linn's comparison of Mormonism to a theatrical production—a mocking and unoriginal imitation of religion put forward by a man who was probably immoral—reveals Linn's own beliefs more than it describes Joseph Smith's following then or now. In making this claim, Linn reveals an important assumption that deserves further exploration: He assumes that Joseph Smith's sincerity is inextricably linked to the truths of the Mormon faith. Because he judges that Smith's intentions were not honest, the religion itself is rendered a sham. Religious *truth* is thus linked to Smith's personal *sincerity*—defined as genuine, honest, and free of duplicity.

This issue still haunts discussions of Smith's legacy: Are the eternal truths of Mormonism dependent on the sincerity of Joseph Smith? And, a corollary to that question: Does contemporary Mormon faith rest on the intentions of the first prophet?

These may seem like inappropriate or even impudent questions to ask during the 200th anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth. After all, in an important sense, history is truth. Christianity is a religious tradition that makes both historical and transhistorical claims: it is grounded in a historical narrative that is itself an element of its truth claim yet is also wedded to ideals and principles that are thought to be eternal. When a Christian claims to believe, he or she is confessing to believe in both a real-life story of Jesus' death and resurrection, and also in timeless principles about the world. Mormons share these claims but add to them a testimony of the veracity of Joseph



LAURIE F. MAFFLY-KIPP is associate professor of religious studies and American studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she teaches a popular course, “Mormonism and the American Experience.” This essay was presented at the Smith-Pettit Lecture at the 2005 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium (Tape SL05-091).



BRIAN KUBARYCZ

Smith's revelations and of belief in a Father in Heaven who has been revealed and is continuing to reveal himself to humanity. Joseph Smith has to be there, in the story, for the tradition to make sense. History must be in play.

But it bears stating, as historian Kathleen Flake and others have so ably shown us, that the historical account of the Mormon tradition can be told in numerous ways; the narrative is not self-evident or unchanging.² In other words, the history of early Mormonism doesn't have to be told in the way it usually is: by placing Smith's guilelessness and honesty front and center. There may be other options, other angles of vision that reveal elements obscured by the shadow of Joseph Smith's personal story. Even if we do linger on Smith's account, it is instructive to move away from the "sincerity box," as I want to call it, to see the Mormon prophet in other lights.

This essay attempts to do three different things. First, it explores how the notion of sincerity has been used by believers and nonbelievers alike to make claims about the truth of Mormonism. Second, it focuses on sincerity as a concept and explores why it can be a problem rather than a solution. And finally, it suggests some other possible framings for the exploration of Mormon history.

THE IDEAL OF religious sincerity is so pervasive in our day and age that we may not even realize the many ways it affects what we see and feel. Many readers may be wondering, in fact: What's the problem here? Of course religious truth is about belief, about having the right internal disposition. Like the air we breathe, our dependence on it is practically automatic.

Almost everyone before and after William Linn—believers, nonbelievers, and agnostics alike—have assumed that judging Smith's intentions will take us directly to the heart of the truth of Mormonism. At the end of the day—or at least at the end of this essay—you may still decide that judging personal sincerity is the surest way to gauge true religion. But I'd like to at least temporarily pull apart this connection, to bracket the question of the ultimate truth of Smith's work and focus instead on Smith's psychology—and thereby show how people use evidence of sincerity to judge the objective validity of the Mormon tradition. For present purposes, I'm not concerned about whether God actually revealed himself to Joseph, or whether there were golden plates in



the New York hills. Instead, I want to focus on how people talk about Smith's relationship to those ancient writings. What I'm most intrigued by is the presumed clean connection between feeling and action, the importance people place on judging what Joseph thought and felt as a litmus test for the validity of Mormon origins and, by extension, for contemporary LDS faith.

So much discussion of Mormonism over the past 175 years has centered on Joseph Smith's sincerity. We might have expected that from Linn—but one hundred years later, biographies and historians continue to engage the issue. In revisiting this terrain, I am struck not only by the vast historiography, but by the patterns of argument, the well-worn channels in which it runs. The most obvious pivot point, of course, is the issue of supernatural versus natural explanations for Smith's work and authority. Was Smith a prophet of God or a charlatan? Related to character questions, almost by necessity, is the issue of how we are to understand the content and production of the Book of Mormon. Is it chloroform in print, as Mark Twain would have it?³ The fantastic imaginings of a creative but thoroughly natural mind, as Fawn Brodie has proposed?⁴ Is it Nathan Hatch's outburst of populist rant?⁵ Or is it, as many believers would hold, the inspired word of God? Did Smith dig it out of a hillside? Did he *think* he dug it out of a hillside? Did he lie and tell people he dug it out of a hillside but for all the right reasons? Authors almost always weigh in on Smith's character. "Was Joseph Smith an honest man?" seems to me to be the underlying question for nearly every interpretation of his life.

Although this matter of Smith's sincerity may seem, on the face of it, to constitute a straightforward battle between believers and unbelievers, Saints and Gentiles, the terrain does not map that easily onto patterns of faith. Take Fawn Brodie, whose 1945 biography of Smith resulted in lambasting by prominent Mormon scholars and her excommunication from the Church. Brodie admires Smith even as she offers thoroughly mundane explanations for his power. As I read her, Brodie thinks that Smith is a really interesting man with a forceful intellect; she argues that "faithful" scholarship has, in fact, downplayed his natural talents in order to bolster the supernatural origins of his book. Harold Bloom, no believer himself, nonetheless considers Smith a religious genius.⁶

Faithful Latter-day Saints have focused equal attention on Smith's inner state. Notice the way that the interplay of surface appearance and interior disposition shapes Marvin Hill's review of Brodie's biography:

The Joseph Smith she depicts is a deliberate deceiver who played out his masquerade for personal advantage. The implication is that Joseph Smith was in fact skeptical as to the truths of Christianity, that he never underwent that moment of conversion which he details in his autobiography, and that he continued to enact his subterfuge until for so doing he was shot by a mob at the Carthage jail. She maintains that, to a considerable extent, his religious efforts were play-acting for the benefit of an appreciative audience.⁷

Hill (along with many others) was incensed by the characterization of Smith as a religious hypocrite whose inner feelings did not match his outer actions.

On the other side of the fence of faith, the less sympathetic biographer Dan Vogel acknowledges this mismatch of interior disposition and external actions but still feels a need to separate the "true" from the "false" religious experience. He theorizes insincerity as, in some cases, morally justifiable:

I'M INTRIGUED BY THE PRESUMED CLEAN CONNECTION BETWEEN FEELING AND ACTION, THE IMPORTANCE PEOPLE PLACE ON JUDGING WHAT JOSEPH THOUGHT AND FELT AS A LITMUS TEST FOR THE VALIDITY OF MORMON ORIGINS AND, BY EXTENSION, FOR CONTEMPORARY LDS FAITH.

Smith really believed he was called of God to preach repentance to a sinful world but . . . he felt justified in using deception to more fully accomplish his mission. Like the faith healer who uses plants or confederates in his congregation to create a faith-promoting atmosphere in which the true miracles can occur, Smith assumed the role of prophet, produced the Book of Mormon, and issued revelations to create a setting in which true conversion experiences could take place. It is the true healings and conversions that not only justify deception but also convince the pious frauds that they are perhaps after all real healers or real prophets.⁸

But the very vigor with which Vogel broaches the subject indicates a discomfort with it; he rationalizes Smith's insincerity. Joseph Smith, however pious, was fraudulent in his means—a fact that invalidates his ministry.

Richard Bushman's recent biography on Joseph Smith is the most exhaustive and sophisticated treatment available. He, too, stresses Smith's sincerity. Smith thought of himself as a revelator, Bushman asserts. Like the Quaker George Fox or the prophets of the Old Testament, he was guided by the voice of God, not the workings of his own mind. In order to "get inside the mind" of the prophet, explains Bushman, one must recognize this fact. Bushman feels that this gets around the thorny question of

whether or not the revelations were *really* from God—in any case, he determines, Smith *thought* they were.⁹ For Bushman, just like the others, it is Smith's veracity that is at stake.

I don't know whether Joseph Smith thought he heard the voice of God or not. Nor is my purpose to judge any of these interpretations that focus on such questions. My purpose, rather, is to call our attention reflexively to the persistence of interest, from both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars, in Smith's sincerity. Did he mean what he said? Did he feel religious inside? Did his outer actions match his inner state? Interestingly, Brodie, Hill, and Vogel all agree that Smith *must* have come to some kind of "inner equilibrium," as Brodie puts it, which allowed for a measure of "sincerity."¹⁰

I should point out, too, that it's not just historians who are interested in this question. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints itself has increasingly elevated Joseph Smith's simplicity and guilelessness as chief virtues. Kathleen Flake tells us that it was only at the turn of the twentieth century, as the Church set out to prove its "Americanness" and downplay its peculiarities, that the First Vision and the tale of the young, uneducated, and innocent boy became a hallmark of the faith.¹¹ The Church has its own reasons for telling the story

this way: the naiveté of a young boy, in an important sense, stands in as a sign of the religious validity of the Church as a whole. Current LDS literature makes this bond explicit. In his April 2002 General Conference address, Elder Carlos Amado urged newcomers to "read the testimony of Joseph Smith with an open mind and real intent. You will feel his sincerity, and you will discover the establishment of the Church, restored in a miraculous way!"¹² Through Joseph Smith's sincerity, then, new believers will come into the Church. Increasingly, belief in Smith's veracity has become a signal feature of faithfulness.

Yet as a philosophical issue (I'll return to the historical question later), sincerity turns out to be a complicated matter: it can be misleading. The LDS Church teaches, on the one hand, that Mormons need sincerity (both theirs and Joseph's) to obtain true faith. They must enter into their exploration with the right heart. On the other hand, the Church cautions that sincerity is not enough: "At the outset of this investigation," explains Elder John Morgan in an 1881 pamphlet,

it is deemed proper and advisable to refer to another point, so that we may have a clear understanding. The point is: Sincerity of belief does not in any way establish the correctness of a principle. Only an unimpeachable testimony can do that.¹³

This reminder that sincerity of belief is not enough to establish something's truthfulness is an important one. But what

about the converse of this equation? Can insincere people express correct ideas and enact religious truths—sometimes despite themselves? It's an interesting question to which I now turn.

THE CHURCH CLEARLY has theological investments in Smith's sincerity. But why should Smith's sincerity matter to us? Of what consequence is it to both believers and nonbelievers to evaluate and judge sincerity? How are the questions we all ask of Joseph Smith—and thus the way we tell his story and the story of the church he founded—shaped by our own cultural assumptions?

It's important, first, to place ourselves in time. Sincerity, it turns out, has not always been seen as a hallmark of religious authenticity. In fact, sincerity itself—or at least the idea that one's inner thoughts and feelings had much to do with one's salvation—has been a subject of considerable dispute in the Christian tradition for at least five hundred years. As Lionel Trilling points out in his provocative essays in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, the word "sincerity" entered the English language in the first third of the sixteenth century, just at the dawn of the Reformation. And the word was connected, morally and aesthetically, to that tumultuous religious transformation: it was derived from the Latin term meaning, literally, "clean, or sound, or pure."¹⁴ Catholics before the Reformation worried much less about intentions and much more about actions, for salvation was earned principally through the rites and sacraments of the church. For Protestants, trying to separate themselves from Catholic ritualism and ceremony, having a "clean soul" became increasingly important. Sincerity provided a convenient way to distinguish "pure" doctrine, religion, or Gospel, from the impure (Catholic). Because Protestants—relying on the Apostle Paul and Augustine as their guides—believed that exterior action flowed from a right interior disposition, they were deeply disturbed by any evidence that one's actions might not accord with one's faith or feelings. Unlike Catholics, who retained the conviction that deeds themselves could motivate feelings (as well as the other way around), Protestants prized purity of heart and purpose as the hallmarks of good character. *Sola fide*. Faith alone will win you heaven. It was only in subsequent centuries that sincerity came to



connote an individual character trait—as in, the absence of feigning or pretense.

Trilling also points out that this revolution in sensibility, this transformation to seeing good character as a matter of inner disposition rather than the performance of particular activities, prompted numerous explorations of the themes of dissemblance and dissimulation in the Elizabethan Era. Think of the number of Shakespeare's plays that deal with the discrepancy between appearance and disposition: men pose as women, villains pretend to be good, and people are fooled by pretense to both comic and tragic effect. The Protestant-inspired fervor for the "pure personality" gained added force in the New World. During the religious revivals of the eighteenth century, so-called "New Light" Protestants proclaimed that one could not be a true Christian without having had a saving experience of God's grace. In turn, considerable scrutiny fell on religious leaders. Were *they* saved? If not, could they save other people? What was the relationship between salvation and inner disposition? In its most famous formulation, one New Light leader asks, "Is a dead man fit to bring others to life?"¹⁵ In other words, those ministers who were not purified internally by God could not lead others to salvation. Unlike the Catholic priest who could serve as a sacramental medium of God despite his own personal failings, the Protestant minister was expected to be morally pure; the state of his soul affected his ability to save others.

The founding of the American nation and the disestablishment of religion lent a new urgency to moral suasion, since one could no longer compel religious behavior. Without a state church to structure and mandate religious action, fellow citizens had to *convince* one another about appropriate beliefs—an activity that they felt would in turn encourage moral conduct. Good behavior was thereby a sign of one's inner state of salvation. Bolstered by romantic sensibilities and the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's anthropology of natural goodness, the fascination with the self and its presentation can be found everywhere in nineteenth-century art and letters—from Ralph Waldo Emerson's assertions of the primacy of loyalty to individual belief and expression to Henry and William James, both of whom, in different spheres, explored the relationship between personal feelings and behaviors and larger moral and aesthetic categories.¹⁶

This relationship has been explored in tales of fallen religious leaders over and over again. A brief list tells the story: Arthur Dimmesdale, the cowardly minister from the *Scarlet Letter*; Theron Ware, the fallen Methodist preacher in Harold Frederic's famous novel who wanted only to impress his new Catholic friends; and Sinclair Lewis's quack preacher Elmer Gantry; and the brilliantly gullible and heavily mascaraed Tammy Faye Bakker. All of their sad stories raise the profound philosophical question: how do we know that what we see is true, is natural, is the *real* self? And this question is premised on the idea that the real self is the self *within*, a self separable from individual behavior, rather than the sum total of one's actions.

This impulse to find the real person beneath the mask or the subterfuge, and to revere people as "good" if their inner states match their outer comportment, also leads to particular obsessions with and evaluations of the past. Two connected preoccupations offer potential reinterpretations of Smith's role in early Mormonism: the American suspicion of self-creation as inauthentic; and the unexamined assumption that personal morality ought to be marked by the transparent and consistent display of one's "innermost feelings."

Americans, shaped by this Protestant spiritual ethic, can be

MORMON SALVATION MAY BE DEPENDENT ON WHAT JOSEPH SMITH DID, BUT IS IT DEPENDENT ON WHAT HE FELT?

deeply disquieted by obvious and overt attempts at self-creation. Our culture may value the "self-made man," but that persona is a far cry from self-fashioning, the active and deliberate creation of a personal image for public effect. The latter garners deep suspicion as suspect or immoral. Think of the pop star Madonna, a contemporary example of someone willing to create herself over and over again (currently refashioned as a mother and housewife). Rather than Madonna-like flash, we tend to look for the real substance beneath the tricks and makeup. We look for sincerity.

Yet American history also offers potentially admirable models of figures who have reshaped their behavior in spite of—or even because of—a failure to feel as moral as they wanted to act. Benjamin Franklin and Dale Carnegie both offer intriguing and confounding examples of different takes on inner disposition and external behavior. Franklin, like Joseph Smith, came from humble origins. He was self-taught, an eclectic reader with deep interests in religious matters. As a youth, he engaged in "indiscrete disputations" that upset others—some of whom apparently spoke ill of him. Unhappy with being the object of scorn, Franklin determined to be seen in a different light. He chose to create a different self, much as Fawn Brodie wants to argue that Smith grew into his role as a prophet and religious leader. Indeed, in his autobiography, Franklin admits to lying and flattering in order to impress people, all to the end of having a good reputation in the world—a goal that he asserts is a deeply moral ideal.

For Franklin, a good character is formed by one's reputa-

tion, not by one's intentions. One acts not on abstract moral principles but on the pragmatic imperative to get along with others and preserve one's name. As he put it, "So convenient a thing it is to be a *reasonable creature*, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do."¹⁷ Franklin was devoted to the art of self-presentation: He reveals his "errata," his mistakes, to his readers in such a skillful way that one is hardly aware of the masterful control he demonstrates over his own image. He puts on the guise of such sincerity that one is taken in, convinced of the essential goodness of his inner character despite his activities. But as he might well point out, the guise is what matters in the world. He made no claims to purity of heart—in fact, quite the opposite.

The example of Dale Carnegie is also potentially instructive because Carnegie believed fervently that entrepreneurship, showmanship, and self-creation are not antithetical to religious faith or purpose: they are, in fact, deeply moral acts. Like Franklin, Carnegie—who brought us *How to Win Friends and Influence People*—urges a certain kind of theatrical play-acting on his readers:

Regard this as a working handbook on human relations: whenever you are confronted with some spe-

cific problem—such as handling a child, winning a wife to your way of thinking, or satisfying an irritated customer—hesitate about doing the natural thing, the impulsive thing. That is usually wrong.

He instructs readers instead to read his pages and follow his advice, and watch it "achieve magic for you."¹⁸ I should note here that scholars have felt as equally compelled to weigh in on Carnegie as they have on Smith: was he sincere or merely a charming deceiver? Yet Carnegie claims, quite straightforwardly and much like Franklin, that the art of living morally in society is *not* about personal sincerity. Theater can provoke magic, he assures us; artifice can ensure morality.

Both Franklin and Carnegie call for a lack of transparency, the obscuring of one's sincere desires for the sake of social cohesion. Their projects of self-creation, in other words, require the use of personal artifice in the service of a greater ethical good. Contemporary philosophers take this point still further. In his 1997 book, *Hiding*, the philosopher Mark Taylor asserts that the mark of our postmodern condition is that we have moved beyond the modern illusion of depth into a world of surfaces. As he would have it, in an era of massive amounts of information and media bombardment, everything now is about appearances and spectacle. Image really has become substance. There is no *there* underneath the surface to unmask. As Taylor puts it in a provocative turn of phrase, "Depth is where the gods hide when they have been chased from the heavens."¹⁹ If Taylor is right, secular scholars have chased the gods from the heavens of their scholarship, but they surrepti-

tiously worship those gods in the guise of sincerity. They love nothing more than to debunk or delegitimize by unmasking insincerity. (I include myself here because I also relished the moral spectacle of Tammy Faye Bakker getting her comeuppance, as if this nullified all religious experience connected with her.) We *do* believe there's some essence—or ought to be one—underneath, behind, or inside, guiding and shaping our exterior behavior.

Artifice and showmanship are particularly sensitive subjects when we talk about religion. But they become especially difficult in talking about Mormonism. On the one hand, Church leaders (especially of late) have emphasized the centrality of faith and belief in Joseph Smith. On the other hand, Mormonism is also a sacramental religion in which particular actions have efficacy not because of the power of the participants, but because of the power of God that is manifest through them. Sacramentalism requires an attention to ceremony and ritual that transcends individual character. It is no wonder that early observers compared Mormonism to Catholicism and to Islam, religious traditions in which ritual plays an essential part. Smith may in fact be understood as an advocate for renewed ceremonialism within American Christianity—in and of itself a marked turn toward materiality and surface appearance. Scholarly debunkers have delighted in pointing to the derivative nature of temple rituals in Masonic tradition, but these rituals might also be explored as a radical protest against the philosophical premises of Protestant revivalism in which one had to scour one's inner feelings before one could commit to Christ. Non-Mormon scholars today have been dismissive of Mormon temple decoration and aesthetics, seeing in them a world of sentimental kitsch and excessive literalism. Dismissed as impure, unnatural, mediated by materiality, things Mormon rankle nonbelievers in part because all Americans have been shaped by a deeply Protestant sensibility of the appropriate moral relationship between belief and behavior, surface and essence.

While it is interesting that outsiders and scholars have used this Protestant lens of sincerity and purity to judge Mormonism, what about the Church itself? This is what I find most intriguing of all: by focusing matters of faith so exclusively on Joseph's testimony, Mormons are capitulating to evangelical pieties in their own self-presentation. And if one believes that salvation comes, at least in



part, through sacramental observances, then why stake accounts of Mormon origins on Smith's sincerity of purpose? (I'm thinking here of the Mormon view of the necessity of receiving certain ordinances, of which LDS emphasis on vicarious temple work for the dead is a staggering example.)

Another way an insider might approach this question is: Why does it matter if Smith was a pious man, as long as God provided the Book of Mormon and restored the priesthood through him? Mormon salvation may be dependent on what Joseph Smith *did*, but is it dependent on what he *felt*? Or, on what modern-day believers claim that he felt? This equation—Smith's sincerity equals religious legitimacy—means that any personal failing of Smith calls into question the truth of Mormonism itself.

I PROMISED A return to history, and the relationship between the narration of Mormon origins and the legacy of Joseph Smith. As I've already mentioned, the focus on sincere intention has shaped the way the story of early Mormonism gets told. The story of Mormon faith is told as a history of Joseph Smith and his sincere striving for God—if you believe this story, if you *testify* to your belief in this story, then you are one of the faithful. Even church outsiders relate the origins story this way. Personal character and history, sincerity and truth, story and faith are all intertwined in this narrative of religious conviction. But are there other potential starting points? I briefly propose several possibilities that highlight different elements of Mormonism.

One approach might be to select a different chronological starting point. In one sense, as historian Terryl Givens has recently pointed out, Joseph Smith is simply the most recent major actor in a grand and sweeping sacred drama, the full contours of which are still to be unfolded and understood.²⁰ In this larger framework, then, the Restoration is not the beginning point at all but merely marks a *replacement*, the rightful settling of temporal affairs from the wayward course of Christian history. America is only the final stage for the unfolding of the last dispensation of a sacred drama. In this frame of reference, starting with the First Vision is sort of like beginning the story of traditional Christianity with the founding of the United Methodist Church. It's an important piece of the picture, clearly, but

it is hardly the only way to set out. Moreover, thinking of the First Vision as the narrative starting point focuses the story more on the organization of the restored church and its leaders and less on the sacred drama of which it is the final act.

A second alternative has been broached by previous scholars but still remains to be fully explored. What if the narrative of Mormon history were conceived as a story of the experiences of ordinary believers rather than the experiences of the leaders? Focusing on leadership reinforces the validity of church authority, collective unity, and the centrality of institution building. But why focus there? Why not explore how ordinary people worked out their own religious understandings? More than twenty years ago, Davis Bitton and Leonard Arrington started down this path in *Saints without Halos: The Human Side of Mormon History*, a study of the lives of ordinary believers within the Church. In their introduction, they remark:

In Latter-day Saint history there has been a tendency to ignore what happens below the top-level of administration. The lives of those who drive the engines of history are ignored, often because they leave no written records, but just as often because they are not considered important. Such an attitude is unfortunate, for the vitality and strength of any movement is

MORMONISM AS A RELIGIOUS TRADITION WORKS OUTSIDE OF THE “SINCERITY BOX” THAT HAS BEEN BUILT TO CONTAIN IT.

expressed in the diversity of its experience as well as its unity of purpose.²¹

Their statement aptly captures the truth that different stories accentuate different elements of history—thus where you begin, and with whom you start—matters greatly.

What if one were to focus on *diversity* of experience rather than *unity* of purpose? Historian Jan Shippo has explored the ways that some of the earliest converts focused their attention much more on the Book of Mormon itself and less on Joseph Smith as a prophet. The saga of a New World civilization drew them in. Equally important were the manifestations of the Holy Spirit that they saw in their midst and experienced for themselves. Miracles, visions, the sighting of “wonderful lights in the air,” were all means by which early believers experienced spiritual power.²²

Family history is also religious history, something which no one knew better than Lucy Mack Smith. It, too, can be seen as the experiential focus for much of Latter-day Saint history. I bring this up, in part, because I noticed in my research that a wonderful tool, the *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM*, itself divides materials into two separate categories: one is “history,” which includes Church histories and the historical memoirs of Church leaders; the other is “biography, autobiography, and family history.”²³ This very division makes an important statement about what counts as religious history, equating it with ecclesiastical and therefore “authoritative” narratives. The stories of “saints without halos,” in contrast, are qualified as

something “other,” something less significant.

Finally, I would offer the possibility that new *geographies* of Mormonism will yield different historical narratives. This example draws most extensively on my own current investigations into Mormon history. I began my work on early Mormonism by reading accounts of missionaries in the South Pacific. The Saints had reached Polynesia by the early 1840s, and I became fascinated by their experiences. Most intriguing for me was a particular image of a native convert. Louisa Barnes Pratt, the wife of Addison Pratt, had hung pictures of Joseph and Hyrum Smith on the wall in her bedroom in Tahiti. Startled by the popularity of those likenesses during evenings of fellowship, she observed that “all the People on the Island came to look at [them].” One evening, a visiting man left the gathered group to look at one of the pictures: “He kneeled before it in order that the painting might come in range with his eyes. . . . For a quarter of an hour he looked steadfastly upon it, I believe without turning his eyes.” Louisa did not assume that this represented an act of worship, but she concluded that “he wished undoubtedly to imprint the lineaments of the features upon his mind.”²⁴

This brief sketch still captivates me. What could natives in Tahiti in 1843 possibly have seen in the Mormon story that

made sense to them? I had always understood Mormonism to be the most “American” of religious traditions, and much of the scholarship on the early Church explains why the Book of Mormon would have been attractive to Americans in the early national period. It was democratic, scholars argued, and it was populist. The Book of Mormon appealed to people who wanted to put the new nation at the center of the sacred landscape. But none of this helped me make sense of the Tahitian converts. They had neither met Joseph Smith nor read the Book of Mormon for themselves, and they had little chance of ever visiting a temple or gathering with the Saints in Zion. They had a picture, a material object, which mediated religious truth, transporting them to another, sacred place. I’m not discounting the talents of the missionaries or the possibility of divine inspiration, but something in the Mormon tradition resonated with the experiences and desires of native peoples in a profound way.²⁵

With this mystery in mind, I subsequently toured the Museum of Church History in Temple Square. Meditating on the handcars and tales of transcontinental suffering and pilgrimage, I again puzzled over how my Tahitian friend would have understood these relics and this account of the faith. Where was *his* story? In what ways might he have thought about the westward trek as a sacred journey? Why would it have mattered to him? I was struck again by the extent to which the authorized history of the Church is, indeed, an American story. Mormonism truly has been presented as an

American religion, in which national borders are deeply problematic but nonetheless essential.

I might have been content to let go of my Tahitian converts, if not for the fact that they and their non-North-American brethren now make up more than half the world's Latter-day Saints. And so I persist in proposing that this geographical variety can inform accounts of the LDS Church from its beginnings. Notice that this line of inquiry doesn't discount the centrality of Joseph Smith: we still witness natives lining up to stare at his picture. But clearly that act meant something distinctive, something that has yet to be recovered fully.

HERE IS OBVIOUSLY much at stake in thinking about the founder and first prophet of the LDS Church. But I think we may see more in Joseph Smith and in Mormonism by recognizing that our focus has been relatively narrow. In responding to hecklers who continually "debunked" Mormonism by "exposing" its leader as an insincere fraud, the Church increasingly devoted itself to countering those accusations by proving Smith's honorable intentions. Historians of all stripes have followed suit. By proxy, this line of argument calls into question the sincerity of each believer at every moment. And this strikes me as a Protestant interrogation that effaces other Mormon claims—specifically, a sacramental claim to a power that works through the most flawed individuals.

In a sense, Joseph Smith Jr. is both more and less than the sum of how he has been memorialized. And Mormonism as a religious tradition works outside of the "sincerity box" that has been built to contain it. ☹



PRIVATE AFFAIR

—high in the Dolomites, northern Italy

Was that really a minuscule church by itself in the clearing between the steep layered green peaks? Or just a leap of faith? Or strained eyes? On a perch of pasture, its microphonic spindle balances a domed thimble: that entertains the antenna which pokes God's feet, explaining both the pilgrim's and our dalliance

here. Now, eyeing the church you spied, hand in hand we descend to near it. Was the frequency complete, the builder's prayer amplified? Even the pines stand clear in worship. We turn, and retreat.

—MARILYN BUSHMAN-CARLTON

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SUNSTONE GALLERY

IT TAKES MANY VILLAGES

By Mary Lythgoe Bradford

*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?"
Then Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall
we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."
JOHN 6:67-68*



tures, but I need the Church's people. In the journey that is my life, the most amazing friends and family have succored me, accompanied me, advised and nourished me. And though I do have friends from outside the Church, the really deep eternal ones came through Church connections.

WHenever I'm asked why I'm a Mormon, my first response is: "Where else would I go? The Church is my village, my home."

I attended another church while staying in Eyeries, a little village in southwest Ireland for several months over a three-year period. This Catholic congregation welcomed me, even invited me to sing in the choir. When one of the bachelor farmers complimented me for my no-drinking-or-smoking clean living, he added that he himself had "never touched the drink." He recited the pledge he had taken as a twelve-year-old. I replied that I, too, had taken a pledge called the "Word of Wisdom" and recited a few lines for him. I enjoyed going to church there, especially since meetings were only about forty-five minutes long, with time for contemplation, the Lord's prayer, and some good thoughts.

The priest was an Irish "Lowell Bennion" because of his emphasis on service. At his previous parish, he had trained young men and boys to build homes for the elderly. He once gave me a blessing by crossing himself, then laying his hands on my head: "I bless you that you will always have the spirit of Christ in your life."

These experiences did not convert me to Catholicism. Like Mike Quinn, I am DNA Mormon. The Church belongs to me and I to it. I don't intend to leave it. Sometimes I feel that the Church is leaving me, but I intend to stick around anyway. I am comforted by the thought that the Church structure we know is but a temporal plan. The eternities will show a better way.

But I need some structure. I may not need so many struc-

CHILDHOOD

I WAS IMPRINTED with LDS convictions as a child running freely over my dad's little acre in East Mill Creek, Salt Lake City, our food chain during the Great Depression. We never felt deprived. We ate fresh fruit and veggies, meat from the calf or pig Dad killed each year. We drank milk from Daisy and Buttercup. From my mother, Lavina Mitchell Lythgoe, I inherited a love of the printed word and the arts. From my father, Leo Thomas Lythgoe, I inherited a love for work and the great outdoors. And from them both, a love of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Neither of my parents were educated past the tenth grade, but they supported their children who chose to pursue higher education.

Through school classes and church dances, I found that I loved people, books, and stories. While others played kickball during grade school recess, I gathered my little circle of fans and read them my stories. In my early years, I sensed that the parables of Jesus and the stories in the Bible were more convincing than the sermons. The fact that I have not fulfilled my childhood and teenage dream of becoming a fiction writer is partly that it was educated out of me and partly because the stories of people I knew, such as Virginia Sorensen, were more exciting than anything I could dream up. The diary that I kept from ages thirteen to twenty-two shows that those years were filled with delightful experiences, encouraging teachers, loyal friends, and

MARY LYTHGOE BRADFORD is former editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, as well as author of *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian*. Her other books include *Leaving Home: Personal Essays* and *Personal Voices: A Celebration of Dialogue's Personal Essays*. An early, longer version of this essay was given at the 2005 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium (Tape SL05-231).

EDITOR'S NOTE: We received this memoir from Mary Bradford at the exact time we were about to interview her and run the Michael Schoenfeld photo (page 41) as part of our Sunstone Gallery series. We felt the synchronicity was just too strong a message to ignore, hence our decision to change the usual way we feature Schoenfeld's incredible portraits.

church leaders who seemed devoted to my development. In the ward, I learned to give a speech, teach a lesson, write and act in plays and skits—and to tend children. My two younger brothers, Tom and Dennis, and my late-arriving sister, Gaye, were my constant companions.

UNIVERSITY

MY WHOLESOME LIFE entered its next village, the University of Utah, where I signed up for classes at the Institute of Religion under Lowell Bennion, T. Edgar Lyon, and George Boyd. These dovetailed perfectly with my classes across the street. I remember thinking: “I am living a charmed life. I want to write about it one day.”

As I reflect on those years, I echo Laurel Ulrich’s words at a commencement speech in which she said her life was anchored by William Mulder at the university and Lowell

English with another group of creative thinkers—Leonard Rice, chair of the English department, Bruce Clark, Jeannette Morrell, Marden Clark, Orea Tanner, and Clinton Larsen, to name a few. I was happy and stimulated in my work but unhappy in church. In my ward, I was a “Special Interest” and had the exciting calling of assistant roll-taker in one of my ward’s several Gospel Doctrine classes. I took to traveling to Salt Lake nearly every Sunday, so friends and family there thought I was attending church in Provo while the Provoans believed I was in church in Salt Lake. I was going inactive, and nobody realized it—not even I.

Luckily at BYU, I began to date a young man I had known for seven years at the University of Utah but who was now teaching economics at the Y while working on a Ph.D. from Harvard—Charles Henry Bradford, or “Chick.” We had similar backgrounds, the same basic worldview. We did hold slightly different political views—he Republican, I Democrat,



MARY BRADFORD WHILE *DIALOGUE* EDITOR, 1978–83

Bennion across the street. Hats off to them and the other fine professors who helped me earn an M.A. in English education and gave me the skills for a lifetime of learning.

My great teachers used the Socratic method—modeling how asking meaningful questions was more important than memorizing answers. Brother Bennion once wrote on the board: “What is your philosophy of life?” We shallow students had no idea what that meant. We parroted clichés we had heard in church while he showed us the shallowness of the then-common method in which the teacher asks, “What am I thinking?” and the students guess at the answer. Life is not a giant *Jeopardy!* game in which our leaders direct questions at us while we try to read their minds. I fear that we are living in a time when teaching is done entirely through testing—with questions thought up by someone who has very little understanding of the questions in the minds of the students. The ability to ask questions from deep within the soul leads us outward in a quest for understanding and faith.

GREAT ADVENTURES

MY FIRST FULL-TIME professional job took me to yet another nurturing village, Brigham Young University, where I taught

but this was before today’s polarization into blues and reds. We blended well. We were purple. Power to the Purple!

Soon after we married in 1957, I was called as Gospel Doctrine teacher. A few weeks later, we accepted with alacrity the opportunity for Chick to work for Senator Wallace Bennett in the Congress of the United States. What a great adventure!

Marriage saved me from inactivity and plunged me into the vortex of childrearing and ward and stake activities. The Arlington Ward became my next village. This first ward in Virginia had an impressive history as modern pioneers. Its founders helped build the chapel with their own hands. We became part of a close group of young couples who reared our children together, and because our parents were not nearby, we were family to each other.

The ward was a healthy mixture of students, government professionals, readers, and thinkers determined to benefit from the many advantages of living near the nation’s capital. The Church was strong in D.C., and we decided to stay even though we received dire warnings from Utah family and friends who tried to convince us of the impossibility of rearing active Mormon children in the “East.” Some expected us to return home to Zion at any moment, but we believed that Zion was wherever we were.

DIALOGUE

WHEN EUGENE ENGLAND and friends founded *Dialogue* in 1966, I immediately volunteered. I saw offering my support to the journal as part of being “anxiously engaged” in a good cause of my free will—a principle I had been taught in my youth. The Church’s in-house organs couldn’t print all the fine work we young people wanted to write. I had no idea at the time that *Dialogue* would become such an important formative village for me. My involvement put me back in touch with former school friends and colleagues. It was an exciting venture at a yeasty time when all kinds of issues were waiting to be questioned.

Gene started me out on my career as a personal essayist by asking me to write for a regular section in *Dialogue*. I had no idea that ten years later, I would become *Dialogue*’s first woman editor at exactly the time when the women’s movement was heating up in this country. I have to thank Bob Rees for “calling” me to this position. He remains my friend and brother.

I was already in my forties when I became editor, but still wonderfully naïve. Imagine my surprise upon learning that my voice, speaking from deep within my cozy cocoon, was now an “alternative voice.” When I went to Salt Lake to keep an appointment with the general authority over church productions, he refused to see me. “I refuse to talk to the editor of *Dialogue*.” I was also turned down as a speaker at the BYU women’s conference by Dallin Oaks: “We can’t have just anybody speaking here.” I was acquainted with Elder Oaks, and he had written for *Dialogue*, so this response very much sur-

prised me. After I had published an article in the *Ensign* on Mormons in Washington, D.C., an editor informed me that had he known I was to become *Dialogue*’s editor, my article would not have been published. (Whenever I think of this response, I smile knowing that a copy of this *Ensign* with my article in it now resides in the cornerstone of the Washington Temple.) I am amazed at policies like these. We are all Church members. Why can’t leaders sit down and discuss the issues that threaten to divide us?

During my years as editor (1976–1982), I worked with a well-grounded board of editors and a staff for whom no task was too small or too large. While I was still with *Dialogue*, blacks received the priesthood, the Church became more international, women spoke out about their rights and responsibilities, and important parts of Mormon intellectual history came to light. Although “Camelot” under Leonard Arrington closed down, professional history writing continued. Lester Bush, associate editor during my tenure, followed his groundbreaking article on blacks and the priesthood with significant studies of birth control and other subjects. We celebrated the Church’s sesquicentennial; we published the first papers delivered at conferences of the Mormon History Association and Association for Mormon Letters. We cooperated with other in-

dependent publications such as *Sunstone* and *Exponent II*, exchanging articles and advice.

This was exciting work, which I somehow did while my bishop-husband ran the ward and my children grew up. I also consulted with government agencies on their writing and led workshops on editing and speaking, a position that came to me through my Mormon network. When it was time to move the journal to Utah under Jack and Linda Newell and Lavina Fielding Anderson, it was on strong footing. Its fortieth anniversary is next year.

After my *Dialogue* sojourn, I was entrusted with the life of my mentor and teacher, Lowell Bennion. Thanks to *Dialogue* and the editing and advice of wonderful friends such as Gene England, Lavina Anderson, and Emma Lou Thayne, I was able to publish Lowell’s biography just before he died in 1995.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

A REPORTER ONCE asked Esther Petersen, that great and famous activist from Utah, for advice she would give young women wanting a career in public service. She answered, “Marry the right man.” I married a man who was devoted to my welfare. His unfailing support of everything I tried to do was my strongest pillar of faith. When Chick passed away in 1991, my ward village, along with my friends in Utah and elsewhere, mourned with me, comforting me during the stages of grief. Fortunately, my three children, Steve, Lorraine, and Scott, along with their twelve children, have among them all of Chick’s fine qualities. When I am with them, I don’t miss him as much.

I need structure, just not so many strictures. . .

My mourning labor took me to Ireland, that green, grieving land, with strong women friends. One of these friends, Sue Booth Paxman, former editor of *Exponent II*, decided to settle in Ireland. As Sue Booth-Forbes, she opened a writers’ and artists’ retreat in a little paradise in southwest Cork. She and the delightful friends I made there created a village much like my childhood one, where I have worked on my writing and my healing. Sue is one of the many women friends who have stayed with me through darkness and light. They have edited my work, given me advice and shelter, stayed with me through long nights of grief, laughed me out of depression. They have helped me rear my children and publish my work.

Besides the mentors and colleagues I have already mentioned, a long line of men have opened doors to friendship and understanding. It gives the lie to the belief that men and women cannot be true friends. They can so!¹

Now I believe I am living in my last village. Three years ago, I sold my house in Arlington and moved twenty miles away into a gated retirement community near my daughter. What I thought would be a peaceful old age devoted to writing my memoirs has proved just as challenging as my other sojourns, partly because I am suddenly an old widow in a young married church. Shades of Special Interest!

IF EVER I would leave the Church, I believe it would have to be out of sheer boredom. And what is boredom but the state that comes when our needs are not being met. I am often bored, but not just because I feel out of place. One source of frustration in church meetings comes from the deadening influence of the present custom of assigning subjects to the speakers—usually the same subject each week to all the speakers. Though some are experienced enough to turn any topic into a stimulating sermon, most simply resort to a computer index of suitable quotations, thereby losing the personal touch. Lowell Bennion’s way of organizing—choosing a topic dear to your heart, then supporting it with scriptures, experience, and prayer—is lost. I used to look forward to the quirky, humorous, personal experiences of the speakers. Our classrooms aren’t usually any better. Instead of free discussion, too many Sunday School and Relief Society teachers now use the boring method of handing out quotations for class members to read aloud.

In spite of this, I remain grateful to the structure of the Church, through which I have experienced many spiritual blessings, beginning with a healing blessing administered to me at the age of three weeks. Just home from the hospital, I had contracted pneumonia and was turning blue. The doctor had given up on me. As my mother recorded in her diary, Bishop Howick stopped in and administered to me. Mother called my healing a miracle and me a miracle baby. Since then I have received many healing blessings that if they didn’t heal me, gave me the courage to work on healing myself.

I was also given the faith that my own prayers could lead to great things. When I was a freshman at the University of Utah, my mother contracted pneumonia. One day my grandmother met me at the door and ordered me, “Take your brothers and pray for your mother. The crisis is here.” At the ward’s next testimony meeting, I stood and gratefully told of my mother’s healing directly after I led my brothers in prayer. Looking back, I think it remarkable that I was given to trust that even my lowly prayers had power.

Chick suffered from a form of muscular dystrophy. Years into our marriage, he confided in me that a difficult issue during the dating he had done before he and I got together was the fear many young women had about bearing his children because of this hereditary disease. He had taken his problem to Harold B. Lee, then an apostle and friend of the family. Elder Lee had been principal of the school where several of my husband’s siblings had gone. Elder Lee gave Chick a blessing, and advised: “Be patient. You haven’t met the girl with enough faith.”

When I became pregnant with our firstborn, Stephen, Chick arranged for me to meet with Apostle Lee, who blessed me that my baby would be free of the disease. When sixteen years later, Stephen was diagnosed with the disease, I had a strange reaction. I recalled that one of Lowell Bennion’s favorite scriptures was this from Micah: “What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8). From this scripture, I came to understand that justice and mercy were primary qual-

ities, and that we should be humble in recognizing that God would walk with us—not ahead nor behind us.

In meeting the news of Stephen’s affliction this way, I was somehow internally satisfied that God would not or could not intervene in the progress of this inherited disease that had already struck generations of worthy Bradfords. That left me with the fact that our worthy child would have to suffer. I took Steve to see a specialist, a doctor who seemed to know of every case in America. She told him: “Look at your father. He is your example of what you can accomplish.” She recommended a physical therapist.

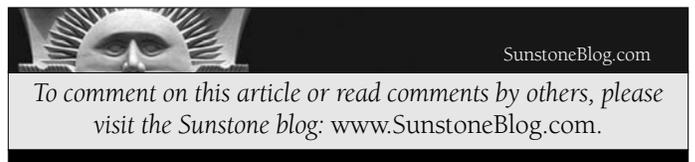
At the same time Stephen was meeting with her, I was sitting in the waiting room in deep despair. I thought, “If only I could take this disease on myself,” when a shaft of light suddenly sliced the dingy air and a still, small voice in my head said, “He will carry this burden himself.” Then Stephen walked smiling into the room, “Mom, there is something I can do!” On our way home, he said, “Mom, I want you to know that I believe I chose you and dad in the pre-existence, and I would do it again!” At that moment, I knew that even if God had not eradicated the disease, he had given us a great blessing—a son as courageous and faithful as his father. Chick had managed to somehow turn his disability into an ability: the ability to inspire others to action. When they saw how faithful he was in all of his duties, even though it was a great struggle just to rise from a chair, they thought, “If he can do it, so can I!” Stephen would do the same.

When I asked Stephen for permission to tell his story here, he responded: “One reason I am grateful for the disease is that, like father Charles, I have a wife with tremendous faith who truly loves me. I would bear this burden again in exchange for this and my three wonderful children.”

THAT THE PRAYERS of a ward, a stake, and a large group of family and friends failed to stop death from taking my husband leaves me in awe at the mysteries of the universe. As I face the end of my life without my partner, I lean on the gospel as I see it joyously lived around me. ☺

NOTE

1. I have been fortunate to have been guided, guarded, and gifted by an army of stouthearted men. My father’s intuitive mentoring was my first example of manhood. My two brothers grew up to become confidants. Teachers and professors such as William Mulder and Lowell Bennion helped form my worldview and opened doors to my professional opportunities. My fifteen years as a “government trainer” came through an Arlington Ward member who happened to be personnel director at the Government Accounting Office (GAO). My job as editor of *Dialogue* came through Gene England and Robert Rees. As editor, I was bolstered by associate editor Lester Bush, business manager Royal Shipp, as well as by Larry Bush, Dave Bailey, Bob King, and a host of other hard-working volunteers. My two sons have now been joined by their four sons as my support system. Isn’t this what the priesthood is—a service organization designed to strengthen women and children?





PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SCHOENFELD

*Are we as a church contributing to the undermining of
the family by ignoring the environment?*

THE GOD OF NATURE SUFFERS

By H. Parker Blount

People usually consider walking on water or in the air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk on water or in the air, but to walk on earth.

—THICH NHAT HAHN¹

YEARS AGO, WHILE I WAS A STUDENT AT BYU, A friend invited me to go jackrabbit hunting. Three or four of us, all returned missionaries, drove into the desert west of Nephi and spent the afternoon shooting jackrabbits. It was one of those late summer days when the blue sky roams forever and the smell of sage mixes with a distinct scent of fall. You could feel the season changing, knowing that soon there would be snow on the distant mountains, even though on the desert floor it was a dry, hot day. We killed a lot of rabbits that afternoon. We celebrated each other's spectacular shots; and we would laugh and cheer when a rabbit, running full speed, was hit, leaped frantically into the air, and tumbled end-over-end along the dusty ground. We ended the day cheerfully, having eliminated, we told ourselves, a few of the pests that plagued the local farmers.

But that night in bed, I was restless and fitful, lost again and again in uncomfortable dreams. I awoke the next morning gloomy and not nearly as sprightly as I had been the day before. As I thought about it through the day, I determined that I never again wanted to hunt and kill something just for sport.

My friends, who were well-grounded and active in the Church, continued to go jackrabbit hunting. Nothing in LDS teachings censured their behavior. They were still worthy of a temple recommend. It wasn't a moral issue for them, and, at the time, it wasn't for me either. The Church framed my conception of morality and what it meant to live the gospel, and it didn't weigh in on the morality of shooting jackrabbits. I didn't pursue the metaphysics of my feelings or even explore them as perhaps a signal of an ethical question. I decided that my discomfort was reason enough for me to not hunt jackrabbits.



H. PARKER BLOUNT is a retired educational studies professor living in Atlanta, Georgia, who is currently building a cabin on the Ohoopsee River. Until recently he believed that being an activist meant attending all of your Church meetings. He welcomes feedback at <parkerblount@alltel.net>.

Now years later, I do see the question of shooting jackrabbits as a moral issue and a theological question. And, as on other matters of morality and theology, I'd like to hear my tradition's guidance and counsel. But, as things stand now, were I to rely solely on statements by LDS leaders and prophets, I'd be confused about what, as a Latter-day Saint, I should feel and think about the Earth. Is it a garden-place or a "lone and dreary world"? Is it home or just a motel room for the night? Should I think of myself as a manager, a partner, or a beneficiary of my corner of Earth?



DOES LDS DOCTRINE SUPPORT A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTAL THEOLOGY?

*Is Earth a fallen, temporary, hostile place?
Is our real home elsewhere?*

THE FIELD OF inquiry that concerns the interplay between religion and ecology, that addresses humankind's relationship to Earth, is variously referred to as ecotheology, environmental theology, and ecospirituality.² Our church is much like other Christian groups, which typically have not shown much concern for the environment. If anything, much of the exploitation and abuse of Earth and its inhabitants has been justified within the framework of religious beliefs that encourage adherents to conquer wilderness and convert pagans. In recent years, however, a shift has begun as some denominations have begun to examine their interpretation of the relationship between God the creator and His creation. Out of that ongoing examination is emerging a theology of caring for Earth as a matter of morality and acknowledging a spiritual relationship between humankind and Earth.

Does LDS Church doctrine support an environmental theology? According to Matthew Gowans and Philip Cafaro's recent article in *Environmental Ethics*, the answer is yes. The authors mention two strengths in particular: "teachings regarding the inherent value of the soul" and "the commandment of stewardship."³ To these, I would add the LDS emphases on Zion and strengthening the family.

Yet even if the Church has a doctrine-based environmental ethic or ecotheology (the story we tell), this clearly is not, Gowans and Cafaro say, widely adhered to by members of the

Church (the story we live). These authors are not the only ones to make this observation. In the preface to their book, *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community*, editors Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, all descendants of Mormon pioneers, call for Church leaders to actively teach “ecological awareness.” They point out that Brigham Young “preached sustainable agriculture and dreamed a United Order while allotting time in LDS general conference for talks on appropriate farming practices and community vitality in harmony with the land.”⁴ They then call readers’ attention to how much has changed since Brigham Young thundered from the pulpits up and down the Wasatch Front. Since his voice has died so has his “ethics of stewardship” for land and community. Seldom do we hear those topics discussed from our pulpits these days.

In framing their concerns, the editors also cite a report on the environmental positions of the thirty largest Christian denominations in the United States. The denominations are grouped in one of five categories:

- a) Programs Underway—denominations with established national environmental programs in which laity can play a meaningful role;
- b) Beginning a Response—denominations beginning to move at the national level and in which lay assistance can help get programs underway;
- c) At the Brink—denominations posed on the brink of national commitment, where lay members’ input might make the difference between inaction and action;
- d) No Action—denominations that have not yet begun to consider action; and
- e) Policies of Inaction—denominations formally committed to inaction.

The authors of the report conclude that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints falls in the last category.⁵

A denomination “committed to [environmental] inaction” is a hard judgment to hear. Gowans and Cafaro aren’t much gentler when they suggest that many consider Mormons to be anti-environmental. It is easy, they write, to “assume that anti-environmentalism is well grounded in the Latter-day Saint faith.”⁶

This lack of environmental consciousness and practice springs, the authors suggest, not from doctrine, but from Church members’ “overvaluation of money and material possessions. . . . We have allowed the pursuit of profit and material wealth to become our central goals.”⁷

Are Gowans and Cafaro correct that chasing materialism is the story members of the Church live? Regrettably, it is not only possible but easy to draw that conclusion. It is also easy to conclude that we Church members have embraced capitalism as God’s economics and that the Church endorses the industrial-technological complex.

For many Church members, prosperity is a sign of God’s blessings. To have an abundance of material possessions seems to serve as proof that we are living the gospel. It is not Mormons but the Amish who exemplify a people embracing a

simple lifestyle as a religious practice.

While Church members are preoccupied with obtaining material possessions *in this life*, we are often paradoxically focused on obtaining a mansion *in the next*. I think it’s fair to say that, implicitly, if not explicitly, most Latter-day Saints express in their everyday lives the doctrinal position that Earth is a fallen, temporary, and hostile place and that our real home is elsewhere.

More times than I can count, I have joined other members of LDS congregations in singing Eliza R. Snow’s lyrics for one of our best loved hymns, “O My Father”:

*Yet oft-times a secret something
Whispered, “You’re a stranger here,”
And I felt that I had wandered
From a more exalted sphere.*

We can in time, Snow assures us later, “leave this frail existence,” and return to the “royal courts on high.”

I have been taught in the Church that mortality is a probationary state wherein we prove ourselves, but that we cannot prove ourselves in a totally agreeable and accommodating setting. Logically, probation must present trials, adversity, suffering, and other tests of character. With such ideas in our heads, it is easy for Latter-day Saints to conclude that Earth is far from accommodating and is, perhaps, even our enemy. At the very least, these ideas promote a wary detachment from an intimacy with Earth. Rather than seeing ourselves as integral components of a sacred place, we tend to believe we are temporary residents of a corrupted place.

The stage is set in the Genesis creation story. Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden into a “lone and dreary world,” a phrase that automatically springs to the mind of faithful Mormons as a description of Earth. That world is often visually depicted in Church lesson manual illustrations and elsewhere as stark, barren, and lifeless. Cast from the garden, Adam and Eve are characterized as homeless wanderers seeking refuge and knowledge. They will never make peace with this world. The world—that is, nature—is their enemy. It will give up its resources—bread—only through the sweat of hard labor. At the same time, Adam and Eve are charged to have dominion over the Earth, a springboard for many to conclude that humans are detached from and superior to the balance of creation. At the end of their wandering, if they have proved faithful, humans will be readmitted into the presence of God—home, safe and secure at last.

In that respect, the Church’s view is not much, if at all, different from the Protestant view that humankind is the pinnacle of God’s creation. That deeply held and cherished belief has allowed members of many churches to interpret dominion to mean entitlement, and stewardship to mean ownership.

In addition, many Latter-day Saints tend to be so focused on earning the rewards of the next life that we fail to comprehend the fullness of this life. As Patrick Mason points out: “At the end of the day, Mormons are believers—millennialist believers at that—and with that identity comes more urgency to save souls rather than to save the world.”⁸

Yet for many in the Church, saving souls is saving the

world. Inherent in our tradition is the charge to build the kingdom of God, to enlarge the stakes of Zion. That charge is so preeminent it is commonly believed that if we are dedicated to that end, everything else will be taken care of. I have heard it said many times that if we are faithful about the Lord's business (meaning Church work), the Lord will handle other problems, including environmental exploitation: "Never mind the rats in the wall, the cat will take care of them."

That too is not a perspective unique to the Latter-day Saints, but one that exists in most Christian denominations. And it is a perspective that caused Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, professors of religion at Bucknell University and co-organizers of a series of thirteen conferences on "Religions of the World and Ecology" held at Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions from 1996 to 1998, to ask:

Have issues of personal salvation superseded all others? Have divine-human relations been primary? ... Has the material world of nature been devalued by religion? Does the search for otherworldly rewards override commitment to this world?⁹



HOLY PLACES

Can nature become a place for "spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace"?

IN THE CHURCH, we meet God in the places we construct for Him. Although we refer to each of our meeting-houses as the house of the Lord, it is the temples that carry that imprimatur. The temple, we have long been taught, is a refuge from the world. More recently, 2003, Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander, of the Presidency of the First Quorum of Seventy, told Latter-day Saints that it is impossible to worship God without "holy places." In "the bustle of the secular world, with its certain uncertainty," he explains, "there must be places that offer spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace." He identifies "places where we meet the divine and find the Spirit of the Lord," as temple, home, sacrament meeting (the chapel, where sacrament meetings are held, is more commonly mentioned), and "venues of historic significance."¹⁰

Nature is not included in his list of holy places. (I have seen members smirk when someone suggests they feel closer to God in the wilderness than in church buildings.) Yet ironically, the Sacred Grove is one of the Church's holy "venues of historic significance." I have to ask myself: who created that grove of trees, and who constructed the buildings?

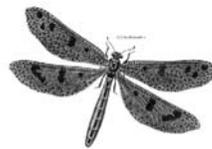
The area of the Piedmont Plateau where I live is dotted with granite outcroppings. Fifty yards through the woods from my house is one outcropping covering at least half an acre. The children called it the big rock. Just a few days ago on a cloudless fall day, I walked through the woods and sat down on a ledge of the big rock facing the afternoon sun. The leaves had been falling, and the trees were nearly bare, but I noticed a poplar tree that stood taller than its neighbors. It had lost all of its leaves except those at the top. Those bright yellow topmost leaves danced and fluttered in the breeze against the deep blue

sky, like a collection of so many Tibetan prayer flags (yellow flags represent Earth). As I watched, I felt prayerful. It seemed sacramental. Angels did not visit me, nor did a still, small voice counsel me. Still it was a heavenly visitation. "My heart in hiding, stirred," as I sat on the rock, feeling the warmth of the sun, watching the leaves move to the rhythm of the afternoon breeze—the breath and voiceless words of God.¹¹ The big rock is on my list of holy places.

Henry David Thoreau wrote to a friend that he had walked to Asnebumskit (a hill in Worcester County, Massachusetts), "one of the true temples of the earth." Continuing, Thoreau wrote: "A temple you know was anciently 'an open place without a roof,' whose walls served merely to shut out the world and direct the mind toward heaven, but a modern meeting house shuts out the heavens, while it crowds the world into still closer quarters."¹²

Were I now teaching about the temple as a refuge, I would say that entering the temple does not remove us from the world. It should remove us from our mundane perception of the world. If we see the world through spiritual eyes, the world itself is a temple, a great endowment of signs, symbols, and power. And, like the body, we can abuse it or not. But when we do, we also close down and disrupt the spiritual blessings that otherwise could be ours. I would suggest we are not exiled east of Eden. Rather, we still live in a garden that we can dress and tend, and where we can walk with God in the cool of the evening. As Joseph Campbell reminds us:

You get a totally different civilization and a totally different way of living according to whether your myth presents nature as fallen or whether nature is in itself a manifestation of divinity, and the spirit is the revelation of the divinity that is inherent in nature.¹³



THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

How are the values of multinational corporations an ecotheological issue, and why should they concern the Church?

IF WE TAKE any polluted or exploited site in today's world and trace it backwards, most likely we will end up at an accounting ledger. Someone is making money from despoiling the earth. The profit and loss statement doesn't take into account what is happening to the place and its inhabitants. And aside from injunctions about personal honesty, the Church has had nothing to say about the larger problem of corporate responsibility and social justice. I have sometimes heard Native Americans say that white people will sacrifice their grandchildren for today's comfort. It does seem that turning a profit today takes precedence over a sustainable tomorrow. Is that not evil?

The bottom-line values of multinational corporations that put profits ahead of the landscape and the community, killing the spirit of the place and the people, are immoral. If we consider ourselves children of God, we have to consider ourselves part of God's entire landscape. It seems dangerous if not arro-

gant to fail to include the landscape in the moral code.

I feel quite a disconnect between the idea that if we as Latter-day Saints drink a cup of green tea we are not worthy to go to the temple and probably won't inherit the celestial kingdom, but we can, without fellow Mormons batting an eye, bulldoze a mountain to put in an ugly and expensive housing development. We can pollute the river, disrupt an important element of the larger ecosystem, and destroy the sacred burial grounds of an ancient people without fear of reprisal in a temple recommend interview or, presumably, at the gates to the celestial kingdom.

The Chilean poet Neruda writes stingingly in his poem, "The United Fruit Co.":

*When the trumpet sounded, it was
all prepared on the Earth,
and Jehovah parceled out the Earth
to Coca-Cola, Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors and other entities.*¹⁴

I drive across Georgia, my home state, still largely agriculture-based, and see the boarded-up and vacant buildings of the small towns. There was a time not many years ago when every small town in this country had a thriving hardware store, a farm utility store, a drugstore with a soda fountain, and a café specializing in locally grown and fresh seasonal vegetables. The owners were members of the community; you knew them, and they knew you. All of those were gathering places at various times during the day for folks to catch up on the local news or the price of livestock, or to ask if the fish were biting.

Now I see wayward vines cover the sides of red brick buildings, hiding the fading "Farmer's Supply" signs. Such scenes cause me to feel lonely and sad, as though I am witnessing the passing of something important, as though I am losing a friend to a terminal illness. I am; we all are. We are losing a way of life that is too important to lose. We are accepting in exchange something shallow and temporary. The café is replaced with drivethrough windows, and superstores are supplanting the hardware store, the mercantile store, the drugstore, and the seed and feed store. In these superstores, we have no community; we are strangers engaged only in commerce.

How are the values of multinational corporations an ecotheological issue, and why should they concern the Church? It is an ecotheological matter because people who have a spiritual relationship with the Earth are being displaced by corporate entities where land is viewed in terms of resources to exploit and profit-producing potential. It is of concern to the Church, or should be, because as multinational



IF WE SEE THE
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*the world itself is
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TO THINK THAT WE
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*is as foolish as thinking
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corporations disrupt the small land-based communities, they are pulling at the stakes supporting Zion.

If there is a single group in the world whose history conveys the importance of self-sufficient communities, it is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church is fundamentally a community. Its history from Kirtland, Ohio, onward was as a religious community that established physical communities. The physical community was interwoven socially, politically, and economically with the community of believers. While most communities in America were self-sufficient, importing only what they could not produce, the Church made self-sufficiency a religious principle. The principle that existed in the land-based Mormon communities is still practiced in Church congregations. Every member has a functional role in the life of the congregation. When a congregation grows to the point of having uninvolved members, a new congregation is spun off. Unlike "megachurches" that have huge congregations, the LDS Church, by design, maintains small church communities where every member is part of the religious economy of the congregation. The paradox is that we are putting all of this at risk and contributing to the undermining of the fundamental unit of the church—the family—by ignoring the environment, particularly the spiritual dimension and the detrimental effects of multinational corporations on communities and families.

The joint council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve has issued "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (1995).¹⁵ How easy it would seem to issue a comparable document pertaining to the earth, the very place where the family, a potentially eternal entity, must first come into being? I agree with Thomas Berry when he says,

*There is no such thing as a human community in any manner separate from the Earth community. The human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single integral community or we will both experience disaster on the way. However differentiated in its modes of expression, there is only one Earth community—one economic order, one health system, one moral order, one world of the sacred.*¹⁶

The Proclamation concludes with these words: "We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society." How is it possible to "maintain and strengthen" the family without considering the fundamental economic and ecological ques-

tions of a sustainable environment? We have more to offer than simply calling upon others to strengthen and maintain the family. As Latter-day Saints, we should be concerned with every threat to the family whether it is sexual, social, economic, environmental, or political. We have so much power to do so much good.

In the end, the campaign to save the family is no different from the one to save the river, or the desert, or the historic building. All are victims of economic exploitation and spiritual disregard. I deeply believe our LDS theology can and should tell us both how to live in preparation for God's celestial creation and the way to live in harmony with God's earthly creation. They fit like hand and glove. Both are God's creation, one here and now, one of a future place and time. Both involve walking a spiritual path. In terms of moral reprehensibility, exploiting the earth and Earth's resources is as soul-destroying as is entering the temple unworthily. If the kingdom of Mormondom is to be a perfect overlay of the kingdom of God, then it has to be a place where the glory of a common lily is seen to be at least as sublime as any of the holy places we construct for worship. In this perfect overlay, God's attention is drawn to a falling sparrow, or a jackrabbit, even as he attends to our anguish.

In becoming this kingdom of God, the Mormon kingdom would honor small-scale communities over corporate development. It would embrace water conservation and energy-efficient technologies. It would protect wild open spaces for the sake of wildlife, and the preservation of solitude, wonder, and awe, which is essential for soul renewal. It would be mindful of family planning.¹⁷

Church leaders might begin to examine the potential damage to families and communities done through the Church's own practices. They might ask themselves such questions as:

- To what extent do our building practices support small, family businesses instead of powerful multinational corporations?
- Do we as a church buy locally?
- Are we purchasing sustainable building materials and avoiding synthetics?
- When remodeling, do we recycle old materials or do we simply send them to the dump?
- Do we practice sustainable agriculture on our Church-owned ranches and farms?
- How much cotton do we use in the clothing we produce as a Church? Of all agriculture crops using conventional farming methods, an estimated 25 percent of all chemicals used are applied to raising cotton. This doesn't take into consideration the chemicals used for processing and dyeing cotton cloth.
- How, as a church, are we addressing the exploitation of the family farmer by the corporate giants?
- How are we doing as a church in recycling the paper we use or in purchasing recycled paper? Do we have a program for recycling?



EARTH GROANS AND THE GOD OF NATURE SUFFERS

Earth as living scripture

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, while in New Mexico, my wife and I visited the Santa Clara Pueblo, known for the pottery made there. We chatted with one of the potters as we admired her beautiful black pottery. As we talked, she told us of her tribe's tradition of the grandmother taking her newborn grandchild into the new day to meet the sun and to be named by the grandmother. In my mind's eye, I envisioned a grandmother, dressed in earthtone colors, wearing squash-blossom jewelry embedded with turquoise. The silver bangles on her wrists tinkle as she raises the child aloft with outstretched arms. The grandmother chants a blessing for the newborn child as the morning sun tops the mountains, rays descending into dark canyons and spreading across the valley floor like the Spirit of God moving across the face of the deep. Mother Earth and Father Sun greet the newest creation, and the connection between all elements of the creation are acknowledged and renewed in that moment as the oldest generation names and introduces the newest generation to the sun, moon, stars, and to Earth and all her creatures. This vision reminds me of the words attributed to Chief Seattle:

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people.

Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother.

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know: The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know.¹⁸

Our LDS creation story has Adam being created from the dust of the Earth. Jacob, King Benjamin, and Mormon all use the term "mother earth," (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 2:26; Mormon 6:15). Enoch hears a voice crying from the bowels of the earth saying, "Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children" (Moses 7:48). Yet even though "mother earth" is a term found in our scripture and is used in ways reminiscent of indigenous peoples, it doesn't seem to show up in our extended theology nor manifest itself as deep respect for the earth in our everyday practice.

Whether we embrace the concept of mother Earth as part of our theology or instead view Earth as fallen and flawed, to be redeemed at some future date, doesn't alter the fact that the Earth sustains us. Daily we eat, drink, and breathe from Earth's resources. Without her, without them, we would not exist. "People must come to understand," the agricultural economist John Ikerd reminds us, "that all of life ultimately arises from the soil."¹⁹ Given this, the obvious choice we should make is to care for the world. It seems simple enough. We have to re-

turn what we take. The principle is so obvious, so fundamental, and so preeminent, it can easily slip right through our fingers.

I envision LDS leaders joining Native Americans as watchmen on the tower to warn the world of the dangers of exploiting the earth for personal gain. Abuse of the earth—the failure to sustain that which sustains us—must be understood and taught as a sin against heaven. At the very least, our theology should plainly proclaim a respect for Earth that rings as clearly as our call for, say, respect for Church leaders, or for the family.

To think that we can be heedless of the Earth is as foolish as thinking that the spirit can be nourished without prayer or meditation. We have the warning prophecies of Native Americans that an abused nature will retaliate. Such prophecies find an echo in our LDS scripture: “Because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God to exclaim: The God of nature suffers” (1 Nephi 19:13).

Earth groans and the God of nature suffers. This suffering will continue until there is a spiritually based consciousness that embraces Earth as more than a stepping stone to some glory beyond. If not Church leaders, who will remind us of how we should feel about Earth? Will it be the kings of the isles of the sea, indigenous people, an astronaut who sounds like a seer?

Suddenly from behind the rim of the moon in long, slow-motion moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize that this is Earth . . . home.”²⁰

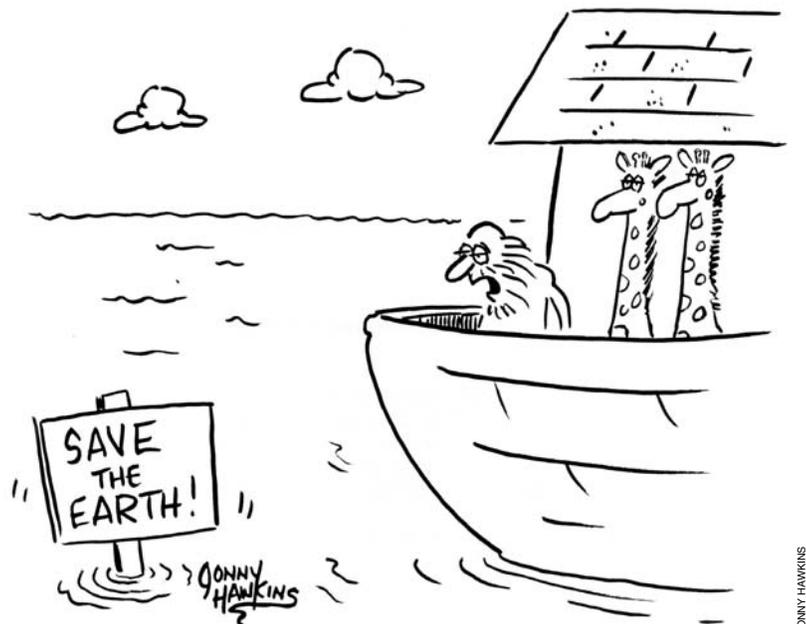
Through my own experiences, I have come to believe that Earth is a living scripture, a source of spiritual growth and understanding. I believe human beings are spiritual beings in a spiritual place where all things are interrelated. I believe salvation involves the entire creation, and out of that grows my concern for Earth and the way we live and relate to its creatures.

This Earth is the only home I know. This is the place where I find beauty and mystery, the place where I know exquisite joy and deep sorrow. It is the only place where I am certain I have tasted love. It is the only place I can be sure I have experienced God. It bounds all I know and frames all my hopes for now and eternity. It is a tree of life for me that sheds forth love and gives meaning to my personal cosmology. I cannot help but believe that there is a spiritual organic whole to our time here on Earth. Noxious weeds and all, it is a sacred place. ☐

NOTES

1. Thich Nhat Hahn, quoted in Scott Russell Sanders, *Staying Put* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), xviii.

2. For a list of selected works on ecology and religion, see <http://ecoethics.net/bib/tl-030-a.htm>. Authors who write in the area of spiritual ecology whose works have informed this essay include Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez, Scott Russell Sanders, and Terry Tempest Williams.
3. Matthew Gowans and Philip Cafaro, “A Latter-day Saint Environmental Ethic,” *Environmental Ethics* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 375–394. The article is based on Gowans’s master’s thesis, “A Latter-day Saint Environmental Ethic,” Colorado State University, 2001. Cafaro was Gowans’s CSU advisor.
4. Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, eds, *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998), ix.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Gowans and Cafaro, 376.
7. *Ibid.*, 394.
8. Patrick Mason, “The Possibility of Mormon Peacebuilding,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 44.
9. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, “Series Forward: The Nature of the Environmental Crisis,” Harvard Divinity School, The Center for the Study of World Religions, accessed 1 November 2004, <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/research/ecology/foreword.html>.
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11. Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover,” (accessed 1 November 2004, <http://www.bartleby.com/122/12.html>).
12. Henry David Thoreau, *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 64–65.
13. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 121.
14. Pablo Neruda, “The United Fruit Co.,” *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 85.
15. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” accessed 1 November 2004, <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,161-1-11-1,00.html>.
16. Thomas Berry, “The Ecozoic Era,” accessed 17 November 2004 from http://smallisbeautiful.org/frameset_publication.html.
17. Williams, Smart, and Smith, *New Genesis*, xii.
18. Chief Seattle, accessed 1 November 2004, <http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/seattle2.html>.
19. John Ikerd, “Economics as If People Mattered: Farming for Quality of Life,” accessed 17 November 2004, <http://www.ssu.missouri.edu/faculty/jikerd/papers/EconasifPeopleMatter.htm>.
20. Edgar Mitchell, accessed 1 November 2004, <http://library.thinkquest.org/28743/solarsystem/earth/>.



“Oh, give it up.”

2002 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Moonstone Winner

A LEAF, A BOWL, AND A PIECE OF JADE

By Joy Robinson



CARA NELSON'S HUSBAND WAS DEAD. THERE WAS no doubt about it. Cara was a nurse, and she knew. The doctor had come when she called, verifying that the lung tissue was almost completely solidified. Rob could not live through the night.

"Do you want an ambulance to take him to the hospital? I'll order one if you like."

"No," Cara said to the doctor who was her friend. "A lot of fuss for no reason. I've taken care of him alone for a year. He may as well die peacefully in his own bed."

Jim Knight looked around, feeling the quiet emptiness of the house. "Is there someone you can call to stay with you?" He asked.

"Yes, there is," Cara said, knowing she would not do that. *I should wake Josie, ask her to come hold my hand while I watch my husband die? I don't think so.*

After the doctor had gone, Cara went to Rob's bedside. She straightened the sheet across his chest. His breathing was barely perceptible. The oxygen canula had slipped to one side. She righted it and readjusted the elastic. She fluffed the pillows under his head. She chose a music tape from the stack on his bedside table and inserted it into the stereo.

Strains of sweet music drifted into the room. His favorite tape. Barbra Streisand's voice began to blend with the jazz instruments Rob loved. *People who need people, are the luckiest people in the world . . .*

Rob had slipped into a coma about half an hour before the doctor came. He did not respond to the doctor's voice or touch. At the sound of the music, his expression changed. Muscles twitched around his mouth. There was movement behind his eyelids.



JOY ROBINSON is an author and freelance editor who has three published books. Her most recent, *Under the Eye of the Shepherd*, is an account of the wartime memoirs of Werner Klein. She and her husband are the parents of a combined family of eleven children. She welcomes comments and feedback at: scrapofjoy@smartfella.com.

The last sense to go is the hearing—one of the important things nurses are taught. Keep your voice calm when caring for terminally ill patients. Don't say anything negative. People have awakened from deep comas and related conversations overheard while they were thought to be dying.

Cara slipped off her shoes and positioned herself on the bed, on top of the covers beside Rob. She did not touch him. She adjusted pillows behind her back. She sat quietly, aware of the music, but not listening. Her mind was ticking off things she would need to do after he took his last breath.

Suddenly—so unexpectedly that Cara's heart leaped and fluttered—Rob sat up. He looked wildly around the room. He stared intently at the foot of the bed. He turned his head toward Cara. There was a stunned look on his face. He lay down. His eyes closed. After a few quavering breaths, it was quite plain that his body no longer housed his spirit.

The oxygen canula began to hiss. Cara reached over and removed it.

So, she thought, *you couldn't accept it. You wouldn't talk about it. You refused to believe that you would die. "I'll beat this," you said. "I'll beat it." Who came for you? Who was it that startled you so? Your mother? She was a sweet soul. It surely wasn't your father—that self-centered, bullying man who taught you so well. He's only been dead twelve years. Not long enough to work his way up to a welcome committee for departing spirits.*

Do you remember, she mentally asked her dead husband, the time Grandma Myrtie came to see me, thirty years after her death?

Myrtie had stood beside the bed one night and waited patiently until Cara awoke. As she slept, Cara sensed someone watching her and opened her eyes. She had expected it to be Missie, the family dog. When Missie wanted to go outside in the night, she stood with her front paws on the bed by Cara's pillow and stared at her until she woke.

But it was not Missie. A short woman in a white dress stood beside the bed. Cara was not afraid. There was a peaceful feeling in the room.

Who is this? What does she want? were the questions that came to mind. Then she recognized the woman she had not

seen for many years. Myrtie, her father's mother. Myrtie did not speak, but through thought transference, she chided her granddaughter for not caring enough about their relationship to get the necessary names, dates, and places recorded so her family sealings could be completed.

You've always questioned your birth. If you had paid more attention to the Spirit, you'd know you were born at the right place, during the right time, into the right line of people. You made a promise. A covenant. A lot of people are depending on you. How long are you going to make everyone wait?

She seemed to know that Cara still carried a grudge about the way Myrtie had treated her as a child.

Cara had told Josie that she would do Myrtie's work when the Spirit moved her. "Not one minute, not one hour, not one year sooner."

As her grandmother stood by the bed, Cara got another message. *It isn't just me you are holding back. There is your grandfather, our children, our parents; we are all links in a chain. Every link must be connected. You are one of the links. Like it or not, you can't be saved without me.*

Cara blinked, and Myrtie was gone. She felt properly chastised and certainly moved by the Spirit. Until the next day. Negative feelings about her grandmother had accumulated like onion layers since she was nine months old. Daylight put everything back into human perspective. Myrtie could have said she was sorry, could have apologized. But she didn't.

Days stretched into weeks, and then became months, as Cara pondered the vision.

Finally, more than two years later, she finished gathering the information, filled out the sheets, and submitted the names. There was no softening of feelings towards her grandmother. But she had fond memories of Grandpa L.J., and she knew it was true; if her work was not done, there would be a black hole where Myrtie's life had been. No one else was going to do it.

Kneeling at the altar in proxy, Cara was sure she heard Myrtie's quiet laughter.

"God can sort this out," she told Josie, who went with her to do the sealings.

Remember, Rob? I woke you. I wanted to share Grandma Myrtie's visit. You laughed. "Spirit beings do not come to earth. There is no such thing as thought transference. When people die, they are dead as an orange peel. Close your yap about stuff like that. Go back to sleep before I give you something else to think about."

She smiled wryly. *No wonder you were surprised just now. Your scientific mind was shocked down to your socks. Spirit beings do move back and forth between the veil.*

CARA GOT UP and went into the kitchen. The telephone book and her address book were on the counter. She dialed the mortuary and gave information to the voice that answered. She filled a glass with water and waited at the table for them to come. When she heard a vehicle in the driveway, she went to the front door and opened it. She knew one of the men who stood there.

"Hello, Russell," she said. He nodded solemnly. They carried a small, wheeled stretcher with collapsible legs. She walked down the hallway. They followed her into the bedroom. She watched as the men deftly did their business. Lifting Rob onto the stretcher, they zipped him into a dark blue bag. She followed them out of the room, waited as they maneuvered the corner, opened the door, and went down the steps.

She watched from the open door as they slipped the stretcher into the back of the van. Russell handed her a clipboard with a paper on it. He showed her the place where she should sign her name. He gave her the receipt.

Janus, Rob's big tabby cat, stalked regally up to the door. She sat on her haunches and looked at Cara. She turned her head, sniffed the air, watched the men, and made a move toward the open door. Cara closed it quickly, leaving her outside.

Janus's name came about because she was two-faced. She could purr contentedly beside you one minute, and in a split-second unsheathe her claws and pull back her lips, sinking teeth and claws into some part of your anatomy. Cara had scars on the inside of one wrist that she would carry forever. Rob was the only one in the family Janus had not clawed or bitten. He insisted on keeping her despite her primal nature.

Cara returned to the kitchen, sat on a stool, and drew the address book closer. It was time to call the children. Five adult children, each living in a different state.

How much of a shock will it be to them? She wondered. Rob would not allow her to tell the children that his illness was serious. Chemical lung cancer not serious? Cara's lips tightened. He wouldn't believe there was something he could not control.

A FEW DAYS AFTER the oncologist had given his diagnosis, with the prognosis of six months left to live, Rob called their home teacher and made an appointment.

The home teacher was a good man who took his calling seriously and, so far as Cara knew, honored the priesthood that he held. He was their neighbor. They had known him for years.

"Thank you for coming, Cal," Rob said. He shook hands with Cal Hunter and smiled. In thirty-six years, he had not said "please" or "thank you" to Cara, or any of the children.

But he was careful to do that with other people. Most of them probably didn't notice that the smile on his mouth rarely reached his eyes.

After the three of them were settled into chairs in the living room, Rob cleared his throat, began to cough, got out his handkerchief and pressed it against his mouth. The coughing subsided.

"We've had a bit of disquieting news," Rob then said.

You've had a bit of disquieting news, Cara thought.

"Sorry to hear that," Cal said. "How can I help?"

"It's my lungs. We've been going to doctors for several weeks. They've done diagnostic tests. What my personal physician was treating as an allergy all last year turns out to be a rare form of lung cancer."



Rob did not wear jewelry. He was a scientist, a hard-headed realist. Nothing could cause him to believe in charms.

At the word cancer, Cal's eyes widened. He took a deep breath and looked away. He did not make eye contact with either Cara or Rob. He needed time to process the information. Cancer. The word had its own life. It hung in the air.

"Of course," Rob continued, "I refuse to accept a negative verdict. I believe it is possible to overcome cancer the same way people overcome other things. A few years ago, Norman Cousins put his cancer into remission by watching, hour after hour, for a month, all the old comedies he could find; Laurel and Hardy, the Keystone Cops, Charlie Chaplin. He was a writer. He did his own research and discovered that laughter releases healthy endorphins which go to work destroying diseased cells. I may try something like that."

Cara stared at Rob. *First you'd need to develop a sense of humor. You'd have to learn how to laugh. You may not have that much time.*

"The doctors say I have six months. I intend to show them how wrong they are."

"Six months?" Cal was clearly at a loss for words.

"Like something you hear in the movies, or read in a book." Rob said. A coughing spasm began. He got out his handkerchief again. When it was under control, he said: "What I want—what I need—is a priesthood blessing. I'm asking you and Brother Campbell to fast with Cara and me for twenty-four hours; then I'd like you to give me a health blessing."

It was the first Cara had heard of the proposed blessing. *Thank you for confiding in me. Thanks for asking.*

"Well, of course. I'd be honored. I'm sure Brother Campbell will feel the same way. I'll drop in and speak with him on my way home." He stood up and prepared to leave. He put out his hand and gripped Rob's hand tightly. "I don't know what to say. But if there is anything I can do, anything at all, please call me."

The priesthood blessing held out hope. Rob clung to that. He began every day with prayer and insisted that Cara kneel with him, a thing they had not usually done together. He promised God that he would research his genealogy (part of the blessing). He would serve a mission when he retired (another part of the blessing). He remembered Ezra Taft Benson's promises that great personal power comes to those who daily read the Book of Mormon. He began studying the book each morning.

He exercised faithfully every day, riding a bicycle, pumping iron, trying to rebuild his lungs. He researched diets that promised cures for cancer. Cara shopped and cooked and prepared the various foods. They went to health food stores and

bought strange-looking roots and herbs from the Orient, bark from Brazil, elixir from Greece, powder from Egypt.

Some of the concoctions caused him to gag and vomit. After a few months, Cara convinced him to stop experimenting with foreign food supplements.

"Let's concentrate on high-protein drinks four times a day. Your body cannot make a miracle out of what it rejects. Besides, vomiting is hard on your stomach and can burn the lining of the esophagus."

For a while, the plan seemed to work. He began gaining weight. He felt stronger.

A Buddhist colleague from China with whom he corresponded sent a jade pendant on a thick, red silk cord. A lotus blossom was delicately carved into the fine piece of jade.

"Put on immediately," the friend wrote. "Do not take off. Jade is good-luck gem. Red cord mean long life. Lotus blossom bring peace. Must get bamboo plant for growing inside house. Touch leaf of bamboo each day. Is good-luck plant."

Cara read the card. She smiled. Rob did not wear jewelry. He was a scientist, a hard-headed realist. Nothing could cause him to believe in charms.

That night, when he was getting ready for bed, Cara was surprised to see the red cord around his neck. She pretended not to notice and never mentioned it.

A few days later, he brought home three slender stalks of bamboo planted in a dark-gold oriental bowl. The bowl was filled with brightly colored, pea-sized rocks. Rob came into the study where Cara was opening mail and sorting medical bills. He placed the plant on the window sill above the desk.

In answer to Cara's quizzical look, he said: "I was looking at spring flowers and there it was. I liked the look of the plants, the vase, and the rocks. Tom says they only need light and water."

Tom Hansen was a friend who owned a large gardening supply store. He had called earlier to tell Cara that some bamboo plants Rob asked about had just been delivered from San Francisco.

So this dying business has turned into game playing. We are not going to discuss the things that should be talked about. We are going to clutch at straws and pretend that what is happening is not happening.

Cara picked up the bowl and held it in the palm of her hand. There was a nice feel to it. She fingered the satin-smooth reeds and touched the pale green leaves.

"Yes," Cara said. "It's well done. Do you remember the young woman we saw in China at the Buddhist temple, kneeling in front of the fertility goddess? She had bamboo

stalks.” The young woman had brought gifts for the goddess: tangerines and pink and white lotus blossoms, in addition to small leafy stalks of bamboo. She sought a blessing. Cara remembered the tears on the woman’s cheeks, and how humbly she offered up the plate that held the gifts.

“I have no memory of that. Orientals have many child-like, superstitious beliefs,” said Rob, who was wearing a jade pendant on a red cord. Avoiding her eyes, he left the room. Cara returned the “good-luck” plant to the window sill.

Ah yes. Occidentals. We are the ones who understand God’s nature. We too are only human, but out of pride, we hide humility and deny vulnerability.

A few days later, Rob sought her out. He was holding the Book of Mormon.

“I’ve been reading in Alma where he writes about the mighty change that came over him when he realized the magnitude of his sins against God and the Church.”

He sat down, marked his place, and closed the book. He rubbed the back of his neck. He looked out the window.

Hard for priesthood-holding Alpha male to speak with lowly wife about weighty spiritual matters?

Cara gave him no help. She had been in this place before with the positions reversed. How many times had she come to him and said: “I’ve been reading something, and I wonder”—holding out her cup—hoping for understanding. Only to be met with a derisive scholarly lecture—“How long have you been a member of the Church and you don’t know that? Keep looking. That’s how you learn.”

Nervously, he chewed his upper lip. Warily, Cara waited.

“This mighty change? I wonder. Do you have an understanding of it?”

He was asking her for spiritual help? She was stunned. And fearful. She was silent.

She and Rob could not do serious conversation. Usually they held differing points of view. Angry words and demeaning confrontations were often the result.

Shall I open myself up? She hesitated.

“What are you, deaf, dumb, and stupid?” The rage begins. “You have no opinion about this simple question?” He stands up, comes close, spits out the words. His face reddens. His eyes protrude and become glittering marbles.

So there it is. Just as she feared. Once she would have quivered and shook, her heart fluttering almost beyond control. But there is a protective covering now. Her heart beats steadily on. She takes a deep breath. Her voice is calm.

“It’s not a simple question, Rob. Alma writes about it, but scriptures show that the mighty change came to a lot of people—to Abraham before he offered up Isaac, and to Jacob when he wrestled all night with an angel. It came to Christ in Gethsemane; to Enos kneeling in the forest; to Moroni, wandering alone in the world waiting to die; to Joseph in Liberty Jail, wondering where God’s hiding place is.”

“Cut to the chase, if you know. What is the mighty change? How does it come about? If it happens, how do we know? What is it about? Do you have an answer for that, Mrs. Mighty Mouth?”

“It’s about honesty, approaching God with total honesty; laying what we are on the altar, all that is bad, all that is good, all that we wish we were—and are not. We lay our sins there and accept the Savior’s blood sacrifice for them.

“We must be able to say truthfully, ‘Here I am. Forgive me. Use me. Help me. Teach me how to love those I don’t like, to forgive those who persecute me.’ If we can do that—and mean it—God can bring about the mighty change. And we’ll know.”

Silence falls between them. Outside sounds are amplified. Robins chatter noisily in the cherry tree outside the kitchen window. Cara knows Janus is prowling, tail twitching, beneath the tree, frightening the birds.

Damn cat.

Rob sat down. “Could you and I do that?”

“Do what?”

“Are you that obtuse? What have we been talking about? Change of heart! Change of heart! Could you and I do that?”

Cara shook her head. “Christ shed his drops of blood alone. Enos was alone in the forest. Moroni was alone in the world. Alma met God’s angel alone. Pentecost may happen in a crowd, but the mighty change of heart that prepares us to meet God comes quietly when we’re alone. It’s a lonely quest. And we pay a price for it. It’s not something two people can do together.”

“I should have known, *Helpmeet*.” His voice trembled with anger. “You don’t know the meaning of the word.” He stood up, shouldered his portable oxygen tank, went into the study, and slammed the door.

Cara was contrite. *Sorry, Father. I messed that up. But how can I help him? He has no respect for my opinion. There’s too much garbage between us. He needs priesthood counsel—if only his pride would allow him to ask.*

Once she would have followed after him—prostitution of self for the good of the family, offering whatever it took to quiet the storm, to smooth troubled waters.

Not now. The family is gone. The oil cruse is empty.

She went downstairs. Work! An antidote for emotional poison. She tackled the washing and ironing. Then she went out and began mowing the lawn.

During the weeks that followed, she knew Rob was wrestling with his dilemma. She knew he was spending time on his knees seeking answers. Daily she saw red knuckle marks imprinted on his forehead. She asked no questions. She waited for signs of the changed heart.

His prayers became more humble. One night he said, “Help me to be better than I am.” He began to treat her more kindly. But the day never came when he said “please” or “thank you.” The day never came when he expressed repentance, or regret, to her.

CARA TOOK DOWN the telephone receiver and began calling her children, the oldest one first. When she had spoken with the last one, she hung up the telephone and went back to the bedroom.

She removed the candlewick spread from the bed, stripped off the sheets and mattress cover, shook pillows out of cases,



“Are you that obtuse? . . . Change of heart! Change of heart! Could you and I do that?”

gathered towels from the bathrooms. Arms loaded, she walked downstairs to the laundry room. She opened the washer, stuffed things inside, added soap, set the controls, and pushed the button that would begin the cleansing process.

She went back upstairs, gathered clean linen, and began re-making the bed. Without thinking, she tightly tucked the sheets, made hospital corners, slipped on fresh-smelling pillow cases, flipped on the bedspread and smoothed it into place.

As she worked, she thought about the weeping and wailing that was expected of new widows. There were Regulations, Protocol, Emily Post, Society, Common Decency to be considered. But thirty-six years of clever acupuncture along exposed nerve endings had done its job. No one would believe what she really felt. Except Josie.

A poem she had written after a time of particular terror came to mind:

*Cruel
Memories pushed down
Into deep pools
Rise to the surface
Recreate pain
Are tied with rocks
And submerged
Again!*

She continued her methodical work. She wheeled the large oxygen tank with its yards of serpentine tubing into the utility closet and closed the door. She hung clean towels in both bathrooms, washed glasses and soap dishes, and put new bars of soap in each dish.

When every trace of Rob's illness was gone, she opened a window. The October air was cold—clean and crisp—no hint of autumnal death and decay. She inhaled deeply. The rising sun was coloring clouds above the Wasatch mountains.

The birth of a new day for each of us. Me here. You, wherever you are.

She left the room, went into the study, and called Josie, her sister/friend who could be depended on to help deal with life's rawest reality. Old wisdom was in her. Ready-made platitudes did not trip off Josie's tongue.

SHE AND JOSIE had been friends for thirty-two years. Both were born in the South; Josie in Texas, Cara in Missouri. Except for a few peculiarities—Cara's ma-

ternal great-grandmother smoked a cob pipe and made serious life predictions from dreams and visions; Josie's rode horses, roped calves, and read tea leaves—their families, extending backwards for a hundred years, were run-of-the-mill, dyed-in-the-wool Southern Baptists, each line with a fair sprinkling of Bible-thumping ministers.

As adults, at the same time in different places, she and Josie had joined the Church and received sacred ordinances that sealed them to their husbands and families eternally. At the time of their conversion, neither woman realized that their husbands, both fourth-generation Mormons, believed without a doubt that they held a clear mandate to rule over wives and children.

The two women believed they were premortal friends. They bonded the day they met, and the bond held. When bad things happened to either of them, they walked the halls of hell together, until the one with the problem could draw clean breaths of untormented air.

Josie's voice comes into the receiver. Cara tries to speak and finds that she is mute.

“Hello?” Josie's voice again.

“It's me.” Cara manages a cracked whisper. “Umm. Rob. He has. Umm.”

“I'm on my way,” Josie says. The line goes dead.

Cara stayed where she was, curled into a corner of the couch. The door was unlocked. Josie could just walk in. She lived only a few miles away. Cara listened for the sound of her car, heard it, and waited for Josie to come inside.

What she heard was the outside door opening and closing. She heard muttering, the sound of cupboard doors opening in the kitchen, the front door opening and closing again. Water running. Cara was numbly curious. But she did not move.

Josie appears; tall, slender, and pretty; her naturally curly hair, once a bright red-gold that glistened in the sunlight, is now auburn without a trace of gray. (She often says it is a pure wonder it hasn't turned white from dealing with the hazardous conditions of life.) Josie is fifty-eight, two years older than Cara.

“Janus left you a love offering on the door mat—a dead robin. Its neck was broken. It was still warm. It was lying on its back with its feet in the air and its tongue hanging out.”

A natural-born mimic, Josie illustrates.

Cara can't help laughing. “Birds don't have tongues.”

"Well, if they did, that's how it would have looked. I gave it a decent burial. I put it in a plastic bag and threw it in the outside garbage bin."

"That cat is evil."

"It's the nature of cats. She's disturbed. Cats have a sense about death."

"I have scars to prove her evilness. I needed stitches and shots." Cara turned her hand over to show the three long white lines on her wrist.

Josie sat down on the couch and took Cara's hand in hers. "A lot of us bear scars having to do with evil. Some aren't so obvious. Do you want to talk?"

Cara began relating the last hours of Rob's life, finishing with how startled she had been when out of a coma, Rob sat straight up in bed staring at someone, or something, that she could not see.

"Like the time Grandma Myrtie came, which he refused to believe. Do you suppose he knows the difference between a live spirit and a dead orange peel now?"

They laugh. Their laughter slides into silence. Then, heads bent together, they begin to weep and murmur unwritten primeval woman-soft comforting sounds for hurt anger sorrow, for mysteries unknown, and known things not understood. When their hearts are cleansed, and their tears are spent, with limp tissues scattered around them like wilted flowers, they wipe their eyes.

"Let's go for a walk," Josie says, "before the phone starts ringing."

Outside, without a word, they head downhill towards the cemetery two miles away, their favorite sanctuary. It is a secluded place surrounded by ages-old oaks, poplars, and pines. The walkways are wide. There is seldom anyone around.

On their visits, they stop beside three graves. Each of them has a grandchild buried there, and Josie's son, who took his own life. They pull weeds, clean around the headstones, and sit beside one of the graves to rest and talk.

"What if . . . ?" they sometimes say. It is fruitless to wonder, and they know it. But still they sometimes look at each other and say, "What if?"

THE NEXT DAY, Cara's children begin to arrive. Some with their own children. The bedrooms are full, and there are sleeping bags in the family room. There are tears. There is laughter. The good times are remembered. Painful memories are skillfully skirted.

When the funeral and burial are over, Cara can stop saying: "Yes, he was a good man. Yes, we will miss him. Yes, the children will be a comfort."

In their far away places, with their own lives to live.

"Yes, he did endure to the end."

What choice did he have? What choice do any of us have? Hope and endurance.

She can stop smiling. Stop comforting. Stop covering her own feelings.

The house is empty. Everyone has returned to the separate lives they are making. She will hear from them. But she is no

longer their center; she is at the periphery now, the outer edge of a sphere that goes round and round. She has adjusted to this painful fact.

She moves through the house, straightening, putting things right but missing deeply the vibrancy recently there—the touch of her children's hands, the feel of their strong, young arms holding her close, the sound of their voices. From the walls, she hears faint echoes, the innocent, joyous laughter of grandchildren who do not yet understand death.

She picks up a stray Raggedy Ann doll, smiles, presses it to her breast, feels the spirit of the child who last held it. Reluctant to let it go, she carries it into the study and puts it on the couch. She rights its apron and straightens the calico skirt. Its button eyes mock her with their emptiness.

She sits down at the desk. A large stack of mail needs attention. She picks up the letter opener, looks at it, lays it aside. She is not ready for that.

She notices a white envelope with the name of the mortuary stamped in black. She opens it.

The jade pendant on the red silk cord is inside.

Oh, yes. I forgot to remove it before calling the mortuary.

She lifts it out, slides the cord through her fingers, traces the delicate carving of the lotus blossom. She sighs deeply, tremulously, and slips the cord over her head. The pendant rests between her breasts, cool at first and then warm.

Peace. Bring me peace. I am not concerned with long life.

She lifts the golden bowl of slender bamboo reeds from the window sill. The stalks are taller now. There are more leaves. One by one she runs the long, pointed leaves between her fingers.

Good luck. Bring me good luck.

Reminded again of the Chinese woman kneeling beseechingly before the fertility goddess, Cara lifts the bowl and holds it out—an offering toward her own God. She closes her eyes. Tears gather and spill over.

Please, Father. I need healing. Heal my spirit. Take away the bitterness. Give me back the heart I once had that was tender as these leaves are tender; but let it be a little tough as the stalks are tough. The world is a scary place, and I will be alone in it.

Cara opens her eyes and looks out the window. Leaves are changing color, falling from the trees. A peaceful presence enters the room. She turns, expecting to see Josie, though she did not hear her come into the house. No one is there.

A feeling of love gathers and surrounds her. Cara breathes deeply, drawing the love inside. No words are spoken, but there is an impression of words. *I'm sorry. So very sorry. For you and for the children. I couldn't let go of the anger. I could not get past myself. I could not open my heart. I never found the love. I tried. But I never knew its power until now. Now it is too late. Please, please, try to forgive me.*

Slowly the presence withdraws. She feels bereft. She sits alone wearing the jade pendant, holding the golden bowl. Nothing in the room has changed except that a bamboo leaf is lying on the desk.

Green bamboo reeds do not drop their leaves.

Good luck.



*“Just kidding around, you know, and then you mentioned it later,
and then it was this thing. In our heads. An idea.”*

PECULIARITIES

TAHOE

By Eric Samuelsen



CHARACTERS

KENDRA . . . BYU student, early twenties

TED . . . BYU student, early twenties

CAST

Peculiarities was first presented at the Villa Theatre, Springville, Utah, mid-October 2002.

It was directed by Tony Gunn. The original cast for the “Tahoe” portion was:

KENDRA . . . Sarah Ratliff

TED . . . Ben Sampson

AUTHOR’S NOTE

IN 2000, I wrote a play called *Peculiarities*, an attempt at theatrical naturalism and an attempt to explore what seemed to me uniquely Mormon sexual mores. The play lay on my desk for some time, and then, in 2002, a student, Tony Gunn, saw it and asked if he could direct it. Tony and I produced the play together at the Villa Theatre in Springville. Since that time, a number of friends, among them Richard Dutcher of Zion Films and James Holmes of Cue Media thought it might make an interesting and unique independent film.

In the last two years, I have begun a professional relationship with Jerry Rapiere, co-artistic director of Plan B Theatre Company in Salt Lake. After reading a draft of my screenplay edition of *Peculiarities*, Jerry directed a production of a truncated version of it in Salt Lake. Jerry and I have since had further conversations regarding it and have decided that, if we can raise the necessary funds, we would like to make this film.

The scene you are reading in this issue of *SUNSTONE* is one of six storylines that would interweave (crosscutting between them) in the finished film. We believe that this character-driven, dialogue-heavy independent film could be produced inexpensively, and could very well prove popular in festivals and art houses. We believe that we could make the entire film for about \$10,000.

Jerry, James, and I, along with cinematographer Mark Barr, have recently added the Sunstone Education Foundation as a partner in this endeavor to see the film made. To create interest in the project, which potentially could result in a financial payoff, *SUNSTONE* has agreed to publish five of the play’s six parts, one in this and each of the next four issues. The sixth part, a humorous thread about an LDS bishop and his wife trying to have a romantic evening while regularly being interrupted by ward business, wouldn’t work well in this format.

—ERIC SAMUELSEN

ERIC SAMUELSEN, Ph.D., is head of playwriting and screenwriting at BYU, where he has been on the faculty since 1992. This is his fourth play published in *SUNSTONE* (*Accommodations*, June 1994; *Gadianton*, July 2001; *Family*, March 2005). Sixteen of his plays have been produced professionally.

NOTE ON SCRIPT

A note about notation. In this play, a dash (—) indicates an interrupted line. An ellipsis (. . .) should suggest a pause, a line trailing off.

NOTE ON LOCATION

The play takes place in Ted's car while he and Kendra are traveling back to Utah from a weekend in Tahoe.

SCENE ONE

(Lights up on KENDRA and TED. Radio on. A very long pause.)

KENDRA: I hate that song. *(She turns down the radio.)*

TED: Oh.

KENDRA: *(She switches the station.)* Country. Country. Great, radio Elko, this sucks. *(She tries several stations.)*

TED: *(After a moment.)* We're in the middle of Nevada. There's not going to be a lot—.

KENDRA: I know where we are. Between Elko and Winnemucca. *(She snaps off the radio.)* Hub of northern Nevada.

TED: Still, I mean, some tunes . . . *(Glances over at her. Decides to keep going.)* Would be, you know . . . nice. . . if we could find a station that . . . *(He runs out of steam. They ride quietly a while longer.)* Did you turn the key back in?

KENDRA: The which?

TED: The room key. Did you turn it in?

KENDRA: We were supposed to leave it in the room.

TED: I think we were supposed to turn it in at the desk.

KENDRA: We were supposed to leave it in the room.

TED: When we checked out. I think—.

KENDRA: We did the quick check-out thing. We didn't make any phone calls and we didn't watch a movie.

TED: You're supposed to check out—.

KENDRA: They have your VISA number if there's a problem. All we had to do was leave the key in the room. On the, whatever, night table.

TED: If you say so. *(A longish pause.)*

KENDRA: They left that thing. The quick check-out form. On the floor by the *USA Today*.

TED: I didn't fill out any—.

KENDRA: I did, while you were in the bathroom. *(To herself.)* Fogging up the mirror.

TED: Did you . . . say—?

KENDRA: Never mind. *(A pause.)*

TED: Okay. *(Another pause. He taps his fingers nervously on the steering wheel.)*

KENDRA: Would you mind not doing that?

TED: What?

KENDRA: You're playing with the steering wheel.

TED: Sorry. *(He stops. Another pause.)*

KENDRA: I hate Nevada.

TED: Mmmm.

KENDRA: It's like this whole nuclear waste dump site.

TED: I think that's actually a little to the south of—.

KENDRA: The whole state. Really, it's like a state for mutants.

Sagebrush, that's got to be some kind of mutant radiation

. . . *(pause)* tumbleweed. . . All that. *(pause.)* . . . Who lives here? Mafia and cowboys. The whole state. And . . . like, space alien people. Area 51. Whatever. And gambling. I hate it.

TED: Hookers.

KENDRA: What?

TED: Nothing.

KENDRA: What did you—?

TED: Nothing. *(Long pause.)* You have the papers?

KENDRA: What?

TED: The papers? From the . . . you know, the . . .

KENDRA: I told you, we left them on the—.

TED: From the . . . the place, the—?

KENDRA: Oh.

TED: Those.

KENDRA: I know, I know what you—.

TED: Do you wanna. . . like, keep. . . ? *(Pause. Another try.)* Do you think we should. . . ? *(Pause. Another attempt.)* They're legal documents. I mean—.

KENDRA: I never want to see 'em again.

TED: No. But maybe we should. Keep 'em. Or somethi—.

KENDRA: *(Pause.)* Twenty years from now. Ten years from now, next year. Are you gonna wanna anyone to even know that—?

TED: No. I guess not.

KENDRA: Me neither.

TED: So. Okay. We're decided. . . . Okay. I'll just . . . get rid of them . . . or someth. . . . *(Pause. Big change of subject.)* I was gonna ask you. Since we're talking. . . . What'd you think of the floor show?

KENDRA: The what?

TED: The show? At the hotel?

KENDRA: What about it?

TED: I was gonna ask what you thought.

KENDRA: It was okay. *(Making an effort.)* I mean it was pretty good.

TED: I thought so. *(Pause.)* The singer. The black lady. Her voice was really—.

KENDRA: Yeah.

TED: Like, they can really sing sometimes. Big black women, you know what I—.

KENDRA: Yeah, I do.

TED: Well. African-American. I uh guess we're supposed to—.

KENDRA: Black. I hate that. Black.

TED: What?

KENDRA: All that political correctness. "People of color." All that.

TED: Well, whatever they—.

KENDRA: She's black.

TED: I mean, I just . . . whatever they want to be—.

KENDRA: I just want to call them one thing and let that be that. I don't want it to, like, change every five min—.

TED: Sure. All I'm saying is—.

KENDRA: Black. Black black black. Black singer, black entertainer, big black woman with a big black voice.

TED: Thing is—.

KENDRA: Drive you crazy, changing every five seconds.



We should have danced. . . . We never danced.

Changing the rules.

TED: Sure. All I'm—

KENDRA: They should just make a rule and then that's it.

TED: Absolutely. Okay? I agree with you.

KENDRA: Okay.

TED: What I was asking. Isn't she *someone*?

KENDRA: Who?

TED: The singer. Who we're talking about. Isn't she, like, a Supreme or something?

KENDRA: A Supreme.

TED: Didn't your parents have those records? Diana Ross and the Supremes, and—

KENDRA: That wasn't Diana Ross.

TED: No, I know, I was just saying she might have been a—

KENDRA: (*Scornfully.*) Diana Ross.

TED: No. But—

KENDRA: You're so gullible.

TED: No, I just—

KENDRA: We're at Tahoe, rinkydink hotel in Tahoe. Not Vegas or, whatever, Mark Taper Forum. They're not gonna have Diana flipping Ross singing in the hotel floor show.

TED: I was just thinking, another Supreme, though. Another one.

KENDRA: Another. . . .?

TED: I mean it was Diana Ross and the Supremes. And I mean who ever hears of the rest of them? I mean, one of them could be at Tahoe, right? Florence Nightengale, Cindy Birdsong, whoever. . . the rest of them—

KENDRA: Cindy Birdsong?

TED: That was one of their names. I think.

KENDRA: You know the names of the other Supremes?

TED: It stuck in my head.

KENDRA: Well, you just know everything there is to know, don't you? (*Pause.*)

TED: That that that. . . the whole . . . I'd never used a . . . it wasn't my fault.

KENDRA: No. To be fair, I guess it wasn't. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE TWO

(*KENDRA starts to cry quietly in the seat. TED looks over at her. Tries to figure out what to say. Can't. Drives on.*)

SCENE THREE

(*KENDRA'S really crying now. TED has no idea what to do. He keeps glancing over at her, hoping she'll quit. She doesn't. Finally.*)

TED: Is there anything I can. . . . (*A pause. She ignores him.*) Are you okay—?

KENDRA: I'm fine. (*He keeps driving. She keeps crying.*)

SCENE FOUR

KENDRA: (*Wiping her eyes with a tissue.*)

I'm sorry. I'm just . . . I just get all. . . .

TED: It's okay.

KENDRA: (*Blowing her nose.*) I just—

TED: It's fine. Do you need another one?

KENDRA: Thanks. (*He hands her a tissue.*)

TED: It wasn't all bad. (*She blows her nose again.*) I mean I didn't think it was all so awful.

KENDRA: Oh, no.

TED: The lake was really pretty.

KENDRA: Sure. It's beautiful.

TED: Horseback riding.

KENDRA: No, of course, that was great.

TED: And that one place, with the electronic darts.

KENDRA: I wish we could have taken one of those lake cruises.

TED: That did look nice.

KENDRA: I think . . . just cruising down the lake at night. . . . maybe dancing.

TED: Dancing slowly in the moonlight.

KENDRA: Yeah! Maybe like that.

TED: We never danced.

KENDRA: No. No, we didn't.

TED: We should have. Or maybe one of those hikes.

KENDRA: Backpacking. Take one of those trails, and picnic.

TED: Picnic by some little stream. You know. Maybe by a waterfall.

KENDRA: See, that's what we should have. . . . (*Pause.*) How did we . . .? Where did this come from?

TED: Goofing around. That one time, talking, you said, "Hey, have you heard of that thing where they go to Tahoe or Vegas?"

KENDRA: Yeah. I remember.

TED: And you said something like, maybe we should try that.

KENDRA: I was kidding.

TED: I knew that. Both of us . . . chortling.

KENDRA: Laughing. Just kidding around, you know, and then you mentioned it later, and then it was this thing. In our heads. An idea.

TED: Not a bad idea.

KENDRA: (*Dismissively.*) Yeah.



CHELSEA BUSH

What do we call ourselves? Exes? . . . It's sort of . . . true. It's exactly true. And . . . also sort of not.

TED: I mean, if we did this again, we'd be . . . inured to it.

KENDRA: (*Under her breath.*) Inured.

TED: Go during the winter, spend the day skiing, and then snuggle up by the fireplace, drink hot chocolate and warm up each other's hands.

KENDRA: That's so. . . .

TED: We should have.

KENDRA: We should have danced.

TED: Watch the moonlight over Lake Tahoe, the ripple of the waves. And the band, a live band, playing something soft. And we'd hold each other on the dance floor, maybe not even actually moving our feet much, maybe just swaying a little with the music. (*Pause.*) And then . . . the boat would finish the cruise, and we'd hold hands, and walk slowly back to our hotel. And we'd go up to our room together, maybe not even talking much, just so glad to—.

KENDRA: (*Very pale.*) Could you pull over please? Please? (*He pulls over.*)

TED: Kendra?

KENDRA: Hurry.

TED: Are you okay?

KENDRA: I'm going to be sick, I think. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE FIVE

KENDRA: So what are we going to tell people?

TED: What do you mean? Who needs to know?

KENDRA: Your roommates, my roommates.

TED: I told my roommates I was going home to see my folks.

KENDRA: Nothing about me.

TED: No.

KENDRA: Okay. (*Pause.*) But my roommates saw you pick me up.

TED: You could tell them the same thing.

KENDRA: What?

TED: That I took you to meet my family.

KENDRA: They'll get the wrong ideas.

TED: What?

KENDRA: That we're really serious. Meeting your parents.

TED: We *are* serious. (*Pause.*) Aren't we?

KENDRA: I don't know.

TED: We've been dating for five months.

KENDRA: I know.

TED: They're probably half expecting it. Big announcement.

KENDRA: They're totally expecting it. You don't know girls' apartments.

TED: So. That's what we say. (*Pause.*) That we went to see my folks.

KENDRA: I don't know if I'm ready for that.

TED: Ready for. . . ?

KENDRA: To go through all that. Jumping up and down and . . . squealing. With delight.

TED: Okay. So. We don't tell them—.

KENDRA: I know what you're—.

TED: We don't make an announcement.

KENDRA: No. Still.

TED: We just say. Quietly, you know?

KENDRA: "Oh, we went to see Ted's parents. No big deal, it doesn't mean . . . anything. Just decided to drive down to San Jose."

TED: Sacramento.

KENDRA: I thought you were from San Jose.

TED: Sacramento. Actually Auburn, we were really close to my—.

KENDRA: Whatever. "Yeah, it was nice. They're nice folks. But no, Ted and I aren't that serious." You don't know girls. Roommates.

TED: My roommates wouldn't even care.

KENDRA: Yeah, well. Trust me, mine would.

TED: Well, would that be so bad?

KENDRA: What do you mean?

TED: I mean, we could. You know? Make a big announcement. Get enga—.

KENDRA: No!

TED: (*A pause. Hurt.*) Okay.

KENDRA: No. I'm sorry.

TED: We don't have to. (*Pause.*) It was just an idea.

KENDRA: If that's a proposal, it's a really lame one and the answer is no.

TED: Sorry. (*Pause.*)

KENDRA: Could we tell 'em you gave me a ride?

TED: What do you mean?

KENDRA: I had to go someplace, and I've been worried about my car, which is true, I have. And you offered to take me. As a friend.

TED: As a friend.

KENDRA: Yeah. You gave me a ride.

TED: Where?

KENDRA: Idaho.

TED: Why?

KENDRA: My sister. She's been going through some issues, and

you offered to take me.
 TED: So we went to meet *your* family.
 KENDRA: My sister. She's at Idaho State.
 TED: And she couldn't just call you on the phone?
 KENDRA: No, it was the kind of thing she had to see me personally.
 TED: What sorts of things would that be?
 KENDRA: I don't know. Sister things. A guy dumped her, or . . . where you have to cry and hug and all that. And . . . it was okay because you have an old companion at Idaho State, so you spent most of your time with him.
 TED: Okay.
 KENDRA: That'll be okay. We went to Idaho together. As friends.
 TED: If you say so.
 KENDRA: I'm sorry, Ted.
 TED: It's okay.
 KENDRA: I couldn't deal with the rest of it.
 TED: Like any suggestion that we actually have a relationship.
 KENDRA: You don't have to be a jerk about it. (*They ride in silence.*)

SCENE SIX

TED: So. I just wanted to. . . . (*Pause.*) We'd talked about going to Men's Chorus next weekend.
 KENDRA: Okay.
 TED: I got the tickets. It was hard. They sell out almost as soon as they go on sale.
 KENDRA: Sure.
 TED: I think they're really good.
 KENDRA: Wade's in it, right?
 TED: Yeah. He loves it.
 KENDRA: Friday?
 TED: Yeah. (*Pause.*) So, we'll plan on that.
 KENDRA: That's fine.
 TED: Did you also want to . . . there was that movie in town that we wanted to—?
 KENDRA: That'd be fine, too.
 TED: Okay.
 KENDRA: I've got a study group on Wednesday.
 TED: That's right.
 KENDRA: But any other night.
 TED: Good. (*Pause.*)
 KENDRA: It doesn't really matter.
 TED: What doesn't?
 KENDRA: Tuesday or Thursday. Either one's fine.
 TED: Oh. Sure.
 KENDRA: I've just been sitting here. Thinking about . . . what do we call ourselves?
 TED: What do you mean?
 KENDRA: What's the word for it?
 TED: Boyfriend, girlfriend?
 KENDRA: I guess. Seems a little inadequate.
 TED: Yeah.
 KENDRA: Lovers. Acquaintances. Friends. A couple.
 TED: We don't have to have a word for it.
 KENDRA: No. I guess not. It's just more comforting if we can.

TED: Exes?
 KENDRA: "This is Ted. My ex."
 TED: It's sort of . . . true.
 KENDRA: It's *exactly* true. And . . . also sort of not.
 TED: I know.
 KENDRA: If we weren't LDS, we'd just be dating.
 TED: Tahoe would be—
 KENDRA: Right. Normal. We'd be two people seeing each other.
 TED: Good ol' law of chastity.
 KENDRA: Yeah. Makes us unique.
 TED: Not so unique. Lots of people do.
 KENDRA: Anymore? Like who? Amish? Hasidic Jews?
 TED: Lots of people. Friends from high school.
 KENDRA: Yeah, well, not many of my friends.
 TED: Most of mine. People don't just . . . routinely fall in the sack.
 KENDRA: Well, I think they do. That's why we all went to BYU, right, so we could be with people with the same standards.
 TED: Sure.
 KENDRA: And so there we are. You and me.
 TED: You and me.
 KENDRA: Letter of the law; we kept the law of chastity. We can honestly say we have not had sexual relations with anyone we weren't married. . . . (*Pause.*) I hated that place.
 TED: I wish we coulda found a nicer place. Elvis—
 KENDRA: No, not the . . . Elvis. But nicer, you know? (*Pause.*) I mean, it just . . . some people actually, that's what they do. That's how they start their lives together.
 TED: I know.
 KENDRA: Not for me. I want to be pure.
 TED: In a way, aren't we?
 KENDRA: Go to the temple and. . . . (*Pause.*) I felt so clever. . . . (*TED looks at her. Looks away.*)

SCENE SEVEN

TED: So. You have the munchies?
 KENDRA: A bit.
 TED: Let's look for a place.
 KENDRA: If you want to.
 TED: Sure.
 KENDRA: We don't have to.
 TED: No, it's okay.
 KENDRA: It's really all right. I'm fine.
 TED: I'm actually rather peckish.
 KENDRA: (*A pause.*) Peckish.
 TED: Yeah.
 KENDRA: Why can't you just say hungry? Or . . . starved?
 TED: Well, I'm not starved. Just peckish.
 KENDRA: Why do you have to do that?
 TED: What?
 KENDRA: Use words like peckish.
 TED: I don't always—
 KENDRA: I hate that; it drives me crazy. Peckish. And munchies, you said you had the munchies. I hate that.
 TED: Sorry.

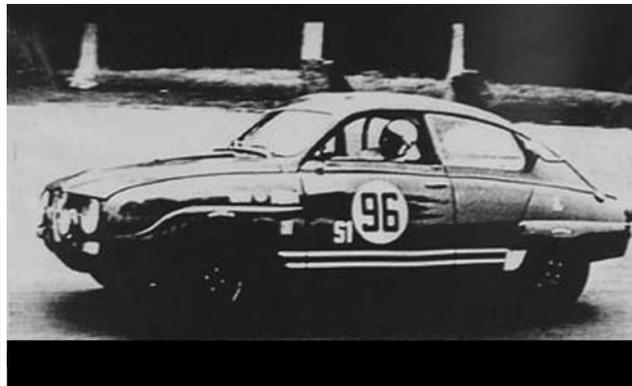
KENDRA: No. Don't stop. I just want to get home.
 TED: Okay. *(Pause.)* Except I really am a bit—
 KENDRA: If you say peckish, I swear, I'm jumping out of the car.
 TED: Hungry. I'm hungry.
 KENDRA: Well I'm not.
 TED: All right. Except that I'm really quite . . . hungry. And I'd like to stop, find a Mickie D's or something.
 KENDRA: McDonald's! It's called McDonald's! It's not Mickie D's!
 TED: Well, whatever it's called, I want to stop at one and buy something because I'm hungry.
 KENDRA: And I want to get home.
 TED: Two minutes. It'll take two minutes out of your life to let me pull over.
 KENDRA: Do what you want to.
 TED: Fine.
 KENDRA: *(Pause. Fuming.)* Except I don't want to. I don't want to pull over. It'll slow us down.
 TED: There's an exit coming up, and I'm taking it.
 KENDRA: You count the amount of time it takes to slow down, find the place—
 TED: What, are you late for, tell me, a cabinet meeting? Your talk in General Conference? Or—
 KENDRA: More like fifteen minutes.
 TED: So live with it.
 KENDRA: I don't want to live with it. I want you to take me home.
 TED: I'm taking that exit.
 KENDRA: No you're not.
 TED: I'm driving.
 KENDRA: If you have even the tiniest consideration for my feelings—
 TED: One hamburger! That's all I'm asking!
 KENDRA: I want to go home!
 TED: You can't go home! Unless I take you!
 KENDRA: Let me drive then.
 TED: I am taking this exit!
 KENDRA: You are not!
 TED: I'm signalling.
 KENDRA: Turn off that signa—
 TED: I'm changing lanes.
 KENDRA: I'm not kidding.
 TED: I'm slowing down.
 KENDRA: No! I mean it Ted. You. Are. Not. Taking. This exit. I'm absolutely serious. I am totally NOT KIDDING. *(Pause. He looks at her. Drives on.)*
 TED: Okay. We missed it.
 KENDRA: Fine. *(They drive.)* You're going 80.
 TED: So?
 KENDRA: Speed limit's 65.
 TED: 75.
 KENDRA: You're speeding.
 TED: It'll get you home faster. *(Pause.)*
 KENDRA: Fine.

(FINAL BLACKOUT.)

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"VOLUPTUOUS," by HELEN WALKER JONES, Salt Lake City, Utah
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 A woman about to dress her mother-in-law in temple clothes for burial reflects upon their relationship from the moment of teen-aged marriage through the last sixteen years of life in the same house.

"RESURRECTION OF THE BOBCAT," by LISA R. HARRIS, Orem, Utah
 A not-always-there old man tries to coax his senile wife back into reality by sneaking her out of the care center where they've been lovingly cared for by a woman from their healthy past.

HONORABLE MENTION

"A SPELL OF FOOLISHNESS," by RODELLO HUNTER (Hunter died this past October)
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THIS YEAR'S CONTEST DEADLINE

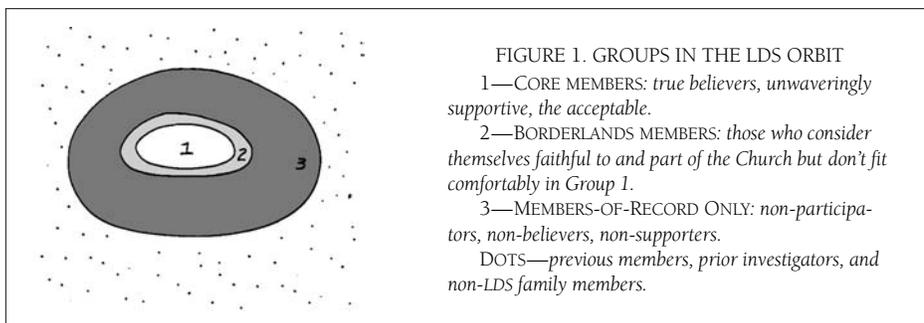
30 JUNE 2006



BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

WORMWOOD AMONG
THE MORMONS

By D. Jeff Burton



THIS REGULAR COLUMN explores the stories of Borderlanders because it is useful to know how others have successfully (or unsuccessfully) dealt with problems and challenges.¹

I recently found a copy of a strange message in my email inbox. Apparently it had been forwarded by someone interested in the column. I simply repeat it here.

My Dearest Wormwood,

I received your email this morning. Wonderful to hear from my favorite nephew again and your news. Marvelous tool, this internet. It was *our* invention—but everybody knows that already.

It has been more than forty long years since I tutored you last. You lost your man back then, of course, in spite of my excellent counsel. You undoubtedly thought of your subsequent consignment to simple observation of life in Bountiful, Utah, as punishment, but it was actually valuable training to become a tempter again—this time among the Mormons.

During these intervening years, I myself have been banished to a small Mormon-run genealogical library in Cincinnati, Ohio. Mine actually *was* punishment—for *your* failure! Can you imagine four decades of endless talk about grandchildren, church meetings, ancestry, temple work, and the

myriad health complaints of the waning years? And this from people I had as much chance of bringing to our Father Below as I have of experiencing mortality! “It was hell,” as they say.

I also lost my rank as Under Secretary in the Lowerarchy but am content for the moment to be an Advanced Tempter Trainer, Class IV. It could have been worse had *my* uncle not tidied things over for both of us. But fear not, I am ready to once again serve our Father Below with distinction and, together, even if consigned to work among the Mormons, we shall salvage our family's good name.

I NOTE FROM your email that you have been assigned a young man new to this sect of the Latter-day Saints. My Mormon is a “high priest” serving on his “stake high council.” Now on the face of it, we would seem to have been assigned very difficult cases. You with a potential zealot, a sparkling new convert to our Enemy's camp, a possibly honorable and charitable fellow filled with hope and good intentions. Me with a lifelong adherent to Mormonism who has little visible blemish on his public record. But do not despair. As I will demonstrate, we have much to hope for, much to work with.

Your email suggests that your man is engaged to a young Mormon woman. This is good. It suggests that his motivations for joining Mormonism may not have been purely gospel-related. Indeed, many new

converts to our Enemy's camp have extra, if not ulterior, motives. Some do it for friends, others are in love with those young rascal missionaries; some desire involvement with a group, and best of all, some are searching for a welfare handout. In these cases, our job is much easier and we can even have a little fun! You can exploit your man's situation as I will shortly explain. In the meantime, I will report to Sloggob and have someone work on expanding his fiancée's tiny slips in chastity. Perhaps we can develop a little more movement on that front.

You complain that your man seems interested in being charitable. As I taught you years ago, our people have successfully perverted the notion of charity throughout Christianity. It is no different in the case of Mormonism. Let me explain with a recent episode.

My man, you see, wants to be known as unselfish, helpful, and charitable. Poor fellow. Deep down he wants to do right, but fortunately, we have instilled in him a very advantageous definition of what is “right.” And even more helpful, we have given him ample opportunity to exercise *our* brand of charity.

This past week, he escorted a group of young Mormon “priests” to a nursing home. It's a typical assignment—occasionally taking a short visit to nursing homes, homeless shelters, and the like—to teach the young men some “charity.” Now on the face of it, such an activity would seem a dangerous and unsettling move for our side, one that might unduly influence our young adherents to look outside themselves—just the opposite of what we desire.

Fortunately, our people have had great success with these types of charitable exercises. We have managed to corrupt the process in the following way. When some poor resident of the nursing home inevitably mentions how unhappy or sick or depressed she is, my man encourages her to “count her blessings” and goes on about what a great time she lives in, how fortunate she is to be in such a swell home, what a fine family she must have to have placed her there, how blessed she is to have been raised a Mormon, and so forth. There are broad smiles all around. He tells her she shouldn't be depressed.

Do you catch my drift? Instead of doing something to bring her happiness, he scolds her for not being happy. Instead of blessing her, he encourages her to count her blessings. In place of caring for her, he points out that she should feel cared for. She, now feeling guilty for not having counted her

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.

blessings, and for being a “burden” to her visitors slips even farther into depression and unhappiness. This works in our favor, of course. Thirty minutes later, my man walks proudly out of the nursing home, carrying a strong feeling of duty accomplished and a vague feeling of having been charitable.

This approach to “charity” and “love” and “service” is integrated into much of local Mormon religious life. And the best of all is those young Mormons who accompanied my man are taught a meaning for charity that will indeed last a mortal lifetime. Ha!

NOW ON TO more delicate matters. The one thing we must guard against is your man receiving a “testimony” of the truthfulness of our Enemy’s teachings. Many Mormons claim this unusual experience.

selves unduly with this dramatic kind of divine intervention—either the person is so good and so deeply enmeshed in our Enemy’s system that he is completely unavailable to us, or, if still unsure of himself, he may be pushed beyond the LDS Borderlands by “true believers” to where we lie in wait to provide solace and assistance.

One avenue we have found to have some merit with the “burning bosom” is to encourage many such experiences. I know this sounds counterproductive, but hear me out. The basic experience is emotion-based. As you know, we are masters at manipulating human emotions. Be sure your man notices similar emotions at, for example, a basketball game when his team is coming from behind to win, or when seeing a sunset, or when hearing a favorite song late at night. Then the

analysis. When done properly, it is one of our strongest weapons in the ongoing battle with the Enemy for souls. Even though many humans know statistics are regularly used to shade the truth, they will almost always embrace those statistics which support their cause. I can’t begin to number the people whose paths have been shifted to our road with the judicious use of statistics. I can show you a delightful busload headed below every week!

We know our Enemy does not honor everyone with a “testimony” but provides many instead with faith and excellent life experiences as good guides for the journey. You might think this detrimental to our cause, but we have found ways around it. We have had, for example, fairly good success with our new Testimony Perversion Program



DEVILS AND VIRGIL BY GUSTAVE DORÉ

ABOVE ALL, TRY to keep your man’s mind off matters of faith related to good behavior. Nothing is as injurious to our work as a man who actually lives the Enemy’s gospel by faith alone. The resulting outcomes—the development of a truly selfless man, for example—can be disastrous to our cause.

We know that our Enemy provides a variety of genuine witnesses. The divine message sometimes takes the form of a “burning in the bosom,” or some other vague signal which we can easily pervert and explain away. It can also come in the form of a “still small voice,” or even an audible voice or, on extremely rare occasions, a vision. Fortunately, our efforts to pervert the witness of voice or vision have seen success: many Mormons themselves now discount as “weirdos” those who claim to have heard God’s voice or experienced a vision. (This from a people whose entire creed is based on a “First Vision!”) We need not concern our-

divine “burning” can be discounted as simply a familiar emotion, “a natural phenomenon.” Familiarity breeding contempt, confusion as to source, and so forth.

It is only a bit more difficult to explain away the hearing of voices. Simply let your man learn about the left brain speaking to the right brain, and so forth. Show your man the statistic that ten percent of non-Mormons hear voices. If that isn’t enough, foster again the idea that those who hear voices or see visions are “weirdos.”

Incidentally, our Infernal Statistics Division has amply validated this estimate and even supplemented it. I love statistical

(TPP), which involves group pressure and its inevitable consequence, dishonesty.

My man’s experience is instructive. While he was still in his teens, a ladder rung broke shortly after he had used the ladder to reach a bird’s nest high in a neighbor’s tree. All concerned realized he might have sustained a serious injury had the rung broken while he was climbing on it. His parents and home teachers expressed their satisfaction that God must have intervened to save his life. I know this sounds counterproductive, but bear with me a moment longer.

A few weeks later, at one of those monthly “fast and testimony” meetings, his mother

and quorum leader both “encouraged” him to bear his testimony of our Enemy’s care and concern for him on the ladder. (We must do something about these testimony meetings! It is still a place where Mormons are able to be open and honest with each other.) Privately, my man felt that it was not God’s intervention, especially since he had been harassing the birds in their nest, but simply good fortune. But the pressure from the group to “bear his testimony” was strong, and he did as he was expected. Shortly thereafter, he was delighted by the admiration his friends and family extended. Our people, of course, encouraged his pride (of God’s personal acceptance and care of him in contrast to unfortunate others) plus his need to gain the acceptance of his group. That was the beginning of a life-long exercise in bearing “testimony” that was not carefully thought out and fed by motivations that were less than pure. This, of course, works to our benefit in diverse ways.

Another ploy for those not receiving a divine witness and who have not fallen victim to the TPP is to inculcate feelings of “God must hate me,” “I must be unworthy,” “something must be wrong with me,” “there isn’t any God,” and the like. This, of course, leaves our prospective convert open to our own tender care. Ha!

Unfortunately, our various testimony gambits fail with some of our Enemy’s followers, and they still have that pesky motivator, faith. (On the other hand, thanks to our efforts, faith is not highly regarded among many Mormons who, because of our perversion of the Enemy’s scriptural teachings, insist that one must “know” to be acceptable.) Above all, try to keep your man’s mind off matters of faith related to good behavior. Nothing is as injurious to our work as a man who actually lives the Enemy’s gospel by faith alone. The resulting outcomes—the development of a truly selfless man, for example—can be disastrous to our cause.

When faith rears its ugly head, one thing you can do is insert into your man’s mind thoughts of faith as being equivalent to belief in Roswell extraterrestrials, astrology, divining rods, intelligent design, and so forth. With Mormons, ouija boards and bleeding statues of saints are largely ineffectual, but the world offers much in the way of “faith-promoting tests” that serve our needs. When astrology or the divining rod is shown inevitably to be questionable, it is only a small leap to questioning faith in God.

You see how it works? Mix all matters of faith into the same pudding.

Another approach is to suggest to your

man that living by faith is a loser’s approach. “Real men get testimonies.” And so forth.

YOU ARTICULATED A concern that your man seems curious and unusually willing to question, study, and investigate things pertaining to religion. Apparently he has even picked up an occasional SUNSTONE magazine! This interest in learning can sometimes work in our favor (especially if his study is conducted on our internet), but most often it is dangerous to our side.

If you can, try to narrow his questioning and curiosity to issues that do not endanger our work. It is useful, for example, to keep your man’s mind on questions such as, “Did Adam and Eve have navels?” and “Should garments be worn during sex?” These are harmless enough and will leave your man with the impression that he is thoughtful and curious.

Another scheme involves encouraging feelings of fear and guilt in your man for reading anything but approved writings and apologetic materials. Most of these are one-sided and shallow, of course, but they often have the look of objectivity and depth. (It is amazing what a few carefully chosen statistics, footnotes, and references can do to foster the illusion of credibility.) If your man responds to this “guilt-and-fear” approach, he will feel his need for study and enlightenment is being properly met, and that any additional thinking is not required and indeed might be dangerous and wrong. Of course, it goes without saying, keep him away from our Enemy’s scriptures or writings that contain real spiritual power. And be sure he does not join any study groups.

If none of these approaches work, things may go badly. Our Enemy’s credo that His glory is intelligence is never proven more correct than when we observe a truly honest, humble but curious human being. These curious types have the capacity for infinite growth and the awakening within of a genuine, Christlike life. That is a tragedy for our side.

May our Father Below be with you,
Your affectionate uncle. ☺

NOTE

1. In my first column (this is the nineteenth), I introduced the Borderland member as one who may have an unusual but LDS-compatible outlook on life, a distinctive way of thinking about faith, belief, and testimony, a different view of LDS history, some open questions about a particular aspect of the Church, reduced or modified activity, or feelings of not meeting Group 1 acceptability criteria. See the figure. Copies of former columns are available on the Sunstone website, www.sunstoneonline.com.

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

D. Jeff Burton
2974 So. Oakwood Dr.
Bountiful, Utah 84010
jeff@eburton.com



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OF GOOD REPORT

MORMONISM AND AMERICA'S
JESUS OBSESSION

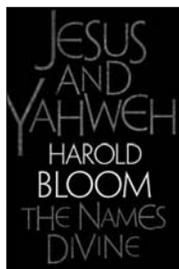
By David Barber

AS I WALKED through the subway station near my apartment in Brooklyn a few weeks ago, a bearded, middle-aged man whom I'd seen on the trains before offered me a mimeographed tract from the Christian Revolutionary Brotherhood, preaching a sort of Marxist Calvinism with "the poor" standing in for the elect, their ultimate victory assured. Boarding the train, I found a color pamphlet in Spanish asking, "¿Quién es Jesucristo?"; the answer turns out to be something about the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose headquarters are just a couple of miles away. And as I write this essay, a controversy is brewing in the national media about Christmas: liberals, it seems, are trying to destroy it, leaving television host Bill O'Reilly and a handful of other brave souls to defend the (apparently suddenly unpopular) commemoration of the birth of Jesus.

The name of Jesus has been a powerful totem in America for as long as it has been spoken here, but the meaning of that totem has been disputed from the beginning. Missionaries, prophets, saints, and hucksters have proposed countless versions of Jesus in America while groups of Americans have used Jesus for an astonishing variety of social, cultural, and political ends. It's contentious and politically motivated to describe the United States as "a Christian nation," but few would hesitate to apply Flannery O'Connor's phrase: "Christ-haunted."

This essay looks at four recent books about Jesus—one by an unbelieving, Gnostic, Jewish literary critic; two by academic historians of religion; and one by a Mormon religion professor engaged in coalition-building with evangelical Protestants. While the depth and breadth of America's Jesus obsession defy any single writer, these books provide rich opportunities for us to re-

flect on Americans' views of Jesus and what these views reflect about ourselves and about our future. Are minority views of Jesus (such as that of the Mormons) destined for assimilation, losing their distinctiveness within an increasingly evangelical Jesus culture? How will the apparent ascendancy of a right-wing, politicized Jesus play out in a nation where Christianity has served political ends as diverse as slave-owning and abolition, working-class solidarity and favors for big business? In global circumstances that some see as a "clash of civilizations," will the name of Jesus serve as a banner 'round which to rally the troops, or will the "Prince of Peace" find followers with the power to avert destruction?



JESUS AND YAHWEH:
THE NAMES DIVINE

by Harold Bloom
Riverhead Books, 2005
256 pages, \$24.95

YALE literary critic Harold Bloom is best known to Mormon audiences as the author of the 1991 *The American Religion*, which found in Mormonism an authentic strain of American religious invention, surprisingly Gnostic in content. In Bloom's latest book, *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine*, he continues a long fascination with religion, focusing on Jesus Christ (the theological figure, distinct from Yeshua or Jesus of Nazareth, the actual historical man) and Yahweh, the God of parts of the Hebrew Bible (which Bloom strenuously objects to calling the "Old Testament").

As a literary critic, Bloom deals with the divinities in question primarily as literary characters. His thesis is that Jesus/Yeshua, Jesus Christ, and Yahweh "are three totally incompatible personages." He makes this point against the Christian view that Jesus fulfills the "Old" Covenant, and against upholders of the politically convenient civic myth of "Judeo-Christianity."

Traditionalist Christians reject Bloom's distinction between the Yeshua of Nazareth who ministered in Judea and Jesus Christ, whom Bloom calls a purely theological God. (Bloom says theology "is always an effort to explain away the human aspects of God" [137]). Further, Christian tradition identifies Yahweh, the fierce God of ancient Israel, with God the Father of Christian theology, and then claims the consubstantiality of Yeshua/Jesus Christ and Yahweh/God the Father as two of the three members of the Trinity.

Mormons identify Jesus Christ and Yahweh as a *single* personage, of course, and the lack of attention to modern biblical scholarship within Mormonism allows most Latter-day Saints to live a lifetime without even hearing of, let alone grappling with, the Yeshua/Jesus Christ distinction. So Bloom's utter denial of all these identities causes equal grief for mainstream LDS Christology.

To make his case that the three personages are distinct and incompatible, Bloom pays special attention to Jesus and Yahweh, the two figures of the trio that capture his imagination. While thoroughly versed in and deeply indebted to modern Biblical scholarship and its multiple-source hypotheses, Bloom rejects most scholarly claims about the historical Jesus as reaching beyond the available (and quite untrustworthy) evidence. "There is not a sentence concerning Jesus in the entire New Testament composed by anyone who ever had met the unwilling King of the Jews," he writes (19). Moreover, among the many erudite historians who have quested for the historical Jesus, "fewer than a handful. . . come up with more than reflections of their own faith or their own skepticism" (12).

But Bloom's skepticism about historical Jesus scholarship doesn't keep him from wading in with his own views of Jesus, distinguished as much by their tentative, almost reticent, quality as by Bloom's extraordinary gifts as a reader of literature. As a reader, Bloom finds himself most fascinated by the Jesus characters in Mark and of John.

The Jesus of Mark is a reluctant Messiah, slowly revealed to his somewhat dense disciples. The defining aspect of this Jesus is his



DAVID BARBER is a writer and researcher living in Brooklyn, New York. He welcomes comments at barber.dave@gmail.com

love for—even his *need for*—his Father, Yahweh.

Yahweh is not the most ancient god worshipped by the Israelites (that distinction probably belongs to El, who was later identified with Yahweh). But he is the god of the earliest textual layers of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), the so-called Yahwist passages written by the Yahwist or J Writer and dating back to the reign of Solomon. (Elohim is the other version of God appearing in the Tanakh and is a later, more bloodless representation by the Priestly Writer.) Bloom's fascination with this ancient text is well known and has already resulted in *The Book of J*, a discussion of the Yahwist passages in which Bloom embraces a speculation that the J Writer was an aristocratic woman at the court of Judea just after the reign of Solomon.

Bloom calls Yahweh “the uncanniest personification of God ever ventured by humankind” (5), “a character so complex that unraveling it is impossible” (6), and “the West’s major literary, spiritual, and ideological character,” who in all of literature is approached only by Shakespeare’s King Lear (8). Yahweh is a human-all-too-human god, for whom the term “anthropomorphic” is insufficient; he gets hungry, he delights in walking in a garden in the cool of the evening, and he descends from his high places to lead his hosts in battle. Most terrible of all, Yahweh is a capricious and jealous god: “Yahweh, like King Lear, demands a bewildering excess of love, the frequent stigma of bad fathers” (166)—yet he seems incapable of actually *loving* in return.

This is the paradox that is capable of animating the spiritual life both of post-Second Temple Judaism and of Jesus. Bloom’s Gnostic tendencies lead him to explore the absence of Yahweh’s love in terms of the Kabbalistic doctrine of *zimzum*, a process in which God (named by Kabbalists “*Ein-Sof*,” or “without end”) inhales himself into himself, thus withdrawing from a part of the universe to create a reality—Creation—outside of himself. The act of creating is also an act of withdrawal. And it is the withdrawal of God that Judaism has had to come to terms with in the face of two millennia of catastrophes, from the destruction of the Second Temple to the Holocaust. Bloom observes, “Any sensible participant in the Covenant fears God, who at once proclaims his particular care for Jewry and pragmatically demonstrates a malign neglect of his people” (138).

The withdrawal of God is also the context of the Jesus of Mark, who “insists upon

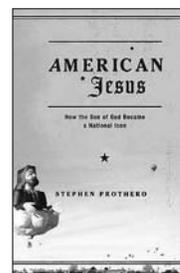
human perfection” and “wants a more perfect God than Yahweh could ever be.” Yet this Jesus loves and desires Yahweh anyway. “If there is a single principle that characterizes Jesus,” Bloom claims, “it is unswerving trust in the Covenant with Yahweh” (12). And Bloom finds in the Jesus of Mark an uncanniness not as strong as Yahweh’s but evocative of it, relying on shock and silence to unnerve his listeners. The Jesus depicted by Mark, distinguished from the Jesus Christ of Marcan Christology, is a true son of Yahweh, not of Elohim or any other abstract deity, and a true and unique prophet.

The Gospel of John presents a different Jesus—a theological, Hellenized “Jesus the Christ.” John’s Gospel is the latest of the four canonical Gospels and is characterized, in Bloom’s words, by an extreme *belatedness* in relation to the Tanakh. Bloom dislikes the Gospel of John for its anti-Semitism even as he recognizes its literary power. For Bloom, a central passage is John 8:56–58 (NRSV):

“Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Mormons use this passage as a proof text for the notion that Jesus is Yahweh, the “God of the Old Testament,” by linking it to Exodus 3:13–14, in which Yahweh tells Moses to tell anyone who asks that his name is “I AM WHO I AM.” Bloom agrees that the Exodus passage is the clear object of John’s allusion—and points out that, astonishingly, rabbinical commentators have made little of the powerful Exodus text, while Christian commentators have mostly denied the allusion. Bloom finds in John’s trope an anxious insistence on the priority of Jesus over Abraham, and of John over Moses, a subsumption of Jewish tradition by Christianity. (And a nasty, murderous Christianity at that. Just before this passage, Jesus has told the Jews that their father is the devil.)

In John, unlike in Mark, Jesus is fully aware of his Messiahship at all times. He is a fully theological being. And this theology, identifying Jesus Christ from the outset as the *logos* or Word (Bloom approvingly cites a speculation that the original reading may once have been a Gnostic *pneuma*, “breath” or “spirit”), is much more Greek than Hebrew—far removed from Yahweh, and destined to lead Christianity far from its origins in a Yahweh-haunted Jesus, who sought a God who had long ago withdrawn from his people.

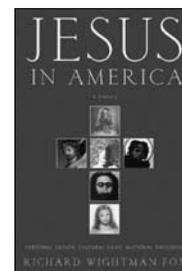


AMERICAN JESUS:
HOW THE SON OF
GOD BECAME A
NATIONAL ICON

by Stephen Prothero
Farrar, Strauss, and
Giroux, 2003
376 pages, \$25.00

JESUS IN AMERICA:
A HISTORY

by Richard
Wightman Fox
HarperSanFrancisco,
2004
488 pages, \$27.95



BLOOM observes that “there are . . . as many versions of Jesus as there are people” (177). Two recent histories for popular audiences examine the many versions of Jesus that have come to life in North America since Christianity first arrived here. In *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, Stephen Prothero, a religious historian and chair of the Religion Department at Boston University, attempts “to see how Americans of all stripes have cast the man from Nazareth in their own image . . . [and thus] to examine, through the looking glass, the kaleidoscopic character of American culture” (7). Richard Wightman Fox, a history professor at the University of Southern California, attempts roughly the same thing in *Jesus in America: A History*.

Of the two books, Fox’s offers a more linear narrative, begins earlier (with the arrival of Spanish missionaries in what is now New Mexico and Florida, and of French Jesuits and English Protestants in the Northeast), and more thoroughly treats its subject, which is more or less limited to “mainstream” American views of Jesus, mostly Protestant and sometimes Roman Catholic. Prothero, on the other hand, divides his book into two parts: “Resurrections” traces a mainstream history of Jesus in American culture from the Revolution to the current megachurch movement, while “Reincarnations” examines versions of Jesus created by groups outside the white Protestant/Catholic narrative: Mormons, African-Americans, American Jews, and adherents of Eastern religions.

Jesus arrived in North America with Spanish missionaries, who used the epidemics of new diseases they had inadver-

tently brought from Europe to teach the Indians of the healing power of Christ. Fox observes that “the hard leap for [one Native American group] was the notion of spiritual sickness as a state distinct from physical ailments” (177). Before they could be saved from sin, the Native Americans had to be taught that they—and their cultural practices—were sinful. Fox gives a sensitive discussion of how the mass conversions of Indians by Spanish missionaries served the dual purposes of evangelism and empire and of how the French Jesuits who proselytized along the St. Lawrence and the Atlantic seaboard rejected the Spanish methods of mass conversions in favor of a truer, more inner conversion. As a result of the Jesuits’ focus, they had much less success in finding converts.

The Protestant Calvinist settlers of New England also did their best to avoid “precipitous conversions,” and, as a result, made fewer converts than even the Jesuits. In fact, it was difficult enough for a “civilized” European, even one raised in a good Puritan home, to be truly converted. One of the strengths of Fox’s book is the rich and sympathetic treatment he gives to different theological views of Jesus, and his discussion of Calvinism manages the difficult task of making that stern and (to us twenty-first-century Americans) alien doctrine appealing. Calvinism’s emphasis on “limited atonement” (Christ’s sacrifice takes away the sins of only those whom God has chosen) and “irresistible grace” (the elect are saved through the will of God alone, not through any choice they themselves have made) can sound to non-Calvinist Christians like a license for pride or for sin: if one is leading a holy life, it is because one is a member of the elect (and, because of the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints,” one cannot fall from this grace once truly justified). If one is not elect, no number of good works can lead to justification (the imputation of holiness by virtue of Christ’s atonement).

But Fox points out that this same theology supported “one of the main dynamics of Puritan piety: the relentless scouring of one’s heart for evidence of self-aggrandizement, hypocrisy, or pride,” since these sins could indicate that the believer was actually not undergoing sanctification, the process of growing increasingly free of humanity’s original, sinful nature that followed true justification. Calvinism was a barrier against self-deception. Indeed, a soul-searching “confession” of one’s inner conversion was a prerequisite for becoming a full church member. Fox writes:

Today we think of the church as a place where people get to feel they are bound for heaven. Puritans and Baptists made it the place where people were cautioned against taking their passionate embrace of Jesus as evidence that they were headed for glorious union with him. (92)

Puritans thus saw Jesus as a “personal savior” in a theological sense, but their creed raised barriers against the familiar, friendly, emotive relationship with him that evangelical Christians now claim.

The rise of the “personal relationship with Jesus” would have to wait for the spread of Arminianism, a heresy within the Reformed movement that would become the de facto American orthodoxy. Arminianism is the view that Christ’s atonement was worked for all of humanity, not just for the elect, and thus that God’s grace saves all who choose to accept it. Popularized by the Methodists, Arminianism gradually spread even to denominations like the Baptists that had originally been Calvinist, and it served as the basis for nineteenth-century American religious movements from revivalism to new sects, including Mormonism. In a young nation predicated on rewarding the fruits of individual initiative, stern Puritan doctrines could not withstand Arminianism’s exaltation of individual choice—and its image of a Jesus extending his forgiving arms to all. By comparison, the apparent arbitrariness of Calvinist election seemed downright un-American.

Along with the rise of Arminianism, another key point in the development of the American Jesus was the separation of Jesus from the church, even for the many American Christians who belonged to churches. Prothero notes how the Deist Thomas Jefferson, who greatly admired Jesus but rejected his divinity along with the rest of the supernatural content of the Gospels, was one instance of an American who tried to separate what he saw as true Christianity (represented by what he saw as the authentic sayings and acts of Jesus) from the false Christianity preached by the churches. According to Prothero, “later in U.S. history, thinkers as different as the abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen would draw” the same kind of distinction, although with drastically different views of “true Christianity.”

Not that churches yielded Jesus to the unchurched; nor did Americans abandon the churches. To the contrary: Prothero points out that before the Revolution, only about

one in five Americans in New England and the mid-Atlantic belonged to a church, and even fewer in the South, while today about three in five Americans are church members.

But both Prothero and Fox trace a history in which Jesus stands apart from any institution—and is readily put to use for a panoply of causes. Revivalists found that stories of Jesus drew far larger crowds than did dry theological disquisitions. A feminized Jesus preached by Henry Ward Beecher and others helped legitimate a “separate roles” ideology of gender while attracting converts with a simple message of love. In reaction, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the preaching of what Prothero terms a “manly redeemer” (represented in Prothero’s book by the familiar Del Parson painting, *The Lord Jesus Christ*) whom ad-man Bruce Barton could tout as a model for businessmen and other go-getters. (See page 27, Figure 28.)

Perhaps no issue demonstrates the flexibility of Jesus in American culture more than does race. Antebellum southern slaveholders noted that Jesus never preached against slavery. Fox argues that white abolitionists were therefore forced to make a crucial turn in their interpretation of Jesus: he didn’t preach against slavery because, although he was divine, he also inhabited a culture that affected the history-bound, particular expression of his message. Attempting an interpretive task that has bedeviled all but the most fundamentalist Protestants ever since, the abolitionists found transcendent teachings of love, freedom, and equality within a New Testament that didn’t explicitly address their concerns. After the Civil War, according to Fox, southern whites saw “a suffering Jesus who stood for the sacrificial valor of a regional culture” while northerners continued the liberalizing trend begun by the abolitionists by extending a Jesus-based call for equality into the Social Gospel and other reform movements. Meanwhile, African-Americans fused Jesus with Moses in an Exodus narrative of movement towards freedom, and African-American leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X critiqued white American views of Jesus. The alternate versions they articulated were sometimes more universal—Marcus Garvey declared that “Jesus Christ was not white, black, or yellow”—and sometimes, as with many of the “Black Christs,” explicitly as culture-bound and particular as were white representations.

In the carnival of religious, cultural, and even commercial expression documented by Fox and Prothero, Mormonism stands out as

peculiar, although hardly the most peculiar. In an illuminating move, Fox places Joseph Smith's 1822 First Vision alongside four other American conversion narratives of the early nineteenth century. Like many others, Smith had absorbed from Methodist revivals an Arminian sense that he must take the initiative to obtain God's forgiveness of his sins. But besides forgiveness, Jesus' appearance at the First Vision marked the beginning of Smith's attempt to end the denominational confusion that beset the Burnt-Over District of New York by appealing to a renewed authority of direct revelation.

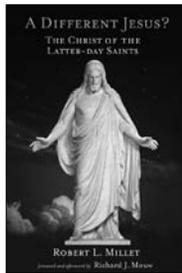
Prothero devotes an entire chapter to Mormon views of Jesus, offering a reasonable periodization. "Textual Mormonism," from the late 1820s to (roughly) the early 1840s, preached a Jesus that differed little from contemporary, Second-Great-Awakening versions. The Book of Mormon uses traditional Trinitarian language, and Mormon hymns and sermons of the period say little about Jesus that could not be found in various strains of Protestantism at the time.

"Temple Mormonism," Prothero's designation for Mormonism's second period, saw a massive departure from traditional Protestant preaching and practice. In post-King Follett theology, Jesus was but one god among many, and the salvation he offered was but one step along the way to the ultimate goal of "exaltation," or progressing to become a god in one's own right. Isolated by polygamy, secret temple rites, and the trek to Utah, Mormons came to see the Church with its authority and ordinances, as a more important mediator than was Jesus, who nevertheless retained his divine status. Beginning with the 1890 Manifesto, Mormonism sought accommodation with the rest of America.

Prothero sees a renewed emphasis on Jesus as the hallmark of a third period, "Twentieth-Century Mormonism." Mormons emphasized their claim to be the second incarnation of the original Christian Church, and apostle James Talmage made an important theological identification of Jesus with the Old Testament Jehovah that elevated Jesus from being a mere "elder brother" of humanity in the pre-existence.

Prothero notes the controversy of the early 1980s in which Elder Bruce R. McConkie criticized Professor George W. Pace of Brigham Young University for advocating a close, "personal relationship" with Jesus. The familiarity expressed by Pace and others was (and is) too close to modern evangelical practices that are culturally alien to Mormons. Such practices include referring to Jesus simply as "Jesus" (without honorifics

such as "the Lord" or "Christ") and praying directly to Jesus rather than to God the Father.



A DIFFERENT JESUS?
THE CHRIST OF THE
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

by Robert L. Millet
Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005
184 pages, \$16.00

DESPITE McConkie's rebuke of Mormons seeking a personalized Jesus, Mormonism has drawn closer to evangelicalism in the two decades since the Pace controversy. One sign of this trend is *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints*, in which BYU religion professor Robert L. Millet attempts to explain Mormonism to an evangelical audience.

Millet's book, published by Wm. B. Eerdmans, a Protestant publishing house, presents a lucid introduction to contemporary, orthodox Mormon beliefs, centered on but not limited to Mormon Christology. Most of what Millet writes will be unexceptionable to the LDS reader, and he doesn't hesitate to broach most of the doctrines that trouble evangelicals, including the Apostasy, anti-Trinitarianism, and eternal progression. Without pulling too many punches, Millet's strategy is to cast Mormon beliefs in the best possible light, giving context that makes them appear reasonable and often as close as possible to traditional Protestant understandings. Sometimes this effort crosses a line of accuracy, such as his claim that the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* (literally, "divinization," the doctrine that the believer becomes more and more holy until a union with God is achieved) is more or less the same as the Mormon belief that humans can become Gods. And viewed as a work of analytic scholarship, *A Different Jesus* contains its share of howlers—not the least of which is the statement that "nothing in the LDS doctrine of Christ has changed in the last 175 years" (139).

Millet's ahistoricism regarding Mormon beliefs is of a piece with his ahistoricism about scriptural texts and points to a cultural affinity between him and his evangelical interlocutors. Certainly not all evangelicals are fundamentalists, committed to absolute inerrancy of the Word, but most would agree with Millet's quotation of President Howard W. Hunter's declaration that "we can be modern without giving way to the influence

of the modernist." And in fact, *A Different Jesus* was written precisely to build bridges with evangelicals over cultural/political issues. The book contains a foreword and afterword by Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, who has been engaged in interreligious dialogue with Millet and other BYU professors for several years. According to Mouw and Millet, the aim of these discussions and the present book is to provide a theological underpinning for enhanced cooperation between conservative evangelicals and Mormons in pro-life efforts and, as Mouw puts it, "various other causes dealing with issues of public morality." (I read that as code mostly for opposition to same-sex marriage and other gay-rights issues, although it certainly includes everything else under the "pro-family" banner of social conservatism.)

I suspect Millet's book will be only partly successful in bridging the theological gap between Mormonism and evangelical Protestantism. Despite Millet's efforts at casting Mormon doctrine in evangelical language ("Unaided man is and will forevermore be lost, fallen, and unsaved"), Mouw probably speaks for most evangelicals when he wonders whether Mormons "have a theologically adequate understanding of the person and work of the One who alone is mighty to save" (184). At least for those who pay attention to theological issues, the divide on issues such as the plurality of Gods, eternal progression, and Mormonism's belief in a limited God is wide indeed.

Still, as Mormons continue on the path of assimilation, we can expect a continued increase in the prominence given to Jesus in Mormon preaching and practice. If this change doesn't include actual theological changes that downplay or eliminate distinctively Mormon beliefs that are incompatible with Protestantism, it may still include significant convergence in worship style. Visiting a nondenominational evangelical megachurch recently, I was struck by the similarity between much of the soft-rock-oriented music used in that service and much of the contemporary music that can be heard in the musical numbers at sacrament meeting, especially popular with younger Mormons.

MILLET'S book is another instance of a common American project: using the name of Jesus to rally support for a political or cultural cause, even though those who are drawn together may disagree about the meaning of the name. Mormons and evangelicals continue to have vastly different theological understandings of

Jesus, but they can agree that to believe in him at least means to oppose abortion and gay marriage.

This strikes me as similar to the successful efforts of liberal Rabbi Stephen Wise and others to create the idea of a “Judeo-Christian” America by praising Jesus’ wisdom without committing to his divinity. Beginning in the 1920s, these efforts contributed to the moderate liberal consensus that dominated mid-century American politics, especially to bringing Jews into the mainstream of American society and significantly reducing anti-Semitism in American life. However, it is this very concept of Judeo-Christianity that Harold Bloom finds incoherent given the irreconcilable differences between Yahweh and Jesus Christ.

According to Bloom, the American Jesus “has subsumed the national myth of the New People chosen for a future of dreamlike happiness, compounded of emancipated selfishness and an inner solitude that names itself as true freedom” (104). As I said earlier, Jesus is as potent a political totem as he has ever been—reference, among other things, the extraordinary effectiveness of George W. Bush’s declaration that his favorite political philosopher is “Christ, because He changed my heart.”

One of the most startling illustrations in Fox’s volume is a digital image from a Florida-based graphic arts company that juxtaposes a Nordic-looking Jesus’ head over patriotic symbols: a bald eagle, the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, the St. Louis Arch, the Capitol dome, and Mt. Rushmore. The text below the image quotes Psalm 33:12: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” —not leaving to the imagination which nation *that* might be.

Bloom observes, “The Jesus Christ of evangelical Protestantism and of Mormonism is the no-so-hidden God of the corporate world in the United States” (184). And Bloom is pessimistic about the future of a nation ruled by such a God:

Our decay and eventual collapse might be brought about by Republican triumphalism, doubtless grounded upon an amalgam of Fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, and the Mormons, who enforce a monotheistic morality while tacitly retaining Joseph Smith’s legacy of a plurality of gods. (102)

The political significance of Jesus is far from uncontested, of course, despite popular caricatures of Christians as conservative and of liberals as secular or atheist. On 6 December 2005, five major U.S. mainline Protestant denominations, including President Bush’s own United Methodists, urged the defeat of the 2006 Bush budget for social justice reasons. And a recent ad campaign by evangelical environmentalists opposed SUV ownership by asking, “What would Jesus drive?”

But if the political polarization of the United States continues to increase, and if

the suburbs, cheap gasoline, and victory on the battlefield. Hyper-Arminian Mormons are little different in this respect. The careful soul-searching and mindfulness of self-deception that were perhaps the best legacy of Calvinism find little place in a political climate where Jesus has become a wedge issue.

As the histories by Fox and Prothero make clear, there have been multiple understandings of Jesus for as long as his name has been spoken in America, and although one Jesus or another may be politically and culturally ascendant, the tremendous diversity and vitality of views are certain to continue.

The richness of the idea of Jesus allows room for hope. My own hope is that the militaristic, xenophobic versions of Jesus that seem ascendant in America today can be counteracted by peacemaking, other-respecting aspects that are equally present in America’s Jesus history. To justify this hope, I can rely only on Jesus’s followers, trusting that enough of them will find in Jesus something other than the frightening vision offered by his most vocal political supporters: a warrior-god who leads his people (America) into battle against abortionists, homosexuals, and Allah.

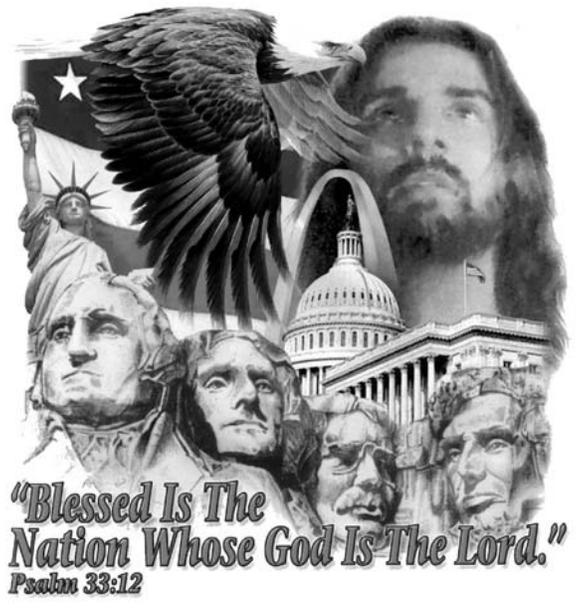
Fox is perhaps the most eloquent in describing the richness of Jesus that is available to every believer—and to non-believers as well in this Christ-haunted land:

There is no single Jesus, in America or anywhere else. He can lead crusades like a warrior, and he can turn the other cheek. . . . Americans will try their best to make him a predictable source of comfort, but he will remain unpredictable. New

prophets will rise up to remind their countrymen that Jesus delivers condemnation along with solace, and many Americans will try to follow his injunction to lose their lives so as to find them. (24)

If, as Millet’s book intimates, the Mormon Jesus is being moved closer to his evangelical counterpart for reasons of political coalition-building, especially for a cause so fraught with the perils of self-congratulation as the “defense of the family,” Mormons risk making themselves that much less disposed to hear these “new prophets.” On the other hand, Jesus is surprising. And the Mormon tradition, like America as a whole, is capable of many different responses to his call. ☪

I HOPE THAT FOLLOWERS WILL FIND IN Jesus something other than the frightening vision offered by his most vocal political supporters: a warrior-god who leads his people (America) into battle against abortionists, homosexuals, and Allah.



the “war on terror” continues to support an anti-Islamic subtext in national politics, the evangelical Jesus will likely prove ever more effective as a triumphalist god of war. This Jesus offers not just an assurance of personal salvation and the promise of help and comfort in the face of difficulty. He also provides an easy definition of “in” and “out” groups (families, church members, and Americans are in while pro-choicers, gays and lesbians, secularists, and Muslims are out) and a license to take part in a “war” on these outsiders in defense of family and nation. And the version of Arminianism that is casually assumed by most American evangelicals leads easily to a belief that one has *earned* the blessings of Jesus, which include a home in

INTERVIEW

MORMON BOY ARRIVES
OFF-BROADWAY

A Conversation with Steven Fales

STEVEN FALES is the writer, creator, and performer of the one-man autobiographical play, *Confessions of a Mormon Boy*. The play details Steven's journey from a returned missionary and young husband and father coming to terms with his homosexuality through his Church excommunication, divorce, and descent into addiction and the darker side of New York's gay scene before eventually regaining control of his life and finding renewed spirituality and healthy balance in his relationships. *Confessions* began as a reading at the 2001 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium and debuted that November at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center in Salt Lake City. That early version, full of Mormon in-humor, was published in the December 2003 SUNSTONE.

The play underwent extensive reshaping in the four years following its debut and has played to fantastic reviews and sold-out runs throughout the U.S. On 5 February 2006, it arrived off-Broadway with an open-ended commercial run at the SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam Street, New York City. For show or ticket inquiries, call (212) 619-1555, or visit www.sohoplayhouse.com.

This following is largely excerpted from a SunstonePodcast interview with Steven conducted by SUNSTONE editor Dan Wotherspoon on 6 December 2005, the day after *Confessions* was featured at a Lincoln Center benefit for the Point Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing college scholarships for students who are "marginalized due to sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity." Some material is excerpted as well as from an email exchange that followed the release of the podcast.

The podcast can be accessed through the Sunstone blog, www.SunstoneBlog.com, or directly at <http://www.sunstoneonline.com/podcast/SunstonePodcast-006-ConfessionsOfAMormonBoy.mp3>.

Congratulations on the Lincoln Center event! I hear the evening raised more than \$250,000 for the Point Foundation.

Thank you! It was a fabulous evening. I don't know if you've been to Lincoln Center before, but it's right across the street from the Mormon temple in Manhattan. The irony of my life! Here I am at the Lincoln Center, and the temple is right there to remind me of where I come from.

Tell us about the origins of the play.

I feel like my life and my art came to a point in this project. When my life fell apart, I turned to stand-up comedy, using humor to deal with the pain. And as I did so, I thought, "I have things I want to share, especially as a gay Mormon father." I wanted to write something for my children so they could know from me, their gay dad, who I am.

I married into a family that is very public about homosexuality. Many know Carol Lynn Pearson and the story of her husband Gerald's homosexuality. Well, I married the

Pearsons' oldest daughter, Emily. I felt like it wasn't enough to just have the Pearson women tell their story—the men needed to tell their story, too, and Gerald Pearson is no longer with us.

I felt it was my duty as a father and an artist to articulate this human experience. And I have found that my journey is parallel to so many other people's. It's not at all unusual to have someone come up to me after a performance and say, "Did you steal my journals to write this? I'm Lutheran."

The play has evolved significantly in its journey from its Salt Lake debut to this off-Broadway run. Tell us the story.

My Utah version had lots of delicious Mormon in-humor, and included the pre-existence and even had Heavenly Mother making an appearance. But soon after that, I started writing a "Gentile" version because many people didn't know who Jimmy Flinders is or what the Lion House means, and so forth. So I wrote a new version, which I workshoped in New York City in June

2002, where several producers got really excited about it.

The first version takes place somewhere in eternity and has me trying to get into the celestial kingdom by telling St. Peter my story. And eventually I do get in. In the Gentile version, I come out in a BYU T-shirt and just tell the story in classic storytelling style. I worked with the fabulous director Jack Hofssis, who won a Tony award for *The Elephant Man*, and Jack helped shape the piece and edit me out so the story could really land.

Early versions of this show were positively received, but one review from the *San Francisco Chronicle* in particular suggested that while the play was very affecting, I still really hadn't gone as far behind the "Mormon smile" as I had set out to do at the beginning. That's when I knew that I really did need to tell my whole story—so I added my escorting experiences and my dealings with drugs. And I got really, really honest.

Eventually the play shows my journey of going from one extreme, Mormonism, to another extreme, hedonism, and then finally coming to a middle ground. The show really is about what it means to be human—the humanization of a Mormon boy—and reclaiming a spirituality that works.

If I am following you correctly, this all happened in 2002–03. Why did it take so long to get to the point where you're at last ready for this off-Broadway debut?

You're right. We were supposed to open off-Broadway in the summer of 2003. But when my producers ran into problems raising the remainder of the money needed to fully capitalize the show, they suggested that if I got full-frontal naked during the performance, they'd have no problem raising the rest of the money and everyone would be able to recoup investments quickly. And while I was at it, they told me to add Mormon garments. When I told them that I couldn't do that—that I *wouldn't* do that—(and I said it very respectfully, and as diplomatically as I could), they canned the show. And I had to wait to get the rights back to my own show.

Eventually I did, and soon after, I took it to the 2004 New York International Fringe Festival, where it won the overall excellence award. And since then, I've been performing it all over the country in developmental runs, trying to raise money for this off-Broadway run. And something that's very satisfying to me is that this time around, almost all of my investors are straight Mormons or straight

WHEN WE GIVE
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POSSIBILITIES.



PHOTOS: WWW.MORMONBYU.COM

men and women. It's very validating to have straight money behind me.

Tell us about the play's main themes. What do you hope members of the audience will feel as they walk out of the theatre?

One message is that we really need to look at the spiritual abuse that is happening in our churches, especially toward gays and lesbians. I define spiritual abuse as any time someone is told that he or she is not worthy of God's full love and blessings. And not only *told* that they're not worthy but also *shown*. For example, we often hear the notion of "hate the sin, love the sinner," but then things get done in the name of this love such as excommunication and banishment from families, or straight spouses will keep children from having a relationship with their gay parent. This using religion to justify keeping people's basic human rights from them is spiritual abuse. And it's really been that message that has propelled this project forward even in moments of total poverty.

The play deals head-on with the issue of: What do you fill the void with when you are told God does not love you? And it illustrates what I think is a very clear link between spiritual abuse and addiction. I took my pain and anger to the bars and clubs. I got into escorting—high-end male prostitution. I thought, if the Church isn't going to take me, I am going to go where people will take me—someplace where I would be accepted. But, in the end, I found that just as I'd wanted to please the Brethren, I wanted to please these

people—and that wasn't healthy either.

I feel I'm currently going through a very happy time, but I had to go through a gay adolescence to find myself. At the end of the play, I take full responsibility for my life and choices. I take on my life and reclaim it along with my kids and my "Donny Osmond smile." The play winds up in a very life-affirming, positive ending. And in none of my story do I blame the Church. I'm just saying that this happens.

In fact, debuting the play at Sunstone was very important for me in finding my voice. Sunstone was the ideal audience for me to first tell my story to, for I wanted to be generous to Mormonism while at the same time being intellectually honest. Sunstone allowed me the perfect vehicle to tap into the voice that I'm using onstage today.

To me, one of the neatest moments in the play is when you describe the spiritual experience you had as the stake president read the decision to excommunicate you.

Unlike some, I decided to attend my church court. I went because I wanted to be complete and to have integrity with the whole process. As I sat there while he was pronouncing my excommunication, it was as if his voice faded away and a warm feeling of

peace and truth washed over me, and another voice said, "*Steven, I know who you are, and I am so much bigger than this church.*" It was a revelation. As my life was falling apart, there it came. It was one of the real gifts of that experience.

I had to go through other trials before I really took a look at that revelation and before I could say that God really *has* been there for me and always has been. And now I'm really working on that relationship with that higher power. I don't believe there's a middleman you have to go through to have a relationship with God. That's what Joseph Smith taught, don't you think?

You asked earlier about the messages I hope people will take home from the play. Well, another one is that it's possible to stop being a victim. I was a victim—of the Church, of the gay scene, of therapists who had steered me wrong, of my parents, of Emily's parents, of Emily. But when we give victimhood up, we have so many choices. We can stop self-destructing and invent new possibilities. One of these for me was to create a show, a transforming piece of theatre, where people leave feeling optimistic about the possibility of transformation and renewed spirituality in their lives. And lo and behold, in doing this, I think I'm doing what I always was taught to do as a good Mormon boy. ☺



NEWS AND COMMENTARY

JOSEPH SMITH, REVISED AND ENLARGED THE PROPHET HAS NEW CLOTHES, BUT DO THE SEAMS SHOW?

By Hugo Olaiž

Joseph Smith is back—larger, more heroic, and more correlated than ever. The bicentennial of his birth occasioned a year-long celebration that included exhibits, symposiums, seminars, pageants, and even an opera (The Book of Gold, performed at BYU). In Salt Lake City, a choir of 16,000 teenagers in gold T-shirts sang and clapped through a nearly two-hour show. At BYU, some 55,000 people attended “Remembering the Prophet Joseph Smith, Youth Spectacular and Youth Showcase.” KBYU produced a six-hour documentary on the Prophet. In Washington, members from the Spokane area performed 32 continuous hours of temple service, completing more than 7,300 ordinances for more than 4,200 individuals.¹

IN HIS CLASSIC essay, “Joseph Smith Visits Redwood City First Ward,” Sam Taylor imagines the Prophet dropping by an average LDS ward and failing to recognize the Church he’d founded.² The bicentennial celebrations of the first Mormon’s birth have been marked by a further irony. Not only has the Church changed since Joseph’s day, Joseph himself has been revised. The Man Who Communed with Jehovah has been re-fitted with clothing that better fits the Saints’ contemporary tastes. Once a polygamist, Joseph Smith is now presented as a devoted monogamist, and his home life has become the object of idyllic celebration.³ Once the bellicose general of an army, he is now presented as a pacific city-builder.⁴ The man who denounced all creeds as abominations has become a national treasure—the “American Prophet.”

How was this revision achieved? Is the newly correlated portrayal of the Prophet seamless, or do the stitches from the patching show? Let’s consider three major components of the bicentennial celebration: the new website JosephSmith.net, the new Church-produced movie *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*, and the birthday bash held this past 23 December.



“JOSEPH SMITH, PROPHET of God,” proclaims the headline on the home page at JosephSmith.net, the website the Church launched last June (the month of the Prophet’s martyrdom). Never before has the Church made available so many maps, photographs, and documents relating to the life of the Prophet. The photograph section includes early and contemporary pictures of Church historic sites, from the Sacred Grove to Nauvoo. The documents section includes reproductions of original letters, manuscripts, and journal entries, with a zoom-in function to let readers get as close as they like. In addition to sections on the mission and life of the Prophet, the new website features testimonies by all members of the current First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve.

The photos and documents lend the site a powerful air of historical authenticity and transparency. And yet the seams left by correlation show through—for instance, the euphemisms used to avoid all reference to

polygamy. The site’s introduction to D&C 132 explains that “this section came at the request of Hyrum Smith for a written revelation to convince Emma Smith of the truthfulness of the principles of eternal marriage.” Why would Emma have difficulties with the principle of *eternal* marriage? Astute readers are left to wonder.

A section of the site called “The Life of the Prophet” reduces Joseph Smith’s complex motivations, impulses, and actions to hagiography. “Joseph led with love” reads a page entitled “A Servant of All.” “He recognized the worth of every soul as a child of God. When asked why so many followed him, he replied: ‘It is because I possess the principle of love. All I can offer the world is a good heart and a good hand.’” There is some dissonance, however, between this characterization of Joseph Smith and the portrait accompanying the page: John Hafen’s 1887 *Joseph Smith Directing the Nauvoo Legion*, which depicts General Smith in full military attire with drawn sword. The leader of love, it appears, is also a leader of war. An accompanying quotation from Joseph likewise suggests a frame of mind that some observers might find self-aggrandizing: “I, like the towering rock in the midst of the ocean, which has withstood the mighty surges of the warring waves for centuries, am impregnable, and am a faithful friend to virtue, and a fearless foe to vice.”



ON 17 DECEMBER, the new film, *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*, premiered at Temple Square’s Legacy Theater; screenings at other visitors’ centers began a few days later. With a cast of more than 1,100 actors, including more than forty principal characters, the film is a visual gem, beginning with a breathtaking aerial shot approaching a riverboat as it steams up the majestic Mississippi River. The project, carried out under the close supervision of the First Presidency, took two years to complete; tens of thousand of hours were dedicated to composing the story line alone. The film was shot in the Church’s motion picture studios at BYU and on location in Missouri, Illinois, Canada, and England.

“Alvin was my oldest brother. He was a hero of mine. . . .” Thus begins Joseph Smith’s account of his life as scripted by the writers and delivered in voice-over. This “autobiography” is a collection of real quotes from sources such as Joseph Smith’s History,



HUGO OLAIZ is SUNSTONE news editor and has published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and other venues. Hugo wishes to acknowledge the feedback and insights by Lavina Fielding Anderson and John-Charles Duffy in drafting this essay.

*The Man Who Communed with Jehovah
has been refitted with clothing that better fits the Saints' contemporary
tastes. His home life has become the object of idyllic celebration.*

the Doctrine and Covenants, and the King Follett Discourse, pasted together with pseudepigraphal material put in Joseph's mouth by the screenwriters. The pasting is generally seamless, but there are moments that may make the discerning viewer blink. When an agonizing Joseph Smith Sr. wonders if he will ever see Alvin again, the Prophet assures him, "You will always be his father, and he will always be your son. The Lord has revealed that that is His plan," Joseph continues. "We can be together with the ones we love forever."

The scene is noteworthy for several reasons, including the fact that this dialogue did not—and could not—have occurred. The screenwriters may have been inspired by an account by Lucy Mack Smith, who reports that the Prophet instructed his father on his deathbed about the doctrine of baptism for the dead. According to Lucy, the father asked the younger Joseph to "be baptized for Alvin immediately." Just before dying, Joseph Sr. added, "I see Alvin."⁵ But the premise, "You will always be his father, and he will always be your son," hinting at the doctrine of eternal families currently treasured by the Saints, anachronistically places later doctrinal developments into the Prophet's mouth. During his life, Joseph Smith used the word "sealing" to mean at least five or six different things, but he never used it to describe the ritual sealing of children to their parents as a way to ensure that the parent-child relationship endures into eternity.⁶ That concept and practice did not emerge until 1894, when Wilford Woodruff instituted the sealing of children to their birth parents as a substitute for the earlier practice of "adoption" in which Mormon men were sealed to Church leaders.⁷ In sum: Only after transposing and rescoring Joseph's unfinished theological compositions can today's Saints sing, "Families can be together forever."

Another aspect of Joseph Smith's history has experienced a remarkable revision in the new film. Many of us remember (and the Church continues to sell) the 1976 film *The First Vision*, with its dramatic depiction of revival preachers and convicted sinners crying "I believe!"—a depiction so dramatic it ap-



Scene from the new Church-produced film, *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*

proaches parody. The new film's telling of the First Vision steers well away from anything that might be interpreted as ridicule or, for that matter, that would strike most viewers as controversial. Joseph and his family are troubled by preachers who declare that God has already chosen who is to be saved and whose hellfire style causes people to "fear God too much." In today's religious climate, most viewers will sympathize with the Smiths on these points. In this film, the warring parties we read about in Joseph Smith's History are reduced to polite disagreement. The minister who confronts the young prophet about his claims is firm in his disbelief but comparatively civil. Instead of warning that the First Vision is "of the devil" (Joseph Smith—History 1:21), he merely advises Joseph to abandon his "foolish notions."

The movie makes a point of informing readers that Mormons do not worship Joseph Smith. Yet the Joseph Smith portrayed in this film is a strikingly Christ-like figure. Like Jesus, Joseph charismatically communes with the common folk—children, the poor,

the sick, and the outcast, including a company of black converts that includes recently rediscovered African-American pioneer Jane Manning James.⁸ The instant healing of a young boy in the Nauvoo swamps recalls similar miracles performed by the Savior. "Tell us, Joe, which Mormon house is going to burn tonight," one of the guards taunts him at Liberty Jail, evoking the tormentors who taunted Jesus to prophesy (Matthew 26:67–68, Luke 22:64). When a grief-stricken Emma asks why Joseph could work no miracle to save one of their own sick children, Joseph replies, "I can only do God's will," an echo of words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John (John 5:30, 6:38).

The film comes to an abrupt end with the martyrdom at Carthage. After his brother Hyrum dies in his arms, Joseph springs to the jailhouse window. The camera follows his point of view: we see what Joseph sees as he crashes through the glass—and then, instead of plummeting to the ground, he ascends (yet again like Jesus) into the clouds. Is Mormon triumphalism no longer able to stomach its founder's death? A viewer not familiar with Mormonism might conclude that we believe there was no martyrdom but only *apotheosis*—that Joseph Smith literally leaped from the window into heaven.



ON 23 DECEMBER, President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted a special event broadcast via satellite and streaming online video from two different locations: the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, and Joseph Smith's Vermont birthplace. "This is a glorious and wonderful day," President Hinckley declared from Vermont. "It is a day of remembrance, a day of great rejoicing, a day for gratitude and thanksgiving, a day in which we acknowledge the moving hand of God in bringing to pass his eternal purposes on behalf of his sons and daughters of all generations." The roll of speakers was limited to members of the First Presidency and Elder M. Russell Ballard.

The choice of Apostle Ballard as speaker was heavy with symbolic significance. A direct descendant of Joseph's brother Hyrum, Ballard represents a palpable link with the Smith family. One of the complexities of Joseph Smith's legacy is that his own wife and children did not follow the bulk of his followers west, instead helping found the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (known today as the Community of Christ), which rejected polygamy and temple ceremonies. Herein lies one of Mormonism's unresolved preoccupations. During the invocation at the opening of the event, President Boyd K. Packer prayed that Joseph and Emma's descendants may be "gathered in" to join the true church. Almost as if in fulfillment of that prayer, the benediction was offered by Uriah A. Kennedy, a fourth great-grandson of Joseph Smith from a line that converted back to Utah Mormonism. Through this symbolic act of vindication, the LDS Church can claim Joseph's progeny as its own—ironically, at a time when the Church's erstwhile rival, the Community of Christ, has laid aside its claim to leadership by the Prophet's descendants.

"We will be adjourned for another 100 years," quipped President Hinckley as he closed the Vermont event. He intended it as a joke, but Freud might detect anxiety beneath the humor—the anxiety that results from asking ourselves: Where will we be, as a church, in 100 years? What will Mormonism look like in the year 2105? Will 22nd-cen-

tury Mormons be hard at work reclothing their founder to fit their times? What aspects of the Prophet's life and teaching will *they* find problematic? What doctrines will *their* Joseph emphasize? In what language will his birthday celebration be conducted? Or is it possible that, having drifted closer toward the Christian mainstream, the Church might celebrate the Prophet's next centennial the way the Community of Christ celebrated this one—with a single, low-key event and a single reference on its website?⁹

WHAT do these celebrations mean? How does this combination of high-tech communications, cinematic craft, and old-fashioned pilgrimage help millions to know Brother Joseph again? By traveling to Vermont, President Hinckley wasn't merely paying tribute to Joseph Smith. He was also reenacting the pilgrimage that Joseph F. Smith had made for the first centennial in December 1905. Of that first centennial, Kathleen Flake has written:

Memorialization of a birth is . . . the blankest of slates upon which to write retrospective meanings. The monument erected in Vermont was susceptible to embodying not only the nature and permanence of the Latter-day Saints' claims about their founding prophet, but their claims about the nature and permanence of their church.¹⁰

What was true in 1905 is equally true for the 2005 celebration. In his centennial celebrations, Joseph F. Smith chose to emphasize the First Vision as the foundation for Latter-day Saint belief, thus painting Mormon uniqueness as resting on modern revelation. One's acceptability and loyalty became a matter of having a testimony of the truthfulness of the First Vision rather than polygamy or other embarrassing pages from the Mormon past.¹¹ The 2005 centennial celebrations have been used as the canvas for similarly reframing Mormonism. The new film's references to Alvin's death, the questions raised about his eternal state, and his family's expressed desire to live with him forever suggest that today's Church wants to make the promise of eternal families more prominent in its message; the film also drives home that the Latter-day Saints embrace a Christ-centered faith. Curiously, despite the recent reemphasis on the Great Apostasy in the new missionary lessons,¹² the representation of Protestant revivals in the new film reflects a relatively positive attitude toward other churches—an attitude emphatically expressed by President Gordon B. Hinckley during the bicentennial celebrations: "We believe that all other churches do great good. We believe in the virtue in the lives of other people in other churches. We acknowledge the tremendous accomplishments of other churches."¹³

In the final analysis, the celebration of the Prophet's birth is important not because of the extraordinary life Joseph Smith led, but because of the Church he founded. Such anniversaries provide an opportunity for the Church to declare its strengths and set the tone for its future.

Flake observes that the Joseph Smith centennial took place during the scandalous Reed Smoot hearings—a time when the Church desperately needed something to celebrate. With the dedication of the Conference Center, the rededication of the Nauvoo Temple, and the Salt Lake City Olympics still fresh in our collective memory, the bicentennial comes at a time when we have grown accustomed—some might say, addicted—to celebrating.

In pointing out the seams in the new stitching of the Prophet's story, I in no way want to dampen the collective enthusiasm for celebrating the Restoration Joseph



CARTOON BY GWEN DUTCHER, BASED ON CONCEPT BY HUGO OLAIZ

"I think correlation may have gone too far on this one."

wrought. I simply want to read, as best I can, whether we're continuing on the path Sam Taylor pointed out—that instead of coming to know Brother Joseph, we're really only coming to better know ourselves. ☞

NOTES

1. "Temple Goers Honor the Prophet," *Church News*, 14 January 2006, 15.

2. Samuel W. Taylor, "Joseph Smith Visits Redwood City First Ward," *SUNSTONE*, August 1992, 54–57.

3. "Joseph Smith deeply loved his family, and his personal writings are filled with prayerful outpourings of tenderness and concern. . . . Occasional glimpses into his family life show him sliding on the ice with his son Frederick, taking his children on a pleasure ride in a carriage or sleigh, and attending the circus" (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, [New York: Macmillan, 1992], s.v., "Joseph Smith: The Prophet"). Consider also books by LDS convert and Joseph's descendant Gracia N. Jones, such as *Priceless Gifts: Celebrating the Holidays with Joseph & Emma Smith* (1998), *Emma and Joseph: Their Divine Mission* (1999), *Emma and Lucy* (2005), and *The Holidays with Joseph and Emma* (2005). Consider also the iconography of LDS artist Liz Lemon Swindle. See "Reality Check," *SUNSTONE* (October 2002):26.

4. Consider, for instance, Glen Leonard's title, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002). For Joseph Smith as a visionary community builder, see Terryl Givens's "Lightning Out of Heaven: Joseph Smith and the Forging of Community," in *Church News*, 17 December 2005, 11.

5. See Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001): 714, 723; also *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: 1901): 308, 313.

6. Gregory A. Prince, *Power From On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Signature Books: Salt Lake City, 1995): 155–72.

7. Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900," *BYU Studies*, 3 (Spring 1974): 291–314.

8. For information about James, see Margaret Blair Young and Darius Aidan Gray's "Standing on the Promises" trilogy (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000–2003).

9. "Bicentennial Commemorative Reunion," posted at <www.cofchrist.org/events/Bicentennial/>. (Accessed 4 January 2006).

10. Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 112.

11. In 1996, President Gordon B. Hinckley referred to Mormonism's earlier racist policies as "those little tricks of history." See "Hinckley Takes LDS Case to the Nation," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 April 1996, D1.

12. John-Charles Duffy, "The New Missionary Discussions and the Future of Correlation," *SUNSTONE*, September 2005, 28–46.

13. "Pres. Hinckley Answers Myriad Questions about the LDS Church," *Deseret Morning News*, 25 December 2005, A15.

COMMENTARY

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT THE MORMONS?

By Seth Perry

The following column is from the 26 January 2006 issue of Sightings, a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Reprinted with permission.

IT SEEMS NEARLY impossible for those in the public discourse to talk evenly about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Commentators are given to hyperbole (the growth of Mormonism is "one of the great events in the history of religion," says intrepid sociologist Rodney Stark in a new book); fawning (according to a *Newsweek* cover story written by a Mormon, the faith is "optimistic, vigorous, a source of continuing personal growth for all who accept its blessings—[it] in many ways echoes the American Dream"); snide joviality (Larry McMurtry writes of Joseph Smith's "prattle about an angel" in the *New York Review of Books*); or outright ridicule (in a *New York Times* book review, Walter Kirn, himself a lapsed Mormon, uses an analogy to belief in Santa Claus to explain how the growth of Mormonism may have nothing to do with its content).

However one may describe the conditions of religious tolerance on the ground, our increasingly tolerant public discourse gives a wide berth to religions outside of the Jewish/Christian norm. The examples above, though, all fairly recent, suggest that there is something not quite as even-handed in the public discussion of Mormonism. Instead, there are articles celebrating Mormons—as some scholars have opined—as a "model minority" among religions: more industrious, healthier and cleaner than the rest of us. And then the opposite: the flickering smile, the whimsical tone—McMurtry, for example, writing in a formal review in a major publication that Brigham Young "fathered fifty-seven children on twenty wives" when he means "with"; and another writer's throwaway line in the *New Yorker* classing Mormons with Wiccans and Scientologists (groups decidedly further from the mainstream than Mormons).

I think the problem has something to do with the fact that Mormonism is different from our culture's de facto Christian/Jewish point of reference—but not *that* different.

Mormonism is no Hinduism: Latter-day Saints share sacraments, the Bible, and indeed the Heavenly Savior with other Christians. But everyone knows, if they know anything about Mormonism, that its followers are not just any Christians: the sacraments sometimes take place in temples where only the approved may venture; the Bible is heavily supplemented with other revealed texts and contemporary prophetic authority; and the salvation offered by the Mormon Christ is combined with a chance for each believer to progress toward godhood.

The fact that these distinctive characteristics are expressed through elements and vocabulary familiar to Christians often leads popular pundits and even otherwise detached scholars of religion to talk about Mormons the way one might talk about that kid in class with mittens pinned to his jacket—bless their hearts, they try, but they just don't quite get it. Among believing Christians, along with the condescension is often a note of defensiveness; people who would never dream of being anything but deferential to more remote religions often feel the need to police the boundaries of their own. Put a universal truth about peace and love in the Buddha's mouth and liberal Christians fall over each other to join in interfaith celebration. But tell a Christian that such a saying came from Jesus—they've just never heard this one—and everyone gets a little uncomfortable.

The answer to this discomfort, of course, is practice; increased discussion of Mormonism in more varied contexts will breed better habits. Recent coverage of the possibility that Mitt Romney—a Mormon and governor of Massachusetts—will run for president has represented a marked step forward, frankly treating his religion as a possible liability while refusing to make it the focal point of discussion. Time will tell, though, if American popular discourse can become fully comfortable with what is often called a "home-grown" American religion. ☞

SETH PERRY is a Ph.D. student in the History of Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

UPDATE

PRESIDENT HINCKLEY RECUPERATING FROM CANCER SURGERY

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY IS CONVALESCING after undergoing laparoscopic surgery to remove a cancerous growth in his colon. The procedure took place on 24 January, and the church president has resumed some duties following his 31 January release from the hospital. Though he was originally scheduled to attend the 26 February dedication of the Santiago Chile Temple, the ceremony has been postponed two weeks amid rumors that the prophet needs a longer convalescence.

President Hinckley, who in 2001 had a pacemaker installed to regulate his heart, suffers from diabetes and walks with a cane to help him cope with dizziness and vertigo. At 95½, he is the second-oldest person to hold the office of Church president. David O. MacKay was 96½ when he died in 1970.



CHURCH CHOOSES NOT TO JOIN WITH OTHERS IN GOVERNMENT APPEALS

THE LDS CHURCH HAS DECRIED INHUMANE TREATMENT of all kinds, expressed compassion for victims of the AIDS/HIV pandemic, and at times showed a willingness to lobby on issues specifically related to its own interests. At the same time, the Church seems hesitant to join with other religious groups in formal appeals to government on policy issues.

In November, the LDS Church declined to join forty-one Utah religious leaders in signing a statement decrying the government's use of torture. Church leaders chose instead to issue a statement condemning inhumane treatment in all its forms. The Church "condemns inhumane treatment of any person under any circumstance," said LDS spokesperson Dale Bills on 23 November. "The Church has not taken a position on any proposed legislative or administrative actions regarding torture."

Signed by representatives of fourteen different religious groups, including Episcopalians, Catholics, Muslims, and Baptists, the interfaith petition called on Congress and President Bush "to rule out 'any and all use of torture' of prisoners of war as an option for the U.S. government or its agents."

The Bush administration came under criticism because of a memo in which then-White House counsel (now attorney general) Alberto Gonzales defined torture as treatment of prisoners that "results in significant psychological harm of significant duration, e.g., lasting for months or even years." Critics argue that Gonzales's definition is unreasonably narrow and thus legitimizes prison abuse. Known as the "Bybee memo," the controversial document was signed by Latter-day Saint Jay S. Bybee, who was then assistant attorney general (see SUNSTONE, July 2004, p. 54).

In January, the LDS Church again found itself at odds with a Utah religious coalition as some thirty-eight leaders of many faith traditions—but not the Latter-day Saints—delivered a

letter to the Utah Senate urging legislators to raise the state's minimum wage.

In contrast to these decisions to hold its public voice back in some areas of human concern, Elder Robert C. Oaks of the Presidency of the Seventy recently joined other religious leaders in a World AIDS Day event in Salt Lake City, calling HIV/AIDS a "scourge" and asking for compassion towards those affected by the disease.

"We mourn with those who have lost loved ones to AIDS and salute the tireless caregivers who give comfort and assistance to those battling with these trials," said Oaks. "We hope that events such as this will increase compassion toward those touched by the disease and promote learning and understanding to limit the incidence of AIDS."

Oaks helped develop AIDS educational materials for LDS congregations in Africa. "We went out to our congregations and used the teaching guide in our Sunday meetings to present five hours of lessons over the course of four weeks," said Oaks. "We taught these materials to 90,000 Latter-day Saints in east Africa."

Leaders of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons called Oak's declaration the "most progressive [LDS] statement to date regarding the global pandemic."

WOMAN DISRUPTS CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

A TEXAS WOMAN WAS ARRESTED IN THE CONFERENCE Center after making a run for the pulpit where President Gordon B. Hinckley was conducting the Church's annual Christmas devotional. According to a story in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Carol Davis was stopped by Church security before being able to deliver to President Hinckley a document with information about a lost portion of the Book of Mormon that she claimed had been translated.

Church security officers told the police that the information Davis attempted to deliver had been circulating on the Internet and that they were familiar with it.

Texts which in recent years have claimed to be translations of additional portions of the Book of Mormon include Gilbert Clark's *The Oracles of Mahonri*, Christopher Mark Nemelka's *The Sealed Portion: Final Testament of Jesus Christ*, and Ron Livingston's *The Sealed Portion of the Brother of Jared*.

BYU STUDENTS CRASH CELEBRATION, STIR UP DEBATE

A GROUP OF BYU STUDENTS DISRUPTED AN EVENT IN honor of fallen soldiers, asking for the return of troops and sparking a debate on peace, war, and patriotism.

According to *BYU NewsNet*, a dozen demonstrators displayed signs that read "Renounce war, proclaim peace" and "Who would Jesus bomb?" during a Brigham Square event at which the BYU Air Force honor guard gave tribute to fallen soldiers. The protestors chanted, "How do we support the troops? Bring them home!"

"We believe peace is honorable and that it should be part of this ceremony," said anthropology major Jason Brown. "We're not confronting anyone. We're just here to support the troops."

Brown complained that BYU policies do not allow peace groups to speak up. "We want to be heard, too," he said. "Why can't we set up tables and hand out hot chocolate and peace signs?"

Letters in *BYU NewsNet* debated the protest. "Chanting to bring troops home in front of an ROTC group is making a mockery of their sacrifice and service to our country," wrote Sam Rogers from Tucson, Arizona.

Other *NewsNet* readers saw the protest as a good sign. The *Daily Universe* editorial board wrote an editorial calling the protest "refreshing." "It's good to see that some people are willing to stand up and say what they feel," they wrote on 6 December, "especially in a place like BYU, where bucking the establishment is so frowned upon. . . . The small group of sign-bearing students should be commended for their willingness to make a difference."

CRAMMING, CREATIVITY KEY TO MEETING READING CHALLENGE

AS THE END OF 2005 APPROACHED, MANY LATTER-DAY Saints took drastic measures to finish reading the Book of Mormon as President Hinckley had challenged them to do. The problem: the prophet issued the challenge only last summer, and the Book of Mormon is 500 pages long. While some opted for traditional approaches such as reading during lunch breaks or while riding the bus, others resorted to measures such as listening to audio versions on their car stereos, home computers, and MP3 players.

"It's been tough to keep up with demand," says Melissa Stockdale of Covenant Communications, which sells the Book

of Mormon in cassette, CD, DVD, VHS, and MP3 formats plus the more traditional printed form. "The orders have been coming in non-stop." From August through December, Covenant Communications sold 28,000 copies of the Book of Mormon in one of these formats—more than double the 11,000 they sold during the same period last year.

Pre-Christmas shoppers especially favored audio formats. According to an employee at the Church's Distribution Center, sales of the book on CD (\$30.00) were ten times higher than usual. Among independent bookstores, one of the favorite items was a DVD narrated by Rex Campbell as the Book of Mormon text scrolls down on the customer's TV, computer, DVD player, or iPod. (\$39.95). The DVD comes with a "reading calculator"—a chart to help users determine how soon they will finish the Book of Mormon by studying for a specified number of minutes each day. For last-minute cram-mers, such charts were particularly helpful.



"I offer a challenge to members of the Church throughout the world and to our friends everywhere to read or reread the Book of Mormon."
-President Gordon B. Hinckley

I commit to read The Book of Mormon by December 31, 2005

Signature _____

Please email your testimony of The Book of Mormon to yread@byu.edu to be compiled into a book of BYU students' testimonies.

THE BOOK OF MORMON READING CHART	
NAME:	_____
GOAL:	_____
START:	_____
FINISH:	_____
1 Nephi:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	
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Jacob:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Enos:	1 Jarom: 1
Omni:	1 Words of Mormon: 1
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Moroni:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Extras:	Title Page Intro. Explanation
Testimonies:	3 Witnesses 8 Witnesses JS
From http://lds.about.com/	

WE ARE ALL ENLISTED.

BYU student leaders promote President Hinckley's challenge to read or reread the Book of Mormon by the end of 2005.

In an effort to encourage BYU students to meet President Hinckley's challenge, the campus's student association printed and handed out "Y Read" cards. The cards included the wording of the prophet's challenge and a place for students to sign their name indicating their commitment to finish the book by the end of 2005, as well as a chart on the back to assist them in tracking their progress. The card also invites students to submit their experiences with the Book of Mormon via email as potential contributions to a book of testimonies the association plans to produce.

What about those Mormons on the run who met Pres. Hinckley's challenge by merely listening to "the most correct of any book" rather than reading it? Were they cheating? Web-savvy Mormons might argue no. After all, the official Church website at lds.com makes the scriptures available in audio format for free.

TIME MAGAZINE NOTES SHIFT IN AGE FOR FIRST MARRIAGES AMONG LDS

IN A SPEECH DELIVERED LAST MAY IN OAKLAND, ELDER Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve called dating “an endangered species” and lamented the current trend among LDS youth to merely “hang out.”

“This tendency to postpone adult responsibilities, including marriage and family, is surely visible among our LDS young adults,” said Elder Oaks. “The average age at marriage has increased in the last few decades, and the number of children born to LDS married couples has decreased.”

Time magazine featured Elder Oaks’s remarks as part of a December article, “Alone in the Pews.” In addition to the statistics Oaks cites, the article adds that after having remained flat since 1985, the median age for Utahns at their first wedding rose between 2000 and 2003 by nearly a year. Still the lowest nationally, the median age is now 21.9 years for women and 23.9 for men.

The *Time* article also notes the difficulty many single Latter-day Saints have fitting into a family-oriented church. “Today, more than 30 percent of Latter-day Saints are singles over 22 (including those widowed or divorced),” the article reads, “a figure explained in part by the rising number of adult converts and a generation of the more culturally assimilated offspring of Mormon baby boomers.”

“Young women, resist too much hanging out, and encourage dates that are simple, inexpensive, and frequent,” Oaks counseled. “Don’t make it easy for young men to hang

out in a setting where you women provide the food. Don’t subsidize freeloaders.”

At least since the days of the pioneers, Mormon leaders have been counseling young men to avoid postponing marriage. Brigham Young’s famous dictum that single men over the age of 27 are a “menace to society,” is apocryphal. However, in 1878, George Q. Cannon said, “I am firmly of the opinion that a large number of unmarried men, over the age of twenty-four years, is a dangerous element in any community” (*Journal of Discourses* 20:7). More recently, in an effort to inspire movement toward marriage, President Ezra Taft Benson quoted 2 Nephi 1:21: “Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men.”

UTAH LEGISLATURE DEBATES CONTROVERSIAL “ORIGINS OF LIFE” BILL

A CONTROVERSIAL BILL THAT WOULD FORCE UTAH schools teaching evolution to provide alternatives without endorsing a particular theory of life passed the Utah Senate on 23 January. SB96 requires public schools “to stress that not all scientists agree on what theory regarding the origins of life is correct, or the origins, or current state of the human race is correct.” The bill passed the Senate by a 16–12 margin, and is now being considered by the House, where it might prove harder to pass.

Even though the bill does not mention Intelligent Design by name, the legislation is seen by many as a bald attempt to put creationism at the same level as organic evolution. The bill is

BYU PROFESSOR IS POSTER BOY FOR “EAT WHAT YOU WANT” DIET

HUNDREDS OF MEDIA OUTLETS ACROSS THE U.S. are publishing stories about a novel approach to weight management by a BYU professor who backs his claims with evidence not many diets can match: the fifty pounds he lost since he stopped dieting.

“Rather than manipulate what we eat in terms of prescribed diets, . . . we should take internal cues,” says BYU health science professor Steven Hawks, “try to recognize what our body wants, and then regulate how much we eat based on hunger and satiety.”

Published in the 18 November issue of the *American Journal of Health Education*, Hawks’s study claims that intuitive eating is significantly correlated with weight loss, lower triglyceride levels, and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Hawks’s approach to eating includes accepting one’s body, adopting an anti-diet attitude, avoiding emotional and environmental eating, and learning how to interpret and respond to body signals such as cravings and hunger.

“Whenever you feel the physical urge to eat something, accept it and eat it,” says Hawks. “The cravings tend to subside. I don’t have anywhere near the cravings I would as a restrained eater.”



I hope they’re working on a “tithe what you want” program.

People

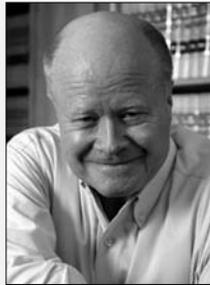


Deceased. Popular LDS speaker and writer W. CLEON SKOUSEN, 92, at his Salt Lake home, 9 January. A former assistant to and communications director for FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, Salt Lake City police chief, and religion teacher at BYU. Skousen was well known for his eloquent speeches and prolific writing. He was also outspoken about his ultra-conservative politics,

which, to the discomfort of many, he believed coincided closely with LDS beliefs.

Skousen founded two conservative think tanks, The Freeman Institute and the National Center for Constitutional Studies, and wrote forty-six books, including LDS bestsellers *The First Two Thousand Years*, *So You Want to Raise a Boy*, *Prophecy and Modern Times*, and *Treasures from the Book of Mormon*. His political and historical writings include *The Naked Communist*, *The Naked Capitalist*, *The Making of America*, and *Fantastic Victory*.

Retired. EDWIN B. FIRMAGE, 70, after thirty-nine years as law professor at the University of Utah's S. J. Quinney College of Law. A writer, scholar, and champion of liberal causes, Firmage opposed the 1981 MX missile project that would have deployed nuclear weapons in Utah, openly championed the rights of Mormon women to hold the priesthood, and challenged the LDS Church to fully embrace its gay and lesbian members. Over the years, Firmage has written on issues of war and peace, co-authored a legal history of the LDS Church, and written two biographies of his grandfather, President Hugh B. Brown.



Awarded. \$4.2 million, to JESSICA AND ASHLEY CAVALIERI, 24 and 19 respectively, by a Washington jury in a case against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Lawyers argued that Bruce Hatch, then bishop for the Cavaliere sisters, failed to protect them from a stepfather who sexually abused them for years. The stepfather served four years in prison for the crimes. Lawyers for the Church say they will appeal the case.

Denied. By the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, PHILIP SABATINO's request to gain access to his birth records. An LDS adoptee from Erie, Pennsylvania, Sabatino, 34, claimed in court records that according to his faith, he "may be saved and exalted after death" if he does temple work for his ancestors.

Third place. RAFE JUDKINS, 22, the gay Mormon from Rhode Island who competed in the last season of the CBS reality show *Survivor: Guatemala*. Judkins, who did extremely well in many of the show's challenges, finally failed in a competition that involved balancing on a wobbly board. Many watchers believe Judkins could have won the competition if, after having failed in the final challenge, he hadn't released eventual winner, DANNI BOATWRIGHT, from an earlier agreement they'd made to go to the "final two" together.



Sentenced. MARVIN SEBASTIAN BERGANZA, 29, and HENRY GIOVANNI VICENTE, 27, to a 35-year prison term, for crimes in connection with the 2004 hijacking of a Book of Mormon tour bus in Guatemala. The bandits killed BRETT RICHARDS, from Ogden, as he tried to stop them from beating the bus driver. They robbed all the tourists and then abandoned them in the jungle some 160 miles from the capital, Guatemala City.

Arrested. KENT PARKINSON, 25, for the third time, in Orem, Utah, charged with raping a woman he met on an Internet dating service for LDS singles. Previous arrests occurred in October 2004. According to Orem Police Lieutenant Doug Edwards, Parkinson has used several aliases on www.single-saints.com and other sites that cater to LDS singles.



Investigated. The actions of TOM EDWARDS, an Air Force commander, for allegedly ordering a Mormon man under his command to stop wearing temple garments. According to Airman 1st Class ANDREW HOWELLS, his commander complained that the undershirt showed through his uniform and told him to remove the garment or leave his unit (a traveling Air Force group). The incident took place last July at a busy airport in Incirlik, Turkey. Howells claims he was berated for his religious principles in front of his unit and strangers.



Featured. LDS actor and comedian KIRBY HEYBORNE, 28, in a Fox sitcom currently being filmed. The ubiquitous Heyborne, who had roles in *The Singles Ward*, *The RM*, and *Saints and Soldiers*, among others, will sport very long hair and play the best friend of the show's main lead. Called *Free Ride*, the show will air starting 1 March.

Media Watch

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN DECISION PUTS MORMONS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

THE DECISION BY LDS TYCOON LARRY H. MILLER TO have one of the movie theatres he owns cancel a scheduled run of the gay-themed drama *Brokeback Mountain* received national and international attention, putting Mormons and Utah in the spotlight and drawing criticisms from the film's co-star Heath Ledger, jokes from Jay Leno, and reflections from Sundance Institute founder Robert Redford.

"Personally, I don't think the movie is [controversial]," Ledger told Australia's *Nine National News*, "but I think maybe the Mormons in Utah do. I think it's hilarious and very immature of a society."

Leno poked fun at the move by *Utah Jazz* owner Miller, saying: "A movie theater in Utah abruptly cancelled a screening of the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. They felt it was inappropriate for the community standards. Instead they ran *Deliverance*."

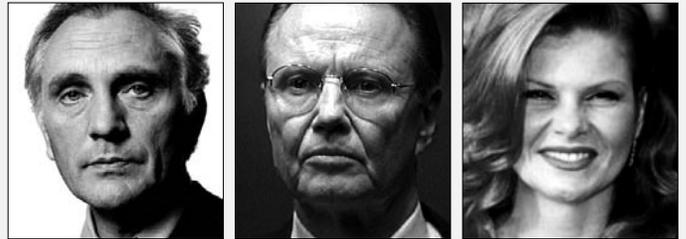
Robert Redford told *The Deseret Morning News* that Miller's decision "might back up on him. It might make him appear to be narrow and afraid of something."

According to the movie's distributor, Focus Features, Miller's theatre is the only one in the country which reneged on the licensing agreement and refused to open the film.

"I see the attention I'm getting is more positive than negative," said Miller, whose decision was the topic of dozens of letters to the editors of Utah's newspapers. "Those on the negative are from the outside."

Not so, said LDS film critic Chris Bellamy, who complained that pulling the movie gives the state of Utah a bad name. "Religious beliefs are religious beliefs," wrote Bellamy in *The Utah Chronicle*, "but the truth of the matter is that a good chunk of Mormons in this community are tolerant of homosexuality and have no problem with the thought of a cinematic homosexual romance, especially when their kids won't be able to get in without a parent anyway."

INDY MOVIE TAKES ON MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE AS SUBJECT



Terence Stamp, Jon Voight, and Lolita Davidovich star in *September Dawn*, an independent feature film based on the Mountain Meadows Massacre

HOW MUCH DID BRIGHAM YOUNG'S RHETORIC ABOUT "blood atonement" and divine justice influence the perpetrators of the Mountain Meadows Massacre? According to an independent movie currently being completed, quite a lot. *September Dawn* is being touted as a love story set against the background of the 1857 tragedy in which more than 130 pioneers were murdered as they traveled through southern Utah.

According to a 22 January *New York Times* article on the film, the project stars Terence Stamp as an "austere, remote, and steely" Brigham Young, along with Jon Voight as a fictional Mormon elder whose family is torn apart over its involvement in the massacre. According to several entertainment blogs, Davidovich plays a member of the wagon train who stands up to the Voight character's threats.

The film is directed by Christopher Cain, who, in a choice he admits will likely be seen as controversial, has chosen to use Young's words, taken from various depositions following the massacre, as voice-over in various parts of the film. In the *Times* story, Cain says, "I sat here watching [the film] a couple of weeks ago, and I was thinking: 'Maybe I made that up. I don't think he would have said that.' And I went back and pulled it up and, man, he did."



Larry H. Miller's funding of the Joseph Smith Papers project encounters its first snag.

The film's romance, something of a star-crossed lovers' tale in which a young Utah Mormon and a member of the wagon train fall in love, serves in much the same way as does the love story in the film *Titanic*: to make the tragedy personal. Cain says, "You can have all the rhetoric you want come out of your mouth, but when you make it specific, a name, a beating heart, it becomes something else."

The massacre has been the subject of recent histories, novels, and documentaries, including books by Will Bagley, Sally Denton, Jon Krakauer, and Judith Freeman. In 2003, University of Utah film professor Brian Patrick made a documentary titled *Burying the Past: Legacy of Mountain Meadows Massacre*. The History Channel also recently completed a two-hour program on the 1857 events, and a public television station in Boston is currently producing a documentary on the same subject.

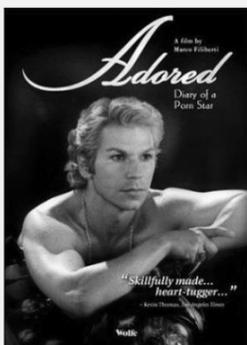
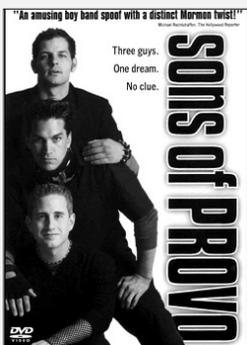
FROM PROVO TO PORNO: MORMON COMEDY MIXED UP WITH PORN STORY

SOME FANS OF MORMON COMEDY WERE SHOCKED when they popped a DVD into their players and found instead an Italian drama chronicling the life of a fictitious gay porn star.

In a story that gained national attention, the company commissioned by HaleStorm Entertainment to make some 50,000 DVD copies of the PG-rated Mormon comedy *Sons of Provo* accidentally burned a few copies of the unrated film *Adored: Diary of a Porn Star*. Ironically, *Sons of Provo* chronicles the life of a squeaky-clean LDS boy band whose theme song goes, "Everclean, cleaner than Listerine / Mellow than Dramamine / Not even close to obscene."

"[*Adored*] is a very heartwarming film about a porn star who reconnects with his family," says Wolfe Video spokesman Corey Eubanks in defense of the movie that some dub pornographic. "It is not a porn film. It's just about someone who is a porn actor."

HaleStorm Entertainment recalled all copies and ordered new ones with a modified label. For each person who wishes to return a copy of the compromised DVD, HaleStorm is offering a \$100 incentive and making an additional \$100 donation to CP80, an initiative to help fight Internet pornography.



Everybody wins in a manufacturer mix-up that placed an Italian film about a fictional porn star on DVDs of a movie about a squeaky-clean Mormon boy band.

sponsored by LDS Senator Chris Butters, R-West Jordan, and endorsed by Mormon conservative lobbyist and Eagle Forum president Gayle Ruzicka. The Intelligent Design movement is currently challenging Darwinism in courts and capitols in several states around the country.

"A great deal of my political stands come from my faith," Butters said recently. "I represent the values that have always been America's morality."

Even though Utah's House of Representatives is overwhelmingly LDS, it is still unclear how that body will vote. Shortly after the Senate vote, House majority whip Steve Urquhart said he could not support the bill because it does not clarify what alternatives to evolution are to be presented.

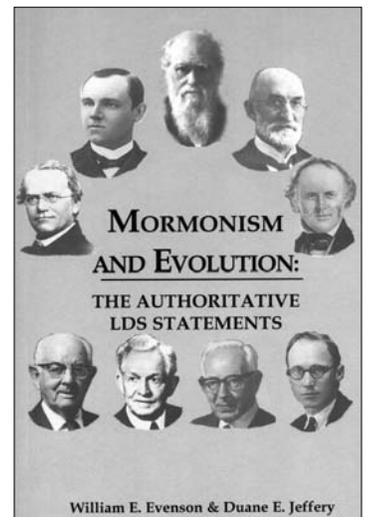
"The backers of this bill are saying this bill has nothing to do with faith or religion," Urquhart said. "If that's the case, and we're only dealing with this on the basis of science, this becomes a very easy decision: There's only one scientific theory regarding the diversity of the species. That theory is evolution."

Evolution is widely supported by LDS scientists. BYU zoology professor Duane E. Jeffery participated in a 2005 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium panel in which he maintained that Intelligent Design is not a scientific theory but merely neo-creationism. Said Jeffery: "Until Intelligent Design can show that you can actually do science and make testable predictions, it has no business being in the science classroom" (Tape SL05-131).

Despite explicit anti-Darwinist statements by conservative apostles such as Joseph Fielding Smith and Boyd K. Packer, the LDS Church has a long-standing tradition of taking no position in the evolution vs. creationism debate. The Church affirms only that God created Adam and Eve, and that they are the parents of the human race.

Together with Utah Valley State College physics professor William E. Evenson, Jeffery has recently published *Mormonism and Evolution: The Authoritative LDS Statements* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2005). The book includes all of the official First Presidency statements that BYU science faculty members originally compiled for a 1992 "Evolution Packet" they handed out to religion faculty and students, as well as statements by Joseph F. Smith, James E. Talmage, Heber J. Grant, David O. McKay, Spencer W. Kimball, and Gordon B. Hinckley.

"People ask me every now and again if I believe in evolution," said President Gordon B. Hinckley in 1997. "I tell them I am not concerned with organic evolution. I do not worry about it. I passed though that argument long ago."



AN OLIVE LEAF

“IF HE IS ALL RIGHT ON THE MAIN LINES”

By Brigham Young

Brigham Young was one of Mormonism's great extemporaneous speakers: “I will present such views as come to my mind.”

In this selection from The Essential Brigham Young (Signature Books, 1992, 239–41; published originally in the New York Herald, ca. September 1877), Young reflects on Joseph Smith and the qualities of humility and humor that enoble the human character. (Following the editorial choices of the Essential Brigham Young, in this passage we retain the same language constructions and variant spellings of the original).



ONE [OF THE THINGS THAT pains me] is to hear saints dwell on Joseph's little shortcomings, as if it made any sort of difference what the idiosyncracies of a prophet or any other man might be, if he is all right on the main lines. That is all we have any business with. There are some people that even grace can't haul up out of the slough of detail into the largeness of the spirit. I have no doubt that there were Israelites who refused to follow Moses because he did or did not part his hair in the middle, and some of that breed are handed down to the present time and are here with us now, and follow Brigham Young and shout, “Our servant Brigham is the Lion of the Lord,” and remember it against Joseph that he went with one suspender and forgot to put on the regulation Mormon underclothes. They think that if he had had his garments with the holes cut in the breasts and knees and elbows, he would not have got bullet holes in his body. . . .

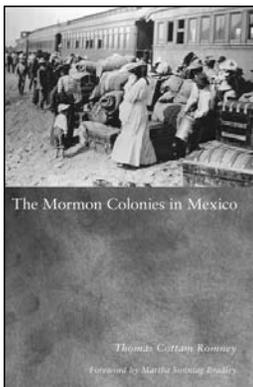
[Some men have asked if Joseph Smith selected me for leader of the saints because of my humility.] Joseph's words were, “for humilty and obedience, I have found none like unto our brother Brigham.” These words have become for me a kind of test of men. When I see a saint full of himself, his own opinion and his own way, I find myself looking at him with the sad eyes of Joseph. It seems to me that humility and obedience are something very profound, and too deep for me. But Joseph

Smith was a poet, and poets are not like other men; their gaze is deeper, and reaches the roots of the soul; it is like that of the searching eyes of angels; they catch the swift thought of God and reveal it to us, even at the risk of forgetting their underclothes and their suspenders.

I have half a dozen children by different mothers that seem nearer alike and more attached to each other than almost any full brothers and sisters I could mention. I say seem, for a great deal of the difference between people is only seeming; the real character often lies below all the seeming—and when we get at that we find many people very much alike.

Take my John W. and Brigham, Jr. Could any two children of the most different parents seem more unlike, yet in all the essentials of character, truthfulness, courage, love of God, and good will to men, there is not the choice of two peas between them; and there are hundreds of the Valley boys just the same. I think on the judgment day men will be called to account for only very few simple fundamental qualities, and all the peculiarities that catch the eye and engage the attention now will be swallowed up in death. But that is no reason why we shouldn't notice them in life, and rejoice in them, for it is only through them that we can tell t'other[?] from which.

Of all the qualities that will perish in the grave, I think humor is the best. Indeed, I'm not sure that it will not survive death, for it often hangs on to the last. I have known saints, the best of saints, too, whose last word was a joke, perhaps about not liking the prospect of their souls going naked into the other world, and before the joke was ended, they were dead. Perhaps they ended it on the other side. Who knows? It is all mystery. I used to run to humor in my sermons, and next day be sorry for it; but I found years after, when I had forgotten the sorrow and the sermons, that people remembered the humor. I sometimes think God must enjoy humor, and that he won't be strict in reckoning with a humorist.



The Mormon Colonies in Mexico

Thomas Cottam Romney

Unavailable since its original publication in 1938, this important document of a little-known chapter in Mormon history is now reprinted with a new introduction by Martha Sonntag Bradley.

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—from the Introduction

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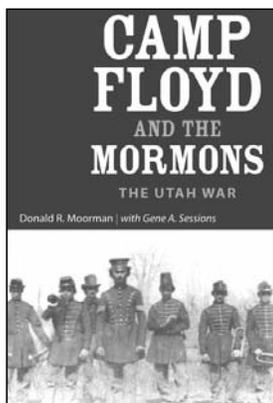
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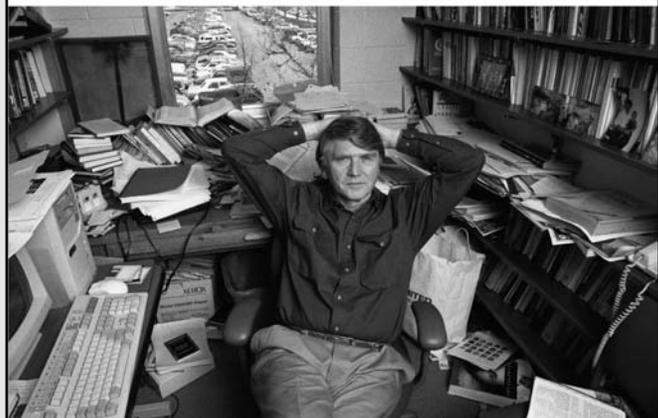
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WE AS A CHURCH, AS WELL AS THE BROADER CULTURE, DESERVE to have a wide range of images of Joseph Smith, including images that are bold, experimental, and challenging. If we are to have any chance of “knowing Brother Joseph,” we must learn to see him fairly and fully. We deserve to see him with fresh eyes.

