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ALLEN D. ROBERTS 1978–1980
PEGGY FLETCHER 1978–1986
DANIEL H. RECTOR 1986–1991
LINDA JEAN STEPHENSON 1991–1992
ELBERT EUGENE PECK 1986–2001

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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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MEANINGFUL BRIDGE

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE ARTICLE IN the June 2007 SUNSTONE, "The Yoga of Christ." Brother McLemore's insights into Eastern views of Christian principles are refreshing to say the least.

I first took up yoga as a way to strengthen my back following the first of two surgeries. However, as I got more involved in my practice, it became much more important than simply a tool for physical therapy. I soon realized that there is an intelligence and spirituality in the body that we normally don't access in our Western or Christian view of spirituality. This intelligence is different from that of the spirit housed in our bodies, which we normally discuss in church. When I do *asanas* (physical yoga postures) in the right frame of mind using breath control, my body seems to have a conversation with my spirit. I almost feel as if I'm an observer watching a dialogue in a play. It seems to grow more intense the deeper into my meditation I get and as I quiet my mind. It's as if there are three pieces of me: my body, my spirit, and my mind. My mind generally chatters away all the time, but as I quiet it, I am also able to "hear" the divine conversations my body has with the spirit.

When I try to describe these kinds of yoga experiences to other LDS people, it usually sounds quite strange to them. Because we are so attuned to Western instead of Eastern paradigms, Church members have difficulty understanding what I mean, so I now rarely discuss my experiences with fellow Church members.

When I was recovering from my first back surgery in late 2005, I had a lot of time to evaluate my life and what I was doing. I realized that I had not really been very fulfilled over the last ten years. The lessons and teachings I received in church, although important, did not seem to help me cope with the stresses and questions of my life. Something was missing. Once I started yoga and meditation, I realized there was another avenue of spirituality that I hadn't explored yet—that there are different types of deep spiritual experience outside what we normally associate with church and the temple.

Shortly after I started doing yoga, I had a faith crisis. I began to question some aspects of my faith. I also had difficulty relating what I was feeling and learning on the mat in my yoga practice to what I normally experienced in church. Over time, I have come to terms

with most of these problems; however, I have found few meaningful texts that bridge the chasm between our LDS/Western view and Eastern teachings regarding religious experience. This article is one of the first things I've read which does so reliably. I want to thank SUNSTONE for including it and encourage the editors to include other such articles in the future.

SCOTT MOBERLY
Yorba Linda, California

FAITHLESS SEEKING CHANGE

I HAVE READ SUNSTONE FOR MANY years and have applauded the changes in the magazine since the last major restructuring; but in my opinion, the June 2007 cover article entitled "Are Boys More Important Than Girls?" by Margaret Merrill Toscano has clearly crossed the line. If it is true that the motto of "Faith Seeking Understanding" is the litmus test for articles appearing in SUNSTONE, I must sadly confess that I found nothing in her article that remotely resembles a faithful attempt to give readers greater understanding regarding gender and equality issues in the church. To the contrary, the article would more appropriately fall in the category of "Faithless Seeking Change," since it included numerous criticisms of Church policies and statements by President Hinckley, as well as the promotion of her own audacious hopes that someday the Church leadership will hearken to her uninspired opinions.

I am left wondering about the criteria SUNSTONE uses to select its cover story articles. I find it most curious that an article critical of the Church and its prophet and written by an excommunicated Mormon is given such preeminence in a magazine dedicated to increasing the faith and understanding of its readership. If SUNSTONE wants to provide space for the opinions of ex-Mormons, it should create another section of its magazine entitled, "Beyond the Borderlands," where people such as Toscano can express their views without subjecting the entire readership to a cover story article that builds neither faith nor understanding.

No, I am not going to cancel my subscription, but I hope SUNSTONE uses more editorial discretion in the future.

DAVID RICHARDSON
Colorado Springs, Colorado

GOING DEEPER

AS MY WIFE BIRGITTA AND I HAD breakfast recently, I read aloud to her Dan Wotherspoon's June 2007 *SUNSTONE* editorial, "Namaste." This is a word I have known for many years to mean "the divine in me bows to the divine in you." Its appearance in *SUNSTONE* sparked a stimulating conversation, and I want to capture some of its highlights for the record.

First, hearing the opening poem by Rilke set a wonderfully appropriate mood. I had quickly and silently read the editorial the day before, when the magazine first came, but great poems are meant to be heard. Thus, hearing it now was a revelation to both of us, a great beginning to this remarkable essay.

Perhaps the greatest insight for me, however, came when reading aloud the essay's third to last paragraph:

One piece of prevailing wisdom says that once we've moved past a difficult challenge, we should put it in our rearview mirror and drive away from it with all speed. As [Rachael Naomi] Remen writes of this path, "Life might be easier then but far less genuine" No, we must go deeper into those things we struggle with, not away from them. We must learn to love even those parts of ourselves that frustrate us. They are the points of vulnerability through which we are able to truly come to ourselves; they are the ground as well as counterbalance to those places and ways in which we soar.

Birgitta asked me to read this paragraph three times. As I did, it occurred to me in an all-new way why I had returned to the institutional church back in 1975, after a traumatic, excommunicated absence of the previous ten years. I'd had to "go deeper into those things" I struggled with, not away from them! And although I was excommunicated yet again seventeen years later, I did not experience the same traumatic result. The second time was liberating and empowering. Nevertheless, here I am still going back to the institutional church via *Sunstone* forums, with the need to "go deeper into those things we struggle with."

This editorial also gives me new direction for reconnecting with the local stake president, who cannot understand why I don't leave the Church alone. He does not seem to understand my love for the tradition of my youth and maternal heritage, despite my outspoken and often critical observations of its

present-day behavior. When I think of this particular stake president, I often think of a remark attributed to Abraham Lincoln: "There's a man I don't like. I'd better get to know him." That is not an easy task.

When we got to the last paragraph of the editorial, Birgitta remembered an incident years ago in Sweden. She now takes over the rest of this letter:

[Birgitta writing] It was wintertime in Stockholm. I lived as a single mother with my two teenaged children on the fifth floor of an apartment building in a respectable part of the city. Arising early for work one morning, I smelled something awful. Searching for its source, I discovered a homeless, long-haired, bearded, disheveled man of indeterminate middle age, reeking and sprawled against the wall a few feet from my front door. Spread around him was debris of all sorts: smoking paraphernalia, chewed chicken bones, and other disgusting trash. I was shocked.

The words of Jesus came immediately to my mind: *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* I said to the man: "What are you doing here?" He mumbled incoherently. As I

wrestled with my conflicted feelings of disgust and Christian principles, I closed the door and stood inside wondering what to do. I called the police. The problem was solved externally but not internally. I felt guilty. How could I have done differently in the name of Jesus? That dilemma has affected my choices in various difficult situations since. It's easier to think that we live out the love of Christ in our sanitized society than to actually behave as Jesus did among the rejected of his time.

Dan, your message in the essay is beautifully, poetically, and cogently written. I was moved deeply and filled with joy. You have given voice to much of my own heretofore unexpressed experience. Thank you.

EUGENE AND BIRGITTA KOVALENKO
Los Alamos, New Mexico



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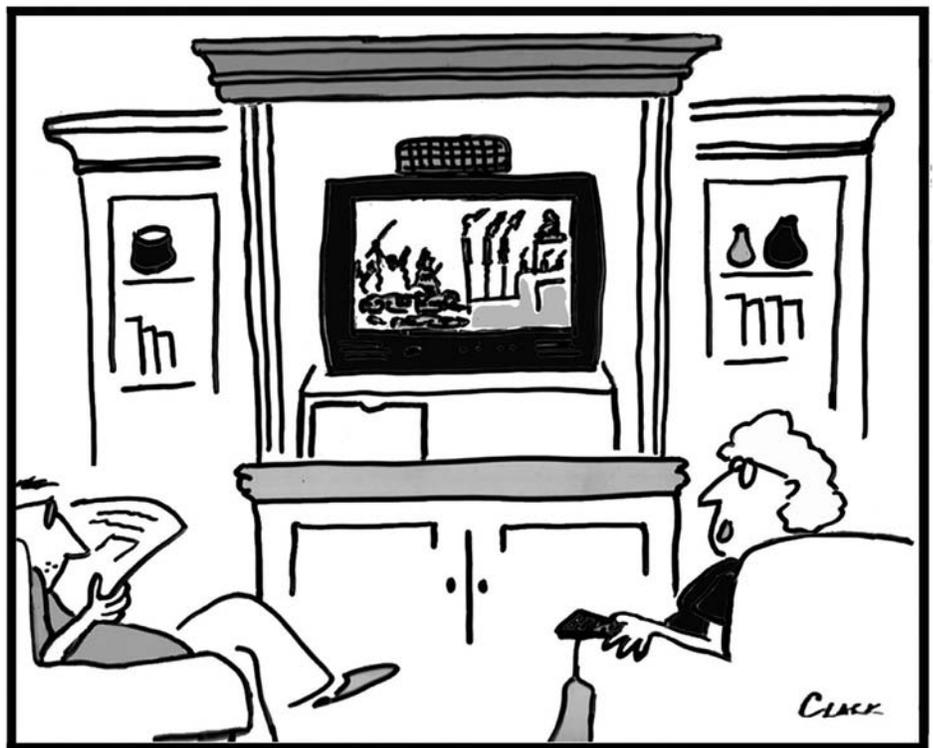
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HONEST JON by Jonathan David Clark



"Unbelievable! Honey, did you know that in some cultures people spend one third of their lives in front of shrines?"

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER

By John Dehlin



In July 2007, the Sunstone board of directors hired John Dehlin as the foundation's new executive director. In this role, John will lead out in implementing specific strategic initiatives to solidify Sunstone as the leading independent forum for open, thoughtful, and constructive discussions of Mormon experience and contemporary issues and bring these discussions to even more audiences—and in new ways. Dan Wotherspoon, who has been doubling as editor of SUNSTONE magazine and the foundation's executive director for the past six years, will continue as magazine editor.

John brings to Sunstone a wealth of experience promoting open discussions of Mormon ideas and experience. He is the founder of the Mormon Stories podcast, a popular Internet radio show exploring Mormon-related issues and themes through personal experiences and stories. He is also the founder of Mormon Matters, a weekly podcast in roundtable format that discusses Mormon news in the broader context of religion and society. He has also served as a member of the Sunstone board of directors for the past two years.

John worked in the computer and technology industry for fourteen years, including stints at Bain & Company and Arthur Andersen, and seven years at Microsoft. John is currently serving as the director of the OpenCourseWare Consortium for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

John served an LDS mission to Guatemala, graduated from BYU in political science (1993), and is completing a master's degree in instructional technology at Utah State University. John is married to Margaret Weber Dehlin, and they are the parents of four children.

I CANNOT ADEQUATELY express how excited I am to come aboard in this new position. I come to Sunstone as one who has benefited tremendously from its influence. A few years ago, I was called as an early morning seminary teacher and began studying LDS church history in earnest. After six months of study, much of my spiritual and religious life began to fall apart. While family and church leaders were not equipped to help me through this crisis, the people of Sunstone were. As I delved into the writings and speeches of people such as Leonard Arrington, Eugene and Charlotte England, Richard Poll, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Lowell Bennion, Bill Bradshaw, Ted Lyon, Margaret Young, Darius Gray, Bonner Ritchie, Claudia Bushman, and others, I found a way to navigate through the turbulent waters—towards a place of healing, and even growth. In so many ways, my family and I owe Sunstone a great deal for “being there” in a time of religious and spiritual crisis. I am deeply honored to be able to “pay forward” the gift of

Sunstone through this new position.

For the past two years, it has been my distinct pleasure to work directly with the Sunstone staff and board of directors. As I have come to see how dedicated and passionate these people are about advancing the Sunstone mission, I feel an incredible sense of gratitude to each of them. In particular, getting to know and working with Dan Wotherspoon has been one of the great blessings of my professional life. I could not be more excited to team with Dan, the rest of the staff, the board, and all of you to take Sunstone into new and exciting directions.

As we have strategized about the future of Sunstone, it has become clear that our biggest priority by far needs to be reaching out to a larger audience in new and innovative ways. Presently, both magazine subscriptions and symposium attendance are in slight decline, and we are under many of the same pressures other print publications are facing. While to some degree we see this dynamic as cyclical, we are in the process of kicking off

several new initiatives which, with your help, will allow Sunstone to have broader appeal and impact:

- **SUNSTONE digitization.** Just as *Dialogue* has recently digitized all its past issues, we are in the process of digitizing every SUNSTONE magazine issue for electronic distribution. As we complete this project, we envision making these issues available on the Internet, as well as in CD or DVD form. We are confident that this will represent a low-cost way to ensure that the rich treasure of past SUNSTONE articles are enjoyed for generations to come.

- **Website redesign.** While the Sunstone website has played an important role over the past several years, it is definitely due for an overhaul. Recently the entire library of past Sunstone symposium presentations was converted to downloadable MP3s. As we complete the magazine digitization project mentioned above, we envision redesigning the site in a way to greatly simplify the finding and sharing of our rich library of magazine articles and audio presentations for current and future generations. We also plan to enhance our web presence with expanded podcasts and other features to build greater community.

- **Increased emphasis on contemporary issues.** As we contemplate ways to expand Sunstone's audience, focusing our magazine and symposium content even more on the most important issues affecting Mormons in their day-to-day lives seems appropriate. Among the topics which we hope to cover in the coming two years are:

- *The Spirituality of the Rising Generation.*

Where and how are twenty- and thirty-somethings finding spiritual fulfillment? Do the lives and experiences of Mormon youth match national trends? Where are today's LDS youth turning to fill their spiritual needs?

- *Addiction and Recovery.* What is the LDS Church doing to help those struggling with various types of addiction? What works, and what doesn't? What are the best spiritual approaches to recovery?

- *Body Image among Mormons.* To what extent are issues such as fitness, diet, eating disorders, obesity, and even plastic surgery prevalent among Mormons? What can we learn from professional counselors or those who have overcome struggles in this regard?

- *Effects of technology on Mormon life and experience.* What impacts have blogging,

podcasting, text-messaging, and social software such as YouTube and Facebook had on LDS and family life? How have new multi-media technologies changed the way the Church—and its critics and apologists—spread their messages?

- *The Mormon Soldier Experience*. Exploring the lives of LDS soldiers and their families serving in active combat in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

- *Mormonism and Politics*. What can we learn from the participation and influence of Latter-day Saints within U.S. politics? This discussion would expand beyond Mitt Romney to include Harry Reid, other Mormon congressmen, executive and legislative staffers, the judicial branch, and other government workers.

Others:

- *Mormonism and the environment*
- *Finding value in scripture regardless of historicity*
- *LDS theology and practices regarding disabilities*
- *How has “raising the bar” affected LDS missionary experience?*

- **Mormon Studies for the Masses.** While Mormon studies journals have been publishing a wealth of scholarship over the past thirty-plus years, most of the basic findings have yet to penetrate the minds of average Latter-day Saints, let alone the general public. While the Church and apologetic groups have begun addressing these issues online—along with a plethora of “anti-Mormon” resources now available—there is no balanced source for people to learn the “basic facts” about these important issues (e.g., polygamy, folk magic, blacks and the priesthood, Book of Mormon translation). We believe that Sunstone is uniquely posi-

tioned to fill this void and will look to provide:

- Framing articles on the main issues within Mormon studies
- An online topical directory which includes not only these summary articles but also a listing of the best scholarly articles on each of these topics (for additional in-depth study)
- Multimedia offerings (e.g., DVDs, Youtube videos) to make these information resources available in a wide variety of formats.

- **Video Histories.** Many of you know that Helen Whitney (filmmaker, *The Mormons*, which aired this spring on PBS) spent thousands of hours interviewing more than one hundred of the most interesting scholars and personalities within Mormonism. Unfortunately, Helen does not own the rights to this footage, and based on inquiries to WGBH (the film’s main sponsor), there are currently no plans to make it available to the public. At Sunstone, we have already begun the process of sitting down with major Mormon scholars and personalities and capturing their stories and expertise on digital video. Over time, we intend to make these interviews available not only online (in places such as Youtube), but also as raw footage for use by future documentarians and researchers.

- **Regional Sunstone Communities and More Symposiums.** Many Sunstone participants have expressed a desire to get together with other subscribers and supporters in their local areas of residence. To facilitate these requests, Sunstone has begun setting up email groups in a few major cities, universities, and countries, including New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Phoenix, Houston, Portland, Seattle, Washington D.C., Raleigh N.C., Boston, several Utah and California cities and universities, Alaska, and the U.K. We envision creating other groups as well. *Subscribe to a local Sunstone community near you: SUNSTONEONLINE.COM/COMMUNITIES. If there isn’t a community near you, please email your request to FEEDBACK@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM.*

We are also eager to find a way to increase the number of regional Sunstone symposiums held each year and soon hope to add

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Managing Religious Questions and Doubts



D. Jeff Burton

With Foreword by Lowell L. Bennion

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into our rotation cities in the U.S. midwest and south, as well as New York City, Portland, Washington D.C., and the U.K., with others to come.

- **Staying connected through email.** We have set up two email newsletters designed to help you stay connected with Sunstone projects and events. The first, “Sunstone Newsblast,” is a monthly letter featuring announcements about upcoming symposiums, magazine issues, podcasts and videocasts, as well as links to Mormon goings-on that we sense you’ll be interested in. The second, “Sunstone: Anxiously Engaged,” is designed for volunteers and others who are interested in helping with projects and working with us to strategize about Sunstone’s future. Please sign up for one or both of these newsletters at SUNSTONEONLINE.COM/NEWSLETTER.

WHILE we are very excited about the promise of these initiatives, we will not be able to succeed without your support! To make substantive progress, we are looking for various types of supporters, including subject matter experts, writers, organizers, and financiers.

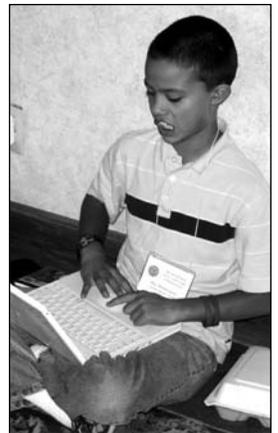
If any of these topics or projects are particularly close to your heart, please contact us at FEEDBACK@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM. We would love to partner with you to make this vision a reality!



“... But first, these public service announcements. . .”

2007 SALT LAKE SUNSTONE SYMPOSIUM

In addition to its usual wide and varied fare, this year's Salt Lake Symposium featured the topic, "The Public Faces of Mormonism." The symposium was launched with a wonderful Smith-Pettit Lecture by Helen Whitney, who spoke about her experiences making the acclaimed PBS documentary, The Mormons. It ended with a very insightful banquet address by W. Grant McMurray, former Community of Christ prophet-president, who spoke about Restoration views and values that would serve well as pieces of a 21st Century global vision. Mitt Romney, take note! In between were discerning and heartfelt remarks, songs zany and spirited, films, plays, intense conversations, friendships renewed and begun, wares and information traded by a wide variety of vendors—and most of all, fun!



PHOTOS BY STEVE MAYFIELD

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DEVOTIONAL

MORNING REFLECTIONS WHILE
STANDING ON ONE FOOT

By Frances Lee Menlove

"The way we spend our days is, of course, the way we spend our lives." —ANNIE DILLARD

I BEGIN WITH a story.¹ This story takes place in a small Midwestern town early in the last century. It is the story of Mr. Simpson, a man who was exacting in all things. He was an accountant, the only accountant in the small town. Each day he would arrive at his office on the second floor of a building along the main street at exactly 8:30. He would walk in, hang his hat and coat on the rack, nod to his secretary, Mrs. Donovan, and sit down at his rolltop desk. He would then take the desk key from his pocket, unlock the third drawer from the top, and pull it out. For a long time, maybe a full sixty seconds, he would look into the drawer, then close it and relock it. Then it was his custom to turn and say, "Good morning, Mrs. Donovan."

For more than a decade, this routine never varied. In all these years, he never said a word about what he looked at in that drawer first thing every morning. Then Mr. Simpson died a couple of years before his planned retirement, and Mrs. Donovan was left to clear out the office, including the desk. I imagine she felt some trepidation as she turned the key of the third drawer and pulled it open. She later reported what she saw. It was a large card. On this card in bold, block letters were the words:

DEBITS ON THE LEFT,
CREDITS ON THE RIGHT.

I start with this story to remind us that we need to stay in touch, in daily touch, with what is most essential. Our accountant chose "debits on the left, credits on the right" as his basic instruction, his grounding. What is most basic to us as we go about our daily lives? What might we put on a card and contemplate for a minute a day?

In this essay, I nominate four candidates for you to consider and ponder. Not so much so that you will adopt them, but to nudge you into seeking out your own most basic instruction to put in your real or imaginary drawer.

THE FIRST CANDIDATE is the punch line from a story told about Rabbi Hillel, an influential Jewish teacher around the time of Jesus. You've all heard the famous saying attributed to Rabbi Hillel: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?"

But it is another story about this renowned rabbi we are going to look at today. Our story begins with a man knocking on the door of Rabbi Shammai, another well-known rabbi who lived near Hillel. Now while Hillel was known for his kindness, his gentleness, and his concern for humanity, Rabbi Shammai was made of sterner stuff.

When Rabbi Shammai opened his door, the man standing there said, "I would like to convert to Judaism and become a Jew, but I don't have much time. I know I have to learn the entire book you call the Torah, but you must teach it to me while I stand on one foot." Now Rabbi Shammai knew full well that it takes years of study to learn the Torah, and here in front of him was this crazy man wanting to learn it while standing on one foot. Rabbi Shammai slammed his door shut.

The man hurried away. Later he found Rabbi Hillel. "I would like to convert to Judaism and become a Jew," said the man. "But I don't have much time. I know I have to learn the entire book you call the Torah, but you must teach it to me while I stand on one foot." Rabbi Hillel looked at him for a moment and then said, "Certainly. Now stand on one foot."

The man balanced on one foot.

"Repeat after me," said Rabbi Hillel. "What is hateful to you, do not do to someone else. That is the whole Torah. Everything else is commentary."

The man repeated after Rabbi Hillel, "What is hateful to me, do not do to someone else. That is the whole Torah. Everything else is commentary." Then Rabbi Hillel added, as the man put his foot back on the ground, "Now, go and learn it so it is a part of you."

This is our first candidate for reflection: *What is hateful to you, do not do to someone else. That is the whole Torah. Everything else is commentary.*

THE SECOND NOMINATION comes from the Book of Micah. In conveying their messages of God's warnings and desires, the prophets Amos and Micah both employ the language of law—court, case, controversy, contend, plea—all legal terms. Amos quotes God, who is both judge and prosecutor and is really ticked off. "I hate, I despise your festivals," says God, "and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies" or, he adds, in your burnt offerings, or the noise of your songs, or the melody of your harps. "But"—and here comes God's bottom line, his non-negotiable demand—"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:21–24, NRSV). The point seems to be that religious observance without social justice is meaningless.

Micah follows the same technique. We are plunked into a trial with God as judge and prosecutor. The prosecutor describes what Judah is guilty of and then proves it. Judah does not have much to say by way of defense, so the judge pronounces sentence. The people have hands full of sacrifices but hearts empty of goodness and justice.

Micah imagines you or me puzzling about what God wants:

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Micah 6:6–7, NRSV)

Is this what God wants? No! Micah says we often make much of that which does not matter much to God. So what is essential? What should we ponder each day? The answer: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to



FRANCES LEE MENLOVE, one of the founders of Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, holds a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Michigan and a Master's of Divinity from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. She has four children, six grandchildren, and lives in Oregon. This sermon was given as a devotional address at the 2007 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium (CD or download #SL07201).

walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

This is the second candidate for our morning reflection: *Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.*

CANDIDATE NUMBER THREE also begins with a story. This is a true story. It never happened, but it is true. A horrendous storm caused massive flooding for miles around a certain town. The flooding continued for almost a week.

On the second day of flooding, the National Guard evacuated the entire town, but one old man refused to go. "This is my home," he said, "and I am staying. I have put my faith in God to protect me and keep me from harm."

On the third day, the flood was about six feet deep, and the old man took refuge on the roof of his house. A woman in a rowboat came by to try to rescue the man. He refused to go. "I believe that God will protect me. I have faith."

On the fourth day, the flood began to creep onto the roof. An officer on a Coast Guard boat came by and tried to convince the old man to come away. "I'm not leaving," he stated. "This is my home. God will protect me."

On the fifth day, the old man was standing on the very top of the roof, and the water was up to his knees. A helicopter came to rescue him with a rope ladder, but he would not be rescued. "Leave me be. My God will protect me."

On the sixth day, the old man drowned. In heaven, the old man waited in line until it was his turn to talk to God. He stepped up in front of the Almighty and said, "Where were you during the flood? I had faith in you! I kept saying that you would provide, and you didn't, and I drowned. Why did you let me down?"

God shrugged and replied, "Who do you think sent you those two boats and the helicopter?"

What this old man missed, what we all can miss, is that our job description requires that we collaborate with God. St. Augustine of Hippo puts it this way, "God without us will not, and we without God cannot."

St. Augustine's famous aphorism speaks directly to this collaboration. It is a saying that inspired Bishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. He quoted it often as he led the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

This is our third candidate for contemplation. *God without us will not, and we without God cannot.*

NOW FOR THE final candidate. If an accountant keeps "debits on the left, credits on the right" in a drawer for contemplation each day, what might a saint write on a card? Fortunately we have a saint we can turn to for some guidance. Not just your everyday, garden-variety saint, but a Latter-day Saint. "Every church needs a saint," says Sterling McMurrin. "Lowell Bennion is Mormonism's saint."²

Lowell Bennion's qualifications for sainthood are legion. He devoted himself to living the Christian life, to teaching, writing about practical religion, and serving the aged, needy, and troubled. He has been called "the conscience of the Church," but really, he was the conscience of the community. For an encyclopedia entry on Lowell, Eugene England wrote:

He is the author of dozens of books and hundreds of essays and lectures that have helped give rational consistency to Mormon thought, have focused it in social morality and service, and have opened it to ecumenical dialogue with other faiths as well as the state and national communities. He has been a courageous, outspoken, and effective foe of religious prejudice and of racism, sexism, and materialism.

He has also demonstrated his teachings and inspired thousands of others to follow them through devoted and effective practical humanitarian efforts in his own community and beyond.³

In 1935, Lowell founded the Lambda Delta Sigma fraternity to help college students integrate learning with service. Thereafter, nearly every Saturday for thirty years, he would accompany a Lambda Delta Sigma chapter or two as they cleaned a yard, painted a house, or delivered food donated by others or from his own garden to those in need. He followed the dictum of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."

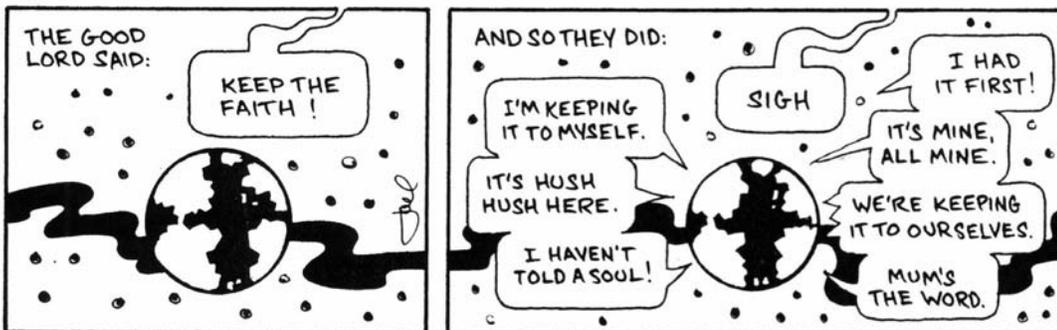
A food bank Lowell started in 1977 consisted of Lowell and some friends and a pickup. By 1990, it had distributed \$3.5 million in food all over Utah. This saint's version of Christian charity, which includes anyone in need, helped nudge the Church along toward moving away from the old motto, "We take care of our own," to adopt a more expansive view of Christian charity, reaching out to all in need. Starting in 1991, LDS fast offerings could be designated for humanitarian aid.

Lowell's life was not always smooth sailing. He was forced out of his job as director of the LDS Institute of Religion at the University of Utah, and his son was excommunicated from the Church for being a homosexual.

Sometimes checked, but never defeated, Lowell Bennion stands steadfast for the finest principles of human decency. When a full history of Mormonism in the latter half of the twentieth century is written, it may well be that the voice of "Brother B" will be heard above the rest.⁴

What might this Latter-day Saint have looked to for inspiration each day? What might Lowell Bennion have believed was bedrock basic to the way he lived his days? Fortunately we have Mary Bradford's superb biography of Lowell Bennion to give the answer to our question: Lowell used a verse from the Bhagavad-Gita as a personal motto: "To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits."⁵ "To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits." This is a dense saying, rich with meanings. Listen to what

Pontius' Puddle



Lowell himself says about it:

In the Bhagavad-Gita (Song Celestial), the devotional classic of Hinduism, I read, "To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits." . . . I have learned that we have but limited control over the fruits of our actions, and individuals respond to our words, intentions and deeds with their own frame of reference, not from ours. I can control only my actions. How others respond to my ways is their business. Thus I am learning to feel, think and act as I believe I should and to get my satisfaction out of my own doings. Why should I place myself at the mercy of others?⁶

So, take action, do your best, and let go of the outcomes. Don't get all snarled up in "what ifs"—"what if" it is received this way or that way, or "what if" they think this or that, or "what if" I am misunderstood, etc. Just use your best judgment, do what you can, and then let go. Let go of outcomes. As Mary Bradford says, Lowell "filled each day with his best efforts and turned to the next with no regrets."⁷ See what you can do, do it, and shut out the rest. In a personal note to me, Mary Bradford summed up Lowell's approach to life:

Don't be afraid to be yourself. . . . Listen to others, read widely, and heed counsel, but do your own thinking, draw conclusions, speak your own words, determine your own actions.

Lowell Bennion also made clear that the fruits of action should not be your motive. Rewards in this world or the next are not to be the motivations for doing good.

Gandhi was also deeply influenced by this divine Hindu maxim, and it shaped his non-violent campaign for freedom. Gandhi writes:

There should be no selfish purpose behind our actions. And to be detached from the fruits of actions is not to be ignorant of them or disown them. To be detached is never to abandon action, because the contemplated result may not follow.⁸

Lowell Bennion applied this Hindu verse to his writing as well—and remember, he was the author of dozens of books and hundreds of essays and lectures. Do your best, sign your name to it, and move on. Let go. Mary Bradford recalls a time when Lowell gave the commencement address at the University of Utah. A relative asked him for a

copy, and he handed over his only copy. (Luckily the talk had been recorded.) This incident exemplifies his discipline of doing the job, signing his name to it, and letting it go.⁹

This is the fourth candidate for our morning reflection: *To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits.*

DEBITS ON THE left, credits on the right. What is it that you might put in your drawer or in your wallet or purse to remind you of your own grounding? What is most basic to you?

In closing, here again are the four candidates. Read them slowly and pause between each to allow yourself a few seconds for private reflection. These are presented, not so much that you will adopt them, but to nudge you into seeking your own most basic instruction.

What is hateful to you, do not do to someone else. That is the whole Torah. Everything else is commentary.

—RABBI HILLEL

What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

—MICAH 6:6–8

God without us will not, and we without God cannot.

—ST. AUGUSTINE

To action alone thou hast a right, not to its fruits. (Do what you can and let go of outcomes.)

—LOWELL BENNION'S motto from the Bhagavad-Gita

In keeping with the theme of short and pithy, I close with a one-line prayer. I give it twice.

*God give me work till my life shall end,
and life till my work is done.*

*God give me work till my life shall end,
and life till my work is done.*¹⁰

Amen. ☪

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Charles Busch for this story.
2. Mary Lythgoe Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), from the back dust jacket.
3. Eugene England, *Utah History Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Lowell L. Bennion," available at www.media.utah.edu (accessed 7 April 2007).
4. Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion*, xii.

5. *Ibid.*, viii, x.
6. Lowell L. Bennion, *I Believe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1983), 37.
7. Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion*, x.
8. Quoted in *Young India*, 15 March 1928.
9. Mary Lythgoe Bradford, private communication with the author.
10. Prayer inscribed on the gravestone of novelist Winifred Holtby, 1898–1935.



HORSE EYE

Sun will settle. In gold.
And ever after
azure.

Higher light yet lurks,
lifts a diaphanous skirt,
uncrosses its legs a bit, nervous.

Aspens, toothpick skinny,
stripped
as if

pulled between two fingers
and left with nothing
but teeth chattering bareness.

What color meadow.
Ripened bear fur to fall into,
if he'd let you.

At its core, marsh.
Blinked reeds scribe its murk
unmarred by wind

nor what left
it sees of alder,
of whitened cliff,

of bruised wisps,
of withering
blue.

—THOMAS ROBERT BARNES



CORNUCOPIA

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Ward Stories

GOT COMPASSION?

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

—JOHN 13:34–35

IT WAS NEARING THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, and in anticipation of my husband's continuing employment, we ordered a brand-new station wagon; it was to be delivered in three weeks. We were very excited about trading in the old car and getting a new one. But the remainder of that year was a nightmare to rival any bad dream.

The following week, my husband's teaching contract wasn't renewed, and he, we, were devastated. Naturally, he was depressed about the job loss, but because he was on a twelve-month contract and would be getting paychecks through the summer, he planned on waiting until September to look for a new position. Thinking of eliminating a car payment in case things didn't go well on the job front, I suggested that we not take delivery on the car. He insisted that the dealership wouldn't let us out of the contract.

September came, and with our stake president's help, Gary found employment as a bill collector for a large department store. The pay was ridiculously low, but he wasn't worried as he didn't pay the bills each month. I did. It was my problem to deal with, and now we had an additional car payment to make. Our kids didn't get new school clothes that year except for the ones I made. I was always stressing about money as it was.

Gary's plan was to make a career change. In preparation, he was taking a typing class at LDS Business College at night. One evening in October, he went to his class while I went to a Cub Scout meeting with our children. Near the end of the meeting, Gary entered the back of the room and signaled to me. His face was bruised and swollen, and the white of one eye was totally red. Walking to his car after class, he had been mugged. His attacker had put him in a headlock and repeatedly pounded Gary's face with his fist. The mugger then pulled Gary's wrist-watch from his arm and ran off.

I'm not sure how Gary got to the meeting that night; maybe angels steered the car from downtown Salt Lake to Sandy. He was really in bad shape. One of the men at the Scout meeting took him to the emergency room.

Gary spent the next few days, including Halloween, moaning in bed. The thing that most distressed him was losing the watch his father had given to him. Some weeks later, he gave a priesthood meeting lesson about the Good Samaritan and mentioned that the watch had been stolen. A few days later, a new watch appeared in our mailbox.

Word got around that we were struggling. Sometime around the end of November, a policeman came to the door. "Some of your friends are concerned about you and want you to have this," he said, handing me an envelope. In the envelope was \$70 in cash. As he left, I wondered who those friends were.

I wanted to make Christmas dresses for my daughters but had no extra money for fabric. A dear friend examined her stash of fabric and gave me the needed material. Then, to my further frustration, my older-model sewing machine, which I had bought for five dollars, refused to function. The same friend lent me her extra sewing machine, and my girls had beautiful new dresses in time for Christmas.

It was Christmas Eve. The kids had gone to bed, and we were putting the last of their gifts under the tree. There was a knock on the door. No one was there, but there was a note that said, "Look in your driveway." On the driveway were five sacks of groceries which included, among other things, a small turkey, two gallons of milk, fresh fruit and vegetables, and candy for stocking stuffers.

THESE ANONYMOUS GIFTS helped us to get through a very difficult Christmas. But there was something missing, something I longed to receive from my neighbors and ward members. What I needed most was hugs and expressions of concern; for someone to actually say to me, "I care about you." I can understand why those givers wanted to remain anonymous; I have given anonymous gifts myself. But I needed their touch and their words.

I don't quite understand why it seems easier for us to give money than to say to someone in distress: "Are you OK? How can I help?"

We're not at all reticent to display our vast intellect and knowledge of the scriptures or give voice to our deeply held spiritual beliefs. But to sincerely express love, concern, and genuine interest in another person who appears to be in distress is difficult for us.

All-seeing eye

THERE ARE ALSO CELESTIAL BODIES



YOUNG WOMEN'S ADVISORS, BE WARNED! FOR A mere \$14.99, plus shipping and handling, the website MORMONSEXPOSED.COM is selling "Men on a Mission," a sizzling 2008 calendar with twelve men who share two things: They are all returned missionaries, and they all have bodies that truly inspire.

"While the fact that twelve young returned missionaries are posing shirtless will certainly raise eyebrows," the website explains, "it may also help to sort out some common misconceptions of Mormons by celebrating the beautiful bodies, great looks, and amazing stories of service of these deeply spiritual men."

According to the site, the twelve men featured in the calendar, who served their missions in places ranging from Argentina to Japan, were "hand-selected for their striking appearances and powerful spiritual commitment."

The claim about spiritual commitment gets blurry, however, when one browses through the T-shirts sold on the same site, which include trite references to Utah polygamy, deformities resulting from Utah inbreeding, and "missionary positions" (two elders biking or knelt in prayer).

As for the calendar, the site explains that "the 'devout dozen' are stepping away from the Mormon traditions of modest dress and 'baring their testimony' to demonstrate that they can have strong faith and be proud of who they are."

Sing a hymn, sister!



A few years ago, a nerve in my face was viciously attacked by a tiny virus which left my face grotesquely distorted for a time. My first day at work with my new look, I heard people whisper as I passed. I knew it wasn't a great look and wouldn't have been offended if someone asked what had happened. I wondered if I were invisible, especially when speaking face to face with someone. Surely they could see how distorted my face was, but nothing was said. There was some whispering, but only two people asked me directly if I were okay. Weeks later, I asked a friend why he hadn't said anything to me. He answered that he had heard what was wrong and hadn't said anything out of respect for my privacy. That I understand, but what would be more respectful than saying, "Hey, are you OK? I'm concerned about you."

Our scriptures tell us that charity should be our first con-

cern, but too often it seems to be our last. We are uneasy when faced with someone else's misfortune. It reminds us of our own vulnerability. We wonder if maybe it's contagious. Christ healed with words and with touch. He told us that the way to recognize his disciples is by the love they show to one another. Do we best express our love by giving anonymous gifts? Or with a gentle touch and by voicing the love in our hearts?

I say, let's get rid of the rule of etiquette that says it's polite to ignore someone's ill fortune. It's okay to ask how someone is doing. If you don't know what to say, just take her hand or put a hand on her shoulder. That says it all. Her cup is not full and needs replenishing. Pour in some compassion.

PHYLLIS BAKER
Salt Lake City, Utah

A Place for Every Truth

SHUNNING BEECHER

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

WHILE WRITING HIS MOST INFLUENTIAL work, *Jesus the Christ*, Elder James E. Talmage consulted the writings of the most able scholars of his day. Among his most frequently cited authorities are Alfred Edersheim, a convert to Christianity from Judaism; Frederick (Canon) Farrar, a noted Catholic authority; and J. Cunningham Geikie, of the Church of England. These sources on Christ's life have been described as "Victorian Lives of Jesus" (see Malcolm Thorp, "James E. Talmage and the Tradition of Victorian Lives of Jesus," *SUNSTONE*, January 1988, 8–13). There is one other major work in this genre, however, that Talmage chose not to cite: *The Life of Jesus the Christ* (1871), by Henry Ward Beecher.

In his day, Beecher was a renowned preacher and speaker. His base of operations was the large Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, which could seat 2,100 with standing room for many more. Beecher was raised a Calvinist but preached for a Methodist congregation. He was an abolitionist who assisted in freeing several slaves through "slave auctions," in which money was raised to secure slaves their freedom. He was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the classic novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Beecher's *Life of Jesus the Christ* received favorable reviews, and Talmage undoubtedly knew about the book. So why, when writing his own life of Christ, did the Mormon apostle shun this potentially valuable source? Here are two possible reasons:

Near the end of his life, Beecher was embroiled in a scandal—an alleged affair with Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of friend and publisher Theodore Tilton—that ruined his reputation. Although Beecher was eventually exonerated, the accusations cast great suspicion on his character. Indeed, Debby Applegate, a recent Beecher biographer, gives circumstantial evidence that Beecher was involved in other affairs. Elder Talmage was a proper man who deeply honored vows of fidelity, propriety, and chastity. And this is certainly one possible reason he would disregard Beecher's book on Christ.

However, Talmage's animus towards Beecher goes back to 1884, when Talmage was a student at Johns Hopkins University. In his journal entry of 4 March 1884, Talmage writes:

In the evening I attended a lecture by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, at the Masonic Temple. His subject was "A tour of the continent" and he related that during the tour he visited Utah. His account of Utah and her

people was very fair in most respects—none of the rant and tear of most talkers upon that subject, but he made the following four very gross mis-statements:

- (1) That the Utah government is entirely under the control of the Church.
- (2) All property of the territory is owned by the Church as a corporation.
- (3) The government of Utah is an absolute despotism.
- (4) Hatred and revenge toward the oppressors of the people is regularly inculcated in the schools.

Talmage goes on to say that he enjoyed the lecture very much but lamented that Beecher's disparaging remarks about Utah would be believed by many, even though Beecher actually spent a very short time in Utah. "I was grieved to hear these statements: For his other references to Utah were remarks of praise for our people."

Talmage then wrote a lengthy letter to a Baltimore newspaper titled *The Day*. The letter is titled "A Young Teacher from Utah Criticizes Mr. Beecher's Remarks." Talmage spends the bulk of the letter refuting Beecher's claims that Utah is under despotic control and says,

I can, from personal experience, deny in toto, and the existence of the despot's arm I have never seen cause to suspect. But if a despotic power is holding sway, either openly or under disguise, within the wide boundaries of this land, should Mr. Beecher, or any one else holding access to the public ear, not cease to cry aloud for its abolition?

Talmage goes on to explain that the "despotic power" to which he alludes is the "disenfranchisement of an entire people," a reference to then-current legal proceedings against the Church in cases against plural marriage. He finishes with a paragraph defending the Utah school system, saying that if Beecher had entered any of the Utah schools,

he never would have said, as he did, that the inculcation of the spirit of hatred and revenge against the "Mormon" oppressors is a regular part of a child's education. I happen to be a graduate from, and have been an instructor in, the leading institution of professedly "Mormon" tenets in the Territory, viz., the Brigham Young Academy, its founder being indicated by its name, and I have never been taught or expected to teach anything in the least akin to hatred or revenge.

Talmage's final thought on the matter of Beecher's brief visit to Utah is as follows: "Though the lecturer be a man of note, will not every one say that 'despotism,' 'hatred' and 'revenge' are strong terms to be applied in the sense in which they were used by Mr. Beecher, with the experience of but a few hours observation to base such usage upon?"



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Of Good Report or Praiseworthy

CELESTIAL MUSIC: A PRIMER

IN AN EFFORT TO HELP THE YOUTH of the Church listen to music that wouldn’t embarrass them if Jesus walked into the room, the following was recently posted as an iTunes Celebrity Playlist by the Man himself.

- 
THE BEATLES: *Abbey Road* (“A real breakthrough in their musical style,” he says, “from mere pop to the beginnings of true artistry.”)
- 
BILLIE HOLIDAY: Anything (“What can’t that woman turn to sheer gold just by brushing that deliciously ragged voice over it?”)
- 
THE GRATEFUL DEAD: Any live album (“Can you dig those eternal psychedelic guitar solos? I signed my kids up for lessons with Garcia as soon as he found his way to this side of the veil—which he described as ‘quite a trip.’”)
- 
PINK FLOYD: *The Wall* (“Such a frank exploration of existential angst has not been recorded since Job!”)
- 
SATURDAY’S WARRIOR: Original cast version (“I go to the Sunstone symposium every year just for the sing-along!”)
- 
APOCALYPTICA: *Inquisition Symphony* (“Metallica on cellos! What’s not to like?”)

Spotted in the Post-Mortal Times

RUNNING OUT OF TIME SALE

HAVE YOU NOTICED? The Four Horsemen are chomping at the bit, the trumps are sounding, and the angel is pouring out his final cups of destruction. With time so short, don’t leave your eternal posterity to chance! Take advantage of Kid Kolob’s huge sale today!

Gotta increase your kingdom—and FAST? Want to snatch up those last elect spirits for your own? Give those dawdling great grandchildren of yours a little surprise and jumpstart the next generation: Birth Control Override Packets are BUY 1, GET 2 FREE.

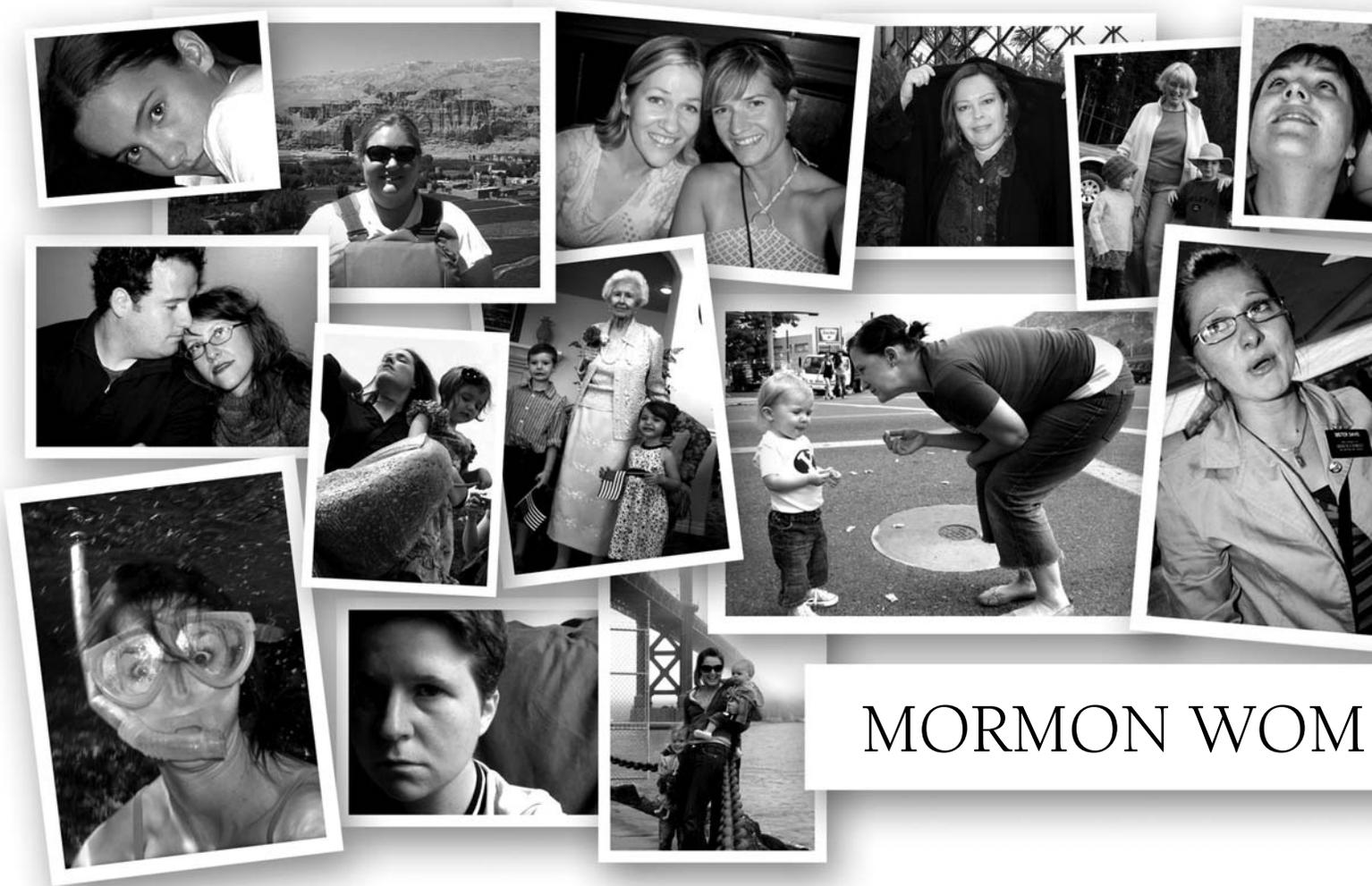
Save 50 PERCENT on pre-birth visits so you can see what gender your progeny’s parents will be! You can never be sure these days.

Then, keep your posterity safe upon atmospheric entry with Trailing Glory Footwear, 30–60 PERCENT OFF.

Want your descendents to have an eternal perspective? Endless Promise Contact Lenses are HALF PRICE!

FREE hot dogs and *My Turn on Earth* soundtracks for every customer. Heck, TAKE TWO!





MORMON WOM

RELIEF, SOCIETY

I'M TOO POOR TO WORK OUT AT THE SNOOTY athletic clubs in my town and too old and pudgy to work out at Bally's or Gold's, so I go to the YMCA with all the other middle-aged mommies trying to sneak in thirty minutes on the stairmaster while their kids take swimming lessons. The particular YMCA I go to is also home of the legendary 9:00 a.m. MWF Aquacise Class.

The median age of the women in this class is, I'd guess, around seventy-five. All of the women are pretty spry, still fit enough to get themselves to the pool and into the water for forty-five minutes of foam-floating-device-assisted water aerobics. I often end up showering and changing at the same time as they finish class. I hope they don't notice that I dress awfully slowly, just because I love listening to them.

As far as I can tell, they have few things in common, besides their commitment to exercise and each other (and the Red Sox!). I've heard a few pointed political comments (though never outright arguments—New England ladies of a certain age do not argue) that suggest divergent views; there's talk of the different churches and synagogues they attend; some have been to college, some not; some are widowed, some still married, one or two divorced. Their bodies are

every size and shape imaginable—tall, short, round, lumpy, thin, saggy, wiry, scarred, varicose, stretchmarked, well-muscled, well-used, all with that softly loosening skin of the aged. All of them seem beautiful to me.

The core members of this group have been taking the same class for nearly a decade. On Wednesdays after class they have brunch together, either at someone's home or at a local diner. They have seen each other through the loss of spouses, cancer diagnoses and treatments, sending grandsons to Iraq, births of grandchildren (and a few "greats"), moves to assisted living facilities. They keep track of class members who have moved away or gone to Florida for the winter, posting notes and cards on a bulletin board in the locker room. When one woman didn't reappear in class after what the ladies considered a suitable period of mourning following her husband's death, they organized a posse to visit her, get her to eat, and coax her back into the routine of exercise classes.

What is most interesting to me about this community is that, as far as I can observe, they are bound not by some lofty shared ideal but simply by a series of decisions to care for each other. Over time, those small choices—to have a conversation after class, to share a meal, to divulge a secret, to ask for or offer a ride to the doctor's office—have built sturdy and lasting friendships on a foundation as flimsy as, well, a swimming pool.



WOMEN'S VOICES 2007

THE LADIES' LOCKER room talk reminds me of my favorite part of church—the treble chatter that precedes the start of the Relief Society meeting. I love to sit off to the side, or even out in the hall, and let the sound of women's voices wash over me. There are loud happy greetings, hushed and earnest discussions of shared griefs, businesslike planning for church meetings or social activities, occasionally awkward introductions and lurching toward new friendships. I've been lucky enough to live in wards where the sisters are nearly as diverse in their life experience and approach to religion as are the locker room ladies, and the polyglot pre-Relief Society buzz seems like the most appropriate and authentic expression of sisterhood. Often I'm sad when someone stands up to hush the chatter and begin the official part of the meeting, with its correlated lessons and sometimes stilted recitations of acceptable answers to predictable questions. But even in these scripted exchanges, there is such richness in women's voices—so much meaning carried on their breath.

I've sometimes wished for the spontaneous spiritual outpourings that seem so common in accounts of the early Relief Society, and I still cherish a vision of celestialized Relief Society meetings where we speak heart to heart and bless one another and sing and prophesy in free and full unity. But for now, I'm learning from the little old ladies in the locker room

to love and appreciate a female relief society on a more human scale, to recognize and savor the gifts that come from simply choosing to tend each other, body and soul. The first step in that tending is to listen, to pay attention to the words our sisters speak and start to hear the ones they don't say. Choosing to hear each other is a simple and profound act of communion.

In these pages, we invite you to listen to Mormon women.

—KRISTINE HAGLUND

Guest Editor, "Mormon Women's Voices 2007"



Thank you, so much, to all who took or sent in photos of yourselves and loved ones for the collages above and on the cover of this SUNSTONE issue:

STIRLING ADAMS, JEANETTE ATWOOD, ANAMARIE BROWN, RONDA CALLISTER, OLIVIA CARTER, JESSIE CHRISTENSEN, ANGIE DELONG, EVAN ESAKI, JUDY ESAKI, KRISTINE HAGLUND, KAREN HALL, NIKKI HUNTER, ROBIN CONNOR KENZIE, JENNIFER LEE, MICHELLE LEE, CARRIE LUNDELL, TRACY LEIGH MULLETT, ANDI PITCHER, RYAN ROOS, JANEEN THOMPSON, LORI WARREN, MELANIE ROSE WILLIAMS

. . . IN ALL PLACES

by Emily Summerhays



EMILY SUMMERHAYS lives in New York City with her husband, Zaur Isaakov. Emily puts her literary education to oblique use procuring government funding for science and education programs. She is a blogger at Feminist Mormon Housewives.

LONG BEFORE HE JOINED THE CHURCH AND LONG before he married me, my future husband asked me over the long arm of the Internet to break down, into percentages, the important aspects of my life. Because it was his game, he went first, and his answer was relatively simple: He allotted some 40 percent to the pursuit, practice, and enjoyment of music; another 40 percent to his education and career; and the rest to incidentals such as learning new recipes and making trips to the bookstore. Intrigued by the challenge of trying to represent my life on a pie chart, I set to it with gusto, breaking it down into tiny slivers representing things such as re-reading favorite books, wrestling on the couch with my little brothers, barbecues in summertime, thinking about learning a dead language but never quite following through, swimming endless chlorinated laps, gardening in the mornings with Mom, and so on and so forth. My non-member friend was amused by my minutiae but interjected as I went on: “Wait. You’ve forgotten your religion. How much does church get?”

I didn’t know how to answer that question. I could have parsed out the hours spent reading scriptures, serving in my callings, or sitting in Sunday School and left it at that, but as I thought about it, that didn’t seem quite right. I couldn’t separate family from the Church, or nature from God, or opportunities from blessings. I couldn’t sever my life from its purpose or my goals from my guiding star. I tried to explain that Mormon is who I am, not what I do. You know: dyed in the wool, true blue, through and through—at all times, and in all things, and in all places.

He thought it was ludicrous to give religion any more than 33 percent. As a non-religious man, as a non-Mormon, and as a product of the former Soviet Union, where religion really had no place, he just couldn’t fully relate to what I was saying. And I was as yet too . . . Mormon to truly understand him either. The game petered out, and he thought no more about it. But I did. For years afterward.

In the same way that one often doesn’t realize how American she is until she finds herself navigating the cities and languages of the wider world, or how western she is until she finds herself forgetting not to look the other stony-faced New Yorkers in the eye, it wasn’t until I left Utah and its attendant Mormon-saturated world that I began to realize just how Mormon I was—*am*. Or rather, it wasn’t until I was more able to step outside the saturation that I was able

to begin to define the parts of my Mormon whole. Conversely, it wasn’t until I officially took my place at the near pinnacle of Mormon womanhood—the position of wife, though not yet mother—that I truly began to feel like an outsider.

I WAS BORN in June 1978, one day after the release of the letter announcing the repeal of the priesthood ban. I was still a young child when women were being told over the pulpit to “go home,” but I saw my mother working outside the home as I grew up, and I was an undergraduate when I heard President Hinckley counsel women and girls to get as much education as they could. Though I was an oblivious teenager when significant changes were made to the temple ceremony, I was always very conscious—perhaps because of the date of my birth—that I belonged to and was growing up in a church that was itself always growing, where major changes were not only possible in theory but had actually taken place.

As a child, I was enamored of church. I sucked up information like a vacuum and sang my heart out every week in Primary. I do not remember feeling set apart from boys in the Church any more than girls were set apart from boys in the secular world—which is to say, we were treated differently everywhere, not just on Sunday. As a tomboy, I fought against the general expectation that I play house and love pink, and scowled at the dresses I had to wear to church, but beyond the fact that boys seemed to get to have a lot more fun than girls (Cub Scout badges and passing the sacrament seemed very glamorous indeed to my young eyes), it never occurred to me then that boys were more valued than girls. Rather, my Church-related concerns then were more generally “Mormon” than “Mormon girl.” For example, I remember, pre-baptism, being very troubled at the thought that other people must surely believe their churches to be true, so how could we be so sure ours *really* was?

As I grew up through the ranks of Primary and then Young Women, it occurred to me that the Church really had nothing to do with me individually. I was a pretty self-motivated student of the gospel, and it seemed to me that the *Church* was a bunch of programs attempting to get people to like and live the *gospel*—which I already did. The Church therefore felt superfluous, and though I still liked to go because I liked to sing and answer questions, I found myself less and less engaged. My mother’s struggle with chronic illness aged my spirit prematurely, perhaps, and what I needed from the Church—real, serious, nuanced answers to real, serious, nuanced questions pressing down on my current life—I simply wasn’t getting. Perhaps because of my early tomboyishness, combined with the fact that I just didn’t seem to fit the mold (physically or otherwise) of the kind of girl boys like, I had become convinced that I would never marry, and YW therefore seemed to me totally irrelevant, as nearly all the lessons seemed to be geared in one way or another toward marriage and home life. To me, the gospel was about an individual’s relationship with Christ, not a woman’s relationship with a

man. I went to church looking for treasures to sooth my heart and to fill my soul, not my hope chest. I sometimes found them.

I was very excited to finally get to go to Relief Society, thinking that, at last, there would be meat to the lessons. Wrong. It was then, at eighteen or nineteen, that I really began to see that women were *expected* to be stunted in their spiritual growth. Or, at least, that it didn't seem to matter to anyone if we ever progressed beyond that point. As children, in Primary, we were encouraged to speak and think alongside the boys, but as soon as we hit Young Women, it was all marriage and babies, sugar and fluff. Relief Society was the end of the line, it seemed to me. There was no progression into something equivalent to high priests or challenging leadership positions. This is all we were expected to learn or be—ever.

For a young woman who longed to learn and who loved the gospel, this was a shattering blow. I began to look around, hoping to be proved wrong, and began to notice that few women spoke up in Sunday School even when men were spouting nonsense, that few women spoke in sacrament meeting other than to recount how they met their husbands or sob about how they would never be as wonderful as their mothers, and that even fewer spoke in general conference. I was annoyed and even embarrassed by the sing-song lispings our women did over the pulpit, and I wondered when or if we were ever expected to come into our own. I began to muse on Heavenly Mother as our ultimate role model—an absent, silent model of eternal womanhood—and thought, *Well no wonder—we have nothing to grow toward.* Our final destination—that is, if we are exalted and become as our Heavenly Mother seems to be—is to disappear almost entirely, lost even to our eternal children, nameless, faceless, actionless, and rarely thought of though not quite disavowed. Relief Society is pretty good practice for that. We learn to hide behind the centerpieces.

Still, I tried to be plucky. I thought, *This need not apply to me.* I went to church with the goal of learning and growing even in an apparent vacuum of learning and growth. I refused to give up speaking up and trying to dig deep, even when it was clear that many just wanted to give the expected answers and get out of there so they could have a much-needed Sunday nap. I was encouraged, however, by how many women, young and old, came up to me after classes and thanked me for saying the things I did. I began to gather around me a posse of little old ladies with twinkles in their eyes, young moms who weren't quite too harried to get to know the non-moms, older moms who were shaking off the exhaustion of those early motherhood years, and so forth. As I grew older and my understanding of people grew more nuanced, I began to see these women as fully subjective people, not just extras in the drama of my life, and I began to love Relief Society for the relationships it could offer. The lessons were still less than stimulating, for the most part, but the relationships were blooming. There *can* be sisterhood in Zion. And there can be profound growth in sharing experience.

WHILE I STROVE for interpersonal learning in my life in the Church, I turned to my secular life for the intellectual and spiritual stimulation I craved. I studied philosophy and poetry, history and art, and all manner of sciences. I traveled and learned languages, visited cathedrals and chapels and groves and standing stones. I stood in rivers and climbed mountains and skinny-dipped in far-flung seas. I turned outward toward what the world could offer me and inward toward what I hoped to be able to find within myself. In all of these places, I found God. I began to be able to separate my Americanness from my westernness from my Mormonness from my femaleness and from my Emilynness. I began to make connections between all of these things that I hadn't noticed before and to sever false links that I had previously glossed over. Still, there were never easy answers. But then, seemingly easy answers were what I had been trying to escape in the first place.

I realize now how I was straddling a generation gap in those days. I came from a fairly traditional Mormon family and grew up in a mostly Mormon community in Mormon-dominant Utah, which still upholds the same general values it had when my grandmother was my age. However, I also grew up in a relatively privileged community where a college education, even for women, was not only possible but expected. My desire to study abroad was supported by parents who probably would rather their youngest daughter didn't trot the globe on her own but who wanted me to have every opportunity I could. And that same grandmother helped me finance my trips. My goal to become a professional woman was made possible through the advances of the very feminism that my culture reviled, and yet no one questioned my personal righteousness when I announced my intentions to remain an unmarried academic.

Inevitably during my studies and travels, I was questioned about Mormonism. I found that questions about the role of women in the Church were particularly troubling. In spite of my chafing at the restrictive single-mindedness of Young Women and Relief Society, I remember wholeheartedly answering that I didn't believe women were treated as secondary in the Church and that I'd never heard men speak of women except in veneration. I rattled off—sincerely—every apologetic I knew on the subject, because I couldn't quite put my finger on what troubled me about my Mormon womanhood. I know that I wished that God's Church expected more from me than what my uterus could offer, but I couldn't honestly say that I had ever myself been actively oppressed. Certainly no one had ever tried to stop me from getting an education or tried to herd me off to the singles ward—although I was fully aware they all saw me as a chubby, hopeless, old maid at the advanced age of twenty-two. But then, a few years later, against all apparent odds, I got married.

OVER THE YEARS my husband and I courted, I had many opportunities to help him learn about, puzzle over, dissect, and eventually embrace the gospel. He asked me all the tough questions, and I was as honest as I could possibly be in my answers, warts and all. The process of



Emily Summerhays and her husband, Zaur Isaakov

his conversion was as major an upheaval in my life as it was in his, for I had to try to see the gospel from the outside, from an entirely adult point of view, with all of its quirks and beauties. These gospel travails were as important to my spiritual and intellectual growth as my worldly travels had been, for they brought to me, as to him, that fresh perspective, that new chance, that eyes-wide-open approach.

As I had been with him through every step of his two-year-long independent investigation of the Church, so too I was present at his eventual missionary discussions, baptism, confirmation, and ordinations. From across the 2,000 miles that separated us while I finished graduate school in Salt Lake and he shopped for graduate programs in New York, I helped him through that first year of membership and all its attendant frustrations and blessings. At the end of that year, we went together to receive our endowments and be sealed in the two temples we had selected for those purposes while on one of our road trips into the Arizona desert (my Russian-born city boy had fallen as much in love with the American West as he had with me). We chose one old and one new: Timpanogos for its mountains and our shiny new endowments; St. George for its history, its quiet grace, and for its white plaster walls that are actually irreverent redrock. Much of the week of our wedding was spent on the road, hopping from temple to temple and from celebration to celebration, trailing friends and family behind us. The week after was spent trekking eastward across America to start our new life.

As happy as I am in my marriage, one of the most difficult postnuptial adjustments I had to make was regarding my treatment at church. It seemed that as soon as I was sealed, the leniency with which I had been dealt as a single sister was suddenly and oddly revoked. As I found myself part of the “in” crowd of Sisters Who Have Accomplished The Goal—Marriage (an accomplishment to which I had never aspired), I was no longer indulged as that slightly eccentric bluestocking spinster type but was expected to take my proper place within

the institution. That meant apparently that I was to speak mostly about how much I adored my husband (which I do) and hoped for babies (which I don't, quite). Any interests outside the home and hearth were supposed to be relegated to the pile of Things That Singles Do Because They Haven't Got Something Better To Do Like Raise A Family. When we moved into our ward in Brooklyn, New York, a place far away in almost every sense from Murray, Utah, I found that cultural correlation had beaten us there: I was asked to introduce us and how we met and say a bit about marriage. He was asked to speak on an actual gospel topic. No one could be bothered to remember my name (*my* name, not his), and no one considered our home to be *ours*—but *his*. Moreover, people seemed affronted if I even gently corrected

them on either point. My professional goals were now seen as at least slightly sinful, and my outspokenness raised more than a few eyebrows. And then, of course, began the endless insinuations that we ought to be breeding.

This was all surprising and jarring to me. For the first time in my life, I felt no support at all from the Church, in spite of all the work and hope I kept pouring into it, and very little friendship. I felt like the institution was trying to swallow me, and I had real trouble getting through to the gospel because of the interference of the Church. I often feel this way still.

However, while I still have many difficulties with the seeming lack of confidence in the Church regarding the abilities of women, and while I believe that women should have greater opportunities to lead and serve and stretch themselves, I have never had a personal wish for the priesthood. Maybe because I was so much a part of my husband's conversion, and maybe because he wasn't born into the idea of a presiding patriarchy, I feel like we truly co-preside in our home. I am thankful for his recognition that so much of what keeps women and men in the Church from reaching (and sometimes from even trying to reach) their full potential, individually and together, is cultural fear. Fear of not appearing to be what we ought to be. Fear of not appearing to feel what we apparently ought to feel. Fear of speaking up. Fear of sticking out. He and I stand together. And we stick (it) out.

As a modern Mormon woman, I have privileges and opportunities open to me that would probably never have seemed possible (if even desirable) to my pioneer ancestors, or even to women just a generation or two before me. I have Church-sanctioned (if not culturally approved) access to virtually every level of education in every possible field of study or employ. I have Church-sanctioned (if not culturally approved) control over my fertility. As the globe grows ever smaller around us, I have the resources to travel to other states and countries to see how the Church works there (or doesn't). Because of the Internet, I have instant access to all sorts of information on

Church doctrine and history—both the familiar and the unsettling—as well as the words of our prophets, both ancient and modern. As cyber-communities enlarge our tent in ways that even Isaiah may have never imagined, I have the opportunity to know people from all over the world or the next ward over, to discuss topics few of us dare broach in Sunday School, and to bear one another's burdens from across the miles. The globalization of Mormonism is increasingly rendering the Mormon culture of my childhood obsolete. The growing awareness of Mormonism as non-Utah-centric among the Mormon women of my acquaintance is forcing us all to look again at those individual parts of us that create our Mormon whole, and to reevaluate exactly what it is that makes us all—wildly different as we are—Mormon.

I'M STILL NOT sure, after all of this, that I know how to answer that long-ago game of percentages. I could still parse out the hours spent reading scriptures, serving in my callings, or sitting in Sunday School. I could even now add hours spent blogging on LDS topics, or explaining my kooky beliefs to my coworkers, or sitting up all night with friends or family discussing questions to which we can never know the answers. But it still doesn't seem quite right. I still can't separate family from Church, or nature from God, or opportunities from blessings. I still can't sever my life from its purpose or my goals from my guiding star. And really, I don't want to. Fraught with challenges as it is, Mormon is who I am, not what I do. You know: dyed in the wool, true blue, through and through—at all times, and in all things, and in all places. ☺

A LOVE STORY

by Kathryn Maughan



Kathryn Maughan has a B.A. from Columbia and an M.F.A. from NYU. She just published her first novel, Did I Expect Angels? (details available at KATHRYNMAUGHAN.COM.) She always changes the names in her nonfiction.

NOTE: This essay is the Third Place winner in the 2007 Eugene England Personal Essay contest.

I AM TEN YEARS OLD AND IN LOVE WITH RONNIE Gardener. He is popular, and I am not. He has blond hair and blue eyes. My blond hair has turned brownish, and my eyes aren't quite any real color. Not that you can tell, with my ugly pink glasses.

Ronnie and I have sat together in homeroom all year. He is funny and makes me laugh; he doesn't seem to mind the glasses. I can't wait until next year, when my parents have promised me contact lenses.

At a sleepover party, I tell all the popular girls of my crush on Ronnie. "I can't tell if he likes me or not," I say. Angie Rich

tells me she'll find out. Monday, at school, she doesn't ask him if he likes me; she asks him to "go" with me. He says yes, and we're a couple.

Our relationship really doesn't change; we don't hold hands, we don't walk together, we certainly don't kiss. But everyone knows we're an item, and that's all that matters. We continue laughing at Mr. Bateman in homeroom, and when the school year is over, we don't see each other at all. Chris Jacobs phones me in July telling me that Ronnie wants to break up. "Okay," I say, and my first romance is over. I'm glad I didn't buy him anything for his birthday.

I AM THIRTEEN years old and in love with John Tyson. We don't have any classes together, but I see him in the hallways and try to look as attractive as I can. I've said hello twice, and once he said it back. I have gotten rid of the hated glasses and bleached my hair blond with hydrogen peroxide. I have braces now, though, and still don't need the bra that I wear.

At the spring dance, I decide I will ask him to dance. I'm wearing a pink dress with big shoulder pads. The last song begins, and I still haven't gotten up my nerve, but then I notice him walking toward me. I demurely look away and don't look back until I notice him escorting Raelyn Meacham onto the dance floor. I end up crying later at the ABC Mandarin Restaurant.

I AM FOURTEEN now and have discovered Mark Hamer. He moved here over the summer and is wonderful. We are in choir and English together. He's not too bright, but he's funny. He goofs around in choir and makes the teacher mad, which I find beautiful. This is the first time I've been truly obsessed with anyone; I think of him all the time. My friend Gayle folds my notes into T-shirts and decorates them like his football jersey. This gives me butterflies. I lie to my older friends, telling them we are going together. They're not around; they don't know. He and I talk sometimes, but nothing more, and before long, Mark is going with Jaimee Creager and they're spending lunch hours naming their children. Jaimee has a huge chest, and I'm still stuffing my bra.

TENTH GRADE ARRIVES, and I go to high school. I get onto the staff of the school paper and quickly realize what an idiot they have for an editor: Bob Laurel. He can't spell, has poor grammar, and zero writing talent. Bob has no idea what I think of his paper, and I don't tell him.

I become friends with Lisa Taylor, who tells me that she is in love with Bob. I find the idea repulsive for a while. Bob likes to think he's dangerous. He swears. He's grown his hair long, loves heavy metal, and is making a big deal about quitting cigarettes. He's eighteen and tells us about what it's like to have sex.

Pretty soon he starts giving Lisa and me rides home, and we spend more and more time together. Maybe he's not so bad. Lisa and I compare notes about what he says to us. Bob decides he likes me better for a while; he starts hugging me a lot and pulling me aside to talk. First it's about the newspaper and

then about me. I am thrilled. One day after school, after I have returned from a vacation to San Francisco, we're alone in the newsroom. He hugs me and tells me how glad he is I'm back. Then he goes in for the kiss. Never having kissed anyone, I turn my head for a hug and his nose hits my right cheek. I feel his back stiffen, and I realize what he was trying to do. I rush out of the room in embarrassment. The next day his interests have shifted to Lisa Taylor.

DRAMA CAMP IS held in the summer between 11th and 12th grades. It's an overnighter, and only the advanced drama class is invited. We play all sorts of improv games during the day and take a hike. After the advisor has gone to bed, the girls sneak into the boys' dormitory. It is Utah, 1991, and the raciest thing we can think of is "Truth or Dare." I am a chicken and choose Truth every time; it soon comes out that I've never been kissed. They label me Virgin Lips, and I am incensed. Amy Porter leans over and asks if I'd like her to dare someone to kiss me. I'd secretly been hoping for that. Acting blasé, I say sure and tell her it must be Tommy Holmes. When she dares him, I can't quite read his expression. Excitement? Or is he upset? He walks over and kisses me. I am not impressed by the whole experience but nevertheless go home a changed woman.

MY SENIOR YEAR has arrived. I am seventeen and finally wear a real bra. I meet a sophomore boy, Derek Wesley, during rehearsals for the school musical. He's overly impressed with my singing, and my friends and I are overly impressed with him. Derek is fifteen and can't drive; I chauffeur him around a lot and am very pleased about it. I find myself more and more attracted to Derek, who is so nice and so smart and so generous. I try everything I can think of to get him interested in me: long talks, voice tutoring, school advice—but nothing works. He's not even jealous when I invent a boyfriend in Finland. Every time I see him I want to scream, "*Can't you see we'd be so perfect together?!*" I graduate from high school and for the first year afterward return to see him in the school plays.

AT EIGHTEEN, I move to New York to attend acting school. I am terribly homesick but can't turn back. My drama teachers tell me to lose weight and "do something" about my hair, but I don't. I am depressed and eat lots and lots of chocolate.

After a while, Jared Lopez begins calling me. I am now nineteen, and he is twenty-seven and works in a muffin shop. He prefaces every conversation with, "I'm not looking for anything more than friendship," which is fine. I have a crush on a law student named Greg. Jared invites me over to dinner a few times, and I go, and we have a good time. The last time, though, Jared puts on Kenny G and begins massaging my shoulders and whispering about the white sands of a Hawaiian beach. It is February, and it has stormed fifteen times that winter and I think I'll go mad if he doesn't shut up. Pretty soon he stops and says, "Can I ask you a question? It's kind of per-

sonal." I tell him I may not answer it, but he proceeds: "Would you mind if I kissed you?"

"Probably," I respond, not knowing what else to say. Jared apologizes profusely. I go home and never again return his phone calls.

I MEET ANDREW Baxter when I get sick with strep throat. My home teacher is out of town, so Andrew, the elders' quorum president, is dispatched instead to give me a blessing. He brings me chicken soup, which I find incredibly nice, not knowing it's a church assignment. He is eight years older than me (I'm twenty now), and his birthday is the day after mine. I decide it's fate. Andrew is an entomologist whose personality is not too far removed from the roaches he studies. This doesn't deter me, though. He lives on 80th Street, so I roam the west 80s for hours every week hoping to run into him. I wear earrings with bugs on them. I ask him to give my sister and me a tour of the Museum of Natural History, where he works; he gets us in for free and then tells me he has to go. I see him at parties and try to start conversations, but we never get much past "How are you doing?" "Fine." "Good." He begins dating someone else right about when I do. He gets engaged.

I MEET JEFFERY Walker a few weeks before I'm supposed to leave for a mission to Costa Rica. Everything is set; I am tidying up loose ends, selling furniture, turning over the lease. He and I attend a concert at the MoMA where the artists are literally plucking the piano strings. We are with a group, and we all head to a diner. I am in rare form, already feeling celibate and having decided I no longer care what men think of me. I tease and poke fun and tell Jeffery he's "Spider Man," though I don't know what that means. Jeffery follows me to my doorstep that night, a 49-block-walk, and we talk until 6 a.m. Specifically, *he* talks until 6 a.m.—all about himself. I check my watch every ten minutes, but he just won't stop. The evening ends with him saying, "And you're going on a mission. Bummer." I smile and go inside.

He begins calling, and since I'm not doing anything else, I go out with him. He won't shut up from the moment the date begins to its end. When we're on the phone, my roommates ask me if I'm on hold. Within three dates, he's kissed me—my first real kiss. It's slightly better than with Tommy, but I feel the same emotional connection. Three more dates and he's proposing marriage. I desperately look forward to September 20, the date of my flight home before I enter the MTC; Jeffery is equally desperate to keep me there. I can't say a flat-out no, so I hide behind my mission call. He tells me of everything we'll do when I return, of our Italian honeymoon.

We write for four months; after that, he begins dating again, and I hear of his engagement through a friend.

I AM TWENTY-NINE, in graduate school, and desperate to succeed. I become equally desperate when I meet Richard Pinehurst, a science professor at my school. We have great conversations, we laugh a lot, we can finish each other's sen-

tences. He's brilliant and funny, two key attractions. I tell myself that the fact he's single, Mormon, and my age has nothing to do with it. He asks me on one date; I get brave and reciprocate, asking him on another. I have him over for group dinners and, since I'm now always in his neighborhood, start phoning to see if he wants to go for cupcakes and the like. I feel us getting closer, and for the first time in many years, hopeful. We click, don't we? We have a great time together, right? I think we do. So really, what could stand in the way? "Spark," I am informed. "No spark" gets in the way. He thinks I'm great in every way but that. No spark—and that's the final word.

As I cry over him, night after night, two other men start phoning: Ted and Jason. They are also single, Mormon, and my age, but after I go out with each one once, I find myself fending them off. They like to phone often, just to talk . . . about nothing. I'm in grad school and don't have the time; but the more we talk, I realize I could be out of school, out of work, on Thanksgiving break and watching a marathon of *The Jeffersons*, and I *still* wouldn't have the time. I suddenly realize what Richard was talking about. With these two other men, there's simply no spark—and that's the final word. ☞

EPILOGUE

Ronnie Gardener fathered three illegitimate children. He and their mother married and divorced between each one.

John Tyson trained as a chef in Seattle and now works on "various vessels" at sea. That's a euphemism for "no steady gig."

Mark Hamer, also the father of a few bastard children, lives on welfare in a small house with a new wife. He spends his days drinking beer and watching TV. Mark still tells anyone who will listen of his glory days with junior high school football.

Bob Laurel and Lisa Taylor got married.

Tommy Holmes has become a repeat sex offender.

Derek Wesley is gay.

Jared Lopez is married with two children. He has his own muffin shop now.

Andrew Baxter teaches entomology in Utah. He broke up with that fiancée but found another. His personality has not improved.

Jeffery Walker and his wife went to Italy on their honeymoon. Three years later, she had an affair, got pregnant, and left him. He immediately remarried. Rumor has it he still won't shut up.

Richard Pinehurst married a woman with whom he feels a "spark."

Ted and Jason are still on their dating-and-phoning-women quest.

I am thirty-three now, and I feel lonely sometimes.

REAL ANSWERS

by Tracy Leigh Mullett



TRACY LEIGH MULLETT is a stay-at-home mom who also runs a design company from her home. She and her husband and three children live in eastern Washington. Tracy is a permablogger at both *By Common Consent* and *Mormon Mommy Wars*.

THE LITTLE GLASS JESUS LAY ON HIS BED OF ceramic straw. My six-year-old hands were shaking as I pulled my rocking chair even with the small crèche. I wondered if I were doing it right—and after a furtive look to make sure my family was occupied, I bowed my head and began the first prayer of my life. Unsure of what to say, but feeling a desperate need anyway, I poured my heart out to the little glass Jesus. The words of that prayer are long lost, but the recollection, the certainty, that someone was listening and wanted to hear me, set me on my way.

MY PATH TO the Church has been a long and winding one. Dancing in and out of the light like a moth, I have come near, and I have fallen far.

The mustard seed of my faith grew in a tangled mess as I tried to figure out who God was—or if he was even real, and I was constantly at intellectual odds with my atheist family. They made good arguments. The logic was hard to reason with, and having no concrete example to follow, I wandered.

During my school years, I would attend church with any friend who offered. By the time senior high rolled around, I had been to Hebrew school, to a Bat and Bar Mitzvah, to Hindu rites, to an LDS chapel, and to Catholic catechism class. Sitting at my parents' dining-room table, I took the missionary discussions in high school, but when the missionaries told me that dinosaurs were made up of pieces from other planets, the scientific influence of my family won out and I never asked them back.

In college, I fell in love with academics and philosophy—and thinking I knew everything, my modern logical arrogance left little room for God. Yet the aching desire for something more, something intangible, soon returned. Looking for answers, I began exploring more esoteric practices.

Books about the Rosicrucians, Buddhism, the Gnostics, Hinduism, Native American practices, and Wicca stacked up on my nightstand. Visitors to my home would gasp at some of the titles—the *Satanic Bible*, *When God was a Woman*, and *Modern Witchcraft*—stacked right next to my ragged, high-lighted NIV bible. I went to Wiccan rites, to pow-wows, and to a friend's charismatic Christian church. I took part in things that frightened me—flirting with darkness did not bring peace. As much as I looked, answers eluded my grasp—but I clung to the wispy childhood memory of someone wanting to hear from me, someone caring and waiting for me to call.

I got mad at God. I raged and fought—sometimes pleading, sometimes cursing him for not answering my cries. I wondered if he were even real, or if, like my intellectual family and friends believed, he was just an opiate for the masses, a crutch for weak people, a primitive holdover that could simply not stand up in the light of reason and science.

WHEN I GOT married, my husband was a practicing Buddhist and had been for well over a decade. We had a non-denominational ceremony presided over by a woman minister, wrote our own vows, and went our merry way. But my searching never stopped.

It wasn't until the birth of my first child that the Lord answered my prayers in a way I was ready to recognize. When that baby slid from my body, it wasn't just the gift of motherhood I received, it was the gift of faith. When the doctor laid my tiny, wet baby on my chest, I knew, knew with a certainty I had never imagined, that God was real.

This left me with a quandary: what to do now? Now God was real, but I still did not know what that meant. My husband and I agreed to try to give our children some bricks of faith, things we had lacked, in hope they would be spared some of our own trials. Maybe, if we taught them what we knew, they would have an easier time building their own foundations.

My oldest son was eight months old when I stepped into our local LDS chapel. It was a fast and testimony meeting. I knew no one and spoke to no one. Sitting in the back with a squirmy baby, having scores of churches and services and years of experiences under my belt, I was slowly stunned by what I heard in that humble, austere, unpretentious chapel. Young people, children the age I had been, stood up, and with knowledge I had yearned for, spoke with certainty of deeply spiritual experiences. I didn't know what to call it, but I knew it was the most real thing I had ever heard.

Less than three months later, I was baptized. I was kind of annoyed that I had to take the missionary discussions; my life experience trumped just about everything: I knew what I was looking for and I had found it; let's get on with it. While my husband was not interested in joining, he was wholly supportive and delighted in my happiness.

That was five years ago next month.

The road has been rocky; my extended family has deep problems with my faith; at one point, my mother stated that I could not be both Mormon and her daughter. Ironically, that clarified my life in one step.

And thus I find myself an LDS woman.

THE SHARP WHIZ and crack of a can of cola popping open breaks my reverie. The kids still dream up in their rooms, as my husband plants a drowsy kiss on my cheek, then plops down in his great-grandmother's rocker next to my desk. Caffeine and the Word of Wisdom is still something we're working out—the coffee pot has been long retired, and my tea cup, sitting here steaming, is full of orange and cinnamon instead of Earl Grey.

We're still working out a lot of things. Joining the Latter-day Saints is not like joining any other church. In most of the churches I explored, the commitment when one joins was minimal: show up, and you're good. Lifestyles did not have to be altered much—one could still live as one chose all week—God was a modern God, and he understood the pressures of modern living. The commandments were suggestions, and we might do well to follow them—but archaic rules such as not taking the Lord's name in vein, paying tithing, and being faithful and honest in one's dealings were quaint relics. Nice in idea, but impractical for modern membership. It was all very convenient.

Becoming a Mormon is anything but convenient. Clothing had to be culled and revamped. While the number of kitchen appliances shrank, our pantry grew exponentially—filling with #10 cans and cookbooks on how to use their contents. Free and easy weekends were gone as we learned how to cram everything into Saturday so we could spend most of Sunday at church. Our boys were introduced to shirts and clippie-ties and the odd idea of sitting still for more than an hour.

The way we spoke, the way we started and ended our days, the way we budgeted and spent our money, where our entertainment dollars went, and what we did on Monday nights—all changed. Even how we interacted with our extended families had to change.

Of course not all of this happened at once—but we, even my thus-far-non-member husband—knew this was no light commitment. My family, in particular, did not, and still does not, understand.

We make concessions. It is doubtful my relationship with my mother will ever be completely repaired in this life. Ironic, since family is so very important to the LDS faith, that my own nearly disowned me. We patch things together, avoid many subjects, and I try not to take it too personally when I'm accused of losing my mind, giving up my individuality, and brainwashing my three children.

Two years ago, my husband decided he had seen enough good come from this struggle I had embarked on alone, and he joined me in the waters of baptism. We didn't tell our families—just had a quiet ceremony with only three friends and our bishop in attendance.

PERHAPS THERE IS benefit in the years I spent in the dark, yearning, searching, and waiting for God to answer my prayers. While people undergoing persecution for the Church is historically nothing new, it is new for *me*. I did not grow up cutting my teeth on the Mormon folktales and history of sacrifice, service, and exodus. It is very personal indeed when I must jeopardize a relationship with my mother and siblings in order to love the Lord as I understand him.

It is a sacrifice I make willingly.

When I hear talk and read words of people dissatisfied with the Church, it baffles me—but at the same time, I understand. Faith is not a fragile teacup to be handled with kid-gloves; you have to test this thing, make sure it's real and can stand up to some scrutiny. You can put the teacup of Faith down, you can

drop it on concrete, but trust me when I say—you cannot break it. You can walk away. You can ignore it. You can forget about it, let it collect dust—but you can never break it.

In my somewhat unique perspective, formed delving into so many other faiths, one thing I learned is this: God can take it. He can take the testing. He can take the doubts, the questions, the searching. He can take my anger, my rage, my disillusionment. He can handle it all—and he loves me anyway. I don't have to tiptoe around God. I cannot hide from the Lord.

In joining this church, I wasn't just joining an organization. I was aligning myself with what I understood to be God. This is a church of ongoing revelation, a church of open canon, and we understand that all is not yet revealed. This is a fundamental tenet of our faith: there is more to come; we don't have all the answers; we are fallible. It's some of these very acknowledgments that made the Church a safe place for me to land.

Recently, I read an article in which the author was very upset with some of the patriarchal structures of the Church. She went so far as to assume, in print, that if the female readers did not agree with her conclusions, it must be because they were ill-informed or repressed by the patriarchy. This is an attitude I have come across again and again in writings critical of Church structures. I simply cannot relate. It is offensive and repressive for someone to tell me I am too ignorant to see my own chains. It is possible to be articulate, to be educated, to be a woman, and to have a difference of opinion.

I chose to be a part of this organization. I chose to go against everything familiar and retool my whole life. Spending almost my entire adult life and all of my childhood without the light of the Gospel, I know truth when I see it. Like a person who has been in the dark too long, my eyes and heart are highly sensitized to light. And this Church, human foibles aside, is where it is.

I find my testimony, though still not as vast and all-encompassing as that of some Saints, is indeed deep. The minutiae of Mormon life does not worry me nor cause me pause—I don't care if there are inconsistencies, glitches in history, imperfections, or living rooms full of kitschy art. What I do know is this: The Lord expects me to figure things out for myself. Studying, praying and listening for the whisperings of his spirit will never lead me wrong.

My faith is still an imperfect animal; it wavers, it surges, it



In a self-described “very Mormon” moment, Tracy Leigh Mullet with her two boys and their friends gather apples for making applesauce.

crests, and it subsides like the tide. But I stay with it, because time has shown me that changes are the norm—change is the constant, and that is part of being here on earth. The thing is, the roots of my little mustard seed, since they have grown on a moving, tumultuous vessel, are flexible and very strong.

It is important to remember, when testing faith, that our church is an evolving thing—that there are answers still to come; that we are a church run by humans, however noble and good, with human frailties and failings. As we teach our children, we too must remember, only Jesus Christ was perfect.

Just as parents cannot give their testimonies to their children, I cannot convince anyone of what I know—but it is the truth, nonetheless. The Gospel of Christ is perfection. The open canon, the modern revelation, the living apostles and prophet—these are all gifts of God.

A FEW YEARS ago, I found a small antique Italian crèche exactly matching the one from my childhood. Each Christmas, I carefully unwrap the small figures and place them in their lichen-covered wood barn, and I tell my children the story of the nativity. They know the names, the faces, and the story of each little figure, and I find myself profoundly grateful that I have real answers to give my children.

It is my prayer that it will always be so.



SEARCHING FOR THE MOTHER GODDESS

by Caroline Tung Richmond



CAROLINE TUNG RICHMOND, a 2005 BYU graduate in history, is a freelance writer living in North Carolina. She has her own blog, "Adventures in Space" (CAROLINEINSPACE.BLOGSPOT.COM).

WHEN I WAS IN SIXTH GRADE, MY TEACHER assigned my class a colorful book on Greek mythology. The book was filled with simple retellings of Classical myths and legends. Its pages burst with vibrant drawings of the great gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus and the poor unassuming humans with whom they meddled.

One of my favorite stories was about Eos, the rosy goddess of the dawn who fell in love with the prince of Troy. Eos begged Zeus to bestow her mortal lover with eternal life—which Zeus grudgingly granted—but unfortunately Eos forgot to ask for her prince to have eternal youth. And so decades passed, and the prince aged into an old wrinkly man, yet he could not die. Eventually he shrank and shrank and shrank until he became a little brown cricket.

In school, I often daydreamed about becoming a goddess. I wanted to be beautiful like Aphrodite and mighty like Hera. I wanted to stare down at the Earth from my heavenly perch in the sky just as Eos did. But I was raised a good Pentecostal girl in a good Pentecostal church. The Bible stories I heard in Sunday School never mentioned the existence of a goddess—only a male deity and male prophets. My church leaders regarded the notion of a feminine divine as blasphemous. They believed God was our Father and thus inherently masculine. In their view of the cosmos, there was no room for a goddess.

When I was twelve, a pair of Mormon missionaries knocked on our front door. My mother welcomed the duo into our home and asked them to share their message with us. I wasn't sure why she invited them in. We already belonged to a church, and we had heard strange things about Mormonism. But my mother liked to have company over, and I suppose the two Mormon boys looked nice enough. The missionaries sat down on our living room sofa and taught my family about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. After their lesson ended, I went to my room and rolled my eyes. Those Mormons believed in some weird teachings.

Not too long later, my mother and little brother agreed to be baptized. My father, ever the atheist, politely declined. I refused baptism too at first. I doggedly clung to my Evangelical roots—not necessarily because I believed in those teachings, but because I was a stubborn teenager. Yet there was some-

thing about the Mormons that I liked. They were very kind to me when I visited their church, and I actually enjoyed attending their services. And even though I thought the Book of Mormon was a little strange, I felt good when I read it. A year and a half after the missionaries knocked on my family's door, I became a Mormon, too.

IT WASN'T TOO hard to adjust to my new religion. I was thirteen when I converted, and so my ideas on spirituality and theology were still nascent. My favorite part of my new church was Young Women, which was held in a bright, sun-filled room on the west wing of our chapel. Every Sunday afternoon, my teachers welcomed all the girls and led us in soft prayer. They always greeted me with a grin and asked how I was doing in school.

One Sunday in Mia Maids, we had a lesson on the importance of families. I had zoned out midway through the session (most likely daydreaming about my latest school crush), but then an unfamiliar phrase snapped me back into the room:

"And we have a Mother in Heaven just as we have a Heavenly Father," my teacher said pleasantly.

I blinked hard. A Heavenly Mother? What was that? I had never heard the term before. Was my teacher referring to a goddess? I turned my head to see if anyone else in the room was perplexed by this reference, but all of the other girls looked perfectly nonplussed, as if this was something they had learned about before.

At first, the phrase seemed blasphemous to me. The reverend at my old church would never have allowed such words to be spoken. Yet in this Mormon classroom, the mention of a goddess—a real goddess—didn't even draw a blink of an eye. I was too shy at the time to ask for further clarification, but the words spoken in class remained with me: Heavenly Mother. Heavenly Mother. I have a Heavenly Mother.

I yearned to learn more about my Mother in Heaven, but she was seldom discussed at ward meetings. On rare occasions, I would hear her name in class or quiet conversation after church, but she was never mentioned in the *New Era* or *Ensign*. My friendly Young Women leaders were unable to shed any light on the topic either. When I asked them about Heavenly Mother, they smiled and briefly stated how the divine feminine was too sacred to discuss at length.

To my mind, it seemed almost unfair to learn of Heavenly Mother's existence but to know so little else. I had countless questions that no one had responses for. What did she look like? What did she do every day? Why didn't we know more about her?

Without any guidance from my church leaders, I was left with only my imagination to discover my Mother in Heaven. Sometimes in school I daydreamed about her, cobbling her visage from what the Greeks had taught me. I envisioned her to be wise like great Athena who ruled over the realm of philosophy, and kindhearted like Vesta who tended the great hearth on Mount Olympus. She was beautiful too—but in an earthy sort of way. White flowers floated through her hair, and soft dirt decorated the soles of her feet. Her quiet eyes, each

the color of water, would stare down at me from heaven or Kolob or wherever she resided.

YET MY THOUGHTS on Heavenly Mother waned as I grew older. While the Greeks offered a rich narrative of the goddesses they worshipped, the LDS view of the female divine was as blank as a white sheet of paper. By the time I reached high school, my fascination with mythology had faded away as I settled into Mormonism. The divine feminine merely became another term in my religious vocabulary alongside the “golden plates” and “modern-day revelation.” Even when I attended BYU, the topic of Heavenly Mother rarely crossed my mind. My life became engrossed in homework and graduate school applications, leaving me little time to ponder the mysteries of the elusive Mormon goddess.

My interest in Heavenly Mother was rekindled only after I got married. Suddenly I was plunged into a new role as a wife and even given a new name, (Sister Richmond) at church on Sundays. Adjusting to married life was pretty easy for me, but I had a harder time adjusting to what it meant to be a wife—and a future mother—on a spiritual level. I wondered if I could balance my feminism with what I saw as the “good Mormon housewife.” I wondered why women could not hold the priesthood and why my husband was advised to preside in our home. And I questioned my place as a woman in the hereafter: what exactly would I be doing in the millennia to come?

As I tried to navigate the Church as a newly-married woman, I hungered to learn more about my Mother in Heaven. The questions I had asked in middle school began to resurface in my mind. Who is Heavenly Mother? What role does she play in the world around me? What role does she play in the eternities? I hoped the answers to these queries would help me wade through my confusion. If I could learn more about Heavenly Mother, then perhaps I could better comprehend my own role as a Mormon woman. Knowing more about her would help me to understand who I should strive to be and, eventually, who I can *become*.

At times, I wonder if Heavenly Mother wants to reach out to me just as much as I want to reach out to her. I can almost see her at the great veil of separation, pounding her smooth fists

against the barrier that separates her from her offspring. And I want to beat my fists in return, clamoring for a connection—any connection—with a Mother that I once knew. But for reasons unknown to me, she remains mysterious and intangible in my life. Once again I am left with only my imagination to ponder her whereabouts and responsibilities.

When I long for Heavenly Mother the most, I like to turn to the hymn “Oh My Father” by Eliza R. Snow. The words in the third verse have always brought me comfort and renewed in me a sense of wonder:

*In the heavens are parents single?
No, the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I've a mother there.*

After reading these lines, I often think about my thirteen year-old self and the moment when I first learned about the exist-



High school junior Caroline Tung (left) and two friends at the “New Beginnings” Young Women’s program the three helped organize.

tence of a Mother in Heaven. The words had been so magical to me back then. They had brought me so much hope. I had grown up in a world where goddesses existed only in the realm of Greek mythology, yet my journey into Mormonism has shown me that Heavenly Mother does indeed exist. That in the heavens, parents are never single.

For now I have decided that I must be grateful for this simple piece of knowledge. I may know little about the divine feminine—but at least I know of her existence. If truths are indeed eternal, then one day I will see my Heavenly Mother again and she will answer all of the questions I have held inside of me since middle school. Until then I must wait, albeit impatiently. And until then, I must define my own place in Mormonism without the insight of my Mother. ☺

A WOMAN IN GHANA

by Tara Babbel Haglund



TARA BABEL HAGLUND, a 1999 graduate of Wellesley College and a returned missionary from Brazil, recently returned from living in Ghana for two years with her family while her husband, Evan, worked at the U.S. Embassy in Accra. She is the mother of 2.5 children three years of age and under, and is looking

forward to their family's next state department assignment in Slovenia.

The prophecies of the holy prophets . . . leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them.
—HELAMAN 15:7

BEAUTY, AN APTLY NAMED NIGERIAN-BORN resident of Ghana, rises with the roosters every morning to get the kids off to school and go to work. Beauty's husband, Givern, usually rises even earlier to fetch water for the family. The Annan family's neighborhood, Osu, a section of the capital city Accra, has tap water only during the rainy season. There are designated pumps in the neighborhood where water is available year-round and residents pay the equivalent of 10 cents U.S. for a bucket of water. Givern usually leaves the house by 3:30 a.m. to avoid the long lines that start around 4:30. He walks the half mile with a wheelbarrow full of plastic, four-gallon jerrycans of water, which is the masculine way of carrying water. (Women carry the buckets or jerrycans on their heads.) Beauty's friends all wonder how she got so lucky to have a husband who helps with the water. Everyone knows that carrying water is women's work.

Beauty was baptized three years ago with her two older children and her husband, following a civil marriage to legitimize the twelve previous years of "traditional marriage." Almost immediately she was called to be a counselor in the ward's Young Women presidency. After two years, she was sealed to her family in the Accra temple, one mile from her home. She was recently called as Young Women president in her ward with forty active young women.

Formerly a seamstress in Nigeria, Beauty sought better work in the emerging prosperity of peaceful Ghana. She finally landed a government job at Ghana's top military hospital as a receptionist in the air-conditioned VIP wing. The only frustration with the government job was that her first paycheck didn't come until six months after she started the fifty-hour-per-week shift-work job.

Givern makes about \$60 per month as a driver for an Indian businessman, which barely pays the school fees for their four kids and an abandoned child they've taken in. Beauty's hospital income, also about \$60 per month, covers water, food, and rent.

The Annan family lives in a one-bedroom home in a family compound. They recently upgraded from a 150-square-foot house to this 250-square-foot home that has an outdoor covered food preparation area and an indoor toilet.

When Beauty was called as ward Young Women president, she was a little overwhelmed. The church building is a half-hour walk away, easily reachable by taxi for \$1 or by two minibuses for fifty cents—but such indulgences would overwhelm the family budget. The extra time commitment of meetings and greater responsibility threatened to swamp her already harried life. She smiled, rewrapped her wrapper (the African version of girding up one's loins), and resolved to do her best, although she was clear with the bishop and everyone else that she reserved the right to quit if things didn't work out.

Beauty is blossoming in her new responsibility. Formerly reserved and reticent to share her opinions with men, she loves going to ward council and contributing. She's learned to be confident and poised as she conducts Young Women meetings and presidency meetings. The structure of the calling has helped her understand how to plan and then execute these plans. The calling as a Young Women president has given Beauty freedoms never known before—the freedom of her own domain and the freedom to do her best, unimpeded by societal gender expectations.

Beauty is not a typical member of the Relief Society in Ghana—she is better educated, more fully employed, literate, and has a stable family. These are luxuries that few Ghanaian women know.

I WENT TO Relief Society in Ghana only a few times before I volunteered to be the nursery leader. My son was almost eighteen months when I heard through the expatriate grapevine that the nursery leader beat children who didn't sing or were otherwise non-compliant. When I considered the likelihood of my son receiving a regular beating together with the potential danger of a snack of unknown origin, I ran to the bishop's office and had my desired calling one week later. I retained the calling for the rest of my two years in Ghana.

One of the few Relief Society lessons I did attend helped me understand Ghanaian women and society from a new perspective. We had a standard lesson on forgiveness, with minimal class participation from the forty-five sisters. The teacher was a beautiful, poised, and intelligent young woman who obviously had prepared well for the lesson. She concluded with a remark about the importance of forgetting the sin after it has been forgiven. A wrinkled old woman in the back row raised her hand and asked, "But how am I supposed to forget when he left marks all over my body?" The well-dressed, wealthy Relief Society president jumped in and added, "Yes, I see them every day—how can I forget something so terrible?" She began to raise her blouse to show the marks of domestic abuse. Almost as if with one voice, other women in the room began clamoring, "Yes, I have marks too," lifting their dresses and skirts and blouses to show their scars, some quite fresh. I sat, horrified and silent, listening to all the women talking at once about their abusers—their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, or

brothers. The teacher never regained control of the class. She loudly reiterated that we need to work hard to forgive and pray very hard to forget, and sat down. We sang “Love at Home” as our closing song.

Down the hall, the Young Women’s president sobbed silently as she noticed evidence of beatings on some of the young women’s bodies. In another room, the Primary, full of scarred and bruised children, was singing “Families Can Be Together Forever.”

Stunned by my experience in Relief Society, I asked my cook and nanny, Evelyn, if what I’d heard was true. She laughed at my naiveté. “Everyone beats everyone in this place,” she chided. She told about the many beatings she’d received at school: because she hadn’t completed her homework; because she was late to school (while helping to feed, dress, and drop off her three younger brothers at their schools—and sometimes needing to administer a caning to a non-compliant brother herself); because she hadn’t gone to the school’s church service on Sunday (opting instead for the LDS service); because her shoes had broken and she’d worn flip-flops (schools require closed-toed shoes with the uniforms); or because she hadn’t gotten the correct answer to a question. The teachers at the schools keep one working cane and one back-up (in case the first breaks) at the ready to flog the students. Evelyn had seen her dad beat her mom countless times, and had been on the receiving end of both her father and her mother’s wrath more times than she could remember. She was very happy that neither of them had caned her since she returned from her LDS mission to Lagos, Nigeria.

Beauty, then my visiting teacher, also laughed at me. “It’s our way of life,” was her response. Beauty used to endure beatings, and she, in turn, kept her children on their toes with frequent canings, like every Ghanaian mother. She decided to spare the rod after learning at church that children thrive when they feel safe and loved. Her husband stopped beating her soon after they joined the Church. Beauty said that you can tell who at church has stopped beating their kids, because the flogging-free kids are the uncontrollable ones.



(Left) Beauty Annan on the evening she taught Young Women’s personal progress goals to adult leaders. (Above) Tara’s mother and son with Ghanaian women and a boy across the street from Beauty’s home.

IN A SOCIETY where men run every institution, make every decision, and treat the women (who do most of the work) very poorly, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a beacon for women’s rights. Women whose husbands are good members of the Church are envied in their neighborhoods; their husbands are taught that women are their equals, and that spouses and children should not be whipped, caned, beaten, kicked, or otherwise abused. These men are instructed to counsel with their wives and to make financial and other decisions together. Persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, and meekness are taught as the keys to human and family relations. A generation of LDS women in Ghana is learning that Heavenly Father loves them and that they need to hear from their husbands only when their husbands are following God. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” offers LDS Ghanaian women an ideal for family life very different from the realities that many have experienced or witnessed around them. Women and men in the Church are actively working toward that ideal. Visible, palpable changes can be seen in the quality of marriages among Church members.

With new perspective, I think of Alma and Samuel the Lamanite’s reflections on the “traditions of their fathers” and rejoice with my friend Beauty, a woman “firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing wherewith [she has] been made free” (Helaman 15:8). 

BLOGGERNACLE VOICES—THE “SINGING MOTHERS (and Wailing Toddlers, Serious Christians, Brilliant Scholars, Single Romantics, Fashion Mavens, Grumpy Moms, and Assorted Poets and Pundits) CHORUS”

Weblogs, or “blogs,” are websites where entries (called “posts”) are published in chronological or reverse chronological order, a bit like a journal. Unlike a journal, however, blogs can allow readers to comment on the posts, and communities of commenters spring up on popular blogs. There are blogs devoted to every conceivable topic, and it is estimated that there are more than 100 million blogs in the “blogosphere.”

The Mormon corner of the blogosphere, often called “the bloggernacle” is full of women engaged in what was once considered part of the feminist project—taking their own lives and thoughts

seriously and expecting others to do the same. If the personal is in any way political, these writings constitute a veritable revolution. Hundreds of Mormon women, able to easily publish their thoughts via the Internet, are talking, arguing, connecting, sharing their thoughts and the details of their lives. Stay-at-home moms, graduate students, world travelers, computer programmers, artists, novelists, entrepreneurs, medical residents—all make up an intricate polyphony with complex harmonies, dissonances, and resolutions.

—K.H.

THAT WE’RE “NOT FREAKS”

A conversation about the bloggernacle with Heather Oman, Janet Garrard-Willis, and Rory Swensen



HEATHER OMAN lives in Virginia with her husband, two children, a dog, and a snake. She has a master's degree in speech language pathology, and is a licensed speech therapist. She is the founder of Mormon Mommy Wars blog and is a member of the editorial board of Segullah Journal.

JANET GARRARD-WILLIS has an MA in literature from Saint Louis University where her Ph.D. is also forthcoming. She dabbles in a variety of subjects, hosts everything from bluegrass to punk on her iPod, loves to teach, cook, and spend time with her hubby and son.



RORY SWENSEN is a husband and a father of four. He is a technology and software manager, serves on the Sunstone board of directors, and writes for the Sunstone Blog.



The audio of the full interview is available for free download at SUNSTONEONLINE.COM/EXTRAS.

RORY: How did each of you first become involved in blogging?

HEATHER: My husband Nathan had been running his blog, Times and Seasons, and it had begun to become a sticky point in our marriage because he was spending so much time on the blog. So he would encourage me—“Well, why don't you blog?”—initially as sort of a way to get me off his back.

But I started my own blog for two reasons. Number one, a post on Times and Seasons about miscarriage had upset me, and I wanted to respond to it in more than just a comment. I wanted to have a forum where I could respond in my own way. The other reason was because being a stay-at-home mom was a big shift from what I had been doing. I had been working full-time as a speech language pathologist before I had my son, and suddenly I went from a forty-to-fifty-hour week to being home and in my house all day. I needed an outlet—a creative outlet of some kind. And I do like to write. I've always liked to write, and it was a way of expressing myself creatively that did not require leaving my house. That's where Mormon Mommy Wars came from.

RORY: Did you explore participating in other group blogs, or did you always just plan to create your own?

HEATHER: At the time, there actually were very few female Mormon group blogs. Feminist Mormon Housewives had not been going very long and did not have much momentum. It certainly didn't look anything like it looks now. Had there been one that was really going, I probably would have tried to participate.

Even today, there really aren't that many female group blogs in the bloggernacle compared to male group blogs. To be fair, the bigger blogs like Times and Seasons and By Common

Consent have incorporated more women and have made, I think, a definite effort to do that. But when they started, they were definitely dominated by male voices.

RORY: Janet, you come at blogging a little bit differently. You came in as a frequent commenter turned permablogger.

JANET: I actually started out as a pretty tentative commenter. I was doing a guest stint as a teacher at BYU for the summer, and one of my students said something to me like, “Yeah, I really like feminism, but it has no sense of humor.” So I was just googling Mormon feminist humor to find proof for her that not only could feminists be funny, but Mormon feminists were, of course, *especially* funny. And the first post that came up was Lisa’s now quite infamous Poop Chronicles. [Lisa is the founder of Feminist Mormon Housewives.]

HEATHER: The Poop Chronicles, yep.

JANET: I know some people are incredibly offended by the Poop Chronicles, but I literally laughed myself off my chair in my little BYU office. And at that time, I didn’t have children.

HEATHER: You will find it funnier in about six months.

JANET: (*Laughing*) Or more frightening. I’m not sure which.

HEATHER: You will find it funnier—give yourself some time. You have to laugh, or you will scream.

JANET: I ended up showing it to a couple of feminist professors at BYU, and I just kind of lurked [on Feminist Mormon Housewives] for a while. But it took me a couple months of reading before I ever commented, and then I very carefully worded my comment into the box and re-read it twelve times before I could hit “post.” And I was very nervous because even though I had already published in the print medium, to me this was somehow much more frightening. And the ironic thing is, I had no idea, even when I became a permablogger, how many people read Mormon blogs.

Then I started commenting a little more and a little more and a little more, and then [Feminist Mormon Housewives] asked me to guest post about six months after that, and I procrastinated and put them off for another six months because I was intimidated. . . . I know that sounds quite weak-spined for a feminist, but I think you’ll find with a lot of professionals that what you believe about other women you’re not always so good at applying to yourself. You might believe women are strong, but that doesn’t mean you believe *you* are. So they asked me to guest post, and then they asked me to stay, and I did. Still having no freaking clue how large it was.

HEATHER: Which is probably a good thing.

JANET: Oh yes. Fairly early on in my tenure, I did a post entitled, “The Bloggernacle Scares Me,” on this very topic. And then I asked people what sort of a rhetorical space is the bloggernacle? What purpose does it serve for you? Because I’d suddenly realized how big it was, and I was scared out of my mind. It was a great conversation, I think.

RORY: I read both of your blogs, and there does seem to be a difference between By Common Consent and Times and Seasons and the tone of your blogs.

JANET: Funnier?

RORY: Funnier, but they’re also much more personal. And, as a man, it really feels like I am almost prying in or spying on. . .

JANET: So it’s voyeuristic to you?

RORY: It is, in the sense that I see conversations I don’t normally see as a man. And it’s very interesting, and it’s pretty enlightening.

JANET: I wonder if that sense of voyeurism is why the snarkernacle likes to poke at us at FMH a lot. Perhaps it stems from the fact that they maybe feel like these are conversations men just should not hear, I don’t know. [The snarkernacle refers to a blog that specializes in sarcastic commentary about the bloggernacle.]

RORY: No, it’s much more of an enlightening. It’s an ability for me to see something that if perhaps I walked into a room where this conversation was happening, the conversation might not continue.



RORY: Moving on. Janet you talk about being nervous to post. There’s an interesting dynamic on the blogs in that it’s very easy to push “send,” and it’s very easy to actually create a blog, and I want to know what each of your vetting processes are. How do you determine what you’re going to post? What kind of editing do you do, and do you consider how somebody might react to this as you’re writing it? Or is it very much—as Lisa talks about—just a way for her to get her thoughts out there no matter what.

JANET: I can speak only from my own experience and can’t represent the rhetorical strategies of my colleagues, but I think you are right about some of Lisa’s posts. She will, in fact, sometimes precede a post with a title that includes the word “rant.” Which to me is a warning that this post is not representational of what she thinks every minute of her life, and that she’s trying to blow off some steam. I get quite defensive of her when people attack her when she already said she was venting.

For me, it depends on the topic. When I posted about peeing on pregnancy tests—no, I didn’t give that a lot of thought. I wrote it in five minutes and posted it because it was funny. But when I wrote about liminality—the experiences of liminality in the Church—yeah, I thought about it quite a lot. I tried to consider how people from the very orthodox side of the Church would view it and how people who feel quite disaffected or on the margins would feel, because I see the role I would like to play as a Latter-day Saint as a bridge. The cultural divide that has formed around a unified gospel of Jesus Christ really, really deeply pains me, and so with a post like that, I obsessively think about different ways to read something. But then, of course, basic linguistic theory is going to

tell you a signifier and a signified cannot mean the same thing to every person, so there's no way to anticipate response. But that's how I go about posting; it depends on the topic.

But comments are different. With comments, it's really easy to hit "send." Ten or eleven times since I've become a permablogger, I've taken advantage of my access to the edit function and gone in because I've felt I have been a bit too defensive or harsh—not because I felt like I was attacking, but because I realized that it might really appear that way to [the person I was addressing]. I have been described by an acquaintance as pathologically nice, so I try to be careful when I comment, but the chatter, the textual chatter, really is more like chatter. You know when you talk to somebody, what you say is gone once you say it. There's a memory of it, but it's not permanent; yet online your comments are permanent, and that is sometimes a little uncomfortable because what I say one moment, I don't necessarily believe five weeks later. So I guess the short answer is: I think quite a bit about the posts. For my comments, I think less but probably wish I thought more.

RORY: How about you, Heather? Do you worry about how you come across?

HEATHER: I do. I'm constantly stunned by the way somebody has taken what I have written. I wrote a post about anger management, and I thought very carefully about it, not wanting to come across as a crazy person but wanting to see if other people had similar experiences with losing their temper, or losing their cool, as a mom. You know: How do we control ourselves as mothers? How do we, in a sense, protect our kids from ourselves when we are out of control? What do we do to keep ourselves in control? Later, I ran across a link to that post, and everybody who was discussing my post on that forum made me sound crazy.

JANET: It was a great post. Such a necessary conversation.

HEATHER: So that's only one example, but many other times I've stumbled across another conversation about my blog and about me, about something that I have said, and I am stunned at how it was taken. So yeah, I do sometimes think about it. Like Janet said, I probably should think more about what I write. Oftentimes though, I'm writing just to be funny, and I'm not thinking very hard about that—I'm just writing a quick little funny thing, trying to make people laugh. I've talked to the other posters on Mommy Wars, and one of our goals is just to make people laugh and enjoy our experiences that otherwise would really make us cry.

I also think about my writing in the sense of, is this well written, is the language tight? Those kinds of things. There are times I have gone back and read posts and thought, "Oh my gosh, I could have edited that," or "Boy, that sentence is too wordy." And so I do try to keep up a certain quality of writing—*(Laughing)* I know that may surprise people who read the blog! I really respect people who can keep up very high quality writing on a blog because sometimes I'm just writing to get it done. So, yes, if I'm going to address an issue that I know is going to strike a chord with people, I do wonder

how people might take it, and I do try not to offend.

What Janet said about comments, though, is very, very appropriate. Posts aren't necessarily offensive to people; where people start to get offended or upset is in the comments. And, as Janet also said, it's easy to fire off something that you're thinking, just click that "send" button and jump into the fray. Then two days later you go back and scroll through the comments, and you think, "I can't believe I said that!" And: of course people are going to be offended by what I said; of course that sounds so awful. One problem with the conversations in the bloggernacle is that they happen very quickly, and if you take too much time to edit or think it through, you're going to miss out on the conversation. So you jump in, and you say what you want to say, and you send it off. And . . . you've offended somebody.

JANET: But, of course, to a degree it's good that we do that because women self-edit too much. I think it's good that we're honest. It's just so sad when what you say then gets significantly misread and you don't even realize it's been misread until twenty-five comments later.

HEATHER: Right. Another sort of limitation of the medium is that often things that would sound okay spoken, look awful in written form. Online, you form an idea of somebody that may or may not be what they are like in real life. There are all kinds of people on Times and Seasons who I really thought were unpleasant. But then I met them and got to know them, and then I read comments by them that beforehand would have sounded really offensive, but now that I know them, I think, "Oh well, he's just trying to approach it from this-and-this point of view." So that's one of the limitations of conversations in the bloggernacle. We don't know each other very well, and things that would sound okay if said out loud look awful on the screen.



RORY: There are a lot of informal posts that are just trying to be funny. But you also expose yourselves in very . . . uh, intimate, ways. I mean, Janet you've talked about infertility, and you share with people the frustrations and the processes but then also the celebrations and the birth announcement. And Heather, you too—you've posted about your very personal experiences. How do you both feel about opening yourself up in this way, because it is a very permanent and very broad medium, and a lot of people are going to be reading what you write?

JANET: I'm different from many women who blog, at least those I've spoken to at 'snackers and on the telephone. ["Snacker" is shorthand for "bloggersnacker," which is a blogger party.] A lot of them are introverts who find their only means of being extroverted through the computer. I'm pathologically extroverted. You say it takes a lot of courage to share. I don't know that I'm capable of doing anything but share.

I decided a long time ago that usually our virtues are also our vices, depending on what we do with them. And the fact



*Group photo from a Feminist Mormon Housewives “snacker” held in April, 2007.
Janet Garrard-Willis is sitting on the right end of the front row.*

that I’m extremely friendly and extremely open scares the pants off of a lot of people; but as a teacher, I continually have students who are terrified of my red-headed extroversion on the first day of class, and then a month later, they wind up bawling their eyes out in my office, unburdening themselves. So I think with my personality—this may sound really high-falutin’ and pretentious—I honestly believe that since I’m so comfortable being open with personal struggles that I have a responsibility to bring those struggles into a broader conversation.

The only brave part of doing that first post on infertility was that I was afraid of getting repetitions of the very few comments I’ve had through the years, of someone telling me that if I were only more righteous I could conceive a child. And none of that came. Generally, then, for me, sharing very personal things is not an issue of bravery; it’s personality combined with a sense that since most people might be uncomfortable talking about this and I’m not, I’m going to start the conversation because the conversation needs to be had.

HEATHER: I think one of the reasons people are drawn to Feminist Mormon Housewives or people come back to Mormon Mommy Wars is because they make a connection. When you’re putting yourself out there, it is a very private thing, like you say, and there are some private moments—but that is what makes the connection and what builds the com-

munity we’re talking about, this bloggernacle. If nobody pulled the curtain aside about what they were thinking, I’m not sure the community would be as strong as it is.

RORY: You bring up community. What does this community mean to you? It’s a creative outlet, you’ve talked about that, but talk about your blog, the commenters in the blogs you participate in, and the overall bloggernacle community.

JANET: May I share a vignette?

RORY: Absolutely

JANET: Two days ago, I received in the mail a baby gift from somebody I have never met. And this isn’t the only time. I’ve gotten maybe five baby gifts in the mail from people who have never seen me, and I am so deeply moved by these gestures. In this case, this is a man who had adopted his child after he and his wife had struggled with infertility, and reading about our adoption made him so happy he handmade me a baby gift.

When I first started doing this, I don’t know that I would have really said it was a community so much as a discussion forum. But it is a community to me because people genuinely care. They care that we have our son.

HEATHER: A friend from Times and Seasons was in town a year or so ago, and we had dinner with him, and he asked us how many friends we have made through the bloggernacle. And I

don't know that I could even have really counted. It is bizarre, I have to say, how this community is formed. It's completely bizarre, but nevertheless it's there.

JANET: People joke about how we can spend so much time on the computer with people we don't know. . .

HEATHER: Yeah, it's an addiction—we probably all need help.

JANET: Bloggers Anonymous.

HEATHER: But, yeah, the community is there.

RORY: Heather, you've been doing this just over two years now; Janet, almost two years. In that time, how has Mormon blogging changed, and what do you see for the future?

HEATHER: There are more Mormon blogs. I also find more women blogging. I have become aware of more solo female bloggers than I ever have before, which is nice to see. I think that initially Times and Seasons and By Common Consent sort of foresaw a revolution. But I don't know that the revolution has really come to pass.

So where is it going? I hope more people will engage in the conversation. But, in fact, it has become a less-intimate space. As you've mentioned, Janet, *a lot* of people read blogs. When I started mine, I felt like there were maybe fifty . . .

JANET: What exactly do you think the early bloggers thought would be the revolution?

HEATHER: The idea that massive changes could be made or that blogging would revolutionize, or at least have a significant impact on, Mormon studies. I don't know what kind of impact it has had, but I don't think it has been as significant as people may have thought in the early days of the medium.

JANET: Would you agree that it's democratized Mormon studies a bit though, because people who don't know Greek or Latin or anything about the stuff you're supposed to know to, say, write for FARMS or something, read Times and Seasons and comment and get treated with respect?

HEATHER: I think so. I think it certainly has made the conversation more accessible to people who probably wouldn't have had access to or even been aware of it. So, yeah, in that sense, I guess it has changed.

JANET: That's one of my favorite things actually. The blogs seem to really have democratized the ability of LDS people to look at scholarship in such a way that hopefully Mormon doctrine conversations in localized wards will perhaps have more nuance.

One of the things I've seen, which is both a blessing and a burden, at least with our blog, is that exponential growth becomes, at some point, unmanageable. There's no way we can read all the comments, and you want to get rid of the really, really, really nasty comments. We try to get them all, but when you have a thread with two hundred comments and seven threads going on at once, and half of us have new babies or jobs or whatever, it's really, really, really hard. So I think that blogging has become in some ways messier.

HEATHER: I'd agree with that.

JANET: Messier and, in that way, more representative of the world outside of the computer.

But as far as how I see blogging changing things, even though it might not be as revolutionary as some have wanted, I hear people saying stuff in Gospel Doctrine class every now and then that I don't think I would have heard five years ago.

As a feminist, I'm also very much invested in the idea of women feeling like they can openly share their stories without being shoved into a particular perspective of how Mormon women ought to be. And, of course, not all Mormon women are sweet, soft-spoken, overly fertile people with half a dozen children whose husbands make enough that the women don't have to work outside their homes. The idea of the stereotypical Mormon woman, I am convinced and have always been convinced, is a lie. There's no such thing as a stereotypical Mormon woman, and when you get women from all over the spectrum of the Mormon church—and I honestly believe that Heather's blog and ours get those—it's really easy to blast aside the assumption that there's something we should be, and that if we're not, we can't somehow still love Christ and be committed to the gospel. I



JEANNETTE ATWOOD

"A pair of keys was found in Relief Society. It has a key to a Ford, a house key . . . a gym pass . . . and what appears to be a miniature Chippendale!"

don't know that I'd call that a revolution, but if it's a revolution in one woman's life to realize that she's okay, that it's okay that she can't get pregnant, or that she's gotten pregnant so many times, or that she's working outside the home, or whatever—that's my kind of revolution.

We [at Feminist Mormon Housewives] get emails and comments, not infrequently, from people just thanking us and saying, "I never knew there was a place where I could safely talk about my doubts without having people assume that my doubts negate what I believe or what I hope to believe." And the more open they can become, even if it's anonymously online, the more open they'll be able to become in their wards. And the more open a ward becomes, the more you get true *communitas*, the more you really get the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more you get people who love each other, genuinely, rather than for some falsified image. And that is my kind of revolution.

RORY: We need to draw this conversation to a close, but before we do, I'd love you each to share your most cherished experience, or your favorite story, about your blogging. Perhaps you have already shared it.

JANET: When I announced that we were adopting our baby, Margaret Young, for whom I have immense respect and absolute admiration, added a comment saying that she couldn't imagine a better mother than me. And after so many years of not being able to have children and assuming that perhaps it was because I would suck as a mother, that comment sort of is, for me, the signifier of everything that happened afterwards: an outpouring of such amazing, authentic happiness from people who've never met me, like the people sending me baby gifts and playing with my baby at a snacker.

I know that's a very self-involved experience, but it's also to me a confirmation of my long-standing insistence that humans, though we all, of course, have darkness in us, are primarily made of light, that we're good. If you can care that genuinely about someone else's pain and the joy that they felt after pain, how bad can you possibly be? It's really blown me away, how kind people have been in the face of our story.

HEATHER: In addition to the kindness that Janet is talking about, I would have to say it's the friendships. It's the friendships that I have developed particularly with the bloggers at Mormon Mommy Wars. I shoot emails to them, I talk to them regularly, and I am just very touched by these relationships that we have forged, even though some of us have never actually met in person.

JANET: And everybody's so willing to help on whatever topic, even things that are so private. Everyone will just say, "Oh no, you're not a freak. Here's how I can help you." (*Laughing*) It's so kind.

HEATHER: (*Laughing*) Really! It's the validation of "not being a freak" that is the best part of blogging!

JANET: Don't we all just want to be validated as "non-freaks"? ☺

A BLOGGERNACLE SAMPLER

I Hope I Get to Keep My Scars

Originally titled, "Scars," the following is adapted from a 15 July 2007 post by QUIMBY at Feminist Mormon Housewives.

FROM an early age, we are taught that our physical imperfections will be removed when we are resurrected. Our scars will disappear, the hair will be returned to our heads, our eyesight will be made perfect, and our fillings will be made redundant.

How boring! I kind of hope it's not the whole truth.

Sure, I'd love to have perfect vision. I could live with a resurrection that included 20/20 eyesight and no more fillings in my teeth. And though I can't speak for him, I'm sure my dad would love to have a full head of hair. I don't doubt that there are people out there who dream of the day their legs and arms will be restored, and I can't begrudge them that. But I hope I get to keep my scars.

I love my scars. They remind me of some of the happiest moments in my life. They hold spiritual significance. They make me who I am.

By far my coolest scar—the scar that is always voted, hands-down, the winning scar in any scar competition I have ever been in—is on my thigh. I was born with hip dysplasia. I have a huge dimple on either side of my thigh from the traction. My hip dysplasia was treated by Shriners Hospital. Left untreated, I wouldn't have been able to walk without a noticeable limp. I love this scar. It is a constant reminder of the blessing of mobility. It is also a constant reminder of the kindness and charity of the Shriners.

Then there is the scar on my face. I have a vertical scar of about a centimetre just under my nose, on one of the ridges between the nose and the lips. It is the result of an accident I had when I was about three, when I fell out of a moving car. My mother raced me home, and my father and neighbor gave me a blessing. I healed with only this small scar to show for it. That blessing was the means by which the neighbor returned to full activity in the Church. I hope I never lose this scar. Every time I see it, I remember my mother's faith in the healing power of the priesthood. I remember my father's love for me and his constant priesthood worthiness. I remember that, sometimes, miracles happen.

Exactly 362 days ago, I received another scar when my child was delivered via Caesarean section. This scar runs almost the length of my abdomen, just below the bikini line. After three attempts at inducing, and two days of contractions that never quite turned into labor, my daughter's heartbeat started to fall. The doctors took me in for an emergency

Caesarean. For the rest of my life, I will have this thin purple line as a constant reminder of my child's birth. I love that line. I see it, and I think of the dedication and care of my medical team, who tried for so long to give me a natural childbirth. I see this scar, and I think of my daughter. I love that she has imprinted herself, not only on my heart, but also on my body.

When I'm resurrected, they can take my bad eyesight, my three fillings, and my excess flesh—but I hope I get to keep these scars.

How Far Do They Dangle?

Originally titled, "Modest about Modesty," the following is adapted from a 21 February 2007 post by COURTNEY K. at Segullah.

WHEN I moved into this ward, I had a neighbor tell me she thought I'd be the next Young Women's President. "No way," I countered, "I don't dress modestly enough."

To which she replied, "Then it's about time you start."

A year later, that calling came, and I thought I'd feel a massive spiritual attack to clean out my closet in preparation for a more reserved collection. Instead, I have felt somewhat of an undertaking to redefine LDS fashion. . . . And truth be told, this is a lonely calling in life. I get a lot of "What in Lucifer's House are you wearing, child?"

Ah, the fine art of dressing up for church. I'd like to think that I give it my full attention (it's a spiritual gift really). Before I head out the door, I look in the mirror and ask, "Is this lovely or is this sexy?" Because to me, that is the all-important difference. (But what do you do with those of us who feel that nothing is lovelier than feeling sexy? There, I said it.)

I had a remarkable experience at the Worldwide Leadership

Training a couple weeks ago. There was much to learn and insight given. But I will never forget the beautiful woman in the front row of Elder Holland's "class" who wore knee-high black boots, tights, and a short plaid skirt topped off with a black turtleneck. In all my life, I had never seen someone from Church headquarters in such a semi-hip outfit. It was as though the clouds had parted and the sun shone through. "There is room in this church for me and my knee-high boots!" I warmly proclaimed in my head.

I'd like to think that there is also room in this church for pencil skirts and converted kimono dresses matched with high heels. Ultra-feminine. I mean, if you are going to be a woman, why not go all-out? As someone who was raised in the heart of Mormondom, I have seen enough women hiding underneath floral tents, once claimed as dresses from the Dress Barn. Since when did modesty mean clothing lines of subtle deviations from men's clothing wear? Where in the handbook does it recommend jumpers?

How far do we go with modesty? Can we go too far? I mean some of us are one step away from wearing *hijab*. And part of me would like to teach the youth of the ward that feminine doesn't need to be hiding all the time. Don't we believe that a woman's body, though absolutely sacred, is also virtuous and of good report? Where is the marriage between celebrating a figure and using it for detrimental plots?

And most importantly, does "one pair of modest earrings" dangle? How far?

Pretty Special

Originally titled, "Looks Aren't Everything," the following is adapted from a 27 April 2007 post by REBECCA at Feminist Mormon Housewives.

I TELL my daughter every day how pretty or beautiful she is. I tell my sons how handsome they are. I also tell them all daily how smart/strong/brave/special they are.

This comment on a recent FMH thread got me thinking about this issue:

While dressing our daughter for church, I caught myself motivating her through promises of being "pretty." "Don't you want to wear a pretty dress?" "Let's do your hair and make it pretty." I only had to hear myself do that once or twice before I put a stop to that. I realize that my usage was probably innocent, but I have decided that being pretty will not be made into a virtue in our home.

I have thought about this quite a bit since having my daughter. And I've thought along similar lines. I'm aware of the possible effects of focusing just on a child's looks—looks aren't everything—but they are part of who you are and can affect how you view yourself.

For me I guess it goes back to being a child/teen. I remember my mum on occasion telling me I was pretty, but I



FROM ASHLEIGH BRILLIANT, "I FEEL MUCH BETTER NOW THAT I'VE GIVEN UP HOPE," 1983

was bullied from about age seven until I was seventeen. As part of that bullying, I was told repeatedly that I was ugly. As a consequence, I believed the constant negative reinforcement, and I have never felt pretty and still rarely do. That has always been extremely painful for me. I know that what I look like isn't all of who I am, but it is a part of me. Over the years, it has affected my confidence greatly.

My natural instinct is to not want my children to feel that same pain. I want to build them up instead of them feeling ripped down like I was. I want them to know their own worth—physically, mentally, and spiritually. I want them to know all the wonderful things about themselves.

Is telling a child that they're pretty/handsome detrimental in the long run? As long as this isn't the only positive reinforcement you give, isn't it OK? Or in a world which seems increasingly obsessed with how you look, is it sending the wrong message?

What's in a Name?

Originally titled, "Name Changing," the following is adapted from a 24 May 2005 post by ARTEMIS at Feminist Mormon Housewives.

MY feminism has mostly been evolving since college (BYU) although I remember that as a seven- to ten-year-old, I would periodically wonder why the scriptures mentioned all these promises to firstborn sons but not firstborn daughters (I'm one). So I guess it was probably only a matter of time before I became a full-fledged feminist. Now I name my cats after Egyptian goddesses. . . .

I think my family didn't realize the extent of my liberalism until I got married—and kept my name. I experimented with hyphenating, but it was a compromise nobody much liked, especially me. It didn't help that my husband's and my last names each have three syllables—talk about a mouthful! Anyway, my husband had a difficult time of it at first. He knew my feelings before the wedding, and while not the type to force any issue, he was somewhat disappointed for a while. I will say that for his sake, I did try to psych myself into the possibility of taking his name, but every time I did it, a deep inner sorrow would take over. Eventually I decided that I couldn't change my name because to do so would betray myself and I would resent "my" new name anyway, which seemed to defeat the purpose of the change in the first place.

My husband has since come around and now fully supports my decision. However, there has still been quite a bit of social pressure or non-acceptance of the practice. My husband has defended my decision several times when I was not around, including keeping after the ward clerks to make sure my name is printed correctly on the rolls, etc. . . . And my mom is on a perpetual campaign to get me to change my name, manifest in thank-you cards, checks, and letters in which she "fixes" my name for me. My husband (after he came around) once had a discussion with our bishop about the issue, and the bishop

said the Church has no policy regarding married women taking their husbands' names.

So my question to FMH is, how do you feel about this issue and its social repercussions? I am very happy with my decision, though I respect other women's decisions to do otherwise. My frustration is that there's such overwhelming social pressure within the Church to do something that has no doctrinal foundation . . . and is just based in tradition. It makes me want to print up Elder Scott's "tradition vs. gospel" talk from several conferences ago and somehow make everybody read it and leave me alone.

In case you're wondering, when we have kids, we're going to give them a first name, middle name, then my last name, then my husband's last name. Obviously that's a little longer than most, so for practicality's sake, the kids will go by first name and last-last name. I feel this is the best option as it reflects the heritage of both families.

A Unique and Valuable Perspective

Originally titled, "Being Single and Adult," the following is adapted from a 16 June 2006 post by LYNETTE at Zelophehad's Daughters.

I'VE been a legal adult for more than a decade now. However, as a single woman without children, in a church context, I often feel relegated to a kind of pre-adult status. Don't get me wrong: I'm perfectly willing to concede that there are quite likely unique life lessons and experiences involved in marriage and parenting that can't be gained elsewhere, and I'm not out to downplay the value of those things. Nonetheless, I'd like to find a way to talk about adulthood which didn't assume that it necessarily included those elements.

The thing is, I don't see myself as being in some preparatory, not-yet-real phase of life where I'm simply passing the time while awaiting the possible arrival of a husband and children. Yes, I'd like for those things to happen. But I'm living a real life right now. I have challenges and problems and things I'm learning and opportunities and stresses. And it stings to hear comments about those who don't yet know what life is about because they aren't married or don't have children. Likewise, I have no desire to be an object of pity. The truth is that my life is actually pretty good. I study something I love. I have some amazing friends (as well as a bunch of lively if not always completely sane siblings). Sure, there are things that are awfully hard at times, but that seems to be a fairly universal aspect of the human condition.

I'm currently watching several of my single friends struggle to stay active, ones who have far fewer doctrinal difficulties with the Church than I do. I wonder what would make it easier. I've long been a bit jealous of the Catholic view that adults can follow a variety of legitimate spiritual paths, marriage being only one of them. As I said, I'm open to the possibility that some things can be learned only through marriage

and raising a family. But I also think I've learned important things from my own life circumstances, perhaps things I wouldn't have learned if my life had gone in another direction.

Talks to singles tend to go along these lines: "Marriage and children are the greatest of all blessings, and we have great compassion for your difficult state. Try not to feel too bad, though, because God will fix it all in the next life." And while I know it's well-meant, I'm rather tired of hearing about singleness as some kind of tragic affliction to be endured and single adults (women in particular) as victims in need of sympathy. (In many ways I think single men have it even worse, as they are more likely to be blamed than to be pitied.) It's difficult to remain in an organization that sometimes seems to see your very existence as a kind of problem in need of explanation. I would far rather hear something like, "You have a unique and valuable perspective on life, and we hope you'll bring it to the table." As much as anything, I simply want to feel that I too have something to contribute.

I honestly don't mind that the church places a lot of emphasis on families and parenting; I think they're tremendously important. But ultimately I think our focus should be on becoming better Christians, in whatever life situations we might find ourselves. And in that endeavor, I don't think that any particular group of people can claim a privileged position or inherently greater insight; surely we all have much to learn from each other.

No Answers. Only Grace

Originally titled, "The Summons that Abides," the following is adapted from a 23 March 2007 post by EVE at Zelophehad's Daughters.

THE last couple of years have been a hard time for my life in the Church; the last several months, particularly hard. A few weeks ago, to my own surprise, I came to the edge of my ability to go on. I broke with certain of my conceptions about the relationship between the norms of the human community and the will of God, telephoned my stake president, and asked to be released from my calling.

Although almost no one in my ward even knows about my current trials with the Church, somehow I just haven't been able to face anyone there. The first week after my break, I stayed home. But I always miss church when I don't go, so the next week I drove across town to attend a ward where I could be relatively anonymous. I sat in the foyer, which is where I like to sit at church, and I sat alone, which is how I like to be at church. I went mostly to take the sacrament, which wasn't brought out. I almost left. But I couldn't bring myself to walk out and drive the twenty minutes back home without anything to show for my pains.

The talks were all on the Great Apostasy. There were the liberal quotations from Bruce R. McConkie, the rhapsodies to Luther and Tyndall and Wycliffe, and an extended analysis of

the Catholic Church's various doctrinal failings. I all but groaned aloud. The casual demolition of Catholicism's nonsensicalities, the unqualified veneration of the Reformation, the equally unqualified denigration of the dark Dark Ages—it seemed all the evidence I needed to prove to myself, yet again, that the Church is not for me.

At times over the past few months, and especially this past month, when everything connected with church has been so hard, when the endless Relief Society announcements in my inbox look like they came from the Mars of Babyshower Land written in the Greek of Motherese, it's been like watching myself crash down a well whose bottom I cannot see, periodically clanking against the sides as I hurtle into the dark. How far will I go? I've found myself picking up cheddar-beer soup in the grocery store or looking at the array of coffees while I stand in line at school for hot chocolate and thinking, in self-pity and exhaustion: Why not? Who cares? My husband's long gone from the Church. I have no children to set an example for. What difference does it make what I do? Why should I try to keep living and living this strange and hopeless Christian life, why should I observe these bizarre customs—the alcohol and coffee prohibitions, the seemingly endless activities and service projects, the funny underwear?

THEN sitting there in the foyer by myself on that bleak February afternoon listening to talks I couldn't decide if I believed a word of, I felt the strangest, most unaccountable sense of mercy. There were no answers to the complexities of the Great Apostasy, or to the more pressing, personal complexities of how on earth it is that I am to go on in this church. There was no sense of clarity about what to do or even what to think. There was just a sense of not being alone in my aloneness, as if some divine, compassionate hand had brushed the tears from my cheek. There were no answers. Only grace.

At moments like that, I recall the scriptures that claim for the quiet voice of God an endurance beyond the heavens and the earth created by its still power, and I remember the voice that calls me, that never ceases to call me beneath the tumult of the world and my daily cares and sins and sorrows, that calls me in the name of Christ. I want to kneel and press my ear to the earth to hear the voice that never ceases beneath it, that indeed founded it, the voice that speaks with the unwavering constancy of song, of a single note sustained and sustained, too deep and piercing for human words. I want to hear that voice with such resolution, such devotion that I cannot waver in any other consideration. I have been so foolish and so wrong. I have mistaken the voices of well-meaning human men and women for the voice of God.

As I try to rebuild my spiritual life from yet another of these inevitable minor crises that constitute a human one, I want to cast away the last shreds of my concerns for what others think of me. . . . I want to hear true, the truth of God and the truth of my own life with an entirety that disallows every hint of polite and empty lies, of false and timorous conformity. I want to fill my ears with nothing but that voice of fierce truth as it resounds and resounds in my own quailing, human heart. ☪

BODIES, BABIES, BREASTS— MOTHERING IN ZION

The shared experience of motherhood forges a connection between many Mormon women—a metaphysical sympathy deeply rooted in the physicality of caring for children. Where two or three LDS mothers are gathered, there will immediately be lively, exasperated, hilarious, joyful conversations about the deliciousness of new babies, the intricacies of breastfeeding, and the challenges and blessings of including children in our spiritual lives and religious observances. Inviting small children of God, whose needs, as the song goes, “are great,” to a half-day of meetings which inevitably conflict

with the meeting of those needs is a recipe for cranky children and disgruntled mommies. We love our children, and we love our Church, and it is a painful love triangle. Fortunately, love triangles often provide fodder for comic relief, as some of the narratives that follow illustrate! These reflections on motherhood remind us of the intimate connection of the practical and the holy so fully embodied in the messy sweetness of our children, and invite us to consider what the experience of caring for young children in church can teach us about what it means to be “members of one body.” —K.H.

MY TESTING GROUND

by Caroline Crockett Brock



CAROLINE CROCKETT BROCK has a Master's of Public Administration degree from Brigham Young University and is a freelance architectural design consultant. In her precious free time, she sings in a semi-professional choir. She lives with her husband and four daughters in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

SINCE BECOMING A MOTHER, I HAVE COME TO THE conclusion that Sunday worship services in our church are not what I call “user-friendly.” I have four girls—ages eight, five, three, and one—so for the past eight years, I have experienced the “young Mormon mom” life at church. Although in the past I have loved coming to church and feeling the spiritual renewal that takes place, I must say that nowadays I don't usually look forward to Sundays. As a mom I have begun to see it as a lot of work. Sunday has become an unknown quantity—I never know what the day will hold. My five-year-old may decide to throw her shoe out the car window and not tell me until we get to church. My three-year-old may decide to wet her pants in the middle of the sacrament. My squirming one-year-old may smash her head against the pew while the bread is being passed and start screaming, causing me to race out to the lobby, leaving my other small children alone in the chapel while my husband is speaking in the Spanish branch on the other side of the building. For me, the level of stress and frustration of getting my children ready for church, then having them sit through sacrament meeting, often results in my feeling angry, then guilty, and ultimately inadequate: I'm not a nice enough mom, I'm not a calm enough mom. Why can't I get it together?

One particularly difficult Sunday morning, my husband

had his usual early meetings and I had to get the four girls ready and to church by myself. We were running late after various Sunday morning dramas—one of my daughters was throwing a screaming fit over her “scratchy” dress, another was smearing yogurt into the carpet, and yet another was hitting and causing fights. I raced to the chapel while giving my daughters a verbal thrashing in the car for their bad behavior. I was desperate to get there before the doors closed for the passing of the sacrament. We would have just made it, but our little entourage took so long to actually get into the building and down the hallway (think three-year-old “princess” meandering twenty feet behind as I am charging down the halls, diaper bags swinging, baby on one hip) that the doors were closed and the bread had just come around. I remember closing my eyes and sighing, thinking to myself, why did I even come?

Turning around in the foyer, I spotted an older lady who frequently vacations in our town. As I asked where her husband was, she serenely replied that he was at the hotel, but she wanted to sit in sacrament meeting because it was the “spiritual high point” of her week. Her reply could not have hit me harder, as I realized that of all the moments of the week, sacrament meeting was the time where I felt the *least* spiritual and the *most* inadequate. For the past eight years, it had become my spiritual low point.

As I sat in discouragement later that day, I was drawn back to my patriarchal blessing and was lead to this passage:

In the pre-existence you were tutored and trained in the principles of the Everlasting Gospel by loving Heavenly Parents. You were there especially dear to your Mother in Heaven as you watched Her with great awe. You marveled at Her Loveliness, and Her grandeur, the power of Her being, and determined then that you would become very much like She is. It will be your privilege on this earth to feel the nearness of your Heavenly Parents and Their inspiration to you.

The phrase that came shooting out at me was, “you determined then that you would become very much like She is.” This verb “determined” resonated with my spirit. I felt as though I was remembering being there and feeling that way, instead of merely imagining it. I knew that this was true. I knew my spirit was just the type to look at Her and set my sights on doing whatever it took to become like Her. I also knew *She* would not leave Sunday mornings to chance.

I WENT ABOUT the next week determined that if nothing else, I would not only be at church on time, I would be there early. When I made this my intention, things began to open up and shift. Midway through the week, I was prompted to type up little checklists for the two older girls so they could simply go down the checklists to get themselves ready instead of waiting for me to direct them. Saturday morning, I decided to clean out my car, knowing that seeing all the paraphernalia that had built up during the week would add to the chaos of the next morning. Saturday afternoon, I began laying out the dresses, tights, hair ribbons, and shoes. That night I cleaned out the diaper bag from the previous week and packed all the items needed for the next day, including some different things for my three-year-old which would help her stay less fidgety during church. By the time I went to bed that night, the house was picked up, I had laid out my outfit and my husband’s shirt, and everything seemed ready for the upcoming day.

Sunday morning dawned, and it felt as though heaven were smiling down upon us. Everything went smoothly as we got ready for church. I had the checklists on the table, and the

older girls followed them. At the end of the list, I had added: help mom with your sisters. They each came and asked what they could do to help. To have my five- and eight-year-old daughters get totally ready for church by themselves, then ask what they could do to help, was just glorious for me! After my daughters were dressed, I actually had a whole fifteen minutes to get myself ready instead of the usual five. I began to realize that much of the frustration I was feeling as a mother was not necessarily due to my children, but was a result of unrealistic expectations and preparation on my part. As I walked out of the bedroom looking at my daughters dressed and ready, sitting nicely on the couch calmly watching a church video, I had to ask myself, “Is this really happening?”

As we all piled into the car and strapped into the various car seats, I was getting pretty excited that all this extra planning was going to pay off. Then I tried starting the car. One of my daughters must have left a door open the night before because the battery was dead. At this point, I saw the situation in an almost comical light—as though I had raced to the finish line and a step before finishing, someone had placed a banana peel in front of me to slip on. I told the kids that Satan was trying to stop us from being to church on time, and that they needed to be quiet so mom could think of a solution. I quickly ripped off my high heels and went rummaging in the garage for my battery starter, found it (a real miracle), hooked up the cables, started the car, and we were on our way!

That morning, despite the switch to daylight savings time and a dead battery, we were at church ten minutes early. We had no yelling in the car, no frustration, and no stress. We calmly picked our pew and greeted the people around us. I

was able to take a deep breath and prepare for the sacrament, and my children sensed my quietness and reverence. They were better behaved throughout the whole meeting because my planning had created an experience where that could happen. As I was thanking my Heavenly Parents while partaking of the sacrament, another phrase from my blessing came wafting through my consciousness: “Your children will look to you in reverence and you will be able to lead them in the paths of righteousness.” I knew that I was being told that by continuing this process of determining and planning for success, I could be the type of mom to be “reverenced” instead of the stressed-out, frustrated mom that I often was.



Since that Sunday, I have embarked on a pattern that I hope to continue. This pattern has made it possible for me to have the sacrament be my spiritual high point of the week, instead of a low point that left me feeling guilty and discouraged. Although the routine my Sabbath day preparation has created has gotten easier, disasters still occur. The difference now is that these disasters aren't exacerbated by my lack of planning and preparation. Being a young mom in our church remains a challenge and often leaves me feeling downright exhausted. Then again, I think God meant for us to have these types of challenges and weekly hurdles. As Latter-day Saints, we believe it is all part of the plan.

I now see the Sunday block of meetings for young mothers as a spiritual testing ground of sorts. Some days it's still a test of duty—I should be there, so I will be there. Some days it's a test of endurance—I'm exhausted and have morning sickness, but I will make it to end. Some days it's a test of motherhood—I go because my children need to be there even if I walk the halls for three hours with a baby. Week by week, I determine my experience of worship and thus my own spiritual refining by my level of commitment to the preparation and organization of the Sabbath day. ☺

FROM THE BLOGS

Worshiping Together and Other Fantasies

Originally titled, "Sabbath Day Happy Hour," the following is adapted from an 22 August 2007 post by COURTNEY K. at Segullah.

MY non-Mormon friends express shock and horror over the fact that there's no nursery for young children during sacrament meeting; that there's no nursery for children under eighteen months; that we're expected to stay in church for three hours and that we can meet at the most ungodly hours; and that there's no "cry room" where we can take unruly children when necessary.

I'm not sure what can be done about inconvenient meeting times. Everyone has her own idea of what times are "convenient," and since we're organized by geographic boundaries and not other demographics, no meeting time would suit the needs of every group of people in the ward. Still, I certainly think the three-hour block could be pared down a bit. If sacrament meeting were even fifteen minutes shorter, it would be an improvement.

Having a nursery operating during sacrament meeting sounds great in theory, but the implementation would require such a radical shift in how we do things—our expectations, our habits, our whole philosophy of what church should be like. On one hand, I like that we are expected to worship together as

families, rather than shuttling the children off. But in my experience, that idea has been a beautiful fantasy and nothing more. Sacrament meeting is not geared toward children in any respect. They are rightfully bored out of their minds. So while I expect my older children to behave themselves—i.e., not scream and run around during the service—I think it's ridiculous to expect a three-year-old to sit still for seventy minutes with nothing but Cheerios and a coloring book to entertain him. (Note: I fully appreciate that there are three-year-olds who *can* sit still for seventy minutes or two hours or more. Unfortunately, the Lord didn't bless me with any of those.)

So I guess it just sucks to take young kids to church, and that's how it is. I appreciate when people just acknowledge that instead of trying to tell you how you can get your twenty-month-old to act more like a seven-year-old.

It would certainly be nice if they took the nursery children a little younger. Even fifteen months would be younger enough.

I also see no reason why the entire bishopric needs to be on display for the entire meeting. Fortunately my husband has never been in the bishopric, but he has been ward organist. That's hard enough.

Need I also add that we wouldn't need larger mothers' lounges or separate fathers' lounges if women felt more comfortable breastfeeding in sacrament meeting? <grin>. Or if sacrament meeting weren't so boring and/or miserable that we jumped at the chance to escape from it? <grin>

How Low Will I Sink?

Originally titled, "Low Points in Parenting: Seven-year-old Boys in Sacrament Meeting," the following is adapted from an 28 March 2006 post by HANNAH at Mormon Mommy Wars.

I HAVE a seven-year-old son. In my experience with motherhood, seven-year-old sons are the low point. And please don't tell me to just wait until he's fifteen, because I'm barely making it as it is.

A few weeks ago in church, Dad was home with sick babies and I was in sacrament meeting with four older kids alone. Our stake has sacrament meeting last, so everyone is tired and hungry and ready to go home before it starts. My seven-year-old was on a roll. He decided to see how far he could push it in public, in church.

First he started talking loudly. I shushed him, and he smirked and went louder. I told him he wouldn't get his treat at home for being good if he wasn't quiet. He went louder. I threatened to take him out. He punched me. Hard. (Of course, we were on the fourth row, not having gotten to sacrament meeting quickly enough, so none of this was discreet.) I grabbed his hand. He kicked me. I told him he was going out. He told me that if I tried, he would kick everybody in our row on the way—in the face.

He had me there. We were in the middle of the row, with nice elderly couples on either end. He's a big seven-year-old, and I wasn't even sure I could get him out, let alone keep him from kicking the neighboring families in the face. There were still fifteen minutes left in sacrament meeting, and I was stumped.

I sat there trying to think while simultaneously holding his hands and feet as he kicked and punched me. The lady behind me said, audibly, "That boy needs a spanking!" I was close to tears. This went on for several minutes.

Then I had a revelation (I'm not sure from what source). I looked a couple of rows in front of me and saw a new family in the ward. The father was an officer in the army—something very impressive to seven-year-olds, in my experience. I leaned over to my son.

"If you don't stop punching and kicking, I will ask Brother Anderson to take you out."

"He couldn't!"

And here's the low point.

"He's in the army," I answered. "He could probably kill you with his bare hands."

"He wouldn't, of course," I added, a bit shocked that I had just threatened murder in church, "but he could."

My seven-year-old's eyes got wide. He quit punching and kicking.

And he went home quietly.

I had succeeded. I increased reverence in church by convincing my son I knew how to hire a hit man.

I wonder how low I'll sink when he's eight.

It Must be My Breasts

Originally titled, "Breastfeeding Incident," the following is adapted from a 28 October 2005 post by KERRI at *Feminist Mormon Housewives*.

TODAY at church I was sitting in the chapel watching over the kids practicing for the Primary program when the executive secretary asked me if I could meet with the bishop for a few minutes. I thought (hoped?) I was being released from Cub Scouts, but then he began by saying that being the bishop is hard and often unpopular (at this point I was getting the hint that I was in trouble). He then talked about how important the missionary program was and how we need people to feel comfortable in our buildings. I must have looked extremely confused because he said, "And I can see you wondering what any of this has to do with you. Our ward council meetings have been discussing the issue of breastfeeding."

Apparently the "ward council" (I learned later it was just two chauvinistic, middle-class, middle-aged, white males present at said meeting) had decided, without the input of mothers, that we need to either nurse in the mothers' lounge or cover the baby with a blanket. Like the baby is the obscene part? Knowing breasts are under shirts is bad enough, I guess, but having a baby connected to them (and hiding said breast with babe's head) makes everyone squirm?

I was very up front and said I have huge issues with this, that this is a public health issue and the law says that women can nurse anytime, anywhere. He started backpedaling, saying he agreed with me but that the young men are uncomfortable with seeing a woman's breasts.

I said that this is a cultural issue, and this is a worldwide church. There is no Church policy on it, and the Relief Society manual talks about how important breastfeeding is. There are even passages in the Bible about nursing in church!

He kept saying he agreed with me but that he had to forward these concerns on behalf of the council. I just don't buy that. He is the bishop, and if people are talking about breastfeeding, he has the option to say "this is a non-issue" and move on. I do not believe that the young men in our ward are turned on or disgusted by breastfeeding. If they are, it is because our culture has taught them that breasts are toys and made them exciting and mysterious.





JEANNETTE ATWOOD

I feel like they're accusing me of being a pervert. I am generally ready to fight for breastfeeding rights whenever it comes up, but I was so devastated I couldn't think clearly. But as we continued on, he agreed with everything I said. He had no reasonable argument or reasoning behind this new standard except that the ward council felt it would be best.

I fled the building, not wanting anyone to see me crying. Sobbed and sobbed in the van until church was over. Came home and buried my head in my husband's chest and bawled my eyes out. I'm trying to do my best. To attend my meetings, despite all my burning unanswered questions, and parent my children. I felt sick the rest of the day from the headache and red eyes and dehydration and overheating and lack of oxygen. And I'm mad at myself for letting it upset me. My husband says I should have said, "This is ridiculous," and walked out. But I was a good girl who wanted to be obedient. I'm mad about that too.

Please excuse the hysterical tone of this post. It must be my breasts. They seem to cause such confusion.

What Do I Want?

Originally titled, "Rediscovering Me," the following is adapted from a 12 February 2006 post by SHALEEN at Tales from the Crib.

I'M figuring out how to contribute to the world outside of my immediate sphere of influence. At the end of six kids (ages nine to six months, the last a set of twins). If you ask me what my interests are, I have to think to give you an answer. The first thing that comes to mind is . . . how to make the structure of my home and family work and work better. But then I think a little deeper and breathe deeply once or twice and, well, what are my interests, outside of what I must know and do in order to preserve my own sanity? I don't know. I love having red walls in my kitchen area. I love to hear my five- and three-year-old talking while looking through a magazine and saying "let's order this online and then it will come

in a box." Victory feels sweet when my son goes to the bathroom in the toilet. At the end of the day when the house is quiet and I think, this is now my time—what do I want to do? During the day, I can give you answers—my brain still works. But by evening, the desire must be strong or I can't remember.

What I used to want is not what I really want. I want peace. I want patience. I want laughter. I want interaction that is meaningful to me. I want a bit more energy when I am at my end. . . . I believe the energy is inside of me and need only be found when I figure out what inspires me, what are my interests. I'm excited to find out!

The Church of the Lastborn

Originally titled, "Sunday Morning Maternity Leave and the Church of the Lastborn," the following is adapted from an 11 February 2007 post by KRIS at By Common Consent.

FOR the past six weeks, thoughts of my having just had my last child have beat like a mantra at the back of my brain: This is the last time you will ever do this. This is the last time you will bring a baby home from the hospital. This is the last time you will button this tiny sweater. . . .

I stay in the rocking chair long after the baby has gone to sleep. Instead of attending my normal LDS meetings, I have worshiped at the church of the lastborn. This is a religion with different sacraments. Quotidian tasks become sacred acts. A baptism of water during a first bath; a special anointing of oil for tender skin. There is only milk, not meat.

Now the babymoon is over—six weeks of Sunday morning maternity leave has been enough time for an unhurried recovery. Today we venture out into the wider world together. Today you meet another part of your family—a community of Saints, who have prayed for your safe arrival and sent their love wrapped in foil-covered casserole dishes. Today we leave our nest, but we also come home. ☺

INVISIBLE SISTERS

Questions about gender inevitably involve questions about sexuality. Nowhere are these questions more fraught and difficult in the contemporary church than in questions surrounding homosexuality. The two pieces in this section consider women whose sexuality troubles both doctrinal and cultural notions of women's sexuality:

lesbians and women involved with gay men. They illuminate the anger and pain that surround these questions, the hope for understanding and reconciliation, and the incomprehensible potential of human love in all its forms. —K.H.

MAKING SENSE OF SUNDAY

by Deborah Farmer Kris



DEBORAH FARMER KRIS lives and teaches high school English in New Jersey and is a blogger at Exponent II. This reflection first appeared as an Exponent II blogpost on 30 May 2006.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: In May 2006, the Church asked bishops to read a letter in sacrament meetings that stated, in part: "We are informed that the United States Senate will on June 6, 2006, vote on an amendment to the Federal constitution designed to protect the traditional institution of marriage. We, as the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, have repeatedly set forth our position that the marriage of a man and a woman is the only acceptable marriage relationship. . . . We urge our members to express themselves on this urgent matter to their elected representatives in the Senate." For me, the Church's rhetoric about homosexuality—and the resulting attitudes and actions of some of the membership—has created much more internal conflict through the years than issues of gender equity. But I talked little about it, and I certainly didn't write about it publicly. After hearing this letter, I finally sat down and wrote out the emotions I had protectively sequestered for a decade.

What is the most important commandment, Lord?

Love God and love your neighbor.

But who is my neighbor?

The Samaritan.

Who is the Samaritan?

The one left on the side of the road, the one you hope will disappear.

(Who is my Samaritan?)

Oh, and what is Love?

ALICE AND CAROL have been partners for more than twenty-five years. For the last five, Carol has been unable to stand—battling one infection after another in her long quest to have a double hip replacement surgery. Alice

spends long hours reading *Harry Potter* aloud, acting out the voices, cooking healthy meals, bringing news of the outside world. I have known my husband for five years. I hope I would bear up as well under the strain of long-term care. I don't know if I am that strong yet. Alice replaces the gauze on an open wound. I go home to hug my husband, with hope for Us twenty years from now.

THE PHARISEES INVITED Jesus to dinner. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating there, she brought perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the host saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Jesus sensed his thoughts, turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman has not stopped kissing my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

What is this thing, love? A power that trumps powers, that revises our histories; strong enough to heal a woman's soul. The name of deity itself: God is Love. "Do you see this woman?" Really see her. I think of the bishop in Cambridge who implored us with Christ's own fervor to make the ward "a safe place for sinners—we are all sinners."

WHEN I WAS three days old, my parents placed me in a crib in the room of my five-year-old sister, Rachel. We shared everything, and I was her grand pupil: she taught me how to read, how to open my junior high gym locker, and how to manage the hallways in high school. When she went to BYU, she let me spend each Friday night with her in her dorm room. I wouldn't have been such a generous big sister. She is shyer than I am—and certainly kinder; an artist and a teacher, making her way in the big city. But she has *chutzpah*, "coming out" while still in college. Provo is not the safest place to be a kind, shy young lesbian. The very place that should be most



Deborah and Rachel, 1997

welcoming and embracing—a church house—becomes an emotional landmine. Memories of anti-gay comments I heard from LDS peers in high school still make me wince; I did take it personally—every joke—but in silence because I didn't have the courage to tell them to Stuff It. Years later, she harbors no bitterness (I'm still making sense of that); she lives a vibrant life and supports my decision to remain a member of a church that has effectively shut its doors to her.

I FINISH A Relief Society lesson. Somehow Rachel had come up, our friendship, navigating these waters. After one then two—and later three and four—women come up to tell me about their brothers, fathers, sisters. It's like confessing a secret, like we have kept it as a skeleton in our closet long after loved ones have come out of theirs.

I DIDN'T WANT to come home crying on Sunday. I had pre-read the announcement on the web and thought I had the grit to attend. Later that evening, I looked up the story of Ruth—balancing two worlds for love of a woman—thought of my sister, wondering: Who is Ruth, and who is Naomi? Protecting and loving each other, trying to worship the same name of God: Love.

Ruth
for sisters

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go:

and where thou lodgest I will lodge: and thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God.

Ruth, you were a good daughter-in-law,
Provider where no husband was
Daughter where only a son had been.
And when Naomi cried out with bitterness
You went to work. You brought home food. Kept house.

But what did you miss
In those lonely hours in the field
(stranger in a strange land)
As you stooped to gather the discarded?
When the wind came to Moab, how the fields blew?
The gossip of the women who know
The story of your birth?

When Israelite women wondered, shifting-eyed,
At the hue of your skin,
The fabric of your hair,
The angle of your voice,
Did you want to shout out what you lost?
To name your dead?
Did you want to carve your sacrifice on your palm
And say, pressing it into passing souls:
Here is my goodness and it is hard.

I'M TRYING TO make sense of it all. Love and loyalty. Church and family. I don't expect to any time soon. ☹

CLEAN-SHAVEN: NO MORE BEARDS

Straight Women, Gay Men, and Mormonism

by Holly Welker



HOLLY WELKER is working on a memoir about her friendships and relationships with gay men.

AUTHOR NOTE: At the 2005 Sunstone Symposium, I attended several panels on homosexual issues and noticed that not only was the predominant focus of such panels male sexuality, most participants were male. In one case, “Steps in the Right Direction? Evaluating New LDS Publications on Homosexuality,” they were exclusively male, though not exclusively gay. Just as when I read the Book of Mormon or surveyed the artwork in any LDS visitor’s center, I found myself wondering, *Where are the women? More specifically, where are the lesbians, where are the wives, ex-wives, ex-fiancées of gay men? There were plenty such women among my acquaintances, but we weren’t discussing homosexuality, at least not at Sunstone in 2005. No one asked us, and we didn’t volunteer. Why not?*

In an attempt to begin addressing the imbalance I saw in 2005, I organized a panel the following year: “Will, Grace, and Angels in Brokeback America: Straight Women, Gay Men, and Mormonism.” This essay is based on my presentation at that panel.

EXCLUSION OF WOMEN AND THEIR CONCERNS from weighty discussions of weighty matters is not a new thing. It’s been twenty-five years since I first read Plato’s *Symposium*, but I remember the discussion in my Western civilization class of Athenian society, its marriage laws and customs: all citizens (who were exclusively male—women could not be citizens) were expected to marry and sire children, preferably sons. In this discussion in 1982, we talked frankly about the flirtation between Socrates and Alcibiades, and considered what it meant for a homosocial, homosexual, patriarchal, misogynist society to require men to marry women and impregnate them as part of their duties as members of the community.

If marrying a woman and fathering children aren’t *quite* as obligatory for good male citizens today as they were in the time of Plato and Socrates, there are still those who argue that these practices should remain rights all men, gay or straight, are entitled to. On 3 August 2006, the *New York Times* ran an article entitled “When the Beard Is Too Painful to Remove,” which noted that “for gay men in heterosexual marriages, even after the status quo becomes unbearable, the pull of domestic life remains powerful. Many are desperate to preserve their marriages—to continue reaping the *emotional and financial*

support of wives, and domestic pleasures like tucking children in at night” (emphasis added), benefits they hope to retain “either by lying, promising their wives they will not have sex with men or persuading [the wives] to accept their double lives.”¹

An example of the middle category, promising fidelity to a wife, is provided by Ben Christensen’s essay “Getting Out,” from the Fall 2005 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. In his essay, Christensen, a gay man who, in his early twenties, married a straight woman and fathered children by her, argues that

The whole point of the civil rights and women’s liberation movements was to allow blacks, women, and other minorities to break free of what had been their traditional roles. We live in a world where it’s okay for blacks to do what was once considered “white” and for women to do what was once considered “male”—get an education, have a career, etc. Why then is it not politically correct for a gay man to venture into what is usually considered the exclusive territory of straight men—to marry a woman and have a family—if that’s what he chooses to do?²

This is a troubling passage, for many reasons. It is simply not true that “the whole point of the civil rights and women’s liberation movement was to allow blacks, women, and other minorities to break free of what had been their traditional roles.” A major goal of the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s (itself merely a more recent episode in a long struggle for equality and human rights in the U.S. that includes the abolitionist movement of the 1800s) was to pass and enforce legislation that would remove the threat of violence racial minorities so often lived under. It was not simply about securing a genuine opportunity to vote or go to school or keeping a seat on the bus; it was about living without fear of lynchings, bombings, beatings, and murders. The same goes for the feminist movement: there has been a long struggle to compel lawmakers and law enforcement agencies to treat sexual and domestic violence as the crimes they should be, and to give women such originally rare privileges as the right to retain property and a legal identity after marriage or to sue an abusive husband for divorce. And let’s not forget the role that the threat of violence has played in the gay rights movement: it’s not all about securing insurance for your same-sex partner or the right to adopt; it’s also about living without the threat of being thrown in prison and sentenced to hard labor for the crime of sodomy like Oscar Wilde, or stabbed to death like Sakia Gunn,³ or tied to a fence and left to die like Matthew Shepard.

Although Christensen claims that “We live in a world where it’s okay for blacks to do what was once considered ‘white’ and for women to do what was once considered ‘male,’” the virtual enslavement of women is still a stark reality in too many parts of the world. It would be more accurate to write that we live in a *society* where *some people* think “it’s okay for blacks to do what was once considered ‘white’ and for women to do what was once considered ‘male,’” but it’s important to note that the only examples cited by Christensen of “white,” “male” activities previously closed but now open to women and racial mi-

norities are the basic human rights of getting an education and seeking rewarding employment. Furthermore, the fact that it might be “okay” for racial and gender minorities to pursue the same goals as white men does not mean they have as many opportunities to do so or receive the same rewards for their efforts.

But the biggest problem with Christensen’s equating his situation with the struggles of the civil rights or women’s movements is that Christensen already has the right he demands: to marry a woman and father children by her. Indeed, he and other gay men have, by and large, always had that right in Western civilization.

Although Christensen’s essay attempts to co-opt progressive discourse and ideology, as in his reference to the civil rights and feminist movements, his stance is actually profoundly conservative. As I’ve noted, the movements he invokes involve long struggles for a wide range of legislation. Christensen makes no mention of legislation in his essay, because what he’s arguing for is not a change in but a more emphatic embrace of a status quo society has only begun to move away from. We should remember that until recently, gay Mormon men were encouraged to marry women—the sooner, the better. Christensen demands not only the continued right of gay men to marry straight women, but approbation and approval for doing so, and he has received even that.⁴

As it happens, I am strongly in favor of legislation opening what has been the exclusive territory of straight men—to marry a woman and have a family—to gay women. But in his *Dialogue* essay at least, Christensen exhibits little regard for the opportunities and rights of women, gay or straight: his concern is with preserving the status quo with regards to the privileges of men, straight or gay. And because neither he, nor the editors of *Dialogue*, nor the respondents to his essay, nor a great many others, seem to acknowledge this, the original question I raised regarding the ancient Greek view of male “duties” remains a vital one, though with a slight twist: What does it mean for a *homophobic*, patriarchal, misogynist society to require men to marry women and impregnate them as part of their duties as members of the community?

Why should a devoutly Mormon gay man care at all about women’s sexuality, given how little attention it receives in Mormon doctrine? Female biology is extremely important in Mormon ideology, of course, as that is what allows women to bear children, and children are central to the Mormon emphasis on the family. But reproduction is only one part of sexuality—after all, one can be a sexual being without ever reproducing. Sexuality also includes physiological states such as arousal, desire, and pleasure, as well as the impact the entire mix has on the psyche or soul. How is *that* treated in Mormon ideology? I’m not saying there’s no room for a nuanced consideration of female sexuality in Mormon thought and experience; I am saying that what is enshrined as scripture thus far reduces the importance of female desire and satisfaction.

Think of Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, wherein marriage is presented as a pragmatic matter of reproduction, in which “virgins” are given unto a man “to multiply

and replenish the earth” (verse 63). Within that construct, the emphasis is primarily on male morality and female purity, in that “if any *man* [note the lack of attention to his sexual status] espouse a *virgin*, and *desire* to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are *virgins*, and have vowed to no other *man*, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with *that that belongeth unto him and to no one else*” (verse 61, emphases added). Obedient submission to this law is named a condition of celestial exaltation. Therefore a man may (should?) espouse as many virgins as he desires. But what mention is made, in the entire section, of female desire? Even the stereotypical emotional (as opposed to physical) desire a woman might have for monogamy, for the exclusive regard and fidelity of her husband, is essentially unrighteous here, and women who refuse to be one of several wives are, in effect, consigning themselves to lesser realms in the hereafter.

There’s also the fact that regardless of how God the Father thinks of his daughters, no matter how exalted and honorable women’s roles in the plan of salvation, in the verse I’ve just quoted, the limitations of language reduce women in their marriages to “that that belongeth unto [one man] and no one else”—they’re not even “those who belongeth,” pronouns more appropriate for human beings. Grammatical niceties aside, the general situation would not have seemed striking or strange in 1843, the year this section is dated; wives at that time were indeed, as a matter of civil law, the property of their husbands. But how does this rhetoric used to explain polygamy to the early members of the Church still affect the way Latter-day Saints think even of the monogamous marriages they are expected to enter into now?

OF COURSE, IT’S not as if American culture at large is particularly concerned with women’s sexuality—unless it’s used in the service of men’s pleasure. Consider the *Salon* article “Live Girl-on-Girl Action!” which discusses straight high school and college girls who make out with other straight women at parties. These girls are “firmly straight, they say, but they’ll kiss their friends as a performance for guys—either for material gain, like free entry or alcohol, or to advertise that they’re sexually open and adventurous.”⁵ Deborah Tolman, director of San Francisco State University’s Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality, tells the author of the article that

In the case of females who get it on solely for male enjoyment, it’s not at all about experimenting with females. . . . “The motivations aren’t about your own desires, they’re about getting guys excited and looking hot. It’s ironic because they’re engaging in sexual behavior, which is supposed to look like it’s about sexual desire. The crucial part of that is that they make sure no one thinks they’re actually lesbians.”

The article goes on to quote Pamela Paul, author of *Pornified: How Pornography Is Transforming Our Lives, Our*

Relationships, and Our Families, who states that girls aren't kissing other girls because they want to. They're doing it because they want to appeal to boys their age. And for boys their age who've developed sexually alongside Internet porn, their sexual cues are affected by the norms and standards of porn. And that's girl-on-girl action.

And when girls fail to get what they want out of this situation—specifically, a boyfriend—it's their fault, not the boys', because although the girls are doing what the boys like and request, they're not meeting the boys' ideal: boys interviewed for the article acknowledge that they would be happy to “hook up,” or have casual sex with girls who kiss other girls, but they wouldn't want them as girlfriends. (Though how a man finds and courts a girlfriend when he's busy bedding random women has always been something I fail to understand.)

desirable or why our sexual relationship never seemed satisfying. Was it a failure on her part? she wondered. She had sadness about feeling alone, confused and hurt in ways that were nearly impossible to articulate.⁷

Separating from a spouse or partner is never easy or painless, even when you know it's time to end a relationship you're unhappy in; as for determining custody of children, I can only imagine from watching loved ones go through it how harrowing and heartbreaking it must be. Furthermore, the trauma inherent in the breakup of a Mormon marriage is often compounded when it involves an issue requiring or precipitating a devout member's reevaluation of his or her relationship to the Church. Coming out of the closet can be traumatic and lonely enough in and of itself, even if you haven't grown up being told acting on same-sex desires can damn you; add the solitary

I suspect many gay men still marry straight women imagining they will be “cured,” leaving the woman open to blame when the cure doesn't take. But why should women rather than men bear the burden for male sexuality?

The same appears to be true for marriages between gay men and straight women: when women fail to get what they want out of the situation—a faithful, loving husband who will cherish them—they are still blamed. For instance, in Steven Fales's one-man, autobiographical play *Confessions of a Mormon Boy*, Fales relates how he married and was unfaithful to his female best friend, and how he handled the prospect of divorce when, after six years of marriage, his “same sex attraction” finally put too great a strain on the marriage:

I turned it all on [my wife]. It was *her* fault! *She* never wore lingerie! *She* wouldn't watch the better-sex videos I ordered from the back of GQ. [She] knew going into this marriage it might come to this. And now that I've finally cracked, she's going to just throw me out?! How *dare* she watch *Will & Grace* and laugh when I was trying to change! *She* had failed *me!*⁶

In a move straight out of Genesis, Fales abdicates responsibility for his own actions, and blames the woman: she failed to beguile me, and I did seek other fruit. Fales eventually acknowledges that of course his wife was not responsible for his homosexuality or the failure of their marriage. But that didn't stop him from blaming her for it in the first place.

Yet even when women are not blamed, their suffering and unhappiness often go unrecognized or undervalued. In commentary accompanying Ben Christensen's essay in *Dialogue*, Ron Schow quotes a Mormon man who spent eight years in a temple marriage:

It was only after I came out to my wife that I realized how much she had suffered and endured over the years in asking questions like why didn't I find her

agony of envisioning yourself in hell because you want what you're told you shouldn't want, or admitting to yourself that one of the primary institutions you've based your life on is not, after all, an adequate spiritual, intellectual, or ethical compass to guide you through the complexities of your existence, and you endure suffering both acute and profound. Factor in divorce and separation from children, both in terms of missing them and feeling guilty at causing their confusion and pain, and you have a recipe for absolutely harrowing anguish.

I point this out to underscore the fact that I have no difficulty imagining that the man speaking here suffered terribly during his marriage, that admitting his homosexuality to his wife was wrenching. But let's consider another aspect of the situation: how self-obsessed and blind do you have to be to live with someone for *eight years* and not notice that you're making her miserable and isolated as well?

Schow continues:

This young man emphasized the falsity of a prevalent myth: “I saw my struggle with (and against) homosexuality as my own cross to bear. I felt I was the one who was suffering, struggling, trying to make things right. What I failed to recognize was that my wife was also part of the struggle even though she lacked basic information.”⁸

In other words, this woman suffered not only because her marriage failed, but because her husband withheld for eight years “basic information” that could have helped her make sense of her life. It's easy to see how this man would feel his sexuality was his own problem, and that dealing with it as he saw fit was his right both as an individual and as patriarch of

his family. However understandable that is, the fact remains that although his withholding of information was not intentionally cruel, it was nonetheless both intentional and cruel, a deliberate choice.

I don't want to minimize or ignore the cruel and vicious ways in which the Church victimizes gay men. But I also don't want to minimize or ignore the cruel and vicious ways in which men who uphold and benefit from patriarchy victimize women, not only politically but personally, in the arena of relationships and sex—and as long as men wield the priesthood in the Mormon church, they do benefit profoundly and explicitly from patriarchy, even when they're gay.

I know it can take a while to figure out one's sexual identity, and that people who eschew sexual behavior during their teens only to marry in their early twenties might not have a firm handle on their sexual orientation. I've known both women and men who figure out after a decade or two of heterosexual marriage that maybe they're not straight after all. I know from watching friends go through it that it's profoundly painful. I also accept that some people are bisexual, and some spouses don't want or require monogamy.

But I also think from observing various marriages and divorces that there's something different happening when men who know ahead of time that they are gay marry women they know are straight, particularly in Mormondom. I submit that patriarchy endows men with a sense of entitlement—witness Christensen's resentment that marrying women and fathering children in a traditional family with a mother and father is still the "exclusive territory of straight men"—that blinds them to the real cost of their actions. Schow quotes a recently divorced gay man who states that "I think a lot of gay men contemplating heterosexual marriage underestimate the impact that their actions have on their future spouse."⁹ Whereas women are trained, through doctrines like the new and everlasting covenant, to accept, however grudgingly, that they will not have the exclusive regard or affection of their husbands, that indeed their feelings about their marriage are of secondary importance to the patriarch's wielding of authority.

Both Fales and Christensen stress that they informed their wives of their homosexuality before the wedding, thus ending the deception under which the courtship was begun. I agree that this sort of honesty is called for before one embarks on a commitment like marriage, and of course if the women really want to accept the challenges inherent in such a difficult marriage, that's their right. But there are two points to consider here. The first is that if a gay man interested in marrying a woman wants to be completely honest and above board, the truly appropriate time to make that admission is *before the first date*, before the woman has begun to fall in love or envision the marriage she might have with the man courting her. Second, I doubt that even full disclosure before marriage really improves the likelihood that such marriages will succeed. In a separate response to Christensen's essay, Marybeth Raynes states, "it is difficult, even impossible, to count the costs of being married to a gay person beforehand."¹⁰ I believe the costs are even more difficult to count when the straight person

in such a marriage is a Mormon woman, given how naively and earnestly hopeful Mormon women are on the topic of marriage.¹¹ And despite Christensen's announced expectation that he will never be "cured" of his same-sex attraction, I suspect many gay men still marry straight women imagining they will be "cured," leaving the woman open to blame—just as in Fales's case—when the cure doesn't take. But why should women rather than men bear the burden for male sexuality?

Even when gay men in straight marriages aren't looking for a cure, they are often still seeking to assuage their own suffering and distress through means that create profound suffering and distress for women, suffering and distress women have been trained to believe they should accept.¹² They have been taught by the culture at large and by Mormonism in particular to value their own sexuality and happiness less than that of the men they are married to, and will do all kinds of things to achieve a "righteous marriage" with a "good man," whatever those things mean.

SO WHAT DO we do instead? How do gay men and straight women share the same planet, if not the same bed? While I am not an advocate of marriage between gay men and straight women, I do think they have much to offer each other in terms of friendship. Among the many influential gay men in my life are my boyfriend from kindergarten, my date to the winter formal my senior year in high school, and my ex-fiancee—all are gay returned missionaries. Then there is my best friend Wayne, who grew up gay and Mormon but never served a mission. Understanding their lives and their sexuality has enriched my own.

Wayne and I currently live on opposite sides of the continent, but we always meet up when we return home for holiday visits with family. Over Christmas 2005, we went to see *Brokeback Mountain* together. I was staying with my sister, who is both a dutiful Mormon who avoids R-rated movies and a devoted, knowledgeable fan of good cinema. She knew she wouldn't see the movie, but she wanted to hear all about it when I got home. "Is it really as good as they say?" she asked.

"It really is," I said. "Heath Ledger is amazing. He deserves an Oscar. He reminded me of some of our cousins and uncles," I told her, thinking of relatives who grew up rodeoing and wore their best boots to sacrament meeting. "He does a thoroughly convincing job of playing a taciturn western cowboy."

"I hear both characters have wives," she said.

"Yes," I said. "And that's one of the things I liked about the movie: all the characters are treated with sympathy and respect. The wives aren't the focus of the movie, but they're not neglected, either. The situation does incredible damage to the women, but they're not treated as acceptable casualties. Anne Hathaway's personality becomes as brittle as her bleached hair, while Michelle Williams—oh, it's just heartbreaking."

"Well," my sister said emphatically, banging pots around as she emptied her dishwasher, "it's great that they portrayed it well, but the situation itself is not OK. These guys have got to stop marrying women."

"You looking for an argument?" I asked. "I was engaged to a

gay man, remember? I don't think gay men should marry straight women, either."

"They've got to stop," she repeated. "They've got to stop hiding behind wives. It's not fair to use women like that."

"I couldn't agree more," I said. "And it's a time-honored practice with a name, in case you didn't know: marrying a woman for the purpose of passing for 'normal' in straight society is called 'having a beard' because it makes one look butch, and I think in general, gay men should be metaphorically if not literally clean-shaven. But I also think that if you want gay men to stop marrying straight women, one good way of helping that happen is to let them marry each other." She made no reply to that—as a Mormon Republican, what could she say?—but she at least nodded.

I know the gay community is divided on the issue of marriage—many believe that heterosexual marriage is an inherently flawed and repressive institution, an arrangement in which one partner is always necessarily subordinate to the other. Marriage is therefore, the argument goes, an institution that lesbians and gay men would be better off not emulating or participating in, since what's really desirable is a transformation of all romantic and sexual partnerships into something more respectful and equal. I certainly respect that point of view, but until we achieve that transformation, I feel that if consenting adults of legal age want to marry a same-sex partner, they should have the legal right to do so, regardless of whether or not they take advantage of that right.

I also feel it is in the best interest of straight women to be advocates of gay rights—it's one of those easy situations where the ethical thing to do is also conveniently self-serving. That's baldly stated, perhaps, but I'm convinced I'm right. I don't know if it's necessarily in the best interest of gay men to be advocates of greater rights for both lesbians and straight women, but I know so many gay men who genuinely and passionately espouse the cause of feminism and women's rights. Their own experiences with oppression have granted them enough empathy that they can imagine something about what it's like to be a woman in this culture, and they want to make life easier for their sisters, mothers, friends, and, in some cases, daughters and ex-wives. They know that patriarchy is still patriarchy, even if the patriarch is queer, and they're willing to renounce the privileges patriarchy extends to them as men, in the interest of justice.

I think it's important to underscore that point: gay men must be willing to renounce the privileges of patriarchy if they are truly interested in justice and equality not only for themselves as members of a marginalized community, but for all marginalized subjects. Furthermore, straight people who advocate for greater rights and respect for gay women and men must also critique any discussion of homosexuality that privileges, automatically and without acknowledgment of what is being excluded, men and their concerns over women and theirs.¹³ As a male friend who critiqued an early draft of this essay put it, a "form of liberation of one group of people—gay men [which, let us not forget, accounts for around 5 percent of the population]—that ignores the consequences of their ac-

tions on other groups—women [50 percent of the population]—does not amount to a liberation at all." Instead, it raises "the question of whether in the defense of such a generalized form of privilege [i.e., the right to be head of the family in conventional heterosexual marriages], patriarchy doesn't in fact (attempt to) transform the political demands of gay men into demands that in the end provide support for the patriarchy and other sorts or forms of hierarchy and privilege."

Thus, gay men must not react like Christensen, who, when he discovered my feminist critique of his position, was both flummoxed and outraged. The possibility that feminists might object to his demand that he be not merely granted but granted *appropriately*, as his masculine due, the rights of a straight man, never occurred to him. Rather, as he eventually admitted to me, he had "always naturally seen straight men as my enemy, and thus assumed that women and particularly feminists were my allies. The enemy of my enemy is my friend, and all that." He didn't respond, "Because I've actively worked to better the lives of women, I always thought feminists would support me when I claimed, as a gay man, the privileges of straight men." Instead, he assumed that since his enemy was straight men in the collective, he could count on women and feminists in the collective to support him, even as he demands the privileges of a conventional straight Mormon patriarch—the only difference being he acknowledges that he is not sexually aroused by women's bodies. But the enemy feminists oppose is not the straight men Christensen claims the right to emulate. The enemy is patriarchy, an entire system that teaches men, regardless of things like sexual orientation, to expect privileges at the cost of women's well-being; Christensen's views are both products and examples of that system.

AS FOR MY own story, I did not marry a gay man, but I was engaged to one, Matthew, in 1988, after we fell in love at first sight. The story has a reasonably happy ending: he had enough integrity and wisdom that he could not permit himself to marry me, knowing that however much he loved me, he would never lose his attraction to men. But it took four years of my wheedling and prodding and begging to extract that confession from him; before that, he kept insisting that his refusal to marry me had nothing to do with sexual orientation, that it was because I wasn't the right *woman* for him. Given how much I loved him, the whole thing absolutely tortured me. His admission that he was gay was a genuine gift, because it allowed me to stop hoping and get on with my life, and from the day he made that admission, I have never ceased to be grateful that he wouldn't marry me.

Because sex is, after all, fundamental to this discussion and to many discussions in feminism, I'll state that we were both Mormon virgins when we met, and we were both Mormon virgins when he called off the engagement.¹⁴ As a result, I would have to speculate as to what our sex life would have been like, and though I consider sex thoroughly central to feminism, the imagined particulars of my unconsummated relationship with this man are pretty moot. Still, I know there was a time when we couldn't keep our hands off each other—that was one



Matthew Dann and Leo Flynn at their marriage 14 April 2007 at the Maison Communale (town hall) of Forest, a district in Brussels, Belgium. Matt and Leo are flanked by their witnesses, Holly Welker (left) and Emily Flynn.

reason it seemed sensible to make wedding plans. I know that I loved him body and soul and will love him until the day I die, if not beyond that. I know that after he ended the relationship, I was utterly bereft, thoroughly heartbroken, absolutely devastated to the point of being suicidal—I couldn't imagine life without him. Not only that, but I felt profoundly isolated and was convinced in my heart that all men are gay, or at the very least homosocial. I saw so little evidence of genuine respect among men for women that it was hard to believe men could actually desire these creatures they demonstrated such contempt for.¹⁵

Mercifully I eventually discovered that sex can be a truly magnificent expression of love and respect and intimacy, something that transforms the way you think not only about sex, but about desire in the first place—pure and simple and complicated and messy, about lust and love and your own libido and your willingness and ability to give and receive pleasure. But sex like that requires great generosity and sensitivity on the part of everyone involved, and while I believe there are some lucky people who simply land in relationships that provide sex like that—I've met people who claimed it happened to them, that losing their virginity was the most glorious experience of their lives—most of us have to work at it, and some of us never achieve it.

Matthew and I are still close friends, by the way, two

decades after we first met and fell in love. It hasn't always been easy, but it's been worth it. We've helped each other through some very tough times, and at this point we've known each other longer than anyone we're in close contact with but not related to. He's been in a committed relationship with his partner for more than ten years. They live in Brussels, and I've visited there a couple of times; I was even an official witness at their wedding, an actual legal ceremony recognized by the state. They have a daughter conceived through artificial insemination; her mother is a lesbian friend of theirs who, along with her partner, has primary custody of the child. Together they're a family—a *good* family.

In his commentary to Christensen's essay, Ron Schow notes that Christensen oversimplifies "his options as either temple marriage or 'a rampant life of unrestrained queerness.' Obviously," Schow points out, "there are many choices between these two extremes."¹⁶ Christensen ends his essay by relating an epiphany that occurred after a "BYU fireside where they tell you to get married. I'd pretty much tuned out the entire thing," he writes, "because it didn't apply to me, but then I got home, sat on my bed, and had a distinct impression that yes, it did apply to me. Yes, I was gay, but that didn't mean I was excluded from Heavenly Father's desire for his children to marry and have families."¹⁷

I am glad Christensen had that epiphany—I accept its

truthfulness. What I don't accept is his oversimplified and religiously predetermined interpretation (Emily Pearson writes about the danger of taking "every spiritual experience . . . at face value" in situations such as these¹⁸), that any marriage he might have must be with a woman for whom he feels little sexual desire. While I certainly acknowledge the right of Christensen and his wife to do whatever they want, and while I am enough of a libertarian to think all consenting adults should have the legal right to marry any other consenting adult(s) who want(s) to marry them, I am also enough of a libertarian to insist on my own right to remain skeptical of marriages so thoroughly shaped and guided by androcentric, misogynist ideology—particularly when that ideology is cloaked in the guise of divine decree—and to criticize the rhetoric employed to defend them.

In a coda to his essay, Christensen acknowledges that I see that Marybeth [Raynes] states my dilemma more accurately when she says that people in my situation choose "between a deep love and erotic attachment plus love." This choice is a good deal more difficult than the over-simplified choice I thought I was making. By choosing heterosexual marriage, I've denied myself the experience of loving someone I am naturally attracted to and my wife the experience of loving someone who is naturally attracted to her.¹⁹

Ultimately, I want for these gay men who choose to marry straight women what they seem unable to want for themselves or grant their wives: I want them to be able to form their families and raise their children in unions where both partners are beloved, cherished, and desired body and soul, and I think the world will be a better place for me and all other straight women and men when gay women and men have that right, as a matter of course and without disputation, qualification, or reservation. ☺

NOTES

1. Jane Gross, "When the Beard Is Too Painful to Remove," *New York Times*, 3 August 2006. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/03/fashion/03marriage_bg.html> (accessed 4 August 2006).

2. Ben Christensen, "Getting Out/Staying In: One Mormon Straight/Gay Marriage," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no 3 (Fall 2005): 121–32, 148–51.

3. Sakia Gunn was a fifteen-year-old who was stabbed to death in Newark, New Jersey, in 2002 for spurning sexual advances by announcing a sexual orientation that excluded the sex of the attackers. Although Gunn's murder galvanized Newark at the time, it received scant attention elsewhere, particularly when compared to the death of Matthew Shepard, and efforts to memorialize Gunn have been relatively unsuccessful. Many analysts argue that Gunn's race (African-American), class (lower), gender (female) and sexuality (lesbian) meant that her murder mattered less in the psyche of the nation.

4. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mixed-Orientation LDS Couples Count on Commitment, Work and Love to Beat the Odds," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 August 2006. Available at <http://www.sltrib.com/ci_4136232> (accessed 4 August 2006).

5. Whitney Joiner, "Live Girl-on-Girl Action!" *Salon*, 20 June 2006. Available at <http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2006/06/20/girl_on_girl/index.html> (accessed 20 June 2006).

6. Steven Fales, "Confessions of a Mormon Boy: An Autobiographical One-Man Play Written, Created and Performed by Steven Fales," *SUNSTONE*, December 2003, 40–56.

7. Ron Schow, "Homosexual Attraction and LDS Marriage Decisions,"

Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 38, no 3 (Fall 2005): 133–43.

8. *Ibid.*, 138–39.

9. *Ibid.*, 138.

10. Marybeth Raynes, "Thoughts of a Therapist," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no 3 (Fall 2005): 143–48.

11. *Good-bye, I Love You* (New York: Random House, 1986) by Carl Lynn Pearson and "Irreconcilable Differences" (*SUNSTONE*, April 2006, 42–48) by her daughter Emily Pearson are eloquent illustrations of this point.

12. See *The Smith Family*, directed by Tasha Oldham, Small Town Pictures, 2002. This documentary chronicles the lives of Steve and Kim Smith. Steve died of AIDS after first passing the HIV virus on to his wife. She now lives with a deadly disease resulting from her husband's unsafe sexual behavior.

13. Even so committed a feminist and passionate an advocate of gay equality and human rights as Carol Lynn Pearson can be guilty of ignoring the existence of lesbians. An ad soliciting "stories from or about gay members of religious families" for Pearson's book, *No More Goodbyes—Embracing our Gay Family and Friends in Spite of and Because of Our Religions*, appears on page 57 of *SUNSTONE*, April 2006. Pearson specifies that she seeks "true experiences from gay people, parents, siblings, wives/former wives, friends, that involve religion either as a part of the problem or a part of the solution (or both)" (emphasis added). There is no mention of husbands/former husbands of gay people; not even the gender-neutral term "spouses/former spouses" is used. Thus, the unconscious assumption seems to be that gay is a subset of male rather than of human being; the unconscious message seems to be that lesbian experience doesn't count. I pointed this out to Pearson at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium; she acknowledged that it was an unfortunate and chagrin-inducing error, and said it was one she would not make again.

14. As evidence of the role of sex in feminism—and the ways in which that role is ignored—I'll relate an anecdote about a panel I attended in 2005, "Advancing Feminist Sensibilities among Mormon Men," the abstract of which read:

Why aren't there more visible and vocal male feminist voices within the Mormon community? The all-male panel will talk about their journeys toward becoming feminists, the challenges they face in maintaining feminist sensibilities in Mormon culture, and ideas they see for encouraging other Mormon men to take more active feminist stances. Audience discussion will follow.

In the audience discussion after the panel, I tried to ask how sex fit into the panelists' understanding of feminism. I was greeted initially by a confounded silence from all four panelists. Eventually one panelist responded, though his answer made clear that he thought I was asking whether or not he enjoyed sex with women. While I was glad to know that he did indeed, I was trying to ask something very different—I was trying to ask if they understood the way sexual denigration is often a primary tool in efforts to disempower women and if being a male feminist had transformed how they understood, experienced, and enjoyed sex. Unfortunately, I was not able to express that at the time of the panel, but even after the panel, when I was better able to gather and articulate my thoughts, I didn't get very encouraging answers. One panelist said to me, "I can see how feminism has real ramifications in regards to sex, but I never thought of it that way; I never thought of feminism as anything but a political movement."

15. At some point, I realized that there are plenty of straight men in the world, and that it is completely possible to feel sexual desire for someone you find contemptible—that, in fact, certain kinds of sexual arousal and activity are fundamentally expressions of contempt, often deliberately so. Although I hope the following examples are not part of the personal experience of most people reading this article, I think it is important to call attention to some of the ways heterosexual sex can involve contempt for women: the brutal attempted date rape described by Sylvia Plath in *The Bell Jar*, for instance, or sex with a prostitute so a man can feel entitled to call the woman he's having intercourse with "a filthy whore," the point being that denigrating and shaming a woman is a turn-on. Then there's the custom practiced in some Islamic societies, where a group of men rape the virgin daughter or sister of a man who has committed certain crimes, in order to dishonor his family: whether or not the woman's impending shame and pain helps the men who perform the rape become aroused, there remains the fact that debasing and humiliating her is the primary motive for the sexual act, to the point that she is expected to kill herself after it. And there's always the use of systematic mass rape, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Darfur, etc., as a means of both torture and ethnic cleansing.

16. Schow, "Homosexual Attraction," 139.

17. Christensen, "Getting Out/Staying In," 131.

18. Emily Pearson, "Irreconcilable Differences," 42–48.

19. Christensen, "Getting Out/Staying In," 149.

WOMEN, EQUALITY, AND PRIESTHOOD— SOFT ANSWERS TO HARD QUESTIONS

When my daughter was about four years old, she stood up on the pew during a baby blessing, looked at the circle of men surrounding a tiny baby, and demanded (loudly), “Hey, where are the mommies?” Sooner or later, or sooner and later, most Mormon women ask questions about the nature of priesthood authority and women’s

relationship to it. The following essays approach these questions from different vantage points and arrive at different answers and, more importantly, at new and different questions. They invite us to see old questions in a new light, to reconsider our own answers, and to appreciate the searching of our sisters. —K.H.

A NECESSARY TENSION

by Ashley Sanders



In the event that she completes an online jogging class, ASHLEY SANDERS will graduate from BYU with a degree in philosophy and English. Besides being able to think abstractly while running long distances, Ashley hopes her education will land her a job as an English professor. In the meantime, she agonizes over urban sprawl and holds weekly discussion nights with friends.

IN THE JUNE 2007 *SUNSTONE*, MARGARET TOSCANO listed five questions that need answering before determining whether boys are more important than girls in the LDS Church. Amidst Toscano’s “how,” “where,” “what,” and “why” questions, there is a “who” question: “Is gender equality in the Church to be measured objectively by outward criteria or subjectively by the feelings reported by LDS women?” This is an important question, since insiders and outsiders rarely agree, and since the answer to the question is important to individual happiness. To answer the “who” question, it might be helpful to examine the question of inequality in the context of another religion and then apply the analogous parts to our own. To do that, I will use an example from Deepa Mehta’s film, *Water*.

The film follows the life of Hindu women living in widow houses called ashrams. Many Hindu women are married off at very young ages, frequently to older, Brahmin men. When the husbands die, Hindu beliefs dictate that widows leave their families, don white saris, abstain from certain foods, and live off the alms of others.

The film seems to suggest that social prisons need no keys—that ashrams stay full without guards or locks. From a secular or outsider perspective, these ashrams seem profoundly unjust. Without the explanations and expectations of a religious perspective, it appears that women are being forced to prop up the caste system by getting married to men who die

and leave them to suffer the unfair consequences. Any secular analysis of the situation would conclude that the women are being degraded to reinforce a system in which males profit at the expense of others.

One of the main characters—a Hindu skeptic who has recently returned from school—points this out, and then offers the solution: *Any scripture that requires or promotes injustice is not scripture and should not be followed.* Easy for him to say. He is a secularist; he has separated himself from Hinduism because of its injustices. He is not bound by the powerful circular arguments, scriptures, and social fallout that would accompany his opinion were he still a practicing Hindu.

The widow woman he loves, and who loves him back (a sin for widows), sees it differently. She is still inside Hinduism though she sees its injustices. Her situation is different because she believes in Hinduism enough to recognize that religions operate differently than other institutions. She believes enough to understand that if there is even a chance that Hinduism is true—including all its necessary or inspired injustices—that it would be a mistake to treat it like a rationalist democracy. Not only that, but she would risk everything if she doubted it.

And what is the point of our analogy? The point is that a person who believes in something even partially—or, worse, who is wondering whether or not she believes it—finds herself trapped between the discourse of the insiders and the criticism of the outsiders, and she must somehow consider both without forgetting that the consequences of being wrong are terrifying.

This is problematic, since the two discourses not only disagree but tout entirely different methodologies. Outsider discourse might conclude, for instance, that women do not appear to be equal in Hinduism, and that the stringent rules applied to widows seem designed to secure a power structure that favors men. A religious apologist might respond in one of several ways:

1. That the perceived inequality is a test of faith, and that faith in Hinduism means ignoring the ethical implications of a commandment in order to love and obey the true religion (the true religion being something apart from and above the ethical question of injustice).

2. That the gods have dictated these (possibly unfair) structures, and that the gods are either always right or else so unknowable that we cannot scan or judge their reasons.
3. That obedience is more important than ethics, and that faith is irrational.
4. That it may really *be* flawed and ungodly, but that most people in the religion could not handle repairing the flaw and therefore the religion must cater to them.

I will respond with secular counterpoints in a moment, but first I want to illustrate the power of the above arguments, even when they are presented to women to reinforce their inferior status.

A person who is wondering whether or not she believes something finds herself trapped between the discourse of the insiders and the criticism of the outsiders, and she must somehow consider both without forgetting that the consequences of being wrong are terrifying.

In the film, a young girl joins the ashram. She is bold and brash and not yet conditioned to accept what others consider to be religious fact. She is one day sitting among a group of ashram women while a priest expounds from scripture—scripture that, ironically, proclaims the inferiority of women. The widows listen raptly, or at least dutifully, ready to accept the claims of authority. The young girl will have none of it, however, and interrupts the priest to ask, outright, why women have no power.

The odd thing is that the priest does not even need to respond; he does not have to punish, censure, explain or dis-

cuss. The women respond for him. They look terrified and shush the girl. The *women* respond! The very same women who were forced to marry certain men; the same women who had no choice in the matter; the same women who were sent to the ashram and separated from their families; the same women who cannot leave; the same women who cannot eat certain foods; the same women who must beg for money; the same women who must become prostitutes when their begging doesn't bring in enough.

And why? There are innumerable possible answers. The point is that the women, voluntarily, stay where they are put. The ashram is not locked; there is no guard. They stay because they love something enough to accept its injustices; they stay

because they believe in irrational, unknowable gods, and they fear the dread consequence of rationality; they stay because they are afraid of what they will be called if they leave; they stay because there are a thousand-thousand explanations for why things are the way they are, and because these explanations never satisfy but insist, flatly, that there is no way to investigate them without challenging them utterly. They stay because there is no method for questioning the system while staying inside of it, because all the virtues in their religion are manufactured to reward staying and disparage leaving.

THIS IS WHY I do not believe we can judge equality in Mormonism by asking its insiders. I believe that the discussion of equality is an inherently comparative activity: It is a comparison between two discourses that check and judge another—two discourses that will never entirely agree or even speak the same language. Equality invokes mathematics, which reminds us that an equation must have two sides. In this case, those sides are represented by secular ethics and religious circularity. Neither one can have primacy and satisfy the other, but I do think they should trouble each other.

A secular ethicist would have some hard responses to the religious explanations for earthly injustice mentioned above. To explanation 1, she would ask what “pure” religion would look like if taken separately from its structures, commandments, and practices, and if one shouldn't decide whether one believes in the former partly by referencing the latter. For explanation 2, she would reject the disconnect between authority and ethics and deplore the idea of an unknowable God. Believing that way, she would argue, you could believe in anything, and religion is obviously not about believing in anything but in adjudicating belief. She would expand the argument to contest explanation 3, insisting that there must be reasons for believing everything, and especially for deciding what to be-



JONNY HAWKINS

“I think I’m about to reach my breaking point”

lieve—particularly when it concerns ethics, which is necessarily a world of reason and sharable discourse. Explanation 4 would also exasperate her, as it would appear to confuse the purpose of religion with its means.

To be fair, the religious person would have some good arguments against the secular ethicist, too. But that is not my reason for writing here. My main point is that insider opinion, although necessary, is not enough when determining questions of inequality. It is not enough for several reasons, some of which I have already mentioned.

1. It is not enough because equality is an inherently comparative term. Since evaluating equality is an ethical task, and since ethics is partly a question of representation, determining equality requires comparing the representation standards of one system with the representation standards of another.
2. It is not enough because public and private speaking is different. When a minority speaks to a majority to demand or even merely consider the question of equality, that minority must tailor its message to the accepted terms and speaking patterns of the majority. They must conform to these in hopes of getting a subversive message across to an institution that has a vested interest in limiting subversion. Thus, even those women who might negatively evaluate their position in the Church will mainly do so in accordance with accepted terms and positions.
3. Most insiders have to overcome a tremendous amount of inertia before they will apply to the institutions they love the same rigorous analyses they apply to other institutions. While this love might be instructive and vital to clearly understanding things, it must be balanced by evaluations from people who are not influenced by the social and cultural expectations that govern the inside.
4. Because religion frequently validates its claims by reference either to itself or to a God who does not follow human logic or timing, it leaves dissatisfied members little to cite but their consciences, and apologists with only anecdotes and positive personal stories. While claims of this type have a valid place, we must allow for the structural and historical critiques that are more readily shouldered by outsiders, recognizing that humane actions within a system do not necessarily imply a humane system.

For these reasons, I believe the ashram analogy is helpful; it helps us to determine if the question of inequality within the LDS Church resembles what I have called the prison that needs no keys. Without the helpful and necessary tension between insider and outsider methodologies, the system could easily remain a prison in which the inertia of allegiance would function as lock and key, with insiders voluntarily staying inside. I think that the question of equality is built on a more revealing riddle: why insiders in one institution defend practices and structures that they would condemn in another. I think we need both sides of the equality debate to start to have that discussion. ☺

WHY DO WE NEED EACH OTHER?

A Personal Search for the Answer to God's Odd Juxtaposing of Male and Female

by Tracie A. Lamb



TRACIE A. LAMB has published several essays, as well as *Yearning for the Living God*, the memoirs of her mission president, F. Enzo Busche (*Deseret Book*, 2004), which she compiled and edited. She and her family are living and working in New Zealand for a year.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MALE AND FEMALE ROLES have always been part of my life. I distinctly remember one day in elementary school when I was playing basketball. I was thinking about being a “Mrs.” someday, and I decided, “I don’t want to just be an ‘s’ in a man’s name.” The struggles and questions have continued since then.

I write to answer my own questions. Some of the most significant questions in my life concern this enigma of male and female. Are we different or just treated differently? What are our respective roles? Why do we have different roles? What do I want my role to be? Do I have a choice? Where do relationships fit in? Do we even need relationships? Why? Why? Why?

I have been married in the temple, divorced, single for six years, and married again. With this new marriage, I am at a more contented place than I have ever been regarding male/female questions. That contentment is also due to having worked through a significant part of the gender question I have as a Mormon woman: What is the priesthood and what, as a woman, is my relationship to it? To put it more bluntly: Why do men get the priesthood and I don’t?

In this essay, I venture a public mulling over of this personal question. I realize that the topic is a controversial one and that many, if not most, may disagree with my conclusions. Nevertheless, I invite you to witness my journey with this question and how I resolved it for myself.

ALTHOUGH I AM from a very small, rural Utah town—backward even today—I was imbued with the feminist spirit of the ‘60s and ‘70s. I also think I was born with more than just a little independence and assertiveness. My patriarchal blessing says I was designed that way: “You have been designed as a leader among your sex,” it says. I took some comfort from those words when I so obviously didn’t fit in with BYU culture or in homemaking meetings.

But that aside, because of the era I grew up in, I was primed early to be a feminist. I was on the cutting edge of the women’s

movement in my town, where I helped break the stereotype barrier by becoming the town's first female gas station attendant. The fact that I was often mistaken for a boy because of my short hair and much-less-than-satisfactory shape was just one of the hazards of pushing the envelope. I was, nevertheless, proud of my effort on behalf of all women.

I was quite a feminist from early on, and though I was also quite devout, that devotion did not keep me from being rankled by the fact that I could not hold the priesthood. I could never understand why some boys and, later, men who seemed so less capable than I were given positions and authority simply because of their physical makeup. I often thought to myself back then, "Men want to lead, but they can't even dance." It was a time of great frustration and questioning for me.

In my growing-up, feminist world, I believed that boys and girls are similar—that the apparent differences come from acculturation and environment. I believed that men and women are just people, basically the same. I was wrong. Boys and girls, men and women are different. I realize there is a continuum of characteristics, and I know each individual comes with her or his own set of qualities. Yet, from my own experience, observation, and searching, I believe some qualities are generally female and some are generally male. For a while, it has been politically incorrect to assert that belief. But more and more, people are acknowledging the differences and trying to understand what they mean.

For example, an article in *Parents* magazine, "Teaching Boys, Teaching Girls," discusses the different learning styles of boys and girls and offers suggestions to parents for working with the strengths and weaknesses of each sex. Little girls, the article contends, develop earlier, have better fine motor skills, and have stronger verbal skills and reading ability. On the other hand, they typically have an aversion to risk and are less adventuresome and techno-savvy than boys. Little boys have stronger spatial skills and are more self-reliant and competitive, but they may lack verbal ability and are often restless and need more physical activity than girls. The article suggests that parents can help their boy or girl by understanding the possible strengths and weaknesses for each sex and using that knowledge to guide their child.¹

Such articles would have been considered heresy by many people only a short while ago and still are by some, but now experts are coming to believe what those who deal with children already know—boys and girls are different in many ways. I hadn't understood that for a variety of reasons.

Perhaps part of my difficulty came from something I realized recently when I was playing Barbies with my youngest daughter. As a girl, I used to play Barbies a lot. My sister and I each had a Barbie, and my cousins had Barbies. We got lots of Barbie clothes at Christmas. But none of us ever owned a Ken doll. There was no Ken in my young life. Perhaps that is significant.

Deep inside, I had a fear, distrust, and general dismissal of males. I did not see them as people. In my ignorance and to my current shame, I used to believe that men did not have

feelings, so it did not matter what I said or did to them. Only in the last few years have I begun to question that premise and wonder where it came from. Perhaps my assumptions came from the incident when an older male relative felt me up, but I called him on it and he never did it again. Or from the rows of high school boys lined up jauntily, one foot against the wall, hands in pockets, smirking, making comments and catcalls as girls walked by. Maybe it was fed by the myriad news stories about horrendous crimes, almost invariably committed by young men. For whatever reasons, I was nervous and defensive in the presence of the adolescent male.

MY FEAR OF men ran deep, but a time came in my life when I decided to face that fear. It was an interesting moment of enlightenment. I have the habit of hanging quotations on my kitchen cabinets, partly because I enjoy them but mostly to help fill up my two daughters with good every day. The saying one week was from Madame Curie, "Nothing is to be feared. It is only to be understood." In one of those rare flashes of insight, I realized that maybe one way to overcome my fear of males was to understand them better.

I started my search with the book, *A Fine Young Man*, by Michael Gurian, which had been recommended by a good friend who has three boys. In second grade, I had gotten my first pair of glasses. Until then, I had been unaware that my eyesight was so poor except that I kept getting bad headaches. I remember very clearly putting on those glasses and being able to see objects that I had never before realized were there. Reading Gurian's book was a similar experience. I hadn't realized I had been so blind to who and what males are. Reading his observations and insights helped me see and understand what I had never seen or understood. It was like seeing words on the blackboard at school for the very first time.

One thing Gurian explains is the incredible impact biology plays in boys' lives. In fact, possibly the point that helped me most was the information about testosterone. Gurian states, "So much of how an adolescent boy lives depends on his hormones, especially his testosterone, the human sex and aggression hormone that makes him into an adult male."²

A *New York Times Magazine* article further explains the significant effects of this powerful hormone. The article, titled "The He Hormone," concludes that testosterone levels are major reasons for the differences in men and women and gives these statistics: "An average woman has 40 to 60 nanograms of testosterone in a deciliter of blood plasma. An average man has 300 to 1000, and a teenage boy can range up to 1300 or so."³ Gurian states in his book, "Adolescent males (pubescent, post pubescent, and then continuing into adulthood) secrete between five and seven surges of this hormone through their bodies each day. By late adolescence, their testosterone levels can be as much as twenty times that of their female peers."⁴ After learning that, I became much more sympathetic to teenage boys. Having myself experienced the monthly heightened awareness of and desire for the opposite sex caused by hormonal fluctuation, I was flabbergasted to realize boys experience that feeling not only daily but many times a day. That

boys are at such mercy to their biologies engendered in me a great deal more sympathy and understanding for them than I hitherto had.

It is not just testosterone that makes males and females different, however. Even our brains work differently. For some functions, we process the same information in different parts of our brains. And for some thought processes, women use most of their brains while men use only a part. Women think in the big picture. What affects one part of a woman's life affects every part of her life.

For example, I have always been grateful I got my degree before I had children. The intense concentration and lack of awareness of the outside world or the passing time as I sat in my carrel pouring over books would have been impossible with children. Once I had a child, I was never able to entirely focus on anything else again. A part of my brain is always occupied in thinking about my children.

Men, on the other hand, tend to compartmentalize more easily and can concentrate on one thing to the exclusion of all else. My friend, for example, was telling about what her husband is like on trips. He is completely focused on the destination—getting to point B—and does not want to be distracted by diversions along the way.

I believe that another difference between the sexes is that it is more difficult for males to mature than for females. Having a baby matures a woman, and once she becomes pregnant, she grows up pretty fast. A man's path to maturity is not as clear, direct, or certain. This fact may be one reason for an observation of Margaret Thatcher's reported in the memoirs of Barbara Bush. Pierre Trudeau, the prime minister of Canada, once acted rudely towards Thatcher. When President Reagan expressed chagrin over the prime minister's behavior, Thatcher replied, "Don't worry. We women are used to men who don't mature."⁵

Gurian's book elaborates ways to help boys mature and the types of support they often need to contain their natural impulses and move from the uncontrolled, immature boy to the disciplined, mature man. The book emphasizes that boys need a great deal of structure and outside discipline. Because of this insight, I have begun to understand and appreciate organizations such as the Army and the necessity of the high level of discipline and training they employ.

After he finished basic training, my brother described an incident where a group of trainees wearing gas masks were put into a building filled with tear gas. Then they were ordered to remove their gas masks. He described the pain and physical indignity of the experience—some soiled themselves, and others vomited; tears and mucus streamed

down their faces as they were forced to remain in the building for a set period of time.

My brother explained the purpose of the exercise: to break down their former selves so that they could be rebuilt as soldiers willing to follow orders and obey commands. I was horrified at the time, but now I see how such extreme measures may be necessary in order to have cocky, arrogant adolescent males become respectful, disciplined men. I realize that not all young men are cocky. However, it does seem that such extreme discipline may be necessary. Such an exercise would be emotionally destructive for most women, I think, but perhaps it is necessary to get the attention of men.

Gurian's book further explains the need most boys have for regimentation and structure. It describes various stages of the male maturation process and explains that when a boy has almost reached physical maturity, it is important that he undertake some sort of quest to help him in the final stages of becoming emotionally mature. The book mentions the vision quests of the Native Americans. It also describes Mormon missions—difficult, highly disciplined assignments where boys are required to give up many pleasures and serve others for two years.

Emphasizing the need to teach boys discipline, Gurian says: "The great lesson adolescent males have taught me is this: There is no such thing as freedom unless it takes place within the limitations of responsibility to higher powers."⁶ In their book *The Lessons of History*, Will and Ariel Durant say it this way: "A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group."⁷



"Yeah, I know what you mean. I'm a deacon myself."

An important element in helping boys to become men is modeling by older males. A phenomenon in the animal kingdom helps illustrate this. A television documentary described an incident involving African elephants. Drought threatened to kill off an entire herd of elephants in a certain area. In an attempt to save at least some of the elephants, park rangers killed the older elephants to give the younger ones a greater chance to survive. Gradually, though, difficulties arose among the young males. They began to form gang-like packs and torment not only other elephants but other animals as well. They became destructive, destroying vegetation and buildings, and even killed other animals for what seemed simply to be the fun of it. Even though most had not reached sexual maturity, they began to display aggressive sexual behavior towards the other elephants, male or female.

The park rangers grew more and more concerned. Was this some kind of illness? Blood samples taken from the young elephants revealed that their testosterone levels were unnaturally high, but what could be done about it? It was suggested that older male elephants be brought from another herd. And it worked. Simply from having the older males around, the testosterone levels of the younger males returned to normal, as did their behavior. A *National Geographic World* article about the incident summed it up this way, “Good adult male role models can help prevent problem behavior in teenagers, be they human or elephant.”⁸

The regimentation, titles, uniforms, and discipline of the military are echoed in the order of the LDS priesthood and programs such as Boy Scouts. The badges, uniforms, awards, and activities assist boys in moving along the path of maturity. As I read more about the needs of the adolescent male, I realized that the priesthood is now set up in a way to fulfill those needs. The developmental stages suggested by Gurian, who is not a Mormon, fit the ages of the Aaronic priesthood quorums. The structure and discipline serve to form, mold, and contain the passions and fulfill many of the needs boys have.

The husband of the friend who recommended Gurian’s book to me told her that he feels boys need the priesthood and directives of the Church to understand that premarital and extramarital sex are absolutely forbidden. He says it has to be unequivocal; otherwise boys and men would struggle even more than they already do in resisting sexual temptation. Those of you who have teenage boys or who have worked with them already know this. I hadn’t, and I didn’t. But gaining a small understanding into how adolescent males tick reduced my anxiety and increased my tolerance. This new insight into the intrinsic, basic differences between males and females casts a completely different light on life.

SO I ADMIT we are different, but that niggling question remains—why? I believe that one way these biological differences serve the general well-being is that the incredibly strong sexual urge adolescent males experience helps get their attention away from gadgets, machines, toys, computers, contact sports, motors, and other moving objects.

Their physical drives make them notice girls, which helps them complete their maturation processes. I have heard more than one mother comment that her son finally started paying attention to his hygiene when he discovered girls. Sex alone clearly does not keep a man with a woman, but it is often what initiates the connection in the first place. And it is in this connection—this synergism of unlike parts—that much of the answer to my question lies.

Elena Cotton, a counselor in Kent, Washington, uses the metaphor of a wheel to illustrate this synergism. Women are the center, the hub, she believes, and their spokes reach out to connect with the outside rim, the men. The men are on the outside, making contact “where the rubber meets the road” and acting as liaison with the world.⁹

Cotton suggests that women calm men down enough to allow men the time and space to be introspective and discover what is already inside of them but undeveloped. Unless a man has a particularly nurturing father, she explains, he learns about emotional connection from the women in his life, starting at about age fourteen when he begins to really notice females. She believes there is a place inside of a man that wants to connect emotionally, but often he doesn’t know how to do it. Women, being more naturally connected to their emotions, help men understand or relate to the emotions they have. For example, men rarely have close friends other than their wives. A refrigerator magnet has this wisdom: *Women are women’s best friends. Women are men’s best friends. Without women, there would be no best friends.*

This ability of many women to connect naturally with other people is illustrated in a *Newsweek* article about autism. The article shows a continuum of “empathizing” and “systemizing” and states, “In general, females relate more to feelings, and males to facts. Autistic kids fit in an extreme male pattern.”¹⁰ In other words, autism, in its inability to relate to emotions, is extreme maleness.

Women, who seem more naturally attuned to emotions, can help men connect to theirs. In addition to this (or perhaps because of it), I think women have a civilizing effect on men. I was touched by a letter to my mother from an artist associate of hers, Garth Harrison, which she shared with me. In the letter he says, “I have often stated that, to the extent that the human animal is civilized, it has much to do with the gentle, patient, peaceful and nurturing qualities of many women; that these are not signs of weakness to be exploited but attributes of strength to be honored, respected and protected.” When I was trying to explain my theory about this to a friend, he readily agreed, saying, “You only need to spend some time deer hunting with a bunch of men to know that’s true.” As Robert Frost says in his poem, “Home Burial,”

*A man must partly give up being a man
With women-folk.*

Because it seemed that having females around was good for males, I felt quite smug about women’s generosity until I had a small epiphany. I was at church watching as the men in our branch stacked chairs and put away tables. Suddenly I realized that men were willing to do women a favor by allowing

women to do the truly important work of caring for children. Men accepted the responsibility of provider so women could have the more significant job of caregiver. I had the feeling the unspoken deal in the preexistence was something like: “You help civilize us, and we’ll do the grunge work.”

LDS discourse states over and over that there is nothing more important than raising children and taking care of the family. I have come to believe this is true not only from hearing Church leaders say as much, but also from another theory of mine. I believe that one way to recognize the will of the Lord is to hold up the mirror of the world to see its opposite. What the world values most is the opposite of what the Lord values. An example is the care of children. An occupation having to do with children is almost always lower in salary than others—teacher, pediatrician, certainly childcare provider. People may pay more to board their dog or park their car than they do to care for their children. By the world’s standards, children are among the very last in importance. But I believe that “the first shall be last and the last shall be first” also applies to children. If caring for and raising little people is as significant as I believe it is, then whoever has the privilege of that responsibility is being given a gift. Traditionally, that has been women.

In my understanding, one of the premises of feminism was that a woman could have it all—a great career and a great family. From my own experience and observation, I have concluded that it is impossible to be a really good mother and a really successful career person. There is no such thing as Superwoman. It seems that many in the feminist movement, instead of teaching the world to value what is female and what women do, encourage women to become like men. A friend who has worked in the corporate world for much of her career said she had to be very masculine at work and that when she was most ineffective at work was when she was most female. I have struggled since childhood with the dilemma of female opportunities and talents being sacrificed to the needs of the family, but I now believe being a good mother is more important than anything else we do.

A basic premise to my thoughts is that there is a God and he has a plan. The Church is the vehicle for that plan. Years ago, I read somewhere that there are three things in life we need. If we have any one of them, we are fortunate—true love, true religion, and true vocation. I have always felt I had my true religion. Next to raising my daughters, my religion has given me the deepest satisfaction in my life. I am a true believer. But that does not mean I am not also a questioner. I have many questions, but I see them as the result of my lack of present ability to understand rather than as flaws in the gospel.

I believe that God’s plan truly includes separate and distinct roles for men and women. At this point in my life, I have come to trust God enough to believe his plan is good and beneficial for us. I know he loves me, and I trust him. I also believe God is a God of order. My friend in the corporate world suggests that any good organization divides its labor. No one person does everything because no one person can. This friend was raised by a single mother and saw how difficult and draining it was to try to be both father and mother. It is unfortunate that

WHERE IS OUR PART?

JUDITH CURTIS of Phoenix, Arizona, writes:



WHEN the women in Nauvoo told Joseph they wanted to form a benevolent society similar to others of the day, he said he had something better for them:

[T]he Society should move according to the ancient priesthood. . . . [I will] make of this society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch’s day—as in Paul’s day. . . . [I am] glad to have the opportunity of organizing the women, as a part of the priesthood belongs to them.*

What has become of our part?

IF the Relief Society were restored to quorum status as it was when Joseph set up the organization, women could once again participate in some of the same ways they did then. Even women who say they do not want the priesthood would most likely welcome the following options:

- Mothers could stand in the circle when babies are blessed so they could hear the words of the prayer and feel the spirit there. I don’t believe there are any other Christian churches that do not allow both parents to participate in a baby’s blessing.
- Wives and endowed single women could stand with husbands or other males when children are blessed in the home or family setting.
- Relief Society sisters could lay their hands on and bless one another.
- Women could be witnesses for baptisms, marriages, and sealings. Stake Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary presidents could attend high council meetings and participate directly rather than having to communicate through an intermediate high counselor.

There is nothing on this list that has not been done before. There is nothing that threatens men’s power. I believe most members of the Church would welcome and accept these changes.

*The first two parts of this quotation are from the 30 March 1842 Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes found in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 110. The third part is quoted E. Howard, “Third Quarterly Conference: Relief Society Salt Lake County,” 7 (1 July 1878), 18.

society has devalued women’s roles, but that does not mean the basic division is wrong. In my theory, as part of the plan, women are allowed the privilege of caring for children in return for what women can teach men.

BESIDES THE PRIVILEGE of having and raising children, do women get anything else out of this bilateral arrangement? Cotton believes they do and provides some insight into this. She explains that men seem to be naturally attuned to their bodies, to the physical. The body and what the body can do is their starting point and the central focus of much of their existence. Women, on the other hand, are often grounded more in the emotional. For good or ill, an emotional thread runs through a woman's life.

Cotton suggests that men help women appreciate the physical side of a relationship and get into the fun of their bodies. For example, girls can learn from boys that they can be tough and that they can be physical. Cotton also believes that although females are nurturers by nature, they also have a masculine, physical side. But they have a need to be connected. When they do something physical—horseback riding, hiking, biking—they generally want to do it with someone.

When I taught the discussions as a missionary, I taught there are two main reasons we come to earth: to practice faith and to get a body. Having a body is one of the most significant aspects of earth life. Because men are so much more physically based, they know more naturally how to really enjoy this gift in many ways. Mary Schmich in her *Chicago Times* column expresses this idea well: "Enjoy your body. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or of what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own."¹¹ Men can help women do this. For example, one friend told me it was ten years after she got married before she learned to appreciate and enjoy variations on the theme of sex, but now she thinks they're great, and they're like candy to her husband. Another friend says that she has more fun with men. She thinks men help women risk and stretch and get out of their comfort zone.

That men help women connect more with their bodies and appreciate the great gift of their bodies is an idea I had never thought of but can accept. I like it. It makes sense. Women, centered in emotion, help men find and connect to their emotional selves. Men, based primarily in the physical, help women enjoy the gift of their bodies.

One way a man can do this, Cotton believes, is for him to learn to create an emotionally safe environment in order for a woman to get into the fun of her body. She counsels that if a man meets the emotional needs of the primary relationship in his life, he will have all the physical satisfaction he needs. Men often don't take the time, don't allow themselves to be open to their feminine, nurturing side, but women have an innate need to be connected, and they can't enjoy the physical side of the relationship until they feel they are connected emotionally.

AS I HAVE come to realize and accept the powerful differences between men and women, my attitude toward men and also toward the priesthood has changed a great deal. I had an interesting experience relating to the priesthood recently. I went to Salt Lake over conference weekend for my mission reunion. That Saturday, a friend and I

went to see the movie at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. We came out of the movie just a little while before the start of the priesthood session of conference. Men and boys were lining up, many with tickets, many others hoping to get standby tickets. There were thousands and thousands of males of priesthood age.

Surrounded by men in white shirts and ties, we wandered around the new Main Street plaza and outside the Conference Center. It was quite an overwhelming experience, and I tried to identify what exactly I was feeling. It wasn't the negative response I had sometimes had in the past. What I felt, I finally realized, was *safe*. I felt secure surrounded by all those priesthood holders. When the Conference Center opened and they began filing inside, they did seem like an army, and I felt safe there in the midst of them.

My view of the priesthood has changed, and I no longer feel resentful, envious, or threatened by the Church's position that it is to be given only to males. Of course, I still don't really understand what the priesthood is or how I have access to that priesthood power. I just feel that because of the differences of men and women, men have the priesthood because it is how they work and it is what they need. It used to be when my daughters asked why I couldn't give them a blessing or they couldn't pass the sacrament, and I told them because we didn't hold the priesthood, they would ask that inevitable question, "But why can't we hold the priesthood?" I used to say, "I don't know." Now I say, "Because boys need to hold the priesthood and girls don't," and I believe it.

I know what some of my feminist friends will say to this. I guess I am no longer an ardent feminist because I do not believe that full equality in ritual and administration is the highest good. I do not believe equality, if it means sameness, is the most important thing. I believe fairness is. I got this idea from something I read in my quest to be a better parent. It said, "Fair is not giving each child the same thing. Fair is giving each child what she needs." I try to apply this principle in my family. I think it applies to the rest of life as well.

This topic of male and female is as old as yin and yang, and many, perhaps most, already understand it. Though usually a good vicarious learner, I had to go through this process myself to truly understand and come to terms with it. Men and women are different. I have come to believe that the tension of physical male and emotional female is where much of the energy of life lies. Just as one of our lessons on earth is to learn to make of our body and our spirit a pleasing combination, so we, as men and women, need to learn to work in concert, to create the harmony possible when we connect.

The world we've created and have to live in sometimes makes the male/female relationship antagonistic. But the world I think God envisions makes it complimentary—to complete, not compete.

Michael Gurian says, "This is the reality we live in: Girls and boys do not understand each other. We have taught them so little about each other's nature that they don't know how to nurture each other."¹² That easily applies to most men and women as well. Maybe as we recognize the different avenues

by which we approach our realities, we will be more able to take advantage of one another's strength. Perhaps recognizing the struggles we each face will help us be more caring about one another, regardless of our sex.

Having to live in the day-to-day still muddies the waters sometimes. Nevertheless, I rarely worry anymore about the priesthood and my relationship to it. That issue has been resolved in my own mind enough that I can simply focus on myself and what I need to do to be a better person. As far as men and women are concerned, I believe that our strengths complement one another, that sameness is not fairness, and that differences are not bad. I believe that we need each other to reach our highest potential, to achieve our greatest good. ☺

NOTES

1. Dianne Hales, "Teaching Boys, Teaching Girls," *Parents*, September 2000, 202–08.
2. Michael Gurian, *A Fine Young Man* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998), 32.
3. Andrew Sullivan, "The He Hormone," *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 April 2000, 46.
4. Gurian, *A Fine Young Man*, 32.
5. Barbara Bush, *Barbara Bush: A Memoir* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 193.
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7. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 35.
8. "Large and in Charge," *National Geographic World*, May 2001, 6.
9. Elena Cotton, personal interview with the author, 10 September 2000.
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"IT WAS LIKE COMING HOME" *My Call to the Ministry*

by Susan Skoor



SUSAN SKOOR is an ordained apostle and member of Community of Christ's Council of Twelve Apostles. When not traveling for her current assignment to the Pacific Field, she lives in Renton, Washington. She and her late husband, John Skoor, are the parents of two grown daughters and one granddaughter.

EDITOR'S NOTE: An early version of this essay was given as part of the panel presentation, "Women in Ministry," at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. Susan Skoor gave a similar address as the keynote speaker at the John Whitmer Historical Association Spring Banquet in Independence, Missouri, on 23 March 2007. That address was published as "Women's Ministries in the Community of Christ: A Personal Reflection," in *The John Whitmer Historical*

Association Journal, Vol. 27 (2007): 111–19. Her remarks are published here with the full cooperation of the JWHA.

I AM AN APOSTLE, SERVING ON THE COUNCIL OF Twelve for Community of Christ, once known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). No one was more surprised than I was when I was called to be an apostle, and I still find myself wondering how it happened and what in the world I think I'm doing. But there it is. I am an apostle. I serve in the Pacific Mission Field, which comprises Alaska, Western Washington and Oregon, Baja California, Australia, French Polynesia, and the Pacific Islands.¹

I travel within my field preaching, teaching, and providing ministry at seminars, conferences, camps, and retreats. As the chief administrative officer, I supervise the staff and ministers in my field and provide direction, interpretation, and guidance concerning World Church policies, procedures, vision, and goals. In addition, and most important of all, I am an apostolic witness of Jesus Christ, called to empower mission and witness among the church membership. It's a huge task and a high profile for someone who was relatively unknown to the majority of church members only two years ago. This is the story of my call to be an apostle and the journey Community of Christ has undertaken on its path toward gender inclusiveness.

FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION of Prophet/President W. Grant McMurray in November 2004, Community of Christ entered into a time of discernment concerning who was to fill that role.² Members and leaders alike prayed, fasted, and sought the will of God in a three-month process that culminated in a Spirit-filled meeting of the Council of Twelve Apostles at the Temple of Peace in Independence, Missouri. Having prayerfully considered the input of the members and leading quorums of the church, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles recommended Steve M. Veazey as the Prophet Designate. He was to be sustained by delegates at a special World Conference in June, 2005 and duly ordained in a public worship service in the Auditorium in Independence.

At the time, I was a high priest, a full-time minister and employee of the church, serving as the financial officer for the Sierra Pacific Mission Center in California. During the discernment process, I was diligent in prayer, fasting, scripture study, and meditation—but equally diligent in keeping the accounts and preparing for my first audit of the books. I had spent a little more than a year transforming myself into a mission center financial officer, and it was with some relief and a tinge of pleasure that I successfully weathered that audit.

I was busy doing accounts and property management one Tuesday afternoon in April 2005, when my computer informed me an email message had arrived from Steve Veazey. I assumed it was an announcement about the upcoming World Conference. It was two hours later when I opened it and read the following:

Confidential.

Top Secret.

Susan:

I would like to visit with you and your husband in your home in Sacramento. I can travel to your area for the meeting. Would you be available Thursday evening or Friday morning of this week. Please don't mention this to anyone else.

Yours in Christ, Steve Veazey.

Panic and dire scenarios raced through my mind. I had done something disastrous to the accounts, and Steve Veazey was coming out to. . . . No, that would have been Presiding Bishop Larry Norris, who is ultimately responsible for all the financial activities of the church. Perhaps I was being fired. . . . No, that would have been Field Apostle Ken McLaughlin, who is responsible for personnel in his field. I called my husband John, who read the email message with astonishment, and said, "He's going to ask you to serve on the World Church Leadership Council."

My mind refused to accept it, but over the next two days, I began to consider the possibility. Steve's most pressing organizational task was to complete his leadership team so it could be put in place immediately following his ordination. Reason said that his visit to our home had a direct relationship with the work that was top priority for him.

John and I picked up Steve at the airport and took him to our home, where I had done my best to prepare a pleasant, welcoming meal for him. We chatted over dinner, getting to know one another better by sharing stories of our courtship and interests. Over dessert, Steve identified the purpose of his visit.

"I suppose you know this is not just a social visit," he said.

"Yes," I answered somewhat ruefully. "I sort of figured that."

"Well, I won't keep you in suspense any longer. I'm here to ask you to serve as an apostle on the Council of Twelve."

I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. All the wind went out of me, and I literally said, "Ooof!" Recovering, I said, "Steve, you need to know I have no confirmation of this call at all. I have no sense that God wants me to be an apostle, and furthermore, you don't know me!"

It was true. Other than this dinner in my home, we had spoken only once before, and that was when I had been hired by Community of Christ three years earlier to be a full-time minister for the church. At that time, Steve was President of the Council of Twelve. In the intervening years, I had experienced his leadership and ministry a few times when I attended appointee gatherings, but still, Steve and I were most definitely not well acquainted.

Most Community of Christ apostles in the recent past received their call after numerous years of full-time ministry and extensive public exposure in a variety of geographic fields. Most had grown up in the church, and many were offspring of parents well-known throughout the church. Nothing in my background seemed to fit this mold. Yet looking back, I see how events and experiences prepared me for the call to apostle.

I had been raised in an Air Force family, moving around the globe every two years—from France, to America, to Japan, to Spain, to England. My mother belonged to the RLDS Church. My father was a non-practicing Methodist. Both my parents were strong and independent, and they attempted to model traditional gender roles. Those efforts were subverted, however, by my father's frequent military absences, during which my mother assumed the dominant role and provided strength, creativity, and family unity.

My parents engendered in me both a belief that I could do anything and a desire to excel in everything I attempted. I set my sights on science—research biology, specifically—and went at it with a single-mindedness that wavered only after I met a friendly, outgoing art teacher named John Skoor. Abandoning science seemed a minor price to pay for the privilege of marrying him, and I've never had any regrets about giving up science.

John was ordained an elder in the church early in life, and I enjoyed assisting him as a young wife and mother of two charming daughters. He would discuss his sermons with me, explain his ministry, and ask my advice in handling pastoral concerns.³ We often worked as a team in planning worship services, organizing events, and growing intellectually through classes and seminars. Gender issues were the farthest thing from my mind. I was happy to serve in any way possible and never thought of ordination for myself.

When we moved to Seattle in 1980, jobs were hard to come by. The Seattle Stake was looking for a youth director, and in sheer desperation, I applied. At that time, I had only my background as a Girl Scout and a brief summer of service in the Older Youth Service Corps to rely on. But the stake president "saw something in me," as he expressed it years later, and risked giving me the job. No one in the stake seemed surprised that an unknown, unordained young woman was responsible for the youth ministry. I tackled it like I did everything else and grew into the job.

When Prophet-President Wallace B. Smith presented the revelation in 1984 that opened the door for ordination of women, I was stunned. Women's ordination had never been a burning issue for me, and I had not been a voice calling for greater gender equality. Some in the church had challenged the exclusively male priesthood policy, trying to legislate for women's ordination and actively working to raise awareness among the membership concerning gender issues, but I was only vaguely aware of their voices and activity. I had not joined them.

IN GENERAL, THERE are three possible paths of change when an organization begins moving from patriarchal structure to gender inclusiveness. The first path is revolution: women demand leadership, and they wrest it from the men, leaving in their wake damaged relationships, broken families, and tarnished ideals that take decades to heal.

The second path is that of grace. Enlightened, self-actualized men, who are stable and spiritually mature, graciously invite women to step into leadership roles, and they do all they

can to insure a mutually empowering environment. That's ideal—and it seldom happens.

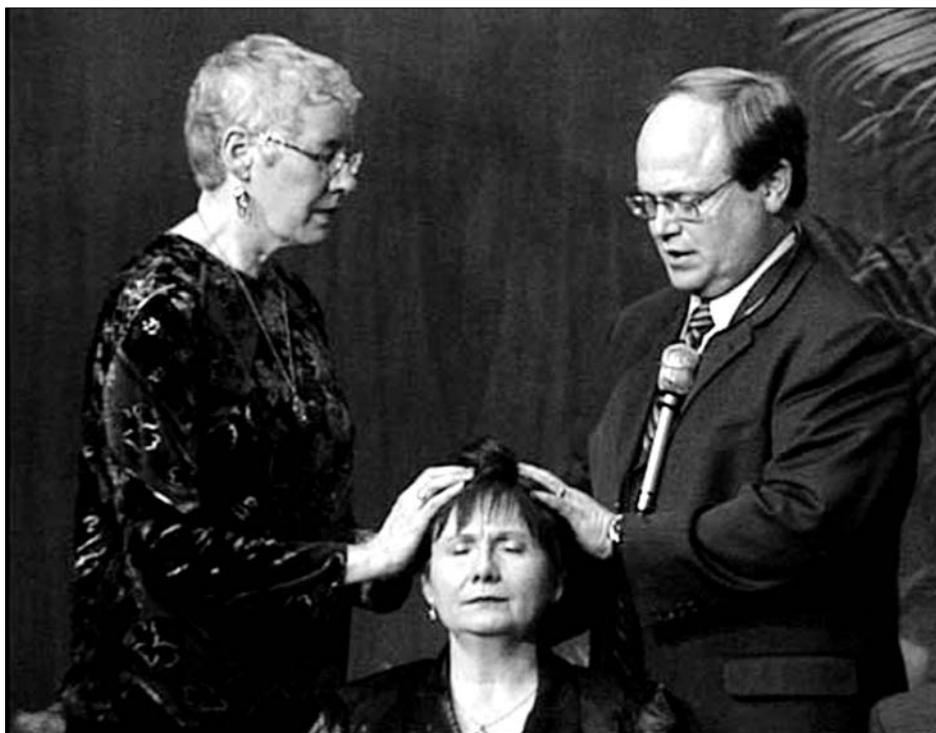
Our church walked a middle path between the two. Utilization of women's giftedness expanded in the 1970s in many congregations and the church's camp programs. Strong, outspoken women in Independence banded together to be a voice for inclusion, and through their efforts, a growing awareness of the potential for ordination of women began to permeate the church. In 1974, the First Presidency replaced the Women's Department with the Women's Ministry Commission. Marjorie Troeh became the Women's Ministry Commissioner and worked cooperatively with male leadership to bring new, creative input to World Church functions and activities.⁴ Male leaders partnered with skilled women on many projects.

The 1970 World Conference initiated "fourteen years of resolutions dealing with the equality and the calling of all."⁵ Resolutions proposing ordination of women were tabled, referred, ruled out of order, or defeated by the body. Other legislation insisted on prophetic direction prior to ordination of women.⁶ The First Presidency appointed a Special Ministries Commission, which recommended greater utilization of the unordained and created a task force to study the ordination of women. Then, in 1984, Prophet-President Wallace B. Smith, in a revelation that caused him great struggle, brought an inspired message about the inclusion of women among the ordained ministry. The gender barrier was broken, and the first women were ordained a year later.⁷

I remember being curious, excited, and a little frightened when ordination was opened to women—frightened because at some point I might be asked to assume responsibility I wasn't sure I wanted. For many others, the change created havoc and dissent. Estimates of those who left the church range from fifteen to thirty thousand, from a membership of 220,000. That means about 3.5 to 7 percent of the people chose to withdraw their membership because of the issue of ordaining women.

The first women ordained often faced hostility from friends and family alike or found their ministry rejected by portions of their own congregation. I was privileged to be in a congregation that embraced women's ministry freely and completely. Being ordained was like coming home. Teacher, elder, evangelist⁸—I grew with each call, and again experienced helping hands along the way, both of men and of women.

Meanwhile, I moved from youth ministry into full-time work at the stake office. I served as executive assistant to four stake presidents, each of whom mentored me and pushed me



Apostle Susan Skoor and President Steve M. Veazy ordain Becky Savage as second counselor in the Community of Christ First Presidency on 27 March 2007.

to expand my understanding of church structure, policy, and procedure as well as ministry. In the role of assistant, I was both safe and empowered. I often did the work of the stake president, quietly, behind the scenes, pleased that I had expertise and knowledge that could be used. All I wanted to do was serve, and the opportunities were many and varied. As long as I distanced myself from the minority who still resisted women in priesthood roles, I felt supported, encouraged, and upheld by both men and women in the church.

I NTERESTINGLY, THAT CHANGED when I entered full-time appointment for the World Church in 2002. With the assignment of a position of authority came deeper struggles with gender issues. After receiving my appointment, I was at times overlooked in meetings; men were given credit for ideas I voiced; questions I raised were ignored or minimized until championed by a man. As I traveled in my field, I found it necessary to prove myself over and over again. Why? What had changed?

Here's one possibility: As long as I was in the background assisting the men, not claiming credit, and wielding only borrowed authority, I posed no threat. It was safe to open doors of opportunity for me, empower my ministry, and use my skills to best advantage. For the most part, that wasn't intentional, it just happened. My last stake president changed that. Although he consulted me as a colleague, he took the reins of leadership firmly into his own hands and worked independently of me. Intentionally, he no longer empowered me to just remain in the background. Instead, at Church Historian Mark Scherer's insti-

Excerpt from the revelation opening priesthood ordination to women (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 156)

156:7a. Hear, O my people, regarding my holy priesthood. The power of this priesthood was placed in your midst from the earliest days of the rise of this work for the blessing and salvation of humanity.

156:7b. There have been priesthood members over the years, however, who have misunderstood the purpose of their calling. Succumbing to pride, some have used it for personal aggrandizement.

156:7c. Others, through disinterest or lack of diligence, have failed to magnify their calling or have become inactive.

156:7d. When this has happened, the church has experienced a loss of spiritual power, and the entire priesthood structure has been diminished.

156:8a. It is my will that my priesthood be made up of those who have an abiding faith and desire to serve me with all their hearts, in humility and with great devotion.

156:8b. Therefore, where there are those who are not now functioning in their priesthood, let inquiry be made by the proper administrative officers, according to the provisions of the law, to determine the continued nature of their commitment.

156:9a. I have heard the prayers of many, including my servant the prophet, as they have sought to know my will in regard to the question of who shall be called to share the burdens and responsibilities of priesthood in my church.

156:9b. I say to you now, as I have said in the past, that all are called according to the gifts which have been given them. This applies to priesthood as well as to any other aspects of the work.

156:9c. Therefore, do not wonder that some women of the church are being called to priesthood responsibilities. This is in harmony with my will and where these calls are made known to my servants, they may be processed according to administrative procedures and provisions of the law.

156:9d. Nevertheless in the ordaining of women to priesthood, let this be done with all deliberateness. Before the actual laying on of hands takes place, let specific guidelines and instructions be provided by the spiritual authorities, that all may be done in order.

156:10. Remember, in many places there is still much uncertainty and misunderstanding regarding the principles of calling and giftedness. There are persons whose burden in this regard will require that considerable labor and ministerial support be provided. This should be extended with prayer and tenderness of feeling, that all may be blessed with the full power of my reconciling Spirit.

156:11a. Dear Saints, have courage for the task which is yours in bringing to pass the cause of Zion. Prepare yourselves through much study and earnest prayer.

156:11b. Then as you go forth to witness of my love and my concern for all persons, you will know the joy which comes from devoting yourselves completely to the work of the kingdom. To this end will my Spirit be with you. Amen.

WALLACE B. SMITH
PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH
INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI
APRIL 3, 1984

gation, he arranged for me to enter the master's of religion program at Graceland University and encouraged me to become an appointee in my own right. Once given a position of authority, I became visible in leadership and therefore posed a threat to any leaders and members still struggling with gender issues.

Here's another possibility: I grew into my ministry among people who had known me for many years, who respected and accepted my leadership long before women were ordained. I was a known quantity, loved and honored for who I was. As an appointee, however, I transferred to other locations. I traveled among those who had no history with me and no reason to respect or trust me. The "new kid on the block" is going to be challenged and tested. Being a woman doesn't give you an exemption from that—it only increases the heat in the normal trial by fire.

Here's another piece of the puzzle: Church members were accustomed to primarily one style of leadership, perhaps with a few slight variations. Women, however, bring new styles of leadership into religious and secular institutions alike. Society as a whole has begun exploring team-building, participative leadership models. Community of Christ intentionally fostered alternative leadership styles in mandatory seminary classes for appointees and in workshops. Just after I entered full-time employment for the church, all field officers were sent a copy of Dennis A. Romig's book, *Side by Side Leadership*. At a subsequent training event, we explored the seven principles and twenty skills of side by side leadership. Concepts such as power sharing, teamwork, transferred authority, and shared visionary goals fostered an openness to creative, participatory leadership styles.⁹

Change is occurring, but old ways die hard, and my softer style of leadership is not always understood or welcomed. Both men and women who are accustomed to, and want, top-down leadership are often uncomfortable with collaboration. It takes time, re-education, and patience to use alternative styles and still be seen as firm and strong. In Community of Christ, in recent years we have seen a broadening of leadership styles among men as well as women. Because women have been on board to model them, more men have found the courage to begin developing a softer approach utilizing grassroots cooperative leadership styles.

Honesty compels me to admit that paranoia also enters in. A few experiences of discrimination and rejection act like allergens. They sensitize a person and cause mistrust and defensiveness in what would otherwise be normal situations. Now if an idea of mine is not well-received in a meeting, I find myself wondering if it's because the idea is bad or if it's because I'm a woman. When I'm introduced to someone who acts cool and aloof, instead of assuming it's a personality trait I wonder if it's because I'm a woman in a position of authority. This suspicion is insidious, and I have to be on my guard against it.

IN 2003, MY daughter Christie researched and wrote her master's thesis about women in top leadership positions in Community of Christ. As of August of that year, nineteen individuals (15 percent) of the church's 127 full-time, paid ap-

pointees were women, including one woman in the Presiding Bishopric and three women serving on the Council of Twelve. Thirty-six percent of the field specialists were women, and 59 percent of those who worked at our church headquarters were women. Thirty-two percent of our 21,555 bi-vocational priesthood members were women. These figures, Christie wrote, indicate that “women still comprise a small number of the higher-paying, greater decision-making positions in the church, while at the same time, they make up a large number of the lower-paying, least decision-making positions.”¹⁰

Christie interviewed thirteen of the nineteen women serving in top leadership positions. She found that similar experiences emerged as commonalities among the participants. On the positive side, commonalities included:

- a deep sense of call and commitment.
- a long history of preparation prior to serving.
- great love for the message, vision, and goals of the church.
- a desire to help the church and its members become all that they can be.

These interviews also yielded similar stories about the struggles these women faced in being hired and accepted in their ministry. The interviews also revealed diversity within the North American church concerning individual and congregational support for women in ministry. Although most of our congregations have embraced and empowered women in ministry, a few congregations still refuse to ordain women.

Among all levels of leadership, speech habits, jokes, expectations, and assignments are affected by old gender models that are difficult to overcome. Becoming sensitive takes time, effort, and concentration—with multiple relapses being the norm. Many folks who truly wish to embrace gender equality still can’t seem to break out of the old molds of patriarchy. These difficulties, of course, are not unique to Community of Christ but rather represent common problems for organizations moving from patriarchy to gender inclusiveness.

The women Christie interviewed had many experiences in common, including:

- interviewers asking inappropriate questions or making discomfiting comments during hiring interviews.
- instances where male colleagues suppressed their voice or representation.
- times when their ideas were ignored.
- experiences where responsibilities were not given or were summarily taken away because of their gender.
- situations where they were bypassed in favor of people who were more patriarchal and hierarchically minded in nature.
- occasions when they felt their leadership styles were not valued.¹¹

Christie’s thesis identified four areas where the church could improve in gender relations:

- 1) creation of an open forum in which women’s her-stories, past and present, can be shared and valued.
- 2) provision for a more female-friendly work environment.

3) establishment of a mentoring program for women.

4) emphasis on valuing women’s ways of leadership.¹²

In general, percentages of women in ministry in Community of Christ have not changed significantly in the last three years.¹³ Yet, progress has occurred along the lines that Christie outlined. Awareness of gender issues has increased. Training has occurred on boundary issues, inappropriate gendered behavior, and harassment. Leadership mentoring has increased in frequency and quality. Awareness of variety in leadership styles is being acknowledged and explored.

We have seen a strengthening of the family unit because men and women in our faith tradition see each other as equally empowered spiritual beings whom God blesses in a variety of ways and calls into ministry. There are households where the wife, for instance, is an elder and the husband is a priest. Initially church leaders wondered if that would be a problem, create divorce or dissension, or undermine the husband’s ministry. That has not been the case. We have seen mutual support for priesthood offices regardless of where they fall in the so-called “hierarchy of offices.”

Children are growing up in a Community of Christ society, where gender equality empowers them to begin practicing public ministry and leadership when they are very young. Both girls and boys offer prayers, give short speeches or testimonies, receive offerings, and participate in other ways designed to deepen spirituality and build confidence in public ministry. Thus, the ordination of women has been very positive for men, for women, for the family, and for the whole church structure.

My hope is that soon we will simply focus on each individual as a person of worth, a person with great giftedness, a person with abilities to lead and to follow, to serve and to minister, called by God and acknowledged by human beings to give her or his giftedness in leadership ways. I would like the church to look at leadership styles rather than gender and to strive for inclusiveness of diverse styles in top quorums. I’d like our vocabulary, our way of thinking and speaking to drop references to gender because they are no longer important.

Recent revelation has called Community of Christ to become a peace church.¹⁴ In order to fulfill this call, our congregations must continue to make concrete changes towards gender equality. By empowering the voices of women, providing a gender-inclusive environment, expanding our current mentoring program, and valuing all styles of leadership, Community of Christ can become a model for change in the empowerment of both men and women worldwide.

I BEGAN MY “her-story” with an account of the call I received from Steve Veazey to serve on the Council of Twelve. I close by sharing the call I received to that office from God. Two weeks after Steve’s visit, I participated in a brief worship service with the staff of the Sierra Pacific Mission Center. The focus for our worship was John 20:19–22.

You remember the story. On the evening of the resurrec-

tion, the eleven apostles gathered in fear and trembling behind locked doors. Christ came and stood in their midst. Think of all the things he might have said, the knowledge he could have imparted, the theological questions he might have answered. Yet the words that have passed down through the ages to us were merely these: "Peace be to you. As the Father sends me, so I send you." Suddenly I remembered that the meaning of the word "apostle" is "one who is sent."

A strong spirit of confirmation rested on me. It was as if the Risen Christ stood before me. Like the disciples of old, I was being called and sent beyond my own locked doors and hidden fears to share the apostolic witness of Christ. This calling is a challenge to undertake new experiences of mission, peace, and grace. God's grace never fails. In these recent months following the death of my husband, I have still felt the assurance and strength of God's Presence. I know, and can testify, that God is and will always be with each of us, healing our brokenness, using our weaknesses, continuing to call us into discipleship and sending us into the world to build the peaceable kingdom that includes all persons. ☞

NOTES

1. This is a recent assignment change, as of 1 April 2007. Previously, I served in the Western Mission Field, which covered the western one-third of the contiguous United States, plus Alaska and Baja California. The new assignment represents the first time a woman has been assigned to an international field outside North America.

2. In general, the Prophet-President of the church has the right to name a successor, and several previous Presidents even made provision for succession by creating a sealed document naming a successor in the event of untimely death or disability. W. Grant McMurray voluntarily chose not to exercise this right. Throughout his tenure as Prophet-President, he reminded the church that we are called to be not just a people with a prophet, but also a prophetic people. He and his leadership quorums implemented discernment procedures to good effect in identifying a new name for the church and in establishing new understandings of tithing and generosity. It was, therefore, consistent with his previous actions that he entrusted the naming of a successor to the church as a whole, thus upholding us as a prophetic people.

3. Ordination in Community of Christ can be a life-long calling to one office, or, in other instances, a person may be called to serve in one office and then receive a subsequent calling or callings to other offices. John was an ordained priest first and was called to be an elder a few years later. An elder is a member of the Melchizedek priesthood and often functions as pastor of a congregation, performs all the sacraments except evangelist blessings, preaches, teaches, witnesses and invites others. Elders serving as pastors and elders serving in supportive roles in the congregation are all expected to provide "pastoral" care—that is, compassion, visiting ministry, and spiritual leadership to assist congregation members as they encounter the difficulties of life. Pastors in Community of Christ are generally bi-vocational, receiving no salary from the church. A few exceptions do exist.

4. It is worth noting that the titles of this commission and of the office held by Marjorie Troeh reflect the first time the terms "women" and "ministry" were officially linked in our tradition's history.

5. Becky L. Savage, *A Journey toward the Ordination of Women in the Community of Christ: A Historical Literature Review* (master's thesis, Graceland University, 2006), 87.

Perhaps a note about the way policies are enacted in our church is in order. Community of Christ is a theocratic democracy, that is, a church guided and administered by the Holy Spirit working through people to bring about divine purposes. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the people of the church share responsibility for governing the church. Checks and balances are in place to insure that human impulses contrary to the Spirit of God do not rule the church.

In practical terms, this means that ministers and administrators lead with the

consent of the people. Priesthood calls, legislative measures, budgets, and financial decisions require support from a conference made up of members of the church. Leaders are either elected outright or appointed with a subsequent sustaining vote of the people.

Congregations hold conferences to vote on their budgets, their officers, and their program of ministries. Large collections of congregations in geographic areas are called mission centers, presided over by a mission center president and mission center financial officer. Ultimately, however, these two officers and the joint decisions of the congregations are accountable to a mission center conference made up of either all the members in that area or elected delegates. Mission center conferences can enact legislation pertinent to their area but can also initiate and recommend legislation to come before the World Conference, which, if enacted, impacts the entire global church. World Conferences are held every three years, a recent change from every two years.

6. *Ibid.*, 76–85.

7. The revelation providing for ordination of women specified that there was to be a year of preparation prior to the first ordinations, to avoid hasty or unseemly decisions; the same revelation called for re-examination of priesthood accountability for all priesthood members. During that year, procedures for evaluating and establishing personal accountability for both men and women were instigated. The new priesthood guidelines specified that a candidate, man or woman, must complete a minimum of three basic classes of study and skill development prior to ordination: Introduction to Ministry, Introduction to Scripture, and a course relevant to the specific office of calling (such as elder, deacon, priest, or teacher). During the year of waiting, many women received calls, took classes, and spent time in personal preparation. When the year was complete, the first ordinations of women occurred.

8. Teacher is an office of the Aaronic priesthood. Like Aaron, brother of Moses, a teacher is a peacemaker and reconciler, one who watches over the people and provides listening, counseling, and encouragement to the members. A teacher may not perform any sacraments. Exercising the skills of teacher provided me good training for pastoral ministry as an elder, and being able to perform the sacraments as an elder expanded my ministry greatly. The call to evangelist required a deepening of my spiritual relationship with God and development of the ability to discern and be sensitive to God's leadings in the ministry of blessing. Evangelists put aside administrative tasks to act as spiritual guides and speak God's ongoing blessing in the lives of people, a heavy responsibility requiring great trust in the Spirit of God. Parallels exist between the peacemaking ministry of the teacher and the spiritual direction and blessing of the evangelist.

9. Dennis A. Romig, *Side by Side Leadership: Achieving Outstanding Results Together* (Marietta, Georgia: Bard Press, 2001), 66.

10. Christie Skoor, "Re-valuing Our Sisters: Women Leaders in the Community of Christ," (unpublished master's thesis, on file in the Temple Library of the Community of Christ, 2003), 82–83.

11. Skoor, "Re-valuing," 131.

12. *Ibid.*, 151.

13. I do not have the current statistics, but projections made in January 2007 indicated there would be 119 general officers, appointees, and field officers. Of those, seventeen would be women, which is 14 percent. Fifty-eight of the 178 field specialists would be women, which is 33 percent. At that time, a number of positions were not yet filled, and some of these would likely be filled by women, which would increase the percentages somewhat.

14. In 1984, Wallace B. Smith brought before the World Conference an inspired document (now in our Doctrine and Covenants as Section 156) which not only provided for the ordination of women but also initiated construction of the long-awaited Temple in Independence, Missouri. The revelation specified: "It shall be a temple of peace. . . ." That revelation sent Community of Christ on a new path toward becoming a peace church. Most faith traditions who call themselves a "peace church" began by bringing together individuals who agree on the definition of peace and the methods for living peace in the world and in their faith community. Our task is far more difficult. Our movement began over 150 years ago by bringing together individuals who agreed on a number of doctrinal issues other than peace. Over the years, our church has grown and gained members from many cultures, many walks of life, and many perspectives. Only now are we trying to transform ourselves into a peace church, incorporating an enormous diversity of opinions about what constitutes peace and how to achieve it.

Consequently, we must listen to one another, embrace the differences among us, and model the peace of Jesus Christ by affirming individuals who may differ from ourselves on the definition and implementation of peace. We have a long road ahead in becoming a unified peace church; but the challenge before us is clear, and the Spirit of God continues to move among us in transforming ways.

Too many women have been taught that self-less-ness is the best spiritual path. This is wrong.

THE HEROINE'S JOURNEY: RECLAIMING THE FEMININE "ISH" OF SELF

By Michael Farnworth

*I was always ashamed to take. So I gave.
It was not a virtue. It was a disguise.*

—ANAIS NIN¹

I BELIEVE MANY WOMEN LIVING IN THE PATRIARCHAL culture of the United States have been seduced to make an unknowing compromise between their spiritual selfhood and culturally determined feminine role-plays. Unfortunately, women have been made to feel perverse if they attend to their own self. They have been labeled “selfish,” one of the most emotionally laden cultural insults that can be levied against them. Women have been shamed into hiding and pretending that their real self, feelings, and accompanying wants and needs are bad, wrong, or just unimportant.

I do not believe that being one's self is a bad thing. In fact, I believe it is the first pivotal step on the road to salvation because as long as we remain unauthentic, even God can't do anything with us. One's true self is the only essence Christ can change and redeem. The spiritual adventure of reclaiming one's true self requires a surrendering of the dishonest ego we have spent a lifetime constructing. This ego is our culturally contrived outer life. We must be willing to relinquish its stranglehold on who we truly are and embark on the spiritual pilgrimage to which we are all called—that of reclaiming the inner kingdom of our soul. This pilgrimage is the most difficult thing we ever attempt. But it is why we're here on earth.

This journey is for both women and men, but this essay concentrates on a paradigm shift that women, especially, need to make. We live in a sexist culture which generates a great deal of feminine contempt hidden behind manipulative, patronizing esteem. This demeaning dynamic can anesthetize a woman's spirit so she is unable to challenge the dominant culture's agenda for her, for to do so brings fear of reprisal and rejection. Women who do not fit into the culture's pattern for female behaviors and roles are marginalized, dismissed, and negatively labeled. Though this culture damages men, too,



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women especially must learn to awaken and reorient their selves from objectification toward the intimate compassion of the heart. It is impossible to embrace a self that either remains asleep or sponsors deep-rooted feelings of self-contempt.

In this essay, I call into question an ideal that many members of U.S. culture consider a sacred cow: the ideal of being selfless. By feigning a selfless personality, women embrace cultural assumptions that are challenging to deconstruct. In our cultural vocabulary, the opposite of a “selfless” personality is a “selfish” one. That opposition, as applied to women's identities, is troubling. The dictionary defines the suffix “ish” as “of, pertaining to, or being, characteristic of, as in girlish, having the qualities of a girl.” Given this definition, “self-ish” would mean having the qualities and characteristics of *yourself*; manifesting the attributes or traits of *yourself*; behaving in ways congruent and consistent with *yourself*. “Self-less,” on the other hand, is the condition of not having a self, of doing only what others want and expect of you. Our culture wants women to be self-less because feminine selflessness comes in very handy when catering to the masculine personality.

I am not saying a woman should reject the social and religious roles provided by her culture, but I am persuaded that many women need to awaken from a culturally induced slumber. They need to awaken to and engage in the heroine's journey of reclaiming the sacred inner landscape of their souls. The act of birthing, mothering, and marriage are heroic undertakings and are of great value both personally and culturally. But if, because of the demands of living a culturally determined life, a woman's own inner soul remains stillborn, abandoned, orphaned, or never embraced in love, then a profound spiritual wound occurs. The pearl of great price—her unique and singular spirit—will never be revealed.

Masculinized religious and secular cultures do not place women's spiritual awakening on their agendas. As a result, women are socialized to surrender their unique thoughts, feelings, and gifts in exchange for a deadened, homogenized, one-size-fits-all feminine role. A woman can, however, fulfill her mortal responsibilities with creative, life-giving options that do not necessitate giving away her unique voice, personality, powers, interests, goals, dreams, intellect, and spirituality. I believe what Carrie Miles wrote about the nature of gender roles:

“Anyone who has tried to live her life solely within the gender box knows that there is not enough room in there for a whole person, let alone a God.”²

Women have a sacred obligation to go beyond their cultural socialization to reclaim their sacred nature as equal companions with men in creation’s truth. God never intended women to become caricatures: “happy mother, satisfied wife.” Women are much more than what patriarchal culture pressures them to believe they are. They are infinitely more than even the most expansive cultural definition of “true womanhood.”

IF SOMEONE ACCUSES us of being selfish, they certainly don’t mean it as a compliment. We generally think of being selfish as something shameful, and we try to deflect any appearance of selfishness before this accusation ever comes our way. Our preoccupation with not appearing selfish in a culture steeped in philosophical individualism is hypocritical.

I am sure most of us have heard of the notion that one can tell what a culture deems most important by the number of words that its language has to express it. For example, we may have heard that Eskimos have more than twenty different words to describe different kinds of snow. That’s because snow is important for the survival of the Eskimo people. As I look up the word “self” in the dictionary, I find more than 160 self-words, beginning with self-abasement and ending with self-worship. If not having a self—selflessness—is a cultural ideal, why is our society so preoccupied with the self? It doesn’t add up, and the reason it doesn’t add up is that we live in a dishonest society. Our society epitomizes self-indulgence, and most of us are unconsciously socialized to follow suit.

For example, while men may preach the importance of selflessness, these same men have been socialized by the culture to pursue selfish interests. Men marinate in selfishness. From the time of boyhood, males are taught to seek and obtain whatever they desire. Beginning in boyhood, men are trained to be rugged individualists. They grow up steeped in competition, whether athletic, academic, romantic, financial, business, or religious. Every domain of modern culture is fertile soil for a man to display his superiority—every domain, that is, except for involvement with the family. *That’s* woman’s work. For men, the “ish” of self is accepted and promoted because male individuality is valued.

While masculine socialization idealizes selfish interests and endeavors, feminine socialization emphasizes the opposite. Women are socialized to meet other people’s needs and are taught not to want anything more in life than masculine approval. If women are beautiful and willing to play the prescribed supportive feminine roles of girlfriend, wife, mother, house cleaner, cook, and lover, they will receive this masculine approval in abundance. As a result, many women seek success in these “womanly” roles. The problem is that in so doing, many never nurture their own unique characteristics and gifts. Female individuality is not valued in our culture, however, so the “ish” of the feminine self is too often substituted for selflessness.

If we think “selfless” is an appropriate spiritual condition to pursue, what would happen if we substituted the word “soul” for “self”? Would “soul-less” be a spiritual condition worth seeking? I don’t think so, but “soul-ful” would be.

Let’s play a bit with another self-word that we never hear. That word is “self-full.” Being self-full would mean being grounded in and conscious of one’s potential as well as limits, yet having the courage to honor both. A woman’s self is of divine origin. A self-full woman would be stable and not easily manipulated by her culture. She would be acquainted with her sacred center, protecting its spiritual nature and origins.

Some have referred to Christ as being selfless, but I don’t believe he was. I believe Christ was self-full. He knew who he was. Christ often retired by himself to commune with the heavens and to refill his own reserves. He gave of himself because of that fullness and shared with others his gifts of light and life. He stood up for himself and others when they were abused by the community before choosing to surrender himself to the plan of redemption. Christ was self-full and was, and is, more than willing to invite us to share that kind of self-full awareness with us. I believe God wants self-full women and men who are grounded in compassion and mercy and thus have the courage to follow Christ on their spiritual paths.

THE PARADIGM SHIFT I am exploring is difficult to explain. In reclaiming the inner kingdom, our souls speak from within and call us to be the persons we were born to be. As we abide in the inner kingdom, we gain clues to our nature. These clues are sacred invitations that summon us to embrace and speak our own voice, our own truth. Our souls speak in safe and gentle ways that compel us to grasp our true selfhood and to care for it as the sacred essence it is. Having existed in other dimensions before coming to this earth, we each brought with us a personality and gifts that were uniquely ours. This gift of self is the result of eons of timeless living and discovery. This self is our birthright.

The spirit and the body are the soul of woman. Just as each body is different and unique, each spirit is remarkable and unlike anyone else in the world of creation. Joined together, they create a rare and matchless soul; but many women don’t feel it. Too many women have been taught that they don’t deserve a genuine self—that selflessness is the best spiritual path to walk. This is wrong. We can’t, with integrity, profess that we are eternal and divine offspring of God and then foster contempt for that eternal identity. Christ’s principal command to love our neighbor as we love our self is often displaced by peripheral concerns.

Reclaiming the inner kingdom is a complex enough spiritual task without the added chore of understanding and shedding the self-contempt that masquerades as selflessness. When our egos attempt to conceal their fallen natures behind shows of selflessness, we wreak havoc on our self and others. Our ego wants us to remain unconscious of its capacity for mischief and will do anything to hide that, including clothing itself in a sense of worth offered by the environment at large. Our ego will gladly embrace the cultural agenda if it receives esteem for

doing so. It desires to fit in, to feel important and accepted within the culture.

Honestly undertaking the healing adventure requires of us a spiritual awakening that involves introspective confrontation of the ego and exploration of things that we may have never really considered. Our ego typically wants nothing to do with the challenging spiritual adventure of awakening because that would mean its eventual demise.

This is a difficult conundrum when one lives in a culture that devalues the unique feminine self. How can one embrace what the culture considers worthless? How can service to God's other children be considered noble but service in behalf of self, depraved?

I am sure we have all heard the advice: "If you don't feel happy or are experiencing a lack of meaning in your life, then go out and serve someone." Service is a wonderful thing, but this advice is worth deconstructing a bit. What is going on in our lives that we feel such emptiness and worthlessness to begin with?

When we resort to self-serving service to engender more happiness in our lives, something is amiss. Christ gave out of his abundance, not out of his insufficiency. There is something inappropriate about giving service for what are ultimately selfish reasons. If service is done to medicate woundedness or to establish one's own sense of purpose or goodness, then it weakens both giver and receiver. Such service is wrong-headed. Ponder the statement of the poet Anais Nin: "I was always ashamed to take. So I gave. It was not a virtue. It was a disguise."

There is dysfunction in the act of giving service to others as a way to reduce the lack we feel as a result of inauthentic living. As humans, we are all indulgent when it comes to the self. To conceal that self-indulgence with self-righteous service is dishonest. Living lives that are not our own will lead to superficial, divided, and fraudulent encounters with the self and others. We will become unfaithful to our natures and strangers in our own lives, regardless of the wonderful roles we play. We will eventually surrender our authentic souls for the pretense of socially acceptable behavior. We will metaphorically sell our unique birthright for the mess of cultural pottage. When we wear other peoples' faces and live other peoples' lives, we lose our sense of integrity. Depression will ultimately set in. Depression

is the state of spiritual disengagement from ourself and from the adventure of life we were sent here to live.

WOMEN WHO ARE truly grounded in themselves will be more resistant to manipulations that our fallen culture prescribes for them. In fact, grounded women are difficult to control—and that causes problems. Our culture does not want women to have a sense of self because if they did, they would be differentiated, mature, and independent, which would cause all sorts of inconveniences for the males in charge. Men have an investment in maintaining the status quo of women acting like children. Thomas G. Plummer described the childlike condition known as the "Ophelia Syndrome":

The Ophelia Syndrome is being chronically ignorant, dependent and submissive. One who is an adult but chooses to be a baby, one who does not know her own opinions and who would not express them to an authority if she did.³

Many women may not be sensitive to the fact that our culture prescribes male-female relationships that are modeled on parent-child relationships. Sociologist, Erving Goffman explains:

Gender relations are patterned on the parent-child complex. In other words, men are to women as adults are to children: loving protectors, who will hold open doors, offer the first portion of sweets, reach high shelves, and lift heavy loads. But along with the privileges of childhood come liabilities. Children's activities are interruptible, their time and territory expend-



JEANNETTE ATWOOD, INSPIRED BY A CARTOON BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST

able. Along with the privileges of being protected comes the loss of rights, and not being respected and treated like a full-fledged person. Being the protector frames someone as competent, capable and deserving of respect. Being protected frames one as incompetent, incapable, and deserving of indulgence.⁴

Remaining in a childlike state is antithetical to being a mature, spiritual woman with a voice. Understandably, some women love to be indulged, protected, taken care of, treated as special. Nevertheless, such treatment creates problems when these same women want to be taken seriously as respected, equal partners. When they take steps in this direction, they are often patronized, ignored, or dismissed with an authoritative pulling of masculine rank: "Trust me." The doctrine of men and women being one flesh in the eternal worlds does not square at all with this notion of a parent-child relationship.

AT THE RISK OF BEING SEEN AS JUST ANOTHER man who thinks he knows what's best for women, I nevertheless extend this invitation: Do not let a perverse culture shame you out of the spiritual heritage that is your self. The invitation to reclaim the inner kingdom of your soul is a spiritual pilgrimage, a transformative adventure to a sacred place deep within you. The healing powers of Christ can unify your displaced and fragmented soul, leading it successfully through the labyrinth of the spiritual journey. I recognize that some of you, understandably, are reluctant to make the trip. As Cher has suggested: "Romance and work," and I would add domestic roles, "are great diversions to keep you from dealing with yourself."⁵

Sometime in your life, however, you will receive an invitation to return to yourself. It may come in the form of a dream, class, thought, or book. The invitation may come from another who is on the path of selfhood, or it may bubble up in your own heart as a result of living a life that you know is not your own.

The invitation to reclaim all of yourself will come to you when your soul is ready. You cannot force the season. When the call comes, it will usually be associated with your having to face uncomfortable beliefs you have about your self.

Our culture has induced a slumber that too often obscures the invitations God is continually sending, calling you to the most important spiritual odyssey of your lives. It is an offense that this is so and that you are not better acquainted with or more supported by our culture for this adventure. The transition from self-contempt to intimate compassion will be realized when you embrace your own inner kingdom. The ability to reclaim your true identity is a spiritual work. It is a metaphorical awakening to another reality. It is a heroine's adventure.

If you were stripped of all your roles, who or what would be left of you? Take away your name, your work, your role of wife, mother, or girlfriend, your education, family or reputation, your spouse or lover—who would you be? The work of discovering your true identity is an excruciating spiritual enterprise which will forever change your sense of self and the

people you share your life with. When you receive this invitation to explore your inner kingdom, I hope you will remember and have hope in the promise, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." When the time is right, someone or something will come into your life and will point you in the right direction, give you a little push, and whisper: go that way. When God sends the teacher, I hope you will have the faith to go.

Within

by Carol Lynn Pearson

I read a map once
Saying the kingdom of God
Was within me
But I never trusted
Such unlikely ground.

I went out.
I scoured schools
And libraries
And chapels and temples
And other people's eyes
And the skies and the rocks,
And I found treasures
From the kingdom's treasury
But not the kingdom.

Finally I came in quiet
For a rest
And turned on the light.

And there
Just like a surprise party
Was all the smiling royalty,
King, Queen, court.

People have been
Locked up for less, I know.
But I tell you
Something marvelous
Is bordered by this skin:

I am a castle
And the kingdom of God
Is within.⁶



NOTES

1. This quotation can be found at <http://www.meirionnydd.force9.co.uk/english/quotes.html>.

2. Carrie Miles, given as part of the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium presentation, "The Genesis of Gender, Or Why Mother in Heaven Can't Save You," audio available at www.sunstoneonline.com, Session SL96135.

3. Thomas G. Plummer, "The Ophelia Syndrome," *BYU Today*, September 1991.

4. I have not been able to relocate the source of this quotation, which I've had in my personal notes for years, but it is consistent with the ideas found in Erving Goffman, "The Arrangement between the Sexes," *Theory and Society*, 4 (1977): 301–33.

5. This quotation can be found at <http://www.dailycelebrations.com/052003.htm>.

6. Carol Lynn Pearson, "Within," *Beginnings and Beyond* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2005).

BOUNDS AND CONDITIONS

ENSOULMENT: STEM CELLS, HUMAN CLONING, AND THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

By Rick Jepson

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

—D&C 58:26

EVERY COMPLEX PROBLEM has a simple solution. But it's wrong. And few complex problems have been more encumbered with simple, wrong solutions than the ongoing debate about human cloning and stem cell research.¹ It's a debate that forces scientists, ethicists, theologians, and politicians to ask the hardest question of all: What does it mean to be a human being? And however tempting they may be, simple answers don't suffice.

If a five-day-old embryo—a ball of cells no larger than the period at the end of this sentence—is a human being, it would be immoral to destroy it. But if it's not a human being, and if destroying it could potentially cure a whole list of human maladies, it would be immoral not to.

This question is inescapably tied to abortion, so battle lines are well entrenched. On one side, the Christian Right holds that human life begins at conception and that a fertilized egg deserves the same protection as any human being. Opposite to that are the strongest of abortion proponents. Mary Anne Warren, for example, wouldn't call someone a human being until several months after birth. For her, a baby isn't a human being until it displays consciousness, reason, motives and goals, complex communication, and a concept of self.²

This begs an obvious question for us: What is the Mormon stand on when spirit and body combine? Though the question is obvious, there's no simple answer.

Five years ago, a handful of LDS senators

led by Orrin Hatch comprised what one journalist called the "Mormon Stem Cell Choir"—a group of conservative, Christian, anti-abortion legislators who nonetheless supported stem cell research and even human cloning.³ Today they sing with four senators and four representatives.⁴ And their position has led many to ask—and a few to misrepresent—what Mormons believe about the beginning of life.

About the time this magazine comes off the press, both houses of Congress will likely attempt to override President Bush's recent veto of a bill that would federally fund research done with leftover embryos from fertility clinics.⁵ As our representatives wrestle with this issue, it's a good time for us to examine our own beliefs. We should be asking what stem cells and human clones actually are and how we feel about their use.

STEM cells are the progenitors of all other cells. In its first few days of development, an embryo is nothing but a ball of stem cells. By the end of the second week, these cells begin to differentiate into three basic layers that then further specialize into general groups and eventually into unique cell types associated with just one organ and just one function. For example, a muscle cell in the heart has different qualities than a nerve cell in the brain, and neither could perform the job of the other.

Because stem cells can develop into any kind of specialized cell, their therapeutic potential is incredible. They could be used to replace cells lost or damaged by diabetes, multiple sclerosis, stroke, heart attack, Parkinson's, ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), and other diseases.

Stem cells come from human embryos, however. And that makes them controversial.

It is true that there are other sources. Stem cells can be harvested from the brain, eyes, blood, liver, marrow, muscles, skin, and umbilical cord. But these are harder to isolate, don't grow as well in culture, and appear to be less capable of differentiating into all types of cells. By all accounts, embryonic stem cells are superior. But again, they can be harvested only by destroying human embryos.

It's easy to dismiss the current uneasiness about embryo destruction by comparing it to past controversies over cadaver dissection, organ transplantation, sperm donation, and in vitro fertilization. And it may be that our grandchildren will make fun of today's trepidation. But that's no excuse for imprudence.

President Bush isn't wrong when he worries that human cloning and stem cell research take "a significant step toward a society in which human beings are grown for spare body parts."⁶ Some complex organs may never be repairable with stem cells. For example, nephrons, the basic component of a kidney, can be developed from stem cells, but there's no obvious way to pack the nephrons in the right way to make them work. The suggested alternative is to harvest whole kidneys from a fetus at about halfway through the pregnancy.⁷ And that's a decidedly less palatable idea.

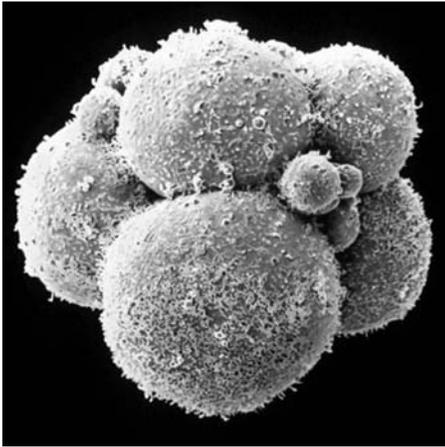
Still, we have an ethical responsibility to consider all options—even if they make us uncomfortable. This is particularly true because, right now, the United States has the opportunity to set ethical precedents for the extent and means of stem cell research. If the U.S. delays, some other countries may not be so careful.

According to a recent report, poor women in Ukraine are paid \$200 in U.S. currency to get pregnant and then have an abortion at twelve weeks. Stem cells are then harvested from the aborted fetuses, smuggled into Moscow, and injected into the sagging thighs and buttocks of wealthy Russian women for £10,000 to £15,000.⁸ By contrast, proposed legislation in the United States carefully regulates stem cell harvest, demands informed donor consent, prohibits payment for embryo donation, and separates fertility clinics from research laboratories. All that the Bush-vetoed bill proposes is to fund stem cell harvesting from the tens of thousands of extra embryos that fertility clinics discard every year anyway.

Human cloning is simply another approach to stem cell harvest. One problem with any kind of transplantation is that the immune system quickly recognizes and rejects foreign cells. The only current way to combat this is to stifle the immune system



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with powerful drugs, leaving people prone to any infection they encounter.

Human cloning could hypothetically solve this problem by creating an embryo that is genetically identical to the patient and then harvesting its stem cells. Although the ethical issues involved in cloning are really no different than those involved in creating embryos for research in any other way, the issues have been muddied both by science fiction and by folks who want to clone champion horses, favorite pets, or historical figures.⁹

WHAT of the Mormon position? Given nearly universal LDS opposition to abortion and lingering reservations about even birth control, why do 56 percent of Utah Mormons support stem cell research?¹⁰ Why have LDS legislators been so prominent in the public debate?

Some have focused on the Mormon doctrine of a pre-existence to answer this. But this doctrine says nothing about the timing of when body and spirit combine and an embryo becomes a human being. Many Latter-day Saints seem to believe that the pre-existent spirit enters the body at conception, and for this reason oppose any embryo destruction. At the same time, many other Christians have no qualms with stem cell research because of their belief that God creates a novel spirit in the embryo days, weeks, or even months after conception.

The more likely root is Mormonism's general dislike for creed. Of this, Gary Bergera writes:

One of the distinguishing features of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a near absence of formal creeds or statement of binding doctrine. For all practical intents, the authoritative systemization of doctrine and theology

LATTER-DAY SAINTS SHOULD NOT FEEL EXEMPT FROM EXAMINING STEM CELL AND CLONING ISSUES FOR THEMSELVES. THE THINKING HASN'T ALREADY BEEN DONE.

does not exist, and deliberately so.¹¹

That may actually be a little too rosy. Elder Boyd Packer, for example, suggested that there was no official statement on stem cell research or cloning because they are as obviously wrong as abortion, birth control, and same-gender marriage: "Without having to have the Church deliver a position on it, you should know what the Lord's position is."¹²

Nonetheless, the Church has been emphatic that it has no official stance on stem cell research nor when human life begins and that the "absence of a position should not be interpreted as support for or opposition to any other statement."¹³

The Doctrine & Covenants reminds us that only slothful and unwise servants sit around and wait for instruction (D&C 58:26), that secular learning is part of our spiritual progression (D&C 130:18–19), and that we must study problems out before we can expect any direction (D&C 9:8–9). When a matter isn't spelled out, the responsibility is ours.

THERE are a few proof texts worth mentioning, however—but not because they paint a clear picture. Rather, they are important to note precisely because they fail to. No Latter-day Saint should feel obligated by them to support one position or another. Nor can any Latter-day Saint feel exempt from searching the matter out; the thinking hasn't already been done.

The scriptures are vague about the moment of ensoulment. The two most popular proof texts come from the story of Christ, and they seem to contradict each other. Elizabeth feels her baby leap with joy in the womb when Mary approaches (Luke 1:39–44). The fetal John the Baptist seems to recognize the presence of the fetal Christ, implying that each is a living soul. But then on the night before his birth, the spirit of Christ visits Nephi (3 Nephi 1:11–14). There may be ways to work around this incongruity, but none that would decisively clarify our question about the beginning of life.

Perhaps the weakest proof texts in our tradition are quotations from General Authorities, living or dead. Although popular, these are usually collected, published, and employed without regard for context or

circumstance. So when we wade through them, it must be warily.

For example, Brigham Young was echoing a common belief of his time when he claimed that the spirit and body unite around the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy: "[W]hen the mother feels life come to her infant, it is the spirit entering the body."¹⁴ Yet David O. McKay suggested that the spirit does not enter until birth and that "life manifest in the body before that time would seem to be dependent on the mother."¹⁵

Here are two prophets with seemingly different views. But McKay's speculation is lifted from a private letter, and Young's statement—quoted authoritatively in *Mormon Doctrine* and elsewhere—is an offhanded remark from a funeral sermon. The real question is not what either man said in those contexts but what either would have said in an authoritative, public statement dedicated specifically to that topic.

The Church has made several official statements, but these simply announce the lack of any binding Church position on the beginning of human life. A clear statement came in 1970: "That there is life in the child before birth is an undoubted fact, but whether that life is the result of the affinity of the child in embryo with the life of its mother, or because the spirit has entered it remains an unsolved mystery."¹⁶

More recently, the *Lincoln Journal Star* mistakenly claimed that, "According to Mormon belief, life does not begin until a human embryo attaches to the mother's uterus after about 14 days." In response to this news account, the Church clarified that it "has no official position on the moment that human life begins" and "has not taken a position on the issue of embryonic stem-cell research."¹⁷

SCIENCE is not ethics. Or so we're told. But sometimes it offers insights unavailable from any other source. In determining what it means to be alive and what it means to be human, there may be no better reference.

We routinely mark the end of human life. We say that a person dies when the lungs stop breathing or the heart stops beating. We consider patients brain dead—and even eu-

thanize them—if their forebrains lack organized electrical activity.

Since these moments seem to define human life at its end, some argue that they likewise elucidate its beginning. They argue that human life begins at birth, with the first breath of air. Or in the fourth week of gestation, when the heart starts beating. Or twenty weeks later, when brain synapses are complex enough to produce recognizable neural activity.

In practice, the LDS Church seems to follow the first of these suggestions. A still-born fetus is not publicly named, added to church records, baptized or endowed by proxy, or sealed to a family. But a child who dies shortly after birth receives all these ordinances.¹⁸ Furthermore, the notion that the spirit enters the body with the first breath of air is supported both by Christ's pre-birth visit to Nephi and by the ensoulment of Adam as described in the Book of Abraham: "And the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground . . . and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Abraham 5:7). But even this practice fails to solidify a Mormon position. Joseph Fielding Smith speculated that the spirits of stillborn children would still join their families in the afterlife and encouraged families to name the children in their own family records.¹⁹

Genetic individuality is another quality that many use to mark the beginning of life. The process of conception creates a unique human genome that has never before existed. Thus a one-day-old embryo is as genetically unique as any adult human and therefore, according to some, is equally human. The Catholic *Donum Vitae* asks, "How could a human individual not be a human person?"²⁰

However, there remains some difficulty with this line of demarcation. Although genetically unique at conception, an embryo may not be guaranteed individuality until two weeks later. Until that time, it can still split into identical twins. Or, more bizarrely, it could also fuse with another embryo and become one individual with mixed DNA.

On about the fourteenth day, the embryo begins a process of infolding called gastrulation. A streak forms down the center of the embryo, and for the first time, it has a back and a front, a left and a right. Gastrulation also signals the first time that the embryo's cells differentiate into basic cell types; until this stage, the cells were generic and disorganized.

Significantly, the embryo now has structure where before there was none. And because of that structure, it also has a

guaranteed individuality. It can no longer fuse with another or split into twins. In the opinion of many scientists and ethicists, only now is it a human being. As the biologist Lewis Wolpert reportedly has said, "It is not birth, marriage, or death, but gastrulation which is truly the most important time in your life."²¹

And from a theological vantage point, it is difficult to explain how ensoulment could work prior to that point. What, for example, would happen to a soul when the embryo splits into twins?

LATTER-DAY Saint concepts of spirit and soul may not be scientifically observable. And there is no reason to suppose that everything important in the universe can be tested in the lab. But science can help us test our spiritual assumptions and, when no revelation is given, can help us mortar between the bricks.

Stem cell research and human cloning have the potential to revolutionize medicine, demystify genetic disorders, and cure a myriad of human ailments—including big offenders such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. The importance of that potential is so great that I believe we're morally compelled to investigate the worth of this research and address its ethical implications.

This issue is too important to be defined by political lines, which continue to blur anyway. There is no clear ecclesiastical direction on these issues. We're therefore left to study it out in our minds, reach our best conclusions, and seek divine confirmation. ☞



NOTES

1. The National Academy of Sciences has a very readable online publication that covers the science of stem cell harvest, research, and therapy in greater depth than space allows in this column. See http://dels.nas.edu/dels/rpt_briefs/stem-cell-high.pdf (accessed 17 September 2007).

2. Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in *Biomedical Ethics*, 4th ed., T.A. Mappes and D. DeGrazia, eds. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 434–40. Electronic copy available at http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/warren_article.html (accessed 4 August 2007).

3. Drew Clark, "The Mormon Stem-Cell Choir," *Slate*, 3 August 2001. Electronic copy available at <http://www.slate.com/?id=112974> (accessed 17 September 2007).

4. These are Senators Orrin Hatch (UT), Robert

Bennett (UT), Gordon Smith (OR), and Harry Reid (NV), and Representatives Buck McKeon (CA), Dean Heller (NV), Thomas Udall (NM), and Jim Matheson (UT). Currently six LDS senators and one LDS representative oppose federal funding of stem cell research.

5. The 2007 Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act passed the House 247–176 and the Senate 63–34 but was vetoed by President Bush on 19 June 2007. The full text of the bill is available at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:S.5>: (accessed 17 September 2007).

6. Quoted in "A Quote-By-Quote Look at Election Year Issues . . . in the Worlds of Science and Religion," *Science & Spirit*, September/October 2004, 32–33.

7. Marc R. Hammerman, "Transplantation of Renal Primordial: Renal Organogenesis," *Pediatric Nephrology*, August 2007. Available online at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/e853417n3784h4r2/> (accessed 17 September 2007).

8. Andrea Thompson, "A Barbaric Kind of Beauty," *Daily Mail*, 7 August 2006. Available online at www.dailymail.co.uk (accessed 15 August 2007).

9. Nancy Gibbs, Susan Reed, and Cathy Booth Thomas, "Baby, It's You! And You, And You . . ." *TIME*, 19 February 2001, 46–58.

10. Michael Janofsky, "Utah, in Poll, Backs Stem Cell Money," *The New York Times*, 17 August 2001. Electronic copy available through query.nytimes.com (accessed 6 August 2007).

11. Gary J. Bergera, ed., *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1989), vii.

12. Boyd K. Packer, "The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character," speech given at CES Fireside for Young Adults, 2 February 2003. Full text available online at www.lds.org. Confusingly, the online student newspaper at BYU reported that Elder Packer said just the opposite: "Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should understand and take an individual stance on cloning issues, President Boyd K. Packer told young adults earlier this month." Lara Updike and Tiffany Smith, "Cloning Raises Religious Issues," *BYU Newsnet*, 20 February 2003, newsnet.byu.edu/print/story.cfm/42417 (accessed 6 August 2007).

13. This statement can be accessed in the "Public Issues" portion of the LDS Newsroom section of www.lds.org.

14. *Journal of Discourses* 17:143.

15. David O. McKay to Tiena Nate, 31 October 1934, quoted in Lester E. Bush, Jr., *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 161.

16. First Presidency Letter, 12 February 1970, quoted in Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 162.

17. This statement can be accessed in the "Public Issues" portion of the LDS Newsroom section of www.lds.org. (See the statement issued in 26 May 2005.) Also, regardless of what the *Lincoln Journal Star's* source claims, a human embryo implants onto the uterus on around the eighth day, not the fourteenth.

18. Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 162.

19. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 280–81.

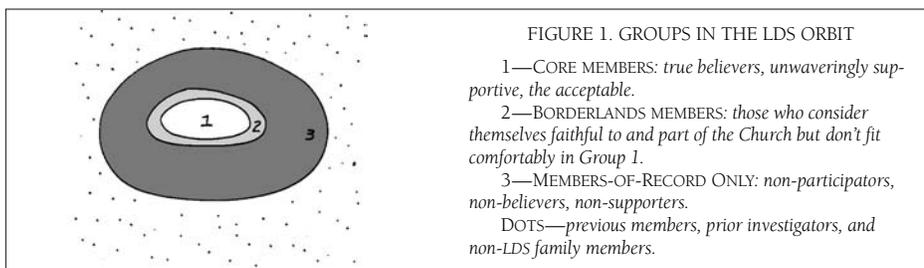
20. *Donum Vitae* is available online at www.priestsforlife.org/magisterium/donumvitae.htm.

21. Quoted at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Wolpert (accessed 25 September 2007).

BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

A 2020 CALL

By D. Jeff Burton



THERE IS A saying to the effect that rich men feel no temptation to steal bread. In a similar way, well-positioned men serving at the local level sometimes feel no temptation to question the system that grants them power nor to really consider their true feelings and beliefs. Many Borderlanders have had this experience, myself included.¹

I would like to share with you a story that dovetails nicely with this experience and with the major theme of this magazine devoted to women's issues.

A 2020 CALL

THE DOOR OPENED slowly into an office suite in the Church Administration Building in Salt Lake City. The security escort waved a farewell. "Nice to have known you folks," he said with a smile. Responding to his visitors' blank looks, he said more seriously, "Men are never the same after they receive a call from this office."

R. Grant Ellison and his wife Anna stepped hesitantly into a spacious outer office. The deep carpet and wool-lace curtains from an earlier era framed large wooden windows overlooking the flower-covered plaza outside.

Darkened oil paintings of early Church leaders hung heavily on the south wall while glass cases on the east displayed an original of the Book of Mormon and other early-Church documents. Light from the ancient cases cast a warm incandescent yellow glow on the wall behind. The office had been remodeled six years ago as part of many

changes in the Church then and was presently lit by a blue-white laser chandelier. In Grant's mind, the new light clashed uncomfortably with the old. "I'll take the traditional any time," he thought.

The receptionist smiled and disappeared through a small door. Grant waited quietly, his faithful wife and companion at his side. Tall, handsome, muscular but sagging, graying at the temples, and dressed in a tailored, dark gray suit, he looked much like a bank president or congressman.

A large double door opened, and a gentle, elderly man shuffled through. Grant had never been in the man's immediate presence before but quickly recognized the distinguished, ninety-six-year-old president and prophet of the Church, now 32 million members strong. Grant's legs stiffened, and his cheeks flushed. He took Anna's arm, knowing that she'd be needing his support.

Sensing the tension, the president spoke in a soft, reassuring tone. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting. I've been looking forward to seeing you. Please, come in." He grasped the Ellisons' arms, separating them, then putting his thin hands at their waists, he gently led them into his inner office toward three high-backed chairs beside his large, glass-topped desk. Directly in front of the desk was a dark leather chair obviously used for ordinations and blessings.

The prophet asked them to turn their chairs so they all could face each other. Their knees were only inches apart, their chairs forming a perfectly equal triangle on the soft carpet. He smiled. His well-known, weathered face and white hair were even more

striking in person.

"President Ellison, we've watched you and Sister Ellison for a number of years now. We know of your accomplishments, devotion to the gospel, and unquestioning support of the leadership of the Church." He paused. "We have something to suggest to you and Sister Ellison."

Nervous but excited, Grant wiped his now-damp hands together. This has to be a call to be an Authority of some kind, he thought. He had served as a bishop, a stake president, a mission president in Germany, and was now a full-time Church leader and employee in London. Anna had served faithfully at his side, becoming a recognized leader in her own right. She was serving on the Relief Society General Board, looking after its interests in the British Isles. She had also become a Director of the UN's Office of International Understanding, a position of considerable visibility in the U.K. She was a real asset to Grant in his increasingly important callings in the Church.

The president continued. "Sister Ellison, will you support your husband in any position we call him to?" She responded without hesitation. "Of course." She sat erect in her chair, her smile serene and pleasant. Her hair was immaculate, her British clothes cut just right, and her hands rested calmly in her trim lap.

Everyone smiled.

"Brother Ellison, will you support your wife in any position we may call her to?" Grant said, "Why . . . yes . . . certainly." He had heard that some calls were introduced like this.

"Well, I have a proposal for you," he said. "Last month it was suggested to the First Presidency that another person be called into the general leadership of the Church. We have discussed this call with the Twelve. They are in harmony with what we propose to do." The prophet searched in his coat pocket for a sheet of paper. The very air in that spacious inner office seemed electric. Grant leaned forward a little.

The prophet read carefully from the paper: "Anna Kandell Ellison, it is proposed that you be called to the position of Church Ambassador to Europe. This calling reports directly to the First Presidency." He paused and looked at Grant: "Brother R. Grant Ellison, it is proposed that you be released from any present callings to support your good wife. She's going to need your strength, your love, your experience, and your priesthood."

Everyone exchanged glances. Concerned for her husband's feelings, Anna looked at

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him closely. Grant slumped slightly and looked blankly at the prophet.

The president's kind voice loosened the tension: "No need to answer just yet. You'll both need to think a little about it, I'm sure. Perhaps a little background information will help you understand the importance of this call." He leaned over and touched a button on his desk. "Michael, please ask J. Lynn Maynard to join us." Turning to the Ellisons, he continued, "Lynn is one of my assistants and can do a good job of explaining how the idea for this call came about."

Grant leaned back, folded his arms on his chest, and choked down a cough. His gaze wandered about the room, finally fixing on an early photograph on the president's desk of the prophet and his beloved wife. She was clinging to the president's arm, looking lovingly into his face. "That's the way things *should* be," Grant thought.

J. Lynn Maynard entered holding a thin lapscreen. She was well prepared for her presentation, which she supported with graphs and charts. "As you know," she began, "the world and the Church have changed a great deal during the second decade. We've become more of a diverse, faith-based religion, one more centered at the local level on Jesus's teachings.

"Partly as a result, just since 2012, we've seen great growth in developed countries such as Japan, Canada, and the U.K. The Church's increased influence in Europe is also being noticed by many ecclesiastical and government leaders, requiring our greater attention and. . . ."

Maynard pushed on smoothly through her presentation, but Grant was not listening very closely. "Why me, God?" he prayed silently. He imagined himself following Anna into church and government buildings and being introduced as "Ambassador Ellison's husband." He saw himself "warming up" smiling Church members while they patiently waited for Anna K. Ellison to take the podium. He imagined waiting for her in hotel rooms while she attended important meetings and then hearing her say, "I'm sorry, but what we discussed is confidential. I can't say anything just yet." He choked on that thought.

Where would his life go now? His Church career, whatever was left of it, would be overshadowed by Anna's position. He would have to defer to her needs instead of she to his. His unspoken dream of rising to greater and greater service was turning into a nightmare, plummeting into obscurity. He had a sudden urge to jump up, escape the room, and quit the Church. This last shocking thought—

impossible only moments ago despite years of unspoken questions and secret personal concerns—shook Grant like blue-sky thunder and his attention flashed back to Sister Maynard.

" . . . and so we've found the new Church Ambassadorship position to be an excellent bridge to leaders around the world," Maynard continued. "It's opened many doors and helped us solve many problems. Ambassador Ellison will be the third Ambassador called."

The prophet smiled. "They haven't accepted yet." He thanked Sister Maynard and invited her to chat for a moment with Anna. Standing, he took Grant by the arm, moving him to the windows overlooking the plaza. Through the imperfect old glass, they could see people passing just outside, some intently heading for the temple, others for the City Creek complex, others seemingly with no destination in mind. None knew what was happening only feet away.

Brother Ellison, do you believe that God is making this call?"

The question hit Grant's mind like water on a hot griddle. "Do I?" he wondered.

The prophet immediately continued. "My years of associating with leaders tell me you're having a problem. Am I right?"

Grant knew he should say, "No, I'm fine. I'd love to support Anna. I'm overjoyed at her call. I'll do whatever is required to see her succeed. I know this is the best for the Church. I know the call is inspired. This isn't about me." Those thoughts were there, but they were swimming with a lot of other, more negative, selfish, and doubtful feelings that Grant suddenly recognized openly. He knew how perceptive the prophet was. He would feel Grant's insincerity if he said what he "should." Best to be honest, Grant told himself. About five seconds of silence had passed.

"Well, President, it's not going to be easy, that's true. It's such a change. It's not that I don't want this for Anna, it's just that . . . well, pride might be one of my problems, and . . . uh . . . it's going to be rough being in the shadows, out of the decision making . . . not being 'Number One,' not being in charge . . . taking direction from a woman. . . . I'm sorry. Honestly, I've been hoping for something like this for myself for years . . . and now it seems. . . . Frankly, I just don't know what to think."

"Brother Ellison, thank you for being honest with me. This is hard, I know. You're not the only one who's experienced these kinds of feelings, believe me," he said with gentleness and love. "You saw the photo of

my sweet eternal companion and me on the desk. I keep that special picture close to remind me that we are all equal in the sight of God, that we must trust Him, and that we must be honest with one another.

"That picture was taken on a Sunday afternoon many years ago. She had just been called to the Relief Society General Board, a tremendous opportunity, one requiring a lot of support and sacrifice on my part. I was released as the president of an elder's quorum," he chuckled. "I felt some of the same emotions you are probably feeling right now—frustration, doubt and concern; wondering what was going to happen to me. And it took me months to overcome those feelings and to let myself be honest with myself, and with others. But it's my testimony that such feelings can be overcome and must be overcome if we are to achieve happiness in this life and exaltation in the next."

Grant nodded, not quite satisfied, not quite understanding, but somehow hopeful now. They walked back to the desk.

"Sister Anna K. Ellison, can you accept this call from the Lord?"

"I can, with Grant's blessing."

"Fine. And you, Brother R. Grant Ellison, can you accept a new calling, that of supporting and sustaining Ambassador Anna K. Ellison?"

"Yes, I'll give it my best."

"The Lord will help. I'd like you to join me as I set apart Sister Ellison. Then I'd like to lay my hands on your head and give you a special blessing, that you will be able to accept your new role and to understand its importance to the Church, to Sister Ellison, and to yourself.

"Sister Ellison, if you'll come forward." ☞

NOTE

1. In my first column (this is the twenty-sixth), 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 previous columns are available via free download at WWW.FORTHOSEHOWONDER.COM.

Please send me any of your experiences from life in the Borderlands.

*D. Jeff Burton,
jeff@eburton.com*

UPDATE

LDS CHURCH EXPRESSES "REGRET"
FOR MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE

THE LDS CHURCH ISSUED A STATEMENT EXPRESSING "profound regret" for the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the 1857 episode in which Mormon settlers in southern Utah killed some 120 California-bound emigrants.



Elder Henry B. Eyring speaks at a memorial service for the 150th anniversary of the Mountain Meadow Massacre

"We express profound regret for the massacre carried out in this valley 150 years ago today and for the undue and untold suffering experienced by the victims then and by their relatives to the present time," said Apostle Henry B. Eyring, speaking on behalf of the First Presidency during a memorial service held on the sesquicentennial anniversary of the massacre. The event was held at the massacre site,

which is owned by the LDS Church and located some 35 miles west of Cedar City, Utah, near present-day Enterprise. The service was part of a series of events held by three organizations that reunited descendants of the families massacred there on 11 September.

"A separate expression of regret is owed to the Paiute people who have unjustly borne for too long the principal blame for what occurred during the massacre," Eyring added. "Although the extent of their involvement is disputed, it is believed they would not have participated without the direction and stimulus provided by local Church leaders and members."

The statement does not include the word "apology" nor ask for forgiveness. While Richard E. Turley, managing director of Family and Church History, told the *Salt Lake Tribune* that the statement was meant to be an apology, an Associated Press story claimed that "church leaders were adamant that the statement should not be construed as an apology."

"We don't use the word 'apology,'" Church spokesman Mark Tuttle told AP reporter Paul Foy. "We used 'profound regret.'"

According to the statement, "the responsibility for the massacre lies with local leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the regions near Mountain Meadows who also held civic and military positions and with members of the Church acting under their direction."

"I don't think shoving it off on local [Mormon] leadership is

an apology," historian Will Bagley told the *Salt Lake Tribune*. "Did you hear an 'I'm sorry?'" Bagley has argued in his book *Blood of the Prophets* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2002) that Brigham Young lied about the massacre for twenty years and refused to go after the Mormon perpetrators.

Descendants of the massacre victims likewise recognized that the First Presidency statement had stopped short of an apology. Patty Norris, president of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Descendants group, called the statement an "almost apology."

"Simply saying 'I'm sorry' would go a long way," said Priscilla Dickson, a descendant of the Tackett family, which was among the emigrants.

This latest statement on the massacre echoed language used by President Gordon B. Hinckley nearly a decade ago. During the 1999 dedication of a new monument at the massacre site, President Hinckley said: "We express our regrets over what happened there, and we all need to put this behind us."

As Scrutiny Intensifies, Descendants Request Control of Site

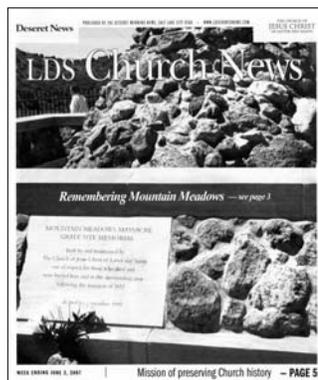
THE STATEMENT OF REGRET COMES AT A TIME OF intense media attention around the massacre and all things Mormon. Released in late August and using the massacre as historical background, the film *September Dawn* offers a hostile, disparaging view of Latter-day Saints, who are depicted as bloodthirsty, fanatical, and conspiratorial. Although much more balanced in tone, the four-hour PBS documentary *The Mormons*, released last April, also focused attention on the massacre, to which it dedicated an entire segment.

Ten days before the anniversary, two of the three existing groups of massacre descendants announced publicly their desire for the LDS Church to allow either federal control or private trusteeship of the site. Phil Bolinger and Scott Fancher of the Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation first delivered this request to Church Historian Marlin K. Jensen last April, but President Hinckley turned it down.

"It's not right for the people who had complicity [in] the killings to be the grave owners," Bolinger complained to the *Salt Lake Tribune*. "I asked [Jensen], 'How do you think the Kennedy family would feel if the Lee Harvey Oswald family had control of the Kennedy tomb?'"

The foundation is also considering asking the Church to remove from its records of vicarious temple ordinances the names of all massacre victims and survivors. Elder Jensen told the *Deseret Morning News* that the only such request he knows of to date was made by Scott Fancher to have two or three names removed, which request was granted. Jensen added that such requests are considered on an individual basis and "under appropriate circumstances, we do grant requests to the extent that we no longer display those records in our public database. We have no way, as a church, of undoing ordinances that have been performed."

The Church Tells Its Side of the Story



The Church News features Mountain Meadows Massacre Anniversary on its 2 June cover

primary sources. Since then, Turley has appeared in numerous forums reaffirming that their “marching orders” are to tell the whole truth and to “present the evidence as we find it—honestly, openly and candidly.”

The book, which places the blame for the massacre on local LDS leaders rather than on Brigham Young, will be released

later this year by Oxford University Press. Although in 2002 it was announced that the title would be *Tragedy at Mountain Meadows*, in the end, a less euphemistic title was chosen: *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.

In a reversal of the silence that has prevailed in official LDS publications for many years, shortly after the broadcast of PBS’s *The Mormons*, articles about the 1857 killings appeared in *The Church News*, *Ensign*, and on the official LDS website, LDS.ORG. In an unprecedented move, the *Church News* made Mountain Meadows Massacre its 2 June cover story. The two-page article is accompanied by a sidebar defending why Brigham Young could not have ordered the massacre.

The *Ensign* article, written by Turley, implies that Brigham Young and other leaders did not conspire to hide any of the facts after the massacre because “their understanding of the extent of the settlers’ involvement and the terrible details of the crime came incrementally over time.” The article briefly mentions that “in 1870 [Church leaders] excommunicated Isaac Haight and John D. Lee” but does not explain why it took twelve years to discipline the men. Nor does the article mention that Lee was later executed in what has been widely regarded as an “official sacrifice”—as Mormon historian Juanita Brooks put it—so that the charges against all other organizers and participants would be dropped.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?—PAST LDS STATEMENTS ABOUT THE MASSACRE

Below are samples of statements about the Mountain Meadows Massacre published in official LDS publications or delivered by Church leaders.

“Leading spirits among the white settlers . . . determined upon the destruction of the emigrants. . . . The conception was diabolical; the execution of it horrible; and the responsibility for both must rest upon those men who conceived and executed it; . . . not with [the Indians].

B.H. ROBERTS, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1930

“The most horrible and shocking crime ever perpetrated within the border of [Utah], . . . it was the deed of enraged Indians aided by a number of white men, who took vengeance into their hands for wrongs committed by a few of the emigrants.”

JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH, *Essentials in Church History*, 1950

“The white men at a given signal, fell upon the unarmed emigrant men. At the same time hundreds of Indians, who had laid [sic] in ambush, rushed upon the hapless party. In five minutes the terrible tragedy was enacted.”

WILLIAM EDWIN BERRETT, *The Restored Church*, 1961

In “what may be considered the most unfortunate incident in the history of the LDS Church, . . . a group of Mormon settlers in southern Utah joined with nearby Indians in killing all but some of the youngest members of a group of non-Mormon emigrants en route to California.”

RONALD K. ESPLIN & RICHARD E. TURLEY, JR, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1992

“No one knows fully what happened at Mountain Meadows. I don’t, nor can it be explained, but we express our regrets over what happened there, and we all need to put this behind us. . . . We need to convey a spirit of reconciliation and of peace. We need to eliminate the hatred.”

GORDON B. HINCKLEY, during the dedication of a new monument at Mountain Meadows, 1999

POLYGAMIST LEADER FOUND GUILTY



AP PHOTO / JUD BURKETT, POOL



TRENT NELSON, SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Above: Warren Jeffs, left, and counsel react to the verdicts. Below: Elissa Wall talks to the media after Jeffs was found guilty on two counts of rape as an accomplice.

WARREN S. JEFFS, PRESIDENT of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was found guilty of two counts of being an accomplice to rape in connection with a 2001 ceremony in which he married Elissa Wall, who was 14, and Allen Steed, 19.

Wall's testimony against Jeffs is believed to have been central in obtaining a guilty verdict. "This trial has not been about religion or a vendetta," said Wall after the verdict was read on 25 September. "It was simply about child abuse and preventing further abuse. I hope that all FLDS girls

and women will understand that, no matter what anyone may say, we are created equal."

"You do not have to surrender your rights or your spiritual sovereignty," she added. "I know how hard it is, but please stand up and fight for your voice and power of choice. I will continue to fight for you."

The trial received wide attention from the national media and was aired live on Court TV.

Due to be sentenced on 12 November, Jeffs faces five years to life in prison for each count of rape as an accomplice. Jeffs is likely to go next to Mohave County, Arizona, where he faces more charges related to teen brides. Also, he faces a federal count of flight to avoid prosecution in Utah and is named in several additional lawsuits, including one that alleges misconduct as a trustee for a property trust connected to his church.

The day after the Jeffs verdict was announced, Utah prosecutors charged Steed, Wall's ex-husband, with rape for having sex with Wall against her will. The now 26-year-old truck driver surrendered himself on 3 October, posted \$5,000 bail, and was released the next morning.

ROMNEY'S MORMONISM CONTINUES TO INTRIGUE MEDIA AND PUNDITS

REPORTERS, POLITICAL CAMPAIGNERS, BLOGGERS, and LDS Church public relations staff have been busier than ever as Mitt Romney's U.S. presidential campaign goes into full swing.

"Religion has not played so prominent a role in a U.S. national election since 1960, when John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic to be elected president," wrote Tom Raum for the Associated Press. Yet according to Raum, Kennedy has an advantage over Romney: when Kennedy ran, Catholics made up roughly 28 percent of the U.S. population while Mormons today represent only 2 percent.

"The differences between Kennedy and Romney are in the nose count," says political historian Stephen Hess. "The religion issue may have hurt Kennedy, but it sure helped him at the same time. . . . There is no way that capturing the Mormon vote is going to win Romney anything."

In his campaigning, Romney frequently tells conservative Christians that he shares their values and convictions. "The Bible is for me the word of God," Romney says. "I also believe that Jesus Christ is my savior," he adds, approximating the language evangelicals use to describe their faith. Yet some have noticed Romney's defensiveness, frustration, and even hostility when asked about the specifics of Mormonism.

A much publicized YouTube clip shows Romney engaged in a heated argument with conservative radio reporter Jan Mickelson during an off-the-air commercial break. Though Romney insisted that he was not distancing himself from his faith, Mickelson accused him of trying to "hermetically seal" his religious views away from his political ones. Mickelson further suggests that Romney should say he "made a mistake" by not taking an anti-abortion stance as Massachusetts governor, since a pro-choice position isn't in accordance with LDS theology. In responding to Mickelson, Romney downplayed LDS opposition to abortion and insisted that not all Mormons are pro-life.

"Every Mormon should be pro-life?" Romney countered.

"If that's what your church says," Mickelson answered.

"That's *not* what my church says!" Romney said. "There are leaders of my church who are pro-choice. You're wrong! That's your problem. . . . I understand my faith better than you do."

Romney added later, "I don't like coming on the air and having you go after my church and me. I'm not running as a Mormon, and I get a little tired of coming on a show like yours and having it all about Mormon [sic]. . . . You're trying to tell me that I'm not a faithful Mormon, and I'm not running to talk about Mormonism."

In another example of Romney's growing frustration with the media, Real Clear Politics blogger Mark Davis recently reported that when he asked Romney about the lack

of archaeological support for the Book of Mormon, Romney replied, "I really don't think it's productive for me to say, 'let me tell you about this doctrine or that doctrine.' I'm not a spokesman for my church."

"Senator Kennedy," Romney continued, playing the part of an imaginary reporter posing questions to JFK during his presidential campaign, "Do you really believe that that wafer turns into the body of Christ; do you really believe that? Has there been chemical analysis [done] in the stomachs of people after they've taken communion? These are not questions you ask someone who's running for President."

Some Mormons have voiced offense as what they see as Romney's misleading answers when asked about particulars of Mormonism. A recent *New York Times* story quotes Logan, Utah, radio host Tom Grover saying that some of his listeners were incensed when Romney called polygamy "awful" (see SUNSTONE, June 2007, 74-75). "That really left a bad taste in people's mouths," Grover said. "That's a tough thing for people to hear when their ancestors sacrificed a lot to live that life. They probably wouldn't bring polygamy back, but they honor the place of it in church history."

Rivals Attack the Church, Apologize

AS ROMNEY'S CAMPAIGN FOR THE GOP NOMINATION gains momentum, three of his rivals were discovered using religion to dissuade Republicans from voting for the Mormon candidate. In mid-June, an aide to GOP candidate Sam Brownback was reprimanded for sending an email to Iowa Republican leaders in which she stated that Mormons are not Christian. "Theologically, the only thing Christianity and the LDS church [have] in common is the name of Jesus Christ, and the LDS Jesus is not the same Jesus of the Christian faith," wrote Emma Nemecek, the Brownback campaign's southeastern Iowa field director. "The LDS church has never been accepted by the Christian Council of Churches." Brownback apologized to Romney for the email.

John McCain's campaign has also been accused of derogatory and inaccurate comments about the LDS faith. According to the *Boston Globe*, Chad Workman, chair of McCain's campaign in Warren County, Iowa, told a group of Republican voters that the LDS Church helped fund Hamas terrorists and compared the Church's treatment of women to that of the Taliban. One 22 June, the LDS Church issued a statement explaining that it does send money to an Islamic charity but strictly for humanitarian purposes and through reputable organizations. McCain later apologized for the accusation.

In a third incident, a staffer for GOP contender Rudy Giuliani provided bloggers with copies of a *Salt Lake Tribune* story about the White Horse Prophecy, according to which, in the last days, the U.S. Constitution will be hanging by a thread and Mormons will save it. Giuliani senior advisor Tony Carbonetti called the email "not acceptable" and apologized to Romney.

The LDS Campaign for a Positive Image

AS STORIES ABOUT THE LDS church continue to appear, the LDS Church has mounted its own campaign to educate the media about polygamy, to give its own version of the events surrounding the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and to capitalize on what LDS Public Affairs calls an "astounding increase of visibility."

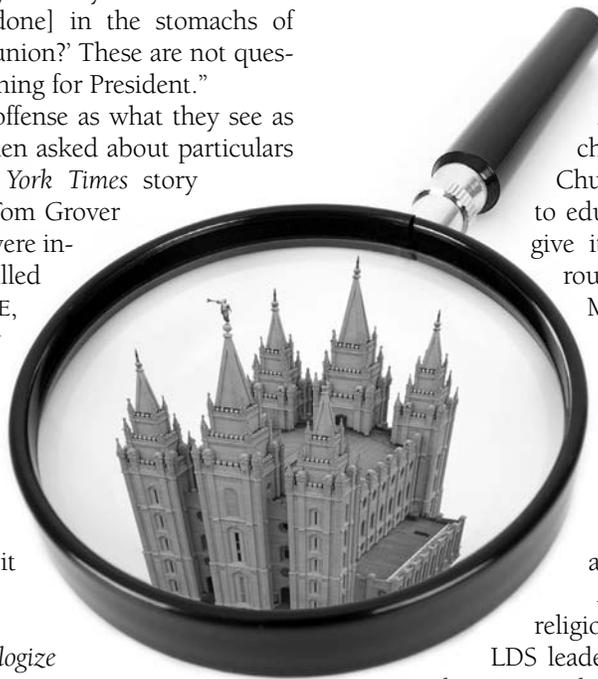
"Public Affairs staff have walked a narrow but very distinct line," reads a 26 July release, "unwilling to discuss political issues but very willing to talk to the news media and others about the Church itself."

According to professor of American religious history Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, LDS leaders know that Romney's bid for the White House has ramifications for the Church. "A

Romney presidency is not simply a vehicle for one man's political aspirations," she wrote in the 21 August issue of *The Christian Century*. "It is the opportunity to have 'a Mormon in the White House.' The LDS Church, anxious to represent itself positively, has capitalized on the media attention to try to dispel old myths and to garner positive attention."

According to the department's own statement, LDS Public Affairs is "breaking the Church's messages down to their simplest form" and trying to educate reporters on four specific points: First, that Mormons are Christian. Second, that there are significant differences between Mormonism and historical Christianity. Third, that the Book of Mormon provides a deeper understanding about the meaning of life. Fourth, that reporters are encouraged to visit church services and "witness firsthand the effect of faith in individual lives."

Despite the Public Affairs department's attempts to make LDS positions more understandable, Maffly-Kipp doubts that either the Church or the Romney campaign will succeed in demystifying Mormons for the general public. "Even if Romney were to explain his religious beliefs at length," she writes, "I doubt that most people would feel more at ease. It is hard to imagine anything Romney says on the subject would be taken at face value by the many Americans already predisposed to be suspicious of the LDS Church."



People

Deceased. President JAMES E. FAUST, 87, second counselor in the First Presidency, of “causes incident to age.” Following six years of service as an Assistant to the Twelve and member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, Faust was ordained an apostle in October 1978, serving in the Quorum of the Twelve until his call to the First Presidency in March 1995.

Born in Delta, Utah, Faust served as an LDS missionary to Brazil, 1939–42, and as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II. He attended the University of Utah, where he eventually earned a law degree, a career he practiced until his appointment as a general authority in 1972. During his career, Faust, a Democrat, served terms as a member of the Utah Legislature and president of the Utah Bar Association, and was appointed by President John F. Kennedy to the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights.

A high school and college runner, Faust’s physical mobility had been limited the last few years of his life, leaving him to deliver conference talks and other remarks while seated. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, five children, twenty-five grandchildren, and twenty-eight great-grandchildren.



Deceased. J.D. WILLIAMS, 81, longtime political science professor at the University of Utah. Williams wrote articles for *SUNSTONE* and *Dialogue* about the intersection between the LDS Church and the state, ran political campaigns for Lowell Bennion in 1964 and 1972, and later ran unsuccessfully as a Democrat for the U.S. Senate. In a 1967 *Time* article, Williams called the now-defunct ban on blacks holding the priesthood “unchristian.” In 1983, when a number of LDS scholars were interviewed by their bishops, he called the proceedings “an inquisition.” After the September Six excommunications of 1993, Williams helped organize the Olive Branch, a group that gathered signatures for a statement calling for reconciliation, which ran in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. The J.D. Williams Scholarship Fund has been established in his honor at the University of Utah Development Office.

Appointed. STEVEN C. WHEELWRIGHT, 63, as president of BYU-Hawaii. A former Harvard business professor, Wheelwright has worked extensively with another Harvard business school alumnus, Kim Clark, who is the president of BYU-Idaho. The two men have written several books together, and Wheelwright was a member of Harvard’s faculty when Clark was admitted to Harvard.



NEW TEMPLE RECOMMENDS TO INCLUDE BAR CODES

WILL BAR CODE SCANNERS SOON BECOME THE NEW “all-seeing eyes” of Mormonism? Bishops and stake presidencies are now busy re-interviewing all temple recommend holders so they can replace their current recommends with barcoded I.D.s that will be scanned at the door. LDS temples are now equipped with scanners, and within a few months, the Church plans to announce that the non-barcoded recommends will no longer be accepted for entry.

According to an article in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the new measure is being taken for security reasons, because fake temple recommends are being created with tools as simple as a computer and color laser printer. Typing the word “temple recommend” in Google Images pulls up seven images of temple recommends, including four showing the design currently in use. Even though current recommends include a small print disclaimer according to which the recommend “remains the property of the Church, is not transferable, and must be surrendered on demand,” cases of abuse have occurred.

Additionally, the new technology will allow the Church to create statistics for temple attendance by ward, stake, or any other demographic. This aspect of the new technology has led some members to express concerns about how their personal information might be used. Will bishops know the names of those in their congregations who are—and are not—regular temple attendees?

This is not the first time temple recommends have included electronic encoding: During the 1980s, recommends featured a magnetic strip containing a patron’s personal information. Recommends were tied to a temple’s “T.R.S.” (Temple Recording System) and were swiped when patrons entered any temple or participated in an endowment session. In the early 1990s, the TRS was simplified and the magnetic strips phased out as the computer systems they required were too sophisticated to maintain in Third World countries.



“I hear you also get a discount at Deseret Book”

CHURCH CELEBRATES ITS CALL OF ONE-MILLIONTH MISSIONARY

WITHOUT ATTEMPTING THE IMPOSSIBLE TASK OF DETERMINING HIS OR HER NAME, ELDER M. RUSSELL BALLARD of the Quorum of the Twelve announced that the Church has called its one-millionth missionary. The missionary program that started 177 years ago, when Joseph Smith's brother Samuel left on a mission with a few copies of the Book of Mormon in a knapsack, today reaches 145 countries, teaches Mormon tenets in 164 languages, and deploys some 53,000 full-time volunteers.

"There's been an explosion of young men, young women serving in their own countries," Elder Ballard said at a 25 June press conference held at the Provo Missionary Training Center. "They can teach the gospel in their own language and own culture, and it's made a tremendous difference."

The press conference showcased the diversity of individuals called today as missionaries. They included a couple from Kenya called to preside over a mission in Nigeria; a pair of young sister missionaries, one from South Korea and one from Mexico, serving on Temple Square in downtown Salt Lake City; a couple from Utah serving a humanitarian mission that takes them all over the world helping to provide clean water to communities; and a pair of young men, one from Brazil and one from Idaho, who just entered the Missionary Training Center in preparation to serve in Japan.

"This is a success story," says John-Charles Duffy, who has written for SUNSTONE on the evolution of the missionary discussions (see September 2005 issue: 28–46). "The size of the LDS missionary program is a testament to the idealism of church members and their spirit of volunteerism—their willingness to offer their time, money, and energy. Missionaries' willingness to serve is indispensable for church growth, and the experience can transform the lives of the missionaries themselves."



JEANNETTE ATWOOD, BASED ON CONCEPT BY HUGO OLAZ

A . . . SISTER?!

PRES. HINCKLEY CELEBRATES 97TH BIRTHDAY, VISITS NEW BUILDING

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY CELEBRATED HIS 97th birthday by visiting Brigham Young University and helping dedicate a building named after him. Finished in record time, sixty days ahead of schedule, the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center began construction twelve months ago, when President Hinckley celebrated his 96th birthday at the groundbreaking ceremony.

"This is a very large building to carry the name of a small man," Hinckley said of the \$35 million edifice. "As I creak into old age with . . . a pacemaker and hearing aids, I sit back and think of days gone by."

The dedicatory prayer was offered by Pres. Hinckley's son, Richard G. Hinckley of the Quorum of the Seventy.

According to BYU associate advancement vice president John Lewis, contractors worked at a frantic pace because "everyone recognized how much they wanted President Hinckley to see the building." Although the effort was never announced publicly, crews worked six-day weeks to reach their goal.

President Hinckley donated one of the hammers he owns,



President Hinckley good-naturedly pats a bust of himself in the main entrance of BYU's new Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center

inscribed with the initials G.H., to be placed in a fifty-year time capsule.

"Will you be there [when they open the capsule in fifty years]?" President Hinckley quipped to BYU President Cecil O. Samuelson.

"That'll be up to you!" Samuelson replied.

AN OLIVE LEAF

BY SIMPLE LOVE AND NEED

By Elouise Bell

The “guaranteed to make you smile” reflection that follows is excerpted from Elouise Bell’s essay, “Family Status,” in her book, *Only When I Laugh* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 90–94.

IN THE MAIL the other day, I received a form to be filled out. It was from one of the growing number of organizations that keep tabs on me, and they wanted their files updated. In addition to name, address, teeth count, and other vital statistics, the form had one item that stopped me dead in mid-scribble, I must admit. It read: FAMILY STATUS _____.

Of course we’re all familiar with the “Marital Status” blank on forms—or even, on bureaucracy’s off-days, “Marital Status.” (To which I crisply reply, “Armed and ready!”) There is an easy spectrum—single-married-widowed-divorced—to pick from for the “marital status” slot, though I’m not at all convinced that those four exhaust the possibilities. (I understand that on the West Coast now, some data sheets ask you to specify the name of “Spouse or Significant Other,” abbreviated S.O.)

But how do you answer a question that wants a one-word response to “family status?” What do you say? “Intact?” “Dispersed?” “Eating me out of house and home?” How do you define your “status” in your family? Think of the possible answers there: “Still considered the baby of the family at 45.” “Barely tolerated.” “One rung ahead of the dog, as nearly as I can tell.”

Perhaps the question really means to ask about family make-up, such as who’s in your family and why. If that’s the question, they really need to provide more than a two-inch line for the response. I understand that the matter of who constitutes a family nearly shipwrecked the National Conference on Families earlier this year. One group kept talking about “the family?”; another group insisted that it was more appropriate to speak of “families,” taking into account what varied assortments of people consider themselves families. Jane Howard, author of the best-selling book, *A Different Woman*, came out with a second book titled *Families*, which she might well have



called *Different Families*. In it, she makes the point that today family groups are determined by many factors in addition to genealogy and biology. . . .

Does every “real” family have children? Or can we rather say that the crucial feeling is one of connecting up with the on-going generations of the human race, feeling a part of the larger Family by holding or romping with those who are where we have been, who are coming up to where we are. Doesn’t the belonging come through being involved, whether by blood or adoption or association or career or volunteer service or the most informal kind of neighborhood dynamics, with the next link in the chain? Some people who bear or beget children lack such a feeling; many without children have it nevertheless.

Is a family necessarily “incomplete” (or “broken” as we often callously call it) if there is one parent instead of two? The history of early Utah is a record of countless one-parent families, mothers raising large numbers of children with only occasional short visits from fathers shared with other families and with church duties. Sometimes these strong, nurturing pioneer families included aunts and sister-wives, live-in cousins, and children who became unequivocal family members not by birth or formal adoption but by simple love and need. . . .

BEYOND the needs of basic comfort and safety, it doesn’t matter whether a home is a hut or a hogan, or a mansion or a condo, only that within its walls we feel secure and cherished. It doesn’t matter if the hand that pushes the stroller or the porch swing belongs to a man or a woman, only that it extends tenderness and an abundance of touching. It doesn’t really matter if there’s a big chair, a middle-sized chair, and a teeny-weeny chair, only that the people who sit in those chairs pull them around to face each other for hours of free, open-hearted, on-going talk.

Oh, by the way, about that question on the form that asked for my FAMILY STATUS. In the blank, after much deliberation, I wrote, “Fine!”

Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest Call for Entries

THE SUNSTONE EDUCATION FOUNDATION invites writers to enter the 2008 Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest, made possible by the Eugene and Charlotte England Education Fund. In the spirit of Gene's writings, entries should relate to Latter-day Saint experience, theology, or worldview. Essays, without author identification, will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of writing. The winner(s) will be announced in SUNSTONE and at the 2008 Association for Mormon Letters conference. Only the winners will be notified of the results. After the judging is complete, all non-winning entrants will be free to submit their essays elsewhere.

PRIZES: A total of \$450 will be shared among the winning entries.

RULES: 1. Up to *three entries* may be submitted by a single author. *Five copies* of each entry must be delivered (or post-

marked) to Sunstone by **30 JANUARY 2008**. Entries will not be returned. A \$5 fee must accompany *each* entry.

2. Each essay must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of white paper and be stapled in the upper left corner. All essays must be 3500 words or fewer. The author's name should not appear on any page of the essay.

3. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter that states the essay's title and the author's name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number. Each cover letter must be signed and attest that the entry is the author'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.



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Cowboys and Prophets.

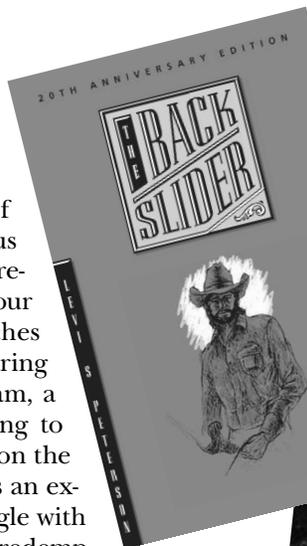
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Statements of the LDS First Presidency: A Topical Compendium

Compiled by Gary James Bergera
Foreword by Dale C. LeCheminant

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