

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought



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a journal of mormon thought

is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.

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THE LGBTQ MORMON CRISIS: RESPONDING TO THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON SUICIDE

Michael Barker, Daniel Parkinson,
and Benjamin Knoll

Introduction

The November 2015 LDS handbook policy change that identified members who participate in same-sex marriages as “apostates” and forbade children in their households from receiving baby blessings or baptisms sparked ongoing attention to the topic of LGBTQ Mormon well-being, mental health, and suicides. When talking about LGBTQ youth suicides in our LDS community, we need to make sure we are working with the best empirical evidence available, and we need to be certain that the evidence presented is being interpreted correctly. Otherwise poor government policies will be put in place that may offer no benefit or might even exacerbate the problem. This article will look at five questions that need to be considered in this very important public health issue:

1. What direct empirical evidence is available regarding LGBTQ youth suicides?
2. What is the indirect evidence?
3. What is the anecdotal evidence?
4. What conclusions can we draw taking into account the limitations of empirical, inferred, and anecdotal evidence?
5. What preventive measures should be implemented while we are waiting for more definitive empirical evidence?

What Is the Direct Empirical Evidence?

*LGBTQ teens are twice as likely to attempt suicide as straight adolescents, according to the Centers for Disease Control.*¹ Others have found that these youth are also more likely to contemplate as well as attempt suicide, although they also point to other factors that also relate to the risk of suicide including depression, substance abuse, and others.²

It is essential to acknowledge that suicidality is multifaceted, and being gay, lesbian, or transgender is not necessarily in all cases risk factors for suicide attempts. In fact, as we will discuss later in this article, LGBTQ people who have supportive families and communities are not at increased risk of poor mental health outcomes. Risk factors for suicide among LGBTQ teens are actually similar to risk factors for suicide among all teens and include hopelessness, major depression symptoms, impulsivity, past suicide attempts, conduct disorder (i.e. destructive, aggressive, deceitful behaviors, and violation of rules), victimization, perceived family support (support from peers does not have the same impact), and the recent suicide or attempted suicide of a family member or close friend. Some of these risk factors, such as family rejection or victimization, might disproportionately impact LGBTQ teens, which would explain their overall higher rate of suicide attempts.³

Family rejection leads to an eight-fold risk of suicide attempts among LGBTQ teens. The Family Acceptance Project (FAP) has done some excellent research showing that there is an exponential risk of suicide for LGBTQ teens who come from families that show “rejecting behaviors”

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health,” <http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>.

2. Stephen T. Russell and Kara Joyner, “Adolescent Sexual Orientation and Suicide Risk: Evidence from a National Study,” *American Journal of Public Health* 91, no. 8 (2001): 1276–81; Arnold H. Grossman and Anthony R. D’Augelli, “Transgender Youth and Life-Threatening Behaviors,” *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior* 37, no. 5 (2007): 527–37.

3. Brian Mustanski and Richard T. Liu, “A Longitudinal Study of Predictors of Suicide Attempts among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 42, no. 3 (2013): 437–48.

such as not addressing issues of bullying and exclusion or endorsing attitudes that exclude members of the LGBTQ community.⁴ They even studied what those rejecting behaviors are, and anyone familiar with the Mormon community would recognize those rejective behaviors as sometimes being common in our communities. (A full list of these “rejecting behaviors” can be found toward the end of this article.) Parents’ rejecting behaviors are often reinforced by local Church leaders and Mormon culture. It is important to note that the risk of suicide remains higher for rejected youth well into adulthood. They also have exponentially higher rates of drug/alcohol use, depression, and HIV infection than youth raised in homes that do not show these rejecting behaviors. The FAP research is in line with other empirical studies that show that many of these risk factors for suicide attempts can be decreased by “family-based interventions that increase support [which] reduce hopelessness and depression symptoms.”⁵

Supportive communities and schools reduce suicide risk among LGBTQ teens. Schools with explicit anti-homophobia interventions such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs) may reduce the odds of suicidal thoughts and attempts among LGBTQ students. A study by the University of British Columbia using data from the 2008 British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey showed that “LGBTQ youth and heterosexual students in schools with anti-homophobia policies and GSAs had lower odds of discrimination, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, primarily when both strategies were enacted, or when the policies and GSAs had been in place for three years or more.”⁶ This study also found that LGBTQ youth in supportive environments experienced fewer suicidal thoughts

4. Caitlin Ryan and Robert A. Rees, *Family Education LDS Booklet* (San Francisco: Family Acceptance Project, 2012), retrieved from <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/family-education-booklet-lds>.

5. Mustanski and Liu, “A Longitudinal Study of Predictors,” 437–48.

6. Tracy Tang, “Gay-Straight Alliances in Schools Reduce Suicide Risk for All Students,” University of British Columbia, Jan. 20, 2014, retrieved from <http://news.ubc.ca/2014/01/20/gay-straight-alliances-in-schools-reduce-suicide-risk-for-all-students/>.

and attempts by about two-thirds. Interestingly, suicidal thoughts and attempts also dropped among heterosexual boys and girls in the schools that put these policies into place.

Mark Hatzenbuehler of Columbia University polled 30,000 Oregon teens and found that those living in supportive communities were 25 percent less likely to attempt suicide compared to teens in more hostile communities (as evidenced by the presence or absence of anti-discrimination policies or anti-bullying programs). “The results of this study are pretty compelling,” Hatzenbuehler said in a statement. “When communities support their gay young people, and schools adopt anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies that specifically protect lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, the risk of attempted suicide by all young people drops, especially for LGB youth.”⁷

Suicides have doubled in the past four years, becoming the number one cause of death among Utah teens. Suicide is the number one cause of death of all Utah youth; this is not the case nationally, and Utah consistently ranks above the national average for suicide deaths.⁸ While Utah suicide rates are higher than the national average, they are, nevertheless, generally in line with the other Rocky Mountain states. Though this is true, it is alarming that the teen suicide rate in Utah has doubled since 2011, which is not something we have seen in the other Rocky Mountain states, nor in Alaska. Figure 1 displays suicide rates (per 100,000) from 1999 to 2014, comparing the fifteen- to nineteen-year-old age group in Utah with the same age group in the United States as a whole as reported by the Centers for Disease Control.⁹

7. Jennifer Welsh, “Homosexual Teen Suicide Rates Raised in Bad Environments,” *LiveScience*, Apr. 18, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.livescience.com/13755-homosexual-lgb-teen-suicide-rates-environments.html>.

8. Utah Department of Human Services, “State Suicide Prevention Programs,” Oct. 2015, retrieved from <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2015/pdf/00004455.pdf>.

9. At the time of this writing, the years 1999 to 2014 were publicly available. We do not see the same doubling of suicide rates in Utah among those aged twenty to twenty-four (although it is higher than the national average in that

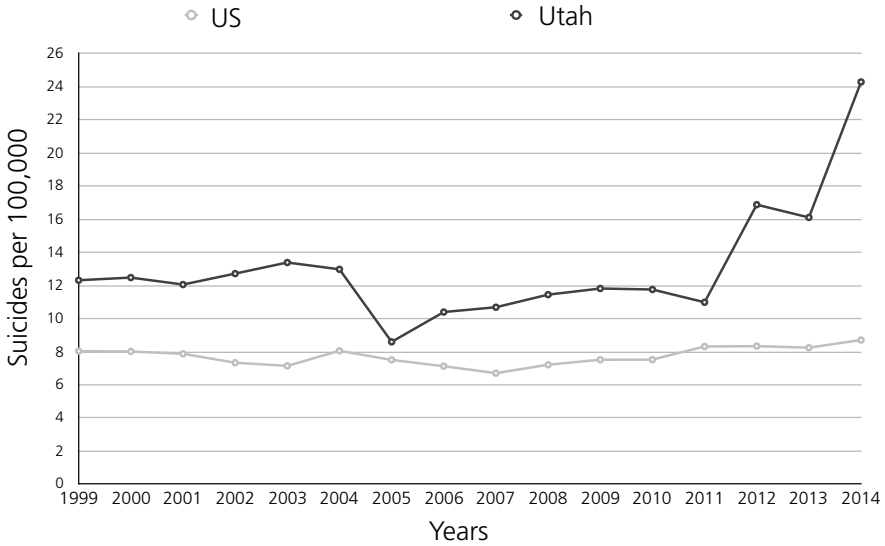


Figure 1: Utah vs. National Suicide Rates, age 15–19, by Year

Summary. A clear body of research shows an elevated risk of suicide among LGBTQ teens nationally and indicates the major risk factors for suicide and other poor outcomes. There is no reason to believe that the LDS community is immune to this. Based on this alone, we need to consider that we have a suicide problem in our community. Analysis of the data suggests that the problem is worse in LDS communities than the national average. The youth suicide rate in Utah is the first statistic that implies this. Although the suicide rate is elevated

age cohort), indicating that the rapid increase seems to be limited to high school-aged youth.

throughout the Intermountain West,¹⁰ no other states have seen the doubling in teen suicides that Utah has had in the past four years. Why is youth suicide in Utah so much higher than the national average? Since LGBTQ issues may be a large factor impacting teen suicides, it would be irresponsible not to address these issues locally, especially when the suicide problem is so acute in Utah, where the highest concentration of Mormons is found. Meanwhile, studies have shown the risk factors for suicide. However, protective factors have not been studied as extensively or rigorously as risk factors.¹¹

What is the Direct Evidence?

Mental health outcomes and mortality rates for LGBTQ are the same as non-LGBTQ people in communities that are friendly to LGBTQ issues. In a 2013 study, Hatzenbuehler, et al. found that in communities that are highly prejudiced against sexual minorities, the life expectancy of sexual minorities is twelve years shorter when compared to low-prejudice communities.¹² Causes of the twelve-year difference are not limited to mental health and suicide; they also include homicide/violence and cardiovascular disease. They also report an eighteen-year difference in the average age of completed suicide among LGBTQ people in high-prejudice communities when compared to low-prejudice communities. We can infer from these findings that an elevated risk of suicide correlates with the elevated risk of mental illness prevalent among LGBTQ people

10. Mikle South, "Op-ed: Misuse of Utah Suicide Data Makes It Harder to Address," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 6, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/3495255-155/op-ed-misuse-of-utah-suicide-data>.

11. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, "Suicide: Risk and Protective Factors," Aug. 28, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html>.

12. Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, Anna Bellatorre, Yeonjin Lee, Brian K. Finch, Peter Muennig, and Kevin Fiscella, "Structural Stigma and All-Cause Mortality in Sexual Minority Populations," *Social Science & Medicine* 103 (2013): 33–41.

living in communities that are hostile to LGBTQ. In a report of the study published in *U.S. News and World Report*, Hatzenbuehler concludes: “The results from the current study provide important social science evidence demonstrating that sexual minorities living in communities with high levels of anti-gay prejudice have increased risk of mortality, compared to those living in low-prejudice communities.”¹³

Meanwhile, there is actual evidence that homosexuals are not at any increased risk of mental illness when they are in a less homophobic community. A study published in *Psychosomatic Medicine* by researchers at the University of Montreal (lead author Robert-Paul Juster) shows that “as a group, gay and bisexual men who are out of the closet were less likely to be depressed than heterosexual men and had less physiological problems than heterosexual men.”¹⁴ A Concordia University doctoral thesis in clinical psychology investigated and examined environmental risks and protective factors that counter-balance the severe mental illnesses that LGBTQ youth have and the role of cortisol, which is a hormone that is released in situations of stress leading to physical and mental health consequences. The author found that LGBTQ youth have abnormal levels of cortisol (compared to their heterosexual peers), which contributes to rates of mental illness and then influence rates of suicide.¹⁵

New research is also emerging that shows transgender people also have normal mental health when they are in a supportive environment from

13. Shannon Firth, “Research: Anti-Gay Stigma Shortens Lives,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Feb. 19, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/02/19/research-anti-gay-stigma-shortens-lives>.

14. Jason Koebler, “Study: Openly Gay Men Less Likely to Be Depressed Than Heterosexuals,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Jan. 29, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/01/29/study-openly-gay-men-less-likely-to-be-depressed-than-heterosexuals>.

15. Sylvain-Jacques Desjardins, “Physiological Impacts of Homophobia,” *EurekaAlert!*, Feb. 2, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.eurekaalert.org/pub-releases/2011-02/cu-pio020211.php>.

an early age. A study out of the University of Washington published in March 2016 showed that prepubescent children who are living openly as transgender with the support of their families fare very well and have no increase in depression or anxiety compared to other children. This is a striking contrast to prior studies on transgender people that have shown higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. The big difference is being able to live openly at a young age with parental support.¹⁶

LGBTQ youth are more likely to be homeless. National studies show an exponentially higher risk of homelessness among LGBTQ teens. A 2013 National Conference of State Legislatures report found that between 20 and 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.¹⁷ Providers and outreach workers in Utah have noticed that this also applies to Utah, and they have noted a high rate of LGBTQ teens from LDS families among the homeless teens they serve. A 2014 *Salt Lake Tribune* article noted: “More than 5,000 youth are estimated to experience homelessness in Utah per year. Of these, at least 40 percent are LGBT and the majority are from religious and socially conservative families, with 60 percent from Mormon homes.”¹⁸

Utah’s doubling of teen suicides in the past four years corresponds to increased rhetoric by the LDS Church against same-sex marriage. As noted above, data from the CDC show that suicides in the fifteen to nineteen age range in Utah have doubled since 2011. While Utah doubled its rate

16. Kristina R. Olson, Lily Durwood, Madeleine DeMeules, and Katie A. McLaughlin, “Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities,” *Pediatrics*, Mar. 2016, retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aapublications.org/content/early/2016/02/24/peds.2015-3223>.

17. “Homeless and Runaway Youth,” National Conference of State Legislatures, Apr. 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>.

18. Peggy Fletcher Stack. “Program Aims to Stop Suicide, Homelessness in LGBT Mormon Youth,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 15, 2014, retrieved from <http://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/sltrib/lifestyle/57682784-80/lgbt-ryan-youth-family.html.csp>.

of suicides among teens, the rest of the country did not see a substantial increase in their suicide rate (see Figure 1). Suicide has become the leading cause of death in this age group in Utah.¹⁹ Of course, correlation does not prove causation, but it is important to look at correlating factors to determine which of these might explain causation. The time frame for this doubling of teen suicides does correspond to an increased focus in the media on LGBTQ issues, especially in Utah as the debate on same-sex marriage played out.²⁰ That clearly led to a backlash, including frequent Church statements criticizing same-sex marriage or the LGBTQ community. It stands to reason that these statements have reinforced conflicts within congregations and families over the issue and has unleashed an increase of demonstrated homophobia and anti-LGBTQ feelings within families. It can easily be inferred that this chain of events exacerbated family rejection of vulnerable LGBTQ teens, thereby increasing their risk of suicide attempts as described earlier.

Most LGBT youth and young adults lose the protective effects of belonging to a religious community. A study of Mormon men in Utah shows that leaving the Church puts one at a much higher risk of suicide. A 2001 study looked at completed suicides of Utah men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four and cross-referenced their activity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The study's authors estimated the individual's degree of church activity by observing the level of priesthood ordination at the date of the suicide. They concluded that leaving the Church raised the risk of suicide among all young men.²¹ We also know that LGBTQ people leave the Church or are invited to leave at

19. "State Suicide Prevention Programs," Utah Department of Human Services, Oct. 2015, retrieved from <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2015/pdf/00004455.pdf>.

20. See Google Trends in both United States and Utah, specifically from 2007 to present on LGBTQ topics: <https://www.google.com/trends/>.

21. Sterling C. Hilton, Gilbert W. Fellingham, and Joseph L. Lyon, "Suicide Rates and Religious Commitment in Young Adult Males in Utah," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 155, no. 5 (2002): 413–19.

very high rates (36.3 percent inactive; 25.2 percent resigned; 6.7 percent excommunicated; 3.0 percent disfellowshipped).²² From these studies we can infer that these LGBTQ young men are among those who have a substantially higher risk of suicide when they lose the protection that membership in a religion provides against suicide risk. If so, then bishops, stake presidents, and family members have reason to worry when an LGBTQ person stops attending church. It seems that the effect of religion on suicidal ideation is mixed. However, a recent study suggests that religion may serve as a protection against suicide attempts, even when LGBTQ people have “internalized homophobia.”²³ This same study shows once again that maturing in a religion increases the risk of suicide among those who leave. It can thus be inferred that LGBTQ people are placed at higher risk when they feel unwelcome in their religious communities and end up losing the protection of religious involvement.

In sum, “it may seem counterintuitive that when individuals chose to leave their religion in order to experience more self-acceptance that they inadvertently experience more risk for suicide.”²⁴ These studies, observations, and data do not directly answer our questions about LGBTQ suicides, but they raise concerns about the well-being, mental health, and suicide-risk among our LGBTQ teens and young adults. In the above cases, the inferred conclusions are compelling and point to a broad range of evidence that demonstrate a serious problem in our community.

22. John P. Dehlin, Renee V. Galliher, William S. Bradshaw, Daniel C. Hyde, and Katherine Ann Crowell, “Sexual Orientation Change: Efforts Among Current or Former LDS Church Members,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 62, no. 2 (2014): 95–105.

23. Jeremy J. Gibbs and Jeremy Gladbach, “Religious Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Suicidal Behaviors among LGBT Young Adults,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 19, no. 4 (2015): 472–88.

24. Gibbs and Gladbach, “Religious Conflict,” 11.

What Is the Anecdotal Evidence?

Anybody who knows a substantial number of LGBTQ people with LDS backgrounds will be astounded by how many have attempted suicide. Those who are in a particular position of outreach, such as the leadership of Affirmation, Wendy and Thomas Montgomery, or Carol Lynn Pearson, have also reported being overwhelmed by the consistent pattern of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicides among LGBTQ people from Mormon backgrounds, particularly among youth and young adults. Clinicians who have worked with teens in Utah including, clinicians from LDS Family Services, have noticed the high rate of despair and suicidal thoughts among LGBTQ teens (as well as adults).²⁵ Further, polling of USGA (a support organization for LGBTQ BYU students) showed a very high rate of suicide attempts among its members.²⁶ Informal polling of LGBTQ youth on a Facebook group for LDS LGBTQ youth has also revealed the ubiquitous nature of suicidal thoughts among our LGBTQ Mormon youth.²⁷

25. Matt McDonald, “LDS Leader’s Comments about Suicides after Policy Change Angers Mama Dragons,” *Fox 13*, Salt Lake City, Feb. 16, 2016, retrieved from <http://fox13now.com/2016/02/15/lds-leaders-comments-about-suicides-after-policy-change-angers-mama-dragons/>; Jennifer Napier-Pearce, “Trib Talk: Suicide in the Wake of LDS Church’s Policy on Gay Couples,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 1, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/blogs/3477833-155/trib-talk-suicide-in-the-wake>.

26. “LGBT Suicides at BYU: Silent Stories,” Understanding Same-Gender Attraction (USGA), Jan. 29, 2016, retrieved from <https://byuusga.wordpress.com/2016/01/29/lgbt-suicides-at-byu-silent-stories-2/>; “‘Just Be There’: A Message of Suicide Awareness and Prevention,” *No More Strangers*, Oct. 10, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.nomorestrangers.org/just-be-there-a-message-of-suicide-awareness-and-prevention/>; see also Annie Knox, “BYU ranked among the least LGBT-friendly campuses,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 10, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/home/2814697-155/ranking-byu-high-among-lgbt-unfriendly-campuses>.

27. Of course, anecdotal evidence is not generalizable because of its non-representative sample bias, prejudice, or any number of other factors. However,

What Conclusions Can We Draw?

When we put these data together, it is impossible to know exactly how many suicides there are among Mormon youth and how many of these are related to LGBTQ issues. In large part this is because data collected by the government on deaths, including suicides, do not generally indicate the sexual orientation of the deceased.²⁸ Despite this fact, we have described above some compelling evidence that allows us to conclude that there is a significant problem and make some reasonable inferences. The direct empirical evidence alone is enough to merit a public health response.

The indirect evidence is also compelling because there are such close correlations between suicide and mental illness/mood disorders, as well as homelessness in general, and LGBTQ people have a higher prevalence of these, especially in communities that are unfriendly to LGBTQ issues and concerns. We can reasonably infer from this that LGBTQ suicides are higher in these communities.

In the case of LDS youth suicides, we are forced to pay attention to both indirect evidence and anecdotal evidence because it is so difficult to gather empirical evidence about any suicide cohort because of the

when the anecdotal evidence becomes massive (as it has to those of us who work directly with LGBTQ Mormons around this issue), then it strongly suggests that something wider may be happening.

28. Mike Barker has asked a suicidologist, several LGBTQ advocates, two forensic specialists (none of these people questioned are from Utah), and at least one concerned Utah lawmaker if there are any states that perform what is called a “psychological autopsy” with regard to the deceased’s sexuality as part of the suicide investigation. The answer has been no. In an email, Barker received the following response from *The Trevor Project* when he inquired about state agencies tracking the sexual orientation of those who have died by suicide:

“This project is currently in the pilot phase. The people involved with conducting the National Violent Death Reporting System have developed a protocol for death investigators to determine the sexual orientation and gender identity of the deceased. They are just beginning training the death investigators on this protocol in the first pilot jurisdiction: Las Vegas.”

stigma associated with it as well as the intense grief experienced by these families. Some families are in denial that their family member is LGBTQ. Furthermore, those youth at highest risk are often the same youth who will hide their sexual orientation, so the family may not even be aware. As one Provo police officer put it: “They don’t leave a note saying they died by suicide because they are gay.”²⁹ It is often difficult to tell if an accidental death is actually a suicide and so those will be missed by any inquiry. Investigating whether sexual orientation is a factor in suicide is clearly complicated, and state agencies in Utah (and other states) have been reluctant to do so.

Normally we should be reluctant to make decisions based on anecdotal evidence alone. However, when the various pieces of evidence (anecdotal, direct, and indirect) provide a highly compelling picture that strongly suggests that lives are at stake (as can happen in any public health crisis), it is critical to be proactive.

Presently, a public health action is even more compelling because we have identified preventive measures that are low cost, low risk, and have already been shown to be effective. Currently the problem is not a lack of evidence, but quite simply a lack of will. We have sufficient direct evidence that is strengthened by indirect evidence and reinforced by anecdotal evidence. The case is strong. Our inability at this time to provide conclusive evidence (again, given that the government does not track the sexual identity of suicide or other mortality indicators) does not diminish our responsibility to take measures to decrease suicides by decreasing suicide attempts—and that is within our reach.³⁰ It is also within our reach to address the depression, despair, and isolation that afflict our LDS LGBTQ youth.

29. Personal correspondence by one of the authors with a direct family member who wishes to remain anonymous.

30. Ann P. Haas, et al., “Suicide and Suicide Risk in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations: Review and Recommendations,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 58, no. 1 (2010): 10–51.

Discussion: What Drives Despair?

Depression and mood disorders play a role in many if not most suicide deaths or attempts. But what can we look at from a community standpoint? What are the factors that put people at risk and then put some of them over the edge? Neuroscientist Michael Ferguson pointed out in a recent podcast interview that “as social beings when you’re shunned or you’re excommunicated or you’re rejected from your primary community of attachments, your body experiences [symptoms] like you’re preparing to die.”³¹ Humans are social creatures and surviving without our most important social connections was historically impossible for our ancestors. Being cast out was literally deadly. To a social animal such as a human, there are few things worse than ostracism.

Consider seeing through the eyes of an LGBTQ teen. Their emergent sense of self as an LGBTQ person often triggers fear of losing their family if their family finds out. Much of what they hear at church inculcates fear that they will not be part of their family in eternity. An entire future is mapped out for them that they see as increasingly impossible to fit into. If they have any gender-nonconforming behaviors or traits, they face bullying at school and at church, and they often do not receive support from their parents around the issue because they are too frightened to talk to them. Parents sometimes reinforce this at home by making homophobic comments, which confirm the child’s fears that they will lose their family if they come out, and that they might even lose their shelter and education by being kicked to the streets.

Meanwhile, hostile messages surround them at church, school, and home. Like every teen, they start to develop feelings and dreams of love and companionship, but then they receive the message that their desires are evil, and that in order to be accepted they have to follow a

31. Fausto Fernos, “FOF #2279 – A Tale of Two Mormons,” *Feast of Fun*, podcast audio, Jan. 27, 2016, retrieved from <http://feastoffun.com/podcast/2016/01/27/fof-2279-a-tale-of-two-mormons/comment-page-1/>.

path that feels impossible for them. Most LGBTQ Mormons have this experience to varying extents. Many of them work their way through it and survive. However, many have other problems, such as depression or poor family structures. The despair often leads them to risk-taking behaviors such as substance abuse or unprotected sex. These factors stack up and multiply their odds of having a suicide attempt or other dangerous behavior.

In the past, there were messages from LDS Church leaders that could reasonably be interpreted by some as indirectly encouraging suicide. For example, in 1981 President Marion G. Romney wrote that “some years ago the First Presidency said to the youth of the Church that a person would be better dead clean than alive unclean.” He then shared a memory of his father telling him before he boarded the train to leave on his mission: “When you are released and return, we shall be glad to greet you and welcome you back into the family circle. But remember this, my son: we would rather come to this station and take your body off the train in a casket than to have you come home unclean, having lost your virtue.”³²

Other statements could be interpreted as encouraging bullying or violence against LGBT individuals. For example, in the 1976 priesthood session of general conference, Elder Boyd K. Packer expressed his hearty approval of a missionary who punched his [presumably homosexual] companion to the floor in response to unwanted sexual advances. He said: “Somebody had to do it, and it wouldn’t be well for a General Authority to solve the problem that way. I am not recommending that course to you, but I am not omitting it. You must protect yourself.”³³

32. Marion G. Romney, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign* (Sept. 1981): <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1981/09/we-believe-in-being-chaste?lang=eng>.

33. Boyd K. Packer, “Message to Young Men,” Oct. 1976, https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1976/10/media/session_5_talk_1?lang=eng. It is interesting to note that this is the only talk in the conference whose transcript is not available; only the audio/visual is available.

While messages like this from the General Authorities have thankfully ceased, they remain part of the cultural memory among older members and can still routinely make their way into sacrament meeting talks, lessons, and advice and counsel from priesthood leaders. LGBTQ youth absorb these messages and may attempt to kill themselves because they conclude that they do not have a future worth living or because they believe that this was what their parents would prefer.

To be clear, we are grateful that rhetoric surrounding LGBTQ issues has improved in many ways over the last several years.³⁴ This positive rhetoric is often difficult to fully internalize (or even perceive as genuine), however, in the context of the other more exclusionary messages that Church leaders continue to send, the most recent and significant of which is the November 2015 handbook policy change that defined Church members who enter into same-sex marriages as “apostates” and forbade baby blessings and baptism to children living in such situations.³⁵ This exclusionary messaging was only exacerbated when President Russell M. Nelson declared in January 2016 that the handbook policy change was the Lord’s will as revealed to his prophets.³⁶

34. Examples include the mormonsandgays.org website as well as Elder Oaks’s October 2012 general conference address entitled “Protect the Children,” in which he stated: “Young people struggling with any exceptional condition, including same-gender attraction, are particularly vulnerable and need loving understanding—not bullying or ostracism,” retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/protect-the-children?lang=eng>.

35. Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Mormon Church to Exclude Children of Same-Sex Couples from Getting Blessed and Baptized until They Are 18,” *The Washington Post*, Nov. 6, 2015, retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/11/05/mormon-church-to-exclude-children-of-same-sex-couples-from-getting-blessed-and-baptized-until-they-are-18/>.

36. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Mormon gay policy is the ‘will of the Lord’ through his prophet, senior apostle says,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 10, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/home/3391057-155/lds-gay-policy-came-from-god>.

Since the majority of LDS families are indeed strong families whose homes are full of love, parents often assume that they would know if their children were feeling conflicted. It is difficult for them to imagine that their child would be afraid to disclose feelings of despair, isolation, or thoughts of self-harm. This is a prevalent assumption of parents, especially those who focus so much time and energy on their families. But many of these loving parents are sending rejecting messages long before they realize that their child might be LGBTQ. As a colleague of ours put it:

Having a loving family isn't enough. Parents need to actually sit down with their kids throughout their youth and specifically say "We will love and be proud of you if you marry a boy or a girl or don't marry at all. Though missions are important, we know that isn't always possible for everyone and that's okay too. We will stand up for you and your choices. We will help you the best we know how, no matter what; even if we don't understand at first. If at some point your life goals feel different than what we currently know about you, we want to discuss that together and understand what your life direction means to you personally. Not being exactly like us should never cause you to fear us being disappointed in you." Until that conversation is being had in the homes of every LDS family, we will continue to see LGBTQ people suffer in isolation.³⁷

Another important source of despair for LGBTQ youth is the political culture in Utah, which is in many ways a reflection of the LDS Church and Mormon community. The Mormon majority in the Utah legislature is widely perceived to be responsive to what the Church leaders support and the Church regularly influences legislation openly, such as when they supported a compromise that allowed passage of a statewide anti-discrimination bill that gave substantial exemptions based on religion.³⁸ We also saw the Utah State Senate in March 2016 shoot down a proposal

37. Personal correspondence between Lori Burkman and the authors, Feb. 2016.

38. Laurie Goodstein, "Utah Passes Antidiscrimination Bill Backed by Mormon Leaders," *The New York Times*, Mar. 12, 2015, retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2015/03/12/us/politics/utah-passes-antidiscrimination-bill-backed-by-mormon-leaders.html.

to modify the state's hate crimes laws to include protections for LGBTQ individuals after the Church opposed the law.³⁹

Meanwhile, the Utah state legislature has taken steps which are not encouraging to LGBTQ youth. Utah, along with seven other US states, has a ban on teachers discussing any LGBTQ issues in public schools.⁴⁰ This makes it very difficult for schools to adopt measures that will help combat bullying and create a safe learning environment for LGBTQ youth. Marian Edmonds-Allen, Utah's leading advocate for LGBTQ youth, laments the situation in our schools: "State school board guidelines that prohibit 'the advocacy of homosexuality' are directly contributing to risk of suicide for youth, both LGBT and straight. Gay-straight alliances, which have been shown to provide a 50 percent reduction in suicide risk for males, both GBT and straight, are becoming even more rare in Utah."⁴¹

As the law now stands in Utah, school counselors are not allowed to address relevant issues with LGBTQ youth who report suicidal thoughts, nor are they allowed to give parents helpful information/resources or even explain the problem when their child is feeling rejected due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁴² One can see how this puts undue stress on LGBTQ teenagers who are left with nowhere to turn for support.⁴³

Even more alarming is the glaring lack of resources for homeless teens. Like the rest of the nation, a disproportionate number of home-

39. Jennifer Dobner, "Senate Kills Hate-Crimes Bill; LGBT Advocates Blame Mormon Church," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 2, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/3608491-155/senate-kills-hate-crimes-bill-lgbt-advocates>.

40. "State Maps," Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/article/state-maps>.

41. Marian Edmonds-Allen, "Suicides or Not, LDS Is Harming LGBT Youth," *Advocate*, Feb. 3, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2016/2/03/suicides-or-not-lds-harming-lgbt-youth>.

42. Utah Code, § 53A, 13-302, retrieved from <http://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53A/Chapter13/53A-13-S302.html>.

43. See Haas, et al., "Suicide and Suicide Risk."

less teens in Utah are LGBTQ. Whether gay or straight, their lives in the streets and canyons of Utah are bleak. Until one year ago, there was not a single shelter bed available for these youth, which number up to 1,000 at any point in time. Even now there is only one shelter, and it can house only fourteen youth. Laws that supposedly protect parental rights have made it impossible for any law-abiding citizen to offer shelter to any of these children, which means that to survive these youth often have had to turn to prostitution or exploitation by adults. Drugs become an all-too-common escape from their bleak existence, further increasing their vulnerability and dependence upon their exploiters.

Discussion: Did the New LDS Handbook Policy Impact Suicide Numbers?

In the aftermath of the November 2015 handbook policy change (referred to previously) there were significant anecdotal accounts of increased suicide among LGBTQ Mormon youth.⁴⁴ This led many to draw direct causal connections between the two events, arguing that the handbook policy change directly caused several dozen youth suicides in the weeks and months that followed. It is important to remember, though, that there was already a major problem with suicide (as well as depression, homelessness, suicide attempts, and despair) among LGBTQ Mormons before the recent policy was revealed. We argue that a better question to ask would be: Are further rejection and homophobia in our communi-

44. Mark Joseph Stern, "The Tragic Results of the Mormon Church's New Policy Against Gay Members," *Slate*, Feb. 8, 2016, retrieved from http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2016/02/08/mama_dragons_respond_to_gay_mormon_youth_suicide.html; Mitch Mayne, "New Mormon LGBT Policy: Putting Already Vulnerable Youth at Even Greater Suicide Risk?," *Huffington Post*, Jan. 28, 2016, retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mitch-mayne/new-mormon-policy-on-lgbt_1_b_9083714.html; Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Suicide Fears, If Not Actual Suicides, Rise in Wake of Mormon Same-Sex Policy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 28, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/news/lds/3473487-155/suicide-fears-if-not-actual-suicides>.

ties increasing depression and despair and consequently intensifying the conditions that contribute to the elevated suicide rate in our community?

As stated above, people in positions of outreach such as the Affirmation leadership and the Mama Dragons leadership found themselves dealing with LGBTQ people in distress and often found themselves spending late nights consoling people who were struggling with suicidal feelings. Due to her high visibility in the media, Wendy Montgomery had already had a constant stream of LDS people reaching out to her around this issue to tell her their stories, seek support, and find resources. After the policy was revealed in November, however, she started getting more and more reports from LDS people reporting an LGBTQ family member had committed suicide. She eventually added up these informal reports and found that there were thirty-two deaths from suicide reported to her between November 6, 2015 and January 17, 2016 (the number rose to thirty-four later that month). When John Gustav-Wrathall, the president of Affirmation, reported Montgomery's numbers on Affirmation.org,⁴⁵ a flurry of media attention and debate arose.⁴⁶

The data reported by Wendy Montgomery seem confusing because, while she did get a high number of reports of suicide since November 6, it is hard to square these numbers with the state of Utah, which reports that there were only ten suicides in Utah in November and December of 2015 in the fifteen to nineteen age range.⁴⁷ We have to be aware that the state will always underestimate actual suicides for several reasons, especially

45. John Gustav-Wrathall, "Our Lives Are a Gift—To Us and the World," *Affirmation*, Jan. 2016, retrieved from <http://affirmation.org/our-lives-are-a-gift-to-us-and-to-the-world/>.

46. See for example Stack, "Suicide Fears"; Tad Walch and Lois M. Collins, "LDS Church Leaders Mourn Reported Deaths in Mormon LGBT Community," *Deseret News*, Jan. 28, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865646414/LDS-Church-leaders-mourn-reported-deaths-in-Mormon-LGBT-community.html?pg=all>.

47. Stack, "Suicide Fears."

because it will not consider an overdose or an accident a suicide, even though overdoses and accidents are both very common ways of attempting/completing suicide. The Utah numbers also did not include suicides from out-of-state, outside of the fifteen to nineteen age range, or from January. Therefore, the number of youth and young adults suicides is very likely higher than ten. Since the reports sent to Wendy Montgomery were not solicited, precise statistical information is not possible. She has admitted that the reports were not always precise and did not always state when the suicide took place, so it is possible that some of them took place prior to the policy change, factors that may also contribute to the discrepancy.

In sum, there is no direct empirical evidence that indicates that the handbook policy change actually increased Mormon LGBTQ youth suicides. The other direct, indirect, and anecdotal evidence that we have discussed, though, are compelling and certainly strongly suggest a link between these things. It is not difficult to imagine that the impact of this policy change will continue to be felt strongly by LGBTQ Mormons for the foreseeable future.

As problematic as the policy is in our view, we believe that it is also misguided to focus exclusively on the policy change as the primary causal factor of LGBTQ marginalization in the Mormon community. Instead, we should address all of the factors that lead to the marginalization and family rejection of our LGBTQ youth. Focusing on the policy while ignoring these other factors, would do a disservice to the individuals we are trying to protect. Even if the policy exacerbated the problems facing LGBTQ Mormons, the primary problems have been in place for a very long time.

What Can Be Done?

What the existing research has clearly shown is that the single largest factor contributing to the mental and emotional health of young LGBTQ people is family acceptance versus rejection. The Family Acceptance Project has specifically identified “rejecting behaviors” that are associated

with mental and emotional harm to LGBTQ individuals. We would do well to ask ourselves if our families, wards, or communities might be doing any of the following:

1. Not allowing or strongly discouraging a youth from identifying themselves as LGBTQ.
2. Not allowing their child to socialize with other LGBTQ youth.
3. Not allowing their child to participate in supportive organizations that will help the youth cope, such as a GSA.
4. Not addressing bullying that their children face around being perceived as LGBTQ.
5. Not protecting their LGBTQ child against derisive comments by uninformed relatives or family friends.
6. Engaging in derisive comments about LGBTQ people or demonizing of LGBTQ people.
7. Not providing a family climate where a child feels safe to come out to their parents.
8. Endorsing statements or comments that make a child fear they will be kicked out of their home or will lose their families if they come out.

The most effective preventions are cheap and easy. We need to educate and support parents and we need to empower our schools to address the needs of our youth. Parents are eager and willing to do what is best for their children. They need to have access to this helpful information through bishops and auxiliary leaders, through mental health providers, and through school counselors. Training needs to happen. Barriers to action need to be removed.

What Should the State Do?

We believe that the state should take more leadership on the issue of LGBTQ and homeless youth. It should participate in efforts to track suicides and suicide attempts and study contributing factors. The state of Utah specifi-

cally should lift the “gag rule” so that LGBTQ issues can be discussed in schools and should require schools to adopt anti-bullying programs that have been proven successful in other school districts. It should remove any barriers and promote the creation of school-based GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) clubs, which have a proven benefit for all students (not just the LGBTQ students). It should seriously address youth homelessness and invest in adequate shelters and remove legal barriers that keep agencies and outreach workers from helping these teens.

What Should the Church Do?

We are going to leave this up to the reader. We have identified the problem. The Church’s role in both the way that LGBTQ issues are handled in Mormon practice, policies, doctrines, and culture, as well as in the legislative process in Mormon-dominant communities, is evident. The Church’s influence in the messages that go to wards and communities about LGBTQ people is, likewise, evident. We hope that Church leaders and members alike will consider the consequences of their positions and rhetoric about LGBTQ issues and find ways to satisfy theological concerns without contributing to the despair and tragedies playing out in the lives of our children.

Conclusion

Any discussion of this issue should take into account whether we are helping or exacerbating the problem. In our opinion, this recent discussion has brought much-needed attention to the issue. Sometimes the discussions have been counter-productive, however. We should not let our focus on one single event, such as the new exclusionary handbook policy, distract us from the numerous issues that lead to distress among our LGBTQ youth. We need to accept that the data we have so far do not allow us to precisely estimate the number of youth suicides driven by the Church’s positions and rhetoric on LGBTQ issues, but we also need to recognize that the evidence points to a serious problem. It also points us toward solutions that are effective and inexpensive.

Furthermore, we should be careful to follow proven guidelines about how to discuss suicide without contributing to suicide contagion. Suicide contagion or “copycat suicide” occurs when one or more suicides are reported in a way that contributes to another suicide.⁴⁸ Suicide contagion is a real problem when suicides become high profile. We can and must discuss suicide among our youth, but we need to do it responsibly. We refer readers to ReportingOnSuicide.org for guidance on how to discuss the issue in our online as well as personal conversations. We also recommend resources such as the Family Acceptance Project (<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>), I’ll Walk With You (<http://www.ldswalkwithyou.org/>), and Affirmation (<http://www.affirmation.org/>).

Finally, we issue a plea for Church members to be a voice for compassion in their individual wards. Speaking out requires courage, but it also decreases pain and saves lives. You may never know who was saved because of something you said or something you did. But it is important to take a stand, speaking and acting with acceptance, understanding, and love. We have an illness. We have a problem. Let’s implement the cure.



Note: a previous version of this article originally appeared as a blog post by the same name on Rational Faiths, February 25, 2016 (<http://rationalfaiths.com/the-lgbtq-mormon-crisis-responding-to-the-empirical-research-on-suicide/>). Interested readers are invited to see the full blog post since the appendix includes detailed summaries and excerpts of the various studies cited in this article. We extend our sincere appreciation to the following people for providing resources, information, and insights: Dr. Mickle South, Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen, Kendall Wilcox, Thomas Montgomery, Wendy Montgomery, Lori Burkman, and John Gustav-Wrathall. We especially recognize and thank the late Dr. Phil Rogers for his generous assistance gathering data from the CDC website and providing us with much of the research discussed in this article.

48. See reportingonsuicide.org and lgbtmap.org.

YOUTH SUICIDE RATES AND MORMON RELIGIOUS CONTEXT: AN ADDITIONAL EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Benjamin Knoll

Much has been discussed and written regarding whether or not the rate of LGBT youth suicides¹ in the Mormon community has risen in the wake of the November 2015 handbook policy change that categorizes same-sex married couples as “apostates” and forbids baptism to children in same-sex married households.² While there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence supporting this connection, more rigorous empirical data are harder to come by.

In an attempt to address this shortage, my colleagues Daniel Parkinson, Michael Barker, and I have presented a wide range of evidence examining direct, indirect, and anecdotal evidence examining the relationship between Mormon culture/norms/rhetoric and youth suicide rates in the Mormon community, especially among LGBT youths.³ We conclude that while there is little *direct* evidence available to be able to conclusively demonstrate that a Mormon environment results in higher levels of youth LGBT suicides, there is sufficient indirect and anecdotal

1. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Suicide Fears, If Not Actual Suicides, Rise in Wake of Mormon Same-Sex Policy,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 28, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/news/lds/3473487-155/suicide-fears-if-not-actual-suicides>.

2. Laurie Goodstein, “Mormons Sharpen Stand Against Same-Sex Marriage,” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2015, A11, retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/07/us/mormons-gay-marriage.html>.

3. See Barker, Parkinson, and Knoll in this issue.

evidence that, when combined with what direct evidence is available, *strongly* points to a link between these factors.

One of the data points we present in our article is the rate of suicide among youth aged fifteen to nineteen in Utah compared to other comparable states over the past several years. We argue: "Suicide is the number one cause of death of all Utah youth; this is not the case nationally. More alarming, the teen suicide rate in Utah has doubled since 2011. . . . While Utah had a doubling of suicides among teens, the rest of the country did not see a substantial increase in their suicide rate."⁴

This evidence is important and, when considered in light of the other evidence they present, certainly supports the argument that the approach to LGBT issues in the LDS Church are influencing suicide rates among young Mormons. Nevertheless, the analysis is also somewhat limited in that we cannot be certain, as we readily admit, that this relationship is not spurious. That is, it is also possible that there are *other* factors which happen to be present in Utah that also affect youth suicide rates *aside* from Mormon religious context on LGBT issues that are more likely to be driving these tragic outcomes. Previous research has identified a number of aggregate factors that affect suicide rates in communities. These include demographic factors like race/ethnicity, age, education, income, and divorce. They also include causes such as population density, altitude, rates of mental illness, and gun ownership.⁵

When there are multiple possible factors associated with a particular outcome (such as youth suicide rates), it is possible to control for these

4. Ibid.

5. Leonardo Tondo, Matthew J. Albertt, and Ross J. Baldessarini, "Suicide Rates in Relation to Health Care Access in the United States: An Ecological Study," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 67, no. 4 (2006): 517–23; Namkug Kim, Jennie B. Mickelson, Barry E. Brenner, Charlotte A. Haws, Deborah A. Yurgelun-Todd, and Perry F. Renshaw, "Altitude, Gun Ownership, Rural Areas, and Suicide," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 168, no. 1 (2011): 49–54; Matthew Miller and David Hemenway, "Guns and Suicide in the United States," *New England Journal of Medicine* 359 (2008): 989–91.

factors by using a statistical tool called “multivariate regression analysis.”⁶ In essence, a regression analysis can identify the *unique* and *independent* effects of one factor on another while simultaneously controlling for the effect of all the other factors that could also be contributing. Think of it as a set of overlapping circles in a Venn diagram: some circles (possible causal factors) overlap with each other to one degree or another. The multivariate regression analysis can identify the *independent* effect of the portion of each circle (factor) that has no overlap with any other circle. In this case, we can examine more rigorously the relationship we reported by analyzing the prevalence of Mormonism in a community on suicide rates while statistically controlling for these other factors that also contribute to suicide rates such as demographics, gun ownership, and mental illness.

To perform this analysis, I examine the effect of the proportion of individuals in all US states and the District of Columbia that identify as Mormon on the per-capita rates (per 100,000) of suicide among youths in those states aged fifteen to nineteen in both 2009 and 2014, the latter being the latest year that such data are currently available from the Centers for Disease Control.^{7, 8} I look at both 2009 and 2014

6. Larry D. Schroeder, David L. Sjoquist, and Paula E. Stephan, *Understanding Regression Analysis: An Introductory Guide* (New York: Sage, 1986); Amy Gallo, “A Refresher on Regression Analysis,” *Harvard Business Review*, Nov. 4, 2015, retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2015/11/a-refresher-on-regression-analysis>.

7. These data are from the “Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics: Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System,” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/>.

8. Suspecting that suicide rates among the fifteen to nineteen age group might represent an overly narrow segment of the youth population, I repeated all these analyses for state suicide rates among the ten to twenty-nine age group in each state and the link between the percentage of Mormons and suicide rates disappeared entirely. This means that the link between the percentage of Mormons in a state and youth suicide rates is limited *specifically* to the high-school-aged group fifteen to nineteen.

to see if there is a change during that five-year interval as the disconnect between LDS Church rhetoric and societal views on LGBT issues has arguably diverged more strongly in many ways during that time. (See also our other article in this issue that shows that suicide rates in Utah rates were fairly stable in the years leading up to 2009.)

I obtained the percentage of Mormons in each state from the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study.⁹ I obtained suicide rates from the Centers for Disease Control. The CDC lists suicide rates in a state only if there are more than ten in any particular year, thus some states are excluded from this analysis. In all, the CDC provides sufficient information so that forty-three states are included in the full statistical analysis for 2009, forty-six states are included for 2014, and forty-two are included in the analysis of the rate of change in suicide rates between 2009 and 2014 (more details below). Here we are able to extend the analysis to *the majority of all US states* to examine whether these trends are generalizable to the entire country.

For the control variables, I include state-level percentages of black, Latino, Asian, bachelor's degree, divorced, median income (in thousands), and median age as given by the 2014 American Community Survey (one-year estimates) as well as state population density (in thousands). I also include the percentage of LGBT population as the research summarized in our other article in this issue shows a link between LGBT identity and suicide risk. These data come from the Gallup organization.¹⁰ Mental health and depression are also associated with suicide rates, and so I also include the serious mental illness rates among the eighteen to twenty-five population (averaged 2013/2014) per thousand, which is obtained from

9. These data are from the "Religious Landscape Study," PEW Research Center, Religion and Public Life, retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

10. Gary J. Gates and Frank Newport, "LGBT Percentage Highest in D.C., Lowest in North Dakota," *Gallup*, Feb. 15, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/160517/lgbt-percentage-highest-lowest-north-dakota.aspx>.

the Department of Health and Human Services.¹¹ While the eighteen- to twenty-five demographic is not identical to the fifteen-to-nineteen age group under consideration, it is the closest age group currently available from the DHHS. I also included a measure of state spending on behavioral mental health services (per thousand) per fiscal year 2010 as reported by Governing.com¹² as this was shown to be related to suicide rates at the state level.¹³ Gun ownership rates per state were obtained from the 2013 national survey.¹⁴ Finally, research has shown that there is a link between state elevation and suicide rates.¹⁵ Given that the states with the highest percentage of Mormon population are also high-elevation states in the Rocky Mountains, I also include a control variable for the average elevation for each state (measured in thousands of feet).¹⁶

11. These data are from the “Population Data / NSDUH,” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services, retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/population-data-nsduh/reports>.

12. These data are from “Mental Health Spending: State Agency Totals,” Governing: The States and Localities, retrieved from <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/health/mental-health-spending-by-state.html>.

13. Tondo, et al., “Suicide Rates in Relation to Health Care Access,” 517–23.

14. Bindu Kalesan, Marcos D. Villarreal, Katherine M. Keyes, and Sandro Galea, “Gun Ownership and Social Gun Culture,” *Injury Prevention*, 2015, retrieved from <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/22/3/216>.

15. Barry Brenner, David Cheng, Sunday Clark, and Carlos A. Camargo, Jr., “Positive Association between Altitude and Suicide in 2,584 U.S. Counties,” *High Altitude Medicine & Biology* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1–5.

16. I originally also included the percentage of weekly church-going in each state as a control variable on the logic that environments that are more religious in general would also possibly contribute to youth suicide rates. This variable was removed, though, due to multi-collinearity as percent-Mormon and percent-weekly church-going are very highly correlated. This is a standard solution to dealing with a multi-variate analysis when two or more variables are highly correlated. See David A. Belsley, Edwin Kuh, and Roy E. Welsch, *Regression Diagnostics: Identifying Influential Data and Sources of Collinearity* (John Wiley

Empirical Analysis

First, Table 1 presents the correlations between the percentage of Mormons in a particular state and the rates of suicide among fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds in 2009, 2014, and the rate of change in suicide rates in each state during that five-year interval.

BIVARIATE CORRELATION RESULTS			
	% Mormon	2009 youth suicide rate	2014 youth suicide rate
2009 youth suicide rate	0.01		
2014 youth suicide rate	0.41*	0.70*	
5-year rate of change, 2009-2014	0.44*	-0.21	0.48*

Table 1

The numbers in Table 1 are “correlation coefficients” and indicate how closely associated two particular variables are. In social and demographic research, a correlation between 0.30 and 0.50 is considered “moderate to substantial.”¹⁷ An asterisk (*) indicates that the relationship is “statistically significant,” meaning that there is a 95 percent chance that the relationship we observe is real and not due to random sampling

and Sons, 1980). I also originally included the percentage of rural population in each state as per the 2010 Census as research has shown that suicide rates tend to be higher in rural areas. See Jameson K. Hirsch, “A Review of the Literature on Rural Suicide,” *Crisis* 27, no. 4 (2006): 189–99. Again, this caused an unacceptable amount of multi-collinearity in the model as the percentage rural is very highly correlated with several of the other variables in the model (specifically percentage Latino, percentage Asian, median income, percentage of bachelors’ degrees, and percentage of gun ownership) and thus percentage rural is not included in these models.

17. David de Vaus, *Analyzing Social Science Data: 50 Key Problems in Data Analysis* (New York: Sage, 2002).

error. In other words, relationships that are *not* statistically significant may simply have appeared at random.¹⁸

Here we see that there is no statistically significant relationship between the proportion of Mormons in a state and suicide rates among youths aged fifteen to nineteen in 2009. We do see, though, that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two in 2014. This means that suicide rates for fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds in 2014 were higher in states where there was a higher proportion of self-identified Mormons. Note also that the correlation is 0.41, which is a moderately strong relationship for social and demographic variables. We also see a similar correlation between the percentage of Mormons in a state and the *rate of increase* in suicide rates in a state between 2009 and 2014. This means that the more Mormons there are in a state, the faster the youth suicide rate increased over a five-year period, regardless of the objective levels of suicide rates in both 2009 and 2014.

To examine this visually, consider the following graphs. Figure 1 presents per-capita age fifteen to nineteen suicide rates in 2009 and 2014 among all US states for which CDC data are available (i.e., higher than ten suicides per 100,000). The states are ranked left to right in order of proportion of Mormon residents. Note that on the left side of the graph (the states with the highest percentage of Mormons), the difference between the grey bars (youth suicides per capita, 2009) and black bars (youth suicides per capita, 2014) is substantial. Then compare with the bars in the rest of the graph. States with the highest percentage of Mormons tend to have much higher objective youth suicide rates in 2014 as well as higher increases in youth suicide rates over the five-year period.

Next, consider the information presented in Figure 2, which plots the percent change in youth suicide rates from 2009 to 2014. Observe

18. For a more comprehensive explanation, see “What Does Statistically Significant Mean?” MeasuringU, retrieved from <http://www.measuringu.com/blog/statistically-significant.php>.

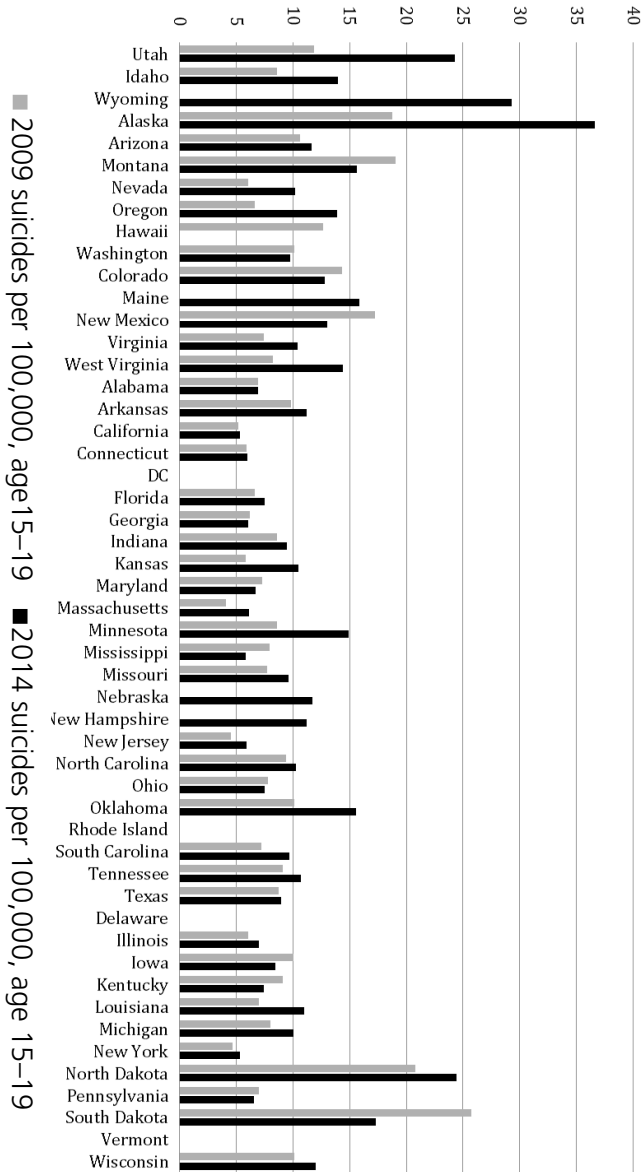


Figure 1 : Youth suicide rates: 2009 and 2014, by US state

the obvious trend line: five-year changes in youth suicide rates increase as a state has an increasingly high proportion of Mormon residents.

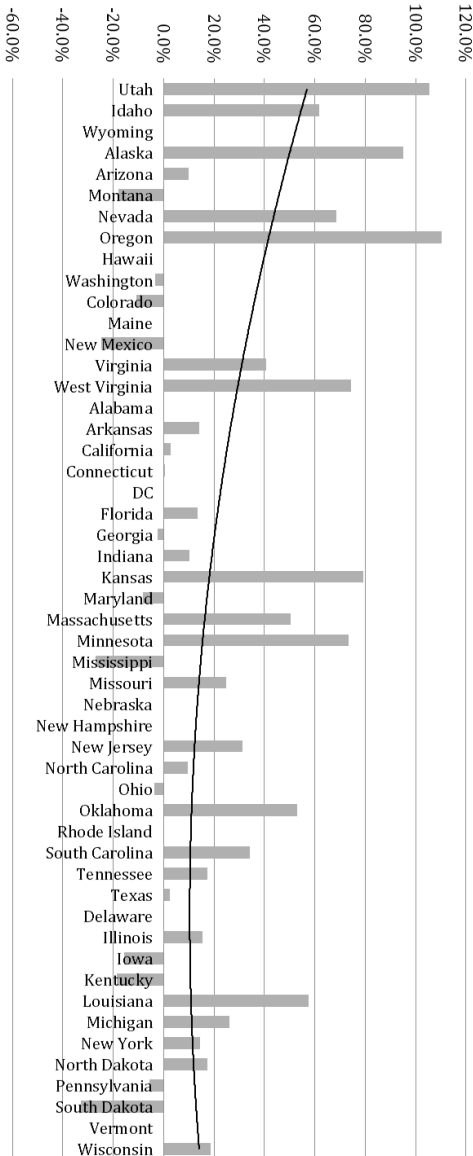


Figure 2: 5-year rate of change in youth (15-19) suicide rates: 2009 to 2014, by US state

As stated previously, we must remember that “correlation does not imply causation.”¹⁹ There could be *other* factors correlated with both the percentage of Mormons in a state as well as suicide rates for high school-aged youths in states, making the relationship between the two spurious.

Thus, Table 2 presents the results of three multi-variate regression analyses, which determine the association between the percentage of Mormons in a state and youth suicide rates in 2009, 2014, and the five-year rate of change between them.²⁰

TABLE 2: MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION RESULTS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	2009 youth suicide rates	2014 youth suicide rates	5-year rate of change in youth suicide rates, 2009-2014
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
% Mormon	-15.44 (8.18)	21.57 (7.20)*	2.41 (0.76)*
Population density	-1.38 (3.29)	-3.58 (4.07)	-0.21 (0.47)
% black	-13.49 (6.25)*	-18.46 (7.64)*	-0.71 (0.81)
% Latino	-1.39 (8.74)	-6.41 (7.51)	-0.43 (0.61)
% Asian	-0.04 (4.35)	-27.70 (35.88)	4.18 (3.75)
% bachelor's degree	-30.15 (30.32)	-43.66 (23.88)	1.87 (2.61)
Median age	-0.20 (0.40)	-0.39 (0.42)	-0.02 (0.05)
Median income	0.26 (0.39)	1.30 (0.40)*	0.00 (0.04)

19. Herbert A. Simon, “Spurious Correlation: A Causal Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 49, no. 267 (1954): 467–79.

20. A Breusch–Pagan/Cook–Weisberg test revealed an unacceptable amount of heteroscedasticity in all three models and so robust standard errors are used as a corrective in each case. After excluding the variables that contributed to multi-collinearity (see n 16), VIF scores for each model were all in the acceptable range of less than 4.0.

% divorced	-91.39 (47.56)	75.35 (49.01)	4.36 (3.93)
% gun ownership	8.69 (8.05)	25.06 (9.66)*	0.82 (0.76)
% LGBT	-139.90 (68.58)*	74.17 (121.84)	18.62 (10.88)
Serious mental illness	-22.80 (20.94)	6.19 (24.95)	-2.67 (2.82)
Elevation (altitude)	0.61 (0.64)	-0.23 (0.63)	-0.08 (0.06)
Mental health spending	-0.07 (-.57)	2.04 (1.13)	0.05 (0.06)
N	43	46	42
Adjusted R-squared	0.761	0.785	0.504

* p<0.05

Table 2

This is what to pay attention to in Table 2:²¹

1) There are asterisks next to some variables but not others. As explained before, the asterisks indicate that the variable is “statistically significant,” meaning that we are highly confident (at least 95 percent confident in this case) that the relationship between that variable and the outcome variable (the one at the top of the column) holds even after statistically controlling for the other variables in the analysis. The level of confidence is given in a “p-value” which shows the chance that the relationship is not statistically significant; a p-value of 0.05 corresponds

21. For a primer on how to interpret regression statistics, see Jim Frost, “How to Interpret Regression Analysis Results: P-values and Coefficients,” The Minitab Blog, Jul. 1, 2013, retrieved from <http://blog.minitab.com/blog/adventures-in-statistics/how-to-interpret-regression-analysis-results-p-values-and-coefficients>.

to a 95 percent degree of confidence. Smaller p-values thus correspond to a higher degree of confidence.

2) Look at whether the number next to the variable is positive or negative. If it is positive, it means that as that variable increases, so does the outcome variable (in this case, suicide rates). If it is negative, it means that as the variable decreases, the outcome variable (suicide rates) increases.

First, these results indicate that the proportion of Mormons living in a state is not associated with a higher level of increase in youth suicide rates in 2009, as observed earlier with the correlation analysis.²²

Second, *even after statistically controlling for a host of other relevant variables, such as demographics, state density, gun ownership, elevation, serious mental illness, etc.*, the proportion of Mormons in a state is associated with higher levels of youth suicide rates in 2014 ($p=0.005$). Figure 3 shows that, controlling for all these other factors, youth suicide rates increase from 11.1 per 100,000 to 22.9 per 100,000 as the percentage of Mormons moves from its minimum in a state (less than 1 percent) to its maximum in a state (55 percent in Utah). These are objectively small numbers, but it means that (again, controlling for other factors) youth suicides are *more than twice as high* in states with the highest levels of Mormon residents compared to states with the lowest levels of Mormon residents.²³

By way of comparison, the effect of gun ownership on youth suicide rates is roughly a factor of four, specifically an increase from 4.5 to 18.5

22. If anything, there is some weak evidence that a higher percentage of Mormons in a state is actually associated with a *lower* proportion of youth suicide rates in 2009 as the significance value for that variable is $p=0.07$ in Model 1.

23. Note also the lines around each of the points in Figures 3 and 4 which indicate the “confidence intervals” or “margin of error.” This is the range for which we are 95 percent confident that the relationship between the two variables is present. Due largely to the decreasing number of states with a high percentage of a Mormon population, the margin of error gets higher as the percentage of Mormons increases.

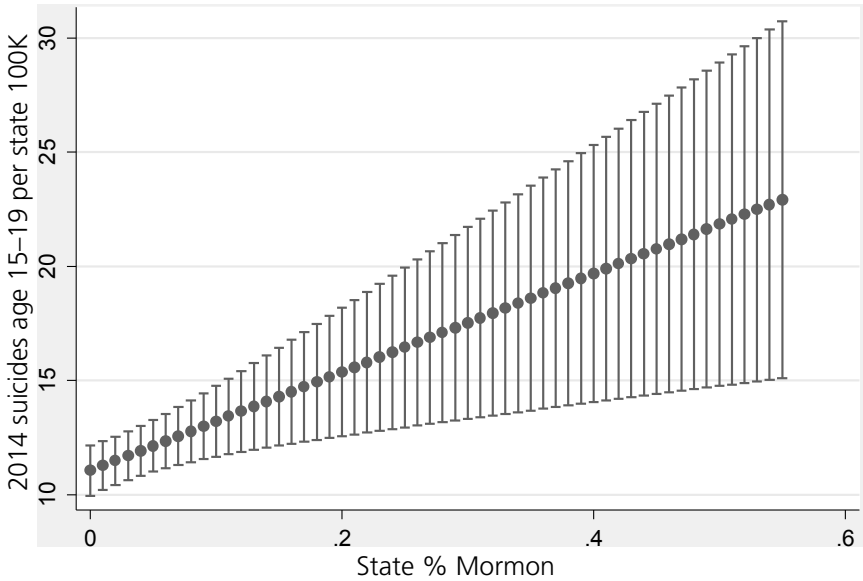


Figure 3: 2014 Mormon context and youth suicide rates

per 100,000 as the levels of gun ownership go from their lowest to highest value. Again, to compare, this means that the effect of percentage of Mormons in a state on youth suicide rates is about half that of gun ownership, or in other words, Mormon prevalence in US states doubles youth suicide rates while gun ownership roughly quadruples them.

Third, *even after statistically controlling for a host of other relevant variables such as demographics, state density, gun ownership, serious mental illness, etc.*, the proportion of Mormons in a state is associated with faster increases in the rate of youth suicides over a five-year period between 2009 and 2014 ($p=0.004$). Figure 4 shows that the rate of change in youth suicides in a state moves from 15.6 percent to 148.4 percent as a state moves from less than 1 percent Mormon to 55 percent Mormon. As

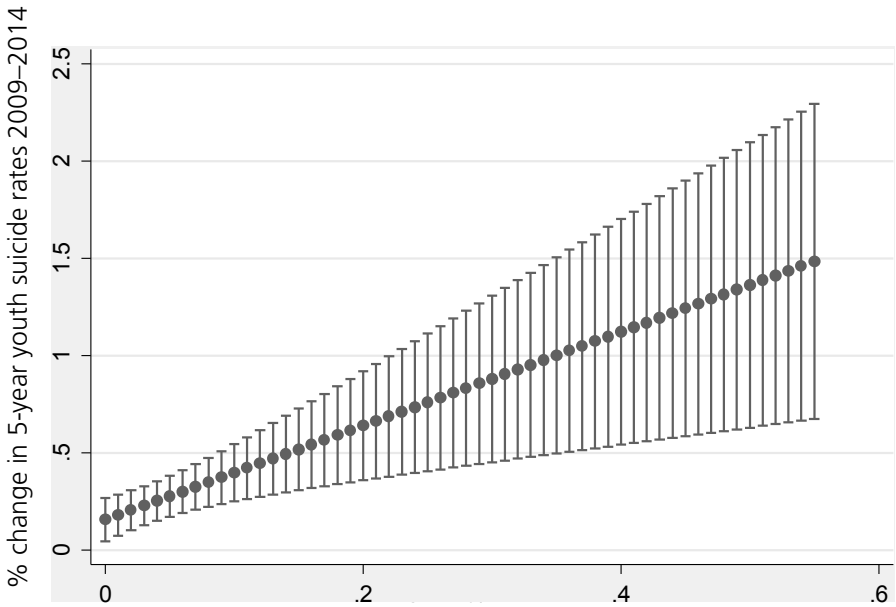


Figure 4: 5-year rate of change in youth suicide rates age 15–19
State % Mormon

we describe in our other article in this issue, suicide rates among Utah youth more than doubled over this five-year period. It is also notable that there are *no other factors* that reliably predict increases in youth suicide rates during that same time period except for the percentage of Mormons in a given state.

Important Caveats

It is important to specify what this analysis does *not* say. As we explained in our companion article, it is nearly impossible to accurately measure the sexual orientation of those who commit suicide (as sexual orientation is not included on death certificates). We therefore cannot definitively

say one way or the other that the youth suicides recorded by the CDC and used in this analysis are LGBT individuals.

Because this analysis relies on aggregate data, we also cannot definitely say one way or the other what the religious identification of those youths is who committed the suicides reported by the CDC. It may or may not be the case that those youth are Mormons; we cannot say for sure based on this evidence because individual relationships cannot be inferred from aggregate patterns.²⁴ It is impossible to definitely know from these data, for example, whether a higher percentage of Mormons in a community is associated with more Mormon youth suicides or whether a higher percentage of Mormons in a community is associated with higher *non*-Mormon youth suicide rates.

Further, these data come only from 2009 and 2014 so we cannot say anything definitive *from this evidence alone* about the effect of the November 2015 handbook policy change on youth suicide rates in Mormon communities. Only after the CDC reports youth suicide rates for 2015 and 2016 will we be able to speak specifically to that topic.

As an additional check, I repeated each of the correlational and regression analyses presented above, substituting the percentage of Evangelicals and the percentage of weekly church attendance for Mormons. This was to see whether the effects shown above also applied to other

24. Inferring individual-level relationships from aggregate patterns is called the “ecological fallacy.” This is a common misinterpretation of statistical data where one assumes that a relationship present in a group or community applies at the individual level. As a very basic example, we might observe that a particular neighborhood is 50 percent female and 50 percent Democratic and assume that each female is also a Democrat when in reality we cannot tell from only the aggregate information. It may also be the case that half of the females (25 percent of the whole) are Democrats and 25 percent of the males (25 percent of the whole) are also Democrats. The 25 percent female Democrats plus 25 percent male Democrats equal 50 percent Democrats in the whole, which is a very different pattern than our original assumption, which was based only on aggregate patterns. See Steven Piantadosi, David P. Byar, and Sylvan B. Green, “The Ecological Fallacy,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 127, no. 5 (1988): 893–904.

religious traditions with conservative LGBT rhetoric and perspectives (percent Evangelical) or whether they applied to religious environments in general (percent weekly church attendance). Neither the percentage of Evangelicals nor the percentage of weekly church-attendance are associated with the three youth suicide variables analyzed above. Further, neither of these variables is predictive of an increase in youth suicides when substituted for the percentage of Mormons in the regression analyses displayed above.²⁵

As a final check, I repeated the analyses above, excluding the cases of Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming as they have the highest percentage of Mormon populations in the country (55 percent, 19 percent, and 9 percent respectively as per the Pew 2014 Religious Landscape Study). This was done to determine whether the “outlier” status of Utah, Idaho, or Wyoming was exerting a disproportionate effect on the results of the analysis (all other states have a population of 5 percent or less). When these three states are excluded, the percentage of Mormons is not associated one way or the other with youth suicide rates in 2009, similar to when those states are included. The association in 2014, however, remains somewhat statistically significant ($p=0.075$). In other words, there is evidence that the relationship between the percentage of Mormons in a community and youth suicide rates in 2014 is still present even when excluding Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming.

As far as the percentage of change in youth suicide rates from 2009 to 2014, excluding Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming from the analysis removes

25. In fact, there is some weak evidence that the percentage of Evangelicals actually *decreases* the rate of youth suicides in 2014 ($p=0.10$) and also the five-year rate of change between 2009 and 2014 ($p=0.05$). This effect, though, could be an artifact of the reality that more Mormons in a state is correlated with fewer Evangelicals in a state. Including *both* the percentage of Mormons and the percentage of Evangelicals in the regression models leaves both variables statistically insignificant. The variable for the percentage of Mormons in 2014, however, is significant at $p=0.013$, as are the percentage of Mormons and five-year rate of change ($p=0.067$).

association between Mormon context and five-year rate of change in youth suicide rates. Thus, it appears that the association between the percentage of Mormons and rates of five-year change in youth suicide rates is due exclusively to the relationship specifically in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming.²⁶

Summary

While any empirical analysis has its limitations, what seems evident from the findings described above is this:

- 1) In 2014, a higher proportion of Mormons in a state was associated with a higher level of suicides among those aged fifteen to nineteen in that state, controlling for a host of other relevant factors that are also linked to aggregate suicide rates. All other things being equal, the presence of Mormon residents in a state more than doubles the rate of youth suicides as the rate of Mormon residents moves from its minimum to maximum value. There is some evidence that this is the case even when excluding Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming.
- 2) This association did *not* exist in 2009.
- 3) The proportion of Mormons in a state is the *only* factor of all those included in the analysis (including factors most commonly identified as contributing to suicide rates) that is associated with an *increase* in the rate of youth suicides between 2009 and 2014. As Mormons move from their minimum to maximum population in a state, the rate of increase in high-school-aged suicides moves from 15.6 percent to 148.4 percent. In other words, the more Mormons there are in a state, the faster suicide rates increased between 2009 and 2014. Further analysis indicates that this effect is due primarily to the rate of change in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming—the three states with the highest Mormon population in the United States.

26. The CDC did not report youth suicide rates for Wyoming in 2009 because the rate was lower than ten per 100,000. To check these results, including/excluding Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, I generated a conservative estimate for the 2009 rate at ten in Wyoming that would create the lowest possible rate of change.

I stress again that because the CDC does not track the sexual orientation of suicide victims, this evidence *does not and cannot show a definitive link* between Mormon religious context and LGBT youth suicide rates in the United States. The link between the LDS approach to LGBT issues and LGBT youth suicides is only *inferred* by these results. This analysis should also in no way be considered the final or definitive word on the topic. While every attempt has been made to identify the relevant factors linked to youth suicide rates in the United States and include them where available in this analysis, it is entirely possible that there is yet some *other* factor linking these two phenomena together aside from the environment that the LDS Church fosters regarding LGBT issues. Interested observers *should* offer plausible alternative explanations for this observed relationship and then empirically *test* them with rigorous social science methodologies, as this is how scientific knowledge is produced. Given the tragic and sensitive nature of this topic, I would think that we should all hope to find support for alternative explanations with additional study, research, and analysis.

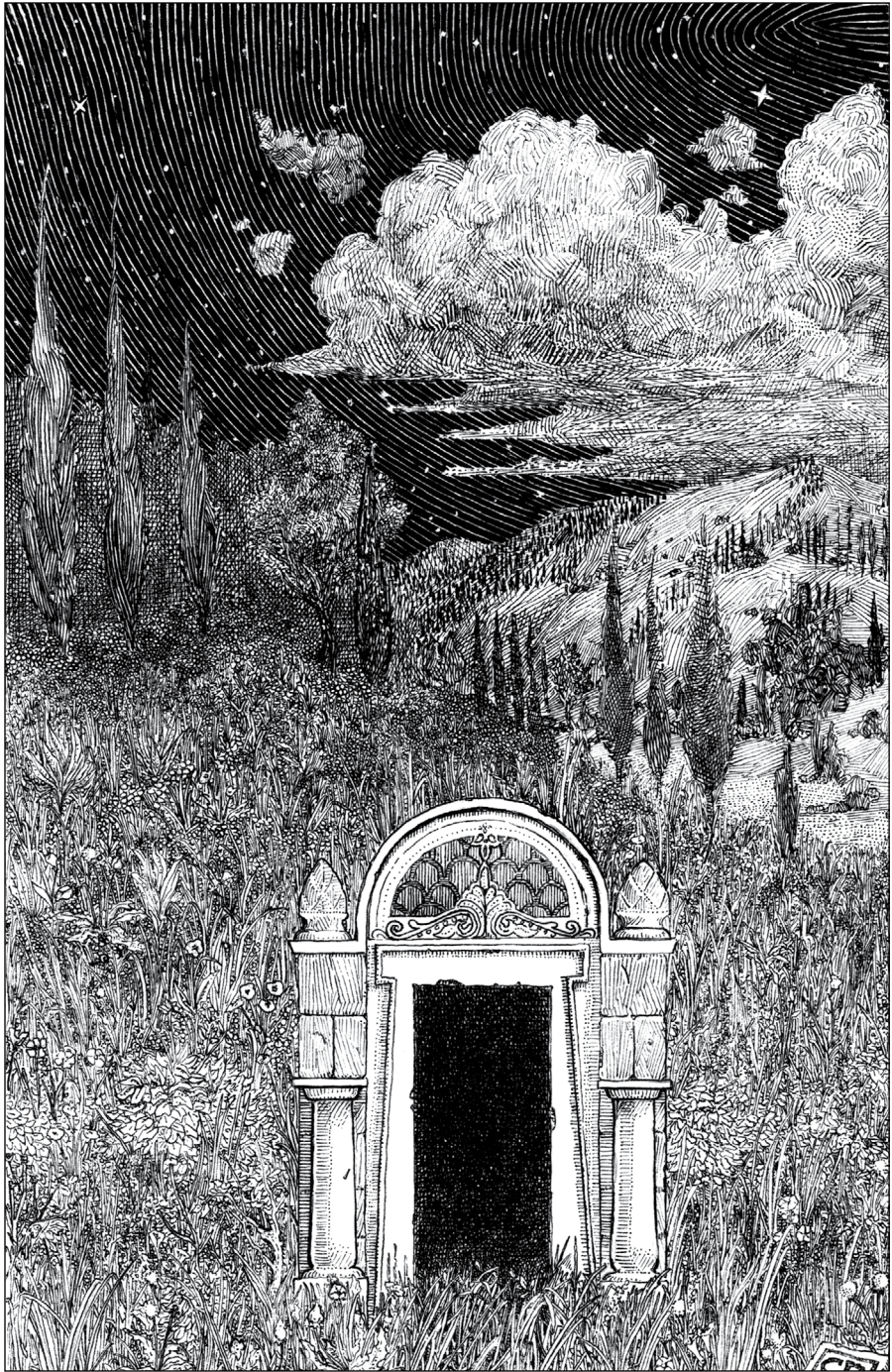
In the absence of a compelling alternative explanation and/or evidence, however, the link between LDS rhetoric and approaches to LGBT issues is, in my judgment, the most plausible and compelling offered to date. While these results can only be *inferred* to support the LDS-LGBT explanation, my colleagues and I have provided a plethora of additional direct, indirect, and anecdotal evidence in our companion article that supports the theorized linking mechanisms for the LDS-LGBT explanation. The evidence presented here provides an additional data point that supports the theorized relationship, making it increasingly difficult (yet not impossible) to reasonably argue that the recent increase in suicides among Mormon LGBT youths are unrelated to the religious context fostered by the LDS Church and its leaders toward the LGBT community.

As a final note, this information and analysis are not intended to condemn, denounce, or “cast stones.” Rather, my objective is to contribute to the conversation on this important topic that quite literally has

life-and-death implications. It is clear that there is a problem. The more information we have available to us about its causes, the more effective we can be at crafting an effective solution.



Note: A previous version of this article originally appeared as a blog post by the same name on Rational Faiths, March 9, 2016 (<http://rationalfaiths.com/mormon-religious-context-and-lgbt-youth-suicides-an-additional-empirical-analysis/>). In the days following its initial release, several online commenters submitted constructive feedback and questions about the article's statistical results, presentation, and methodology. This feedback prompted several minor revisions that are reflected in the current version of this article. I extend my sincere thanks to the many commenters for their questions and comments, which helped make the revisions reflected in this version. It is important to note, though, that the substantive results from the original version are unchanged.



Christian Degn
Ego Tomb
Ink on paper

THE ART OF QUEERING BOUNDARIES IN LDS COMMUNITIES

Roni Jo Draper

I am the mother of a queer son. I am also an active member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as a professor at Brigham Young University, where I teach courses in literacy education, educational research methods, and multicultural education. I was raised in a biracial home and converted to the LDS faith when I was nineteen. I think it is important to understand that I was raised neither Mormon nor homophobic. It is also important to understand that my queer son was not born to me, but rather sought out our home after coming out and needing a safe place to live and be loved. My goal today is to disrupt the notion of boundary maintenance, given who I am as an LDS woman and mother of a queer son. I would like to suggest, instead, queering the boundaries that we make and maintain.

Allow me to begin by sharing some of the challenges faced by mothers of LGBTQ individuals. (I assume this is the case for other people who love and support LGBTQ folks, but I will speak from the experience of being a mother.) When my son came out to me, he was not out to the world. I promised him that the only person I would tell was my husband and I left it up to my son to tell my other sons and the rest of the world. Therefore, while I was completely supportive of my son, I felt isolated by his coming out.

Where could I turn to for help without compromising his confidence?

Who could help me process this information in a way that would respect my love of the gospel, my goals as a mother, and my love for my son?

What were other mothers doing to help their children in the context of their LDS faith?

How could I maintain my faith and confidence in the Church, given the reality of my son's life (which at the time of his coming out included severe depression and anxiety accompanied by suicide ideation)?

I could not find answers immediately within my faith community, as discussions of LGBTQ lives seemed forbidden in Church settings. I hit a boundary. I also did not know where to meet LDS LGBTQ individuals, a community that I assumed existed but I didn't know how to access it (or even if it was proper for me to do so). I didn't know anything about the boundaries of this community.

Thus, I initially looked for online resources and found very little that seemed to speak to me as a mother. I buried myself in the literature about LGBTQ individuals, depression, helping a loved one with suicide ideation, and what The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints taught about being gay and Mormon. As an academic, I took profound interest in queer theory (and as an educator I gravitated toward queer pedagogy). I worked within my own boundaries as a person with access to the internet, as an LDS woman, and as an academic.

I found some answers. I also found ways to insert myself into the LDS LGBTQ community and conversation. I have also participated to some degree within the larger LGBTQ conversation as an academic. And thus I find myself testing boundaries of various communities, relying on the good will of others to accept me as a member of those communities.

In August of last year, I wrote in my journal:

I recognize at once that I am not queer. And when I am in the queer community I am wholly aware that I am an interloper and a guest. I recognize also that my views [on LGBTQ matters] mark me as someone to be feared or at least handled with care among some members of the ward or even my colleagues [at the university]—communities to which I have belonged without fear in the past. And so I move within those communities with a degree of caution in order to protect my own soul.

I feel my place in both communities is tenuous and conditional. And that is a bit hard on my heart. I have considered getting out of the fight. *This is not my fight* is a thing I say to myself as justification to walk away to the

comforts of my community, to my established scholarship, and my settled soul. *This fight came to you* is a thing I am reminded of as I stay. I realize that there is no comfort in my community until this fight is won. I realize that I can use my scholarship in this fight. I realize that this is my soul work.

And so I find myself somewhat uncomfortably occupying this space between: between peace and complete disarray, between faith and utter disbelief, between hope and crushing despair, between my desire to fight and my desire to surrender in defeat.

I have found queer theory useful in helping me make sense of these binaries, and boundaries, and the points in between. Challenging my own identity, for instance, as an insider or outsider has been a disruptive project. Queer theory invites me to ask questions of identity and how “normal” is produced and reproduced within communities. Moreover, rather than focusing on “identities in need of repair or as the problem,”¹ queer theory shifts my focus of inquiry toward the larger society’s need to define, produce, and protect “normal” by rejecting anything that appears to be deviant.

For me as a straight, cisgender person, queer theory offers a way to consider my shifting identity as an LDS woman away from a more mainstream point within Mormonism (an identity that I would have rejected even prior to my son’s arrival in our family) and toward an identity as an LDS woman who finds herself outside of what would be considered “mainstream.” Queer theory allows me to move away from viewing queer identities, including my own emerging queer identity, as problematic. (I realize the trouble with identifying myself as queer given that I identify as a straight, cisgender person; however, my work interrogating and seeking to transgress gender and sexuality norms invites a queer identity, even while I reject a desire to pass as queer in queer spaces.)² Rather, queer theory allows me to examine the problems in

1. William G. Tierney and Patrick Dilley, “Constructing Knowledge: Educational Research and Gay and Lesbian Studies” in *Queer Theory in Education*, ed. William F. Pinar (New York: Routledge, 1998), 54.

2. See Annette Schlichter, “Queer at Last?: Straight Intellectuals and the Desire for Transgression,” *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 4 (2004): 543–64.

the various communities I occupy and that have located queer bodies, desires, and lives as “other” or outside the boundary that encompasses normal. As such, my own sense of normalization itself has become the subject of my analysis and I have begun to see my inclusion and exclusion from various communities as a problem of culture and thought.

This allows me the freedom to see myself, not as a person who is broken or in need of some special treatment—indeed I needn’t be pitied or celebrated or perhaps, even understood—but as a person who is part of a larger community of humans who have unquestioningly accepted normal, and conversely, as a person who has also rejected people who might find themselves outside the confines of normal. Indeed, I can’t help but understand my own complicity in nominalizing those around me by creating a community that both produces and rejects some individuals. Like all of us, I am a boundary maker and maintainer.

All the while I understand that (as I have pointed out before) taking up a straight, cisgender identity as part of a queer community also challenges the limits and boundaries of queerness—something that I cannot do on my own. Indeed, to take up a non-mainstream LDS position (a position that isn’t unique to mothers of LGBTQ kids, I understand) within an LDS community or to take up a straight, cisgender position within a queer community does not simply necessitate my own desire to do so. It also requires the permission of the community to expand its borders to include someone like me. Thus, I must work both as an individual and as a member of the community to offer an alternative to normal and to create a community in which my particular variety of normal is included.

Intellectually, I knew that I could not be the only LDS mother of a queer kid. But finding those other mothers proved to be very difficult. About a year after my son came out, I found the Mama Dragons group (which had about twenty members at the time). The group has now grown to over 800 members. Last year I interviewed forty-five of them. I was interested in their stories, both out of curiosity and out of a desire to know if my journey as an LDS mother (of another woman’s child) was “normal” (perhaps a selfish act as an academic).

What I found were stories of mothers who were both fierce and humble, loving and angered, determined and scared, and faithful and doubtful. I could relate so well to the paradoxes they held comfortably, albeit loosely. They told stories of shifting their gospel focus away from the doctrine of strict obedience and toward an understanding of agency from an eternal perspective. They told stories of caring less about eternal consequences and who might accompany them to the celestial kingdom and caring more about the current temporal and spiritual needs of their LGBTQ children. They told stories of how they worried less about following the words of prophets with exactness and, instead, took comfort in the working of the Spirit within themselves that stirred them to action for both their own children and for other people's children. Their stories filled me with hope and courage as a mother, as a member of the LDS community, and as a worker to make the world a better place.

With the Mama Dragons, I have found community. With them I experience a sense of belonging. With them, I am completely normal. With them, I needn't exist on some boundary at the risk of being rejected or expelled. My feelings are valued. My goals are valued. The ways in which I work to keep my family safe and whole are valued. And the ways I affirm my son and his life are valued. I am safe to feel joy for his relationship with his boyfriend. I am safe to feel anger with a new policy. I am safe to help a Mama accept a new name for her trans kid. I am safe to share ideas for how to make the world safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ individuals.

With that said, the Mama Dragons is not completely an inclusive group. Men, for instance, are not welcome to join (there is another group for them). I also know that not all LDS women of LGBTQ kids have felt safe with the Mama Dragons. Members of the group can be, at times, crass and their anger toward the Church often comes out in biting commentary. And so some women leave. The Mama Dragons certainly create and maintain their own boundaries.

Meanwhile, the Mama Dragons community lives on the boundaries of the LDS community and is often viewed with suspicion and fear. Similarly, the Mama Dragons live on the boundaries of the LDS LGBTQ

community and again is often viewed with suspicion and fear. But the community exists, nevertheless, and is a place of refuge for many mothers who suddenly find themselves on a path that they had not prepared for themselves. For many LDS mothers who find themselves working to make sense of what they could not bear to know³—about their child, about their relationships, and about their Church—the Mama Dragons represents a community whose boundaries are just right.

I suppose the point I would like to make is that individuals take up difficult work as boundary makers, maintainers, and crossers (something that I am somewhat comfortable with as a biracial, female academic, LDS convert, working mother—I have always found myself crossing many borders).

Thus, each of us must do careful work to understand our efforts as makers of boundaries—why do we make the boundaries we do? How do those boundaries serve to protect us? How do those boundaries harm us or cut us off from people who would contribute to our well-being? We must examine our work in maintaining boundaries—why do we feel threatened when our boundaries are challenged? How much effort do we put into protecting the boundaries that we have created? Are those efforts worth it when we consider the consequences? And we must take up the work of queering boundaries—what might we gain by stretching our boundaries? What does the community stand to gain by including those outside the boundary? What are our limits with regard to inclusivity?

Ultimately, communities must take up the important work of questioning the boundaries they make, the efforts they place in protecting and maintaining those boundaries, and how those boundaries serve to exclude goodness and stunt the growth of the community.

This work begins with imagination, a topic for another day.

3. Deborah P. Britzman, "Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight," *Educational Theory* 45, no. 2 (1995): 151–65.

IN OUR LOVELY OUBLIETTE:
THE UN/INTENDED CONSEQUENCES
OF BOUNDARY MAKING &
KEEPING FROM A GAY
MORMON PERSPECTIVE

D Christian Harrison

I joined the Church at a very young age and grew up attending meetings without my family—who were, by and large, not religious. One of my earliest memories is walking home from school with Ricky, my next-door neighbor and playmate. We were just coming up on the gate that connected the schoolyard to the gravel road I lived on. We were talking about what we wanted to be when we grew up. I don't remember what he said, but his father was a border patrol officer, so I assume he said something like "police officer" or "FBI agent." When my turn came, I said—with conviction—"a wife." Ricky's eyes grew wide, and I knew then and there that I'd crossed a line. I was quick-witted for an eight-year-old and brushed it all off as a joke (ha! ha!) and spent the next few minutes talking earnestly about how much I wanted to be an architect.

Of course, I didn't really want to be a wife. But I was eight years old, and in my mind, if all I really wanted from the future was a husband, then that must mean that I wanted to be a wife.

I never crossed that line again. Instead, I buried whatever had blossomed that beautiful spring morning. Of course, buried things refuse

to stay buried—especially beautiful things like love. Still, it wasn't until fifteen years later that I once again dared to utter something so very close to my heart. It was 3:00 am on a Sunday morning and I was up late with a neighbor talking about what we wanted to be when we grew up (I sense a pattern here), and out of the blue he asked the question I hadn't dared ask myself:

“Harry,” he said. “Are you gay?”

I mumbled “yes” and then quickly excused myself—“it's late and I've got church in the morning.”

Today, I'm an out gay man and an active member of my ward. I serve in the Elders Quorum presidency, I organize our annual chili cook-off, and I'm the priesthood chorister. In my profile on mormon.org, I say:

As a gay man who understands that my orientation is a gift and not a curse, I've often been asked how it is that I could possibly be part of a Church that so thoroughly misunderstands who I am and my value in the eyes of my Father in Heaven. It's hard, I say. I pray for change . . . but I also pray for patience. I was born gay . . . and I chose to be Mormon. And being Mormon is a choice I make every day. It's not always an easy choice—but it's mine.

The Church is a work in progress. Just like me.

I am, you might say, intimately familiar with the myriad boundaries imposed on queer members of the Church. I am, I must confide, painfully aware of their costs.

This is the final session of a three-day conference on boundary making and keeping as it pertains to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I'm sure you've heard plenty of boundary metaphors—walls, fences, lines in the sand. So I'll skip the beautiful one I'd crafted, using Mississippi River levees . . . and, instead, just jump to the pay-off:

Boundaries are morally neutral. They keep things in, they keep things out. Sometimes they keep the right things in and the right things

out, and sometimes they don't. And almost always there are unintended consequences. Talking about these consequences is important. It helps us evaluate and improve the boundary. Responsible gatekeepers and wall builders take stock of the boundaries they maintain. Responsible gatekeepers and wall builders take notice of problems.

The Policy of Exclusion (The POX)

On the afternoon of Thursday, November 5, 2015 at 2:59 p.m., John Dehlin of Mormon Stories fame posted the following to Facebook:

Hearing credible rumor (acknowledging it's just a rumor at this point) of a new definition of LDS Apostasy that now specifically includes same-gender marriage as grounds for apostasy.

Fourteen minutes later, he confirmed the rumor with a screenshot of the change. In short order, additional details were added, namely that children of such couples were to be denied baptism and other blessings of membership.

What followed was a storm of epic proportions.

For the first few hours, I watched as defenders of the faith argued vigorously that this was a stunt or hoax by Dehlin to defame the Church. The Church, they argued, would never do such a thing. But as more details came out and as news outlets got around to the business of fact-checking the story, the song changed and suddenly the Church—which couldn't possibly do such a thing—was on God's errand.

It was a sight to behold.

The texts, messages, and phone calls began to stream in and did not stop for a solid week. I and so many of my brothers and sisters in Christ were in shock and we were seeking each other out—"Did you hear?"; "Are you okay?"

The next morning, I posted something to my Facebook wall that was picked up by my friends at *By Common Consent*, a Mormon group blog:

As I lay here this morning, awash in a flood of emotion—shock, dismay, disappointment, fear—I am coming to the idea that last night’s policy announcement was a profound betrayal. Not the hot betrayal of animus, but the cold betrayal of studied indifference.

Yes, it feels like animus. It looks like animus, but it smells like the well-oiled machinery of an inhuman bureaucracy—grinding away. And this morning, I am mustering what strength I have to whisper to myself “the worm forgives the plough.”



To my friends who have left and to my friends who are now leaving: I understand; being a part of the Kingdom of God isn’t supposed to hurt this much. You’ll be sorely missed—perhaps not by shepherds who should know better, but by me, at least . . . and by others, who notice when virtue goes out of them.



I’ve said, elsewhere, that being a Mormon is a choice I make every day. Today is a hard day to choose . . . but today I choose to stay. The Church is traveling through new territory . . . and the roads out here can be brutal. Last night, our wagon lost a wheel.

Yet I have hope. The Promised Land is out there. A land where the full spectrum of godly love is embraced. . . . Where families of all stripes are nurtured by the good word of God, as they go about magnifying their holy calling.

To borrow a phrase from our cousins in faith: Next year in Jerusalem.¹

1. D Christian Harrison, “Yet I Have Hope,” *By Common Consent*, Nov. 6, 2015, retrieved from <https://bycommonconsent.com/2015/11/06/yes-i-have-hope/>.

My heart had been cut out and this was the best I could do. The Policy of Exclusion—P, O, X—was real.

The Church's public relations apparatus creaked into action and did what it could to manage the story—including a half-hearted attempt to describe the Policy of Exclusion as a blessing for the children involved. I'll set aside the question of whether or not the Policy of Exclusion was in any way inspired. I'll also set aside the real consequences for the families targeted by the policy. I will, instead—ever so briefly—discuss the fallout from this clumsy act of boundary making and keeping.

1) There have been and will continue to be suicides as a result of the Policy of Exclusion and the climate it fosters. The numbers are hard to come by (for obvious reasons), but there are already confirmed deaths.

2) Professional and armchair apologists are already distorting core doctrines of the Church to make space for this heretofore unimaginable act of cruelty. It began with frightening speed just a couple hours after John Dehlin's post and continues to this day: baptism, the line goes, can wait; the gift of the Holy Ghost isn't as essential for children as we've been led to believe. What's worse, perhaps? If the policy robbing Black saints of the blessings of the priesthood is any indication, the harm done by post-hoc theories justifying the unjustifiable will outlive the policy by decades—zombie doctrines unwilling to die, perpetuated by a Church unwilling to apologize.

3) This hastily written policy will continue to be a source of operational confusion unless and until the Church rescinds and/or rewrites the policy. As anyone who's ever been in a bishopric knows, letters of clarification fade quickly from memory—stuffed into the back of the battered old binder that holds the Handbooks of Instruction. If it's not printed in the Handbook, mentioned in the table of contents, and listed in the index, it's lost to the ages.

And, finally . . .

4) The policy is already driving away the tender-hearted among us. In the hours and days after the leak, I was sought out by countless

friends and acquaintances who needed someone to talk to—someone understanding, someone safe. I spoke to ward and stake leaders from my area, to children of General Authorities, to faithful Latter-day Saints of every stripe—each and every one in utter dismay. Some had asked to be released from callings, others turned down callings that had just been extended. One friend—the son of senior Church leadership—was being considered for a significant position in his area, and found himself praying for the call not to come. And then, on Sunday, December 13, 2015 at stake conference, my stake president held up a stack of white papers and commented that since November 5, 110 stake members had resigned. And for every one person I know who has resigned, I know ten who are on life support.

Praxis of Erasure

On February 23 of this year, Elder Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve attended a regional meeting in Chile, where he participated in a question-and-answer session. One question in particular caught the world's attention: How can homosexual members of the church live (and remain steadfast) in the gospel?

Elder Bednar's response was somewhat lengthy, but led with this: "First, I want to change the question. There are no homosexual members of the Church." Elder Bednar continued: "We are not defined by sexual attraction. We are not defined by sexual behavior. We are sons and daughters of God. And all of us have different challenges in the flesh."² The rest of his response builds upon this premise. If you have a chance, I recommend listening to his answer in its entirety. As you consider his response, it's important to know that Elder Bednar has answered similar questions, in other settings, in much the same way.

2. "Preguntas y Respuestas con Elder Bednar 23 feb 2016 Area Sudamerica," YouTube video, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIwXMHZWgik>. The relevant section begins at 41:47.

I don't know his intent in building this wall where and how he did, but here's the bottom line: in those few moments, Elder Bednar effectively erased the lived experience of hundreds of thousands of members of the Church, a rhetorical sleight of hand that will only ever be used against queer members of the Church because other scenarios are "preposterous." Who, after all, would think to say that there were no Blacks in the church, or single people, or women . . . who, indeed?

Shifting Sands

So there's exclusion and erasure and then there is this curious tug-of-war that we see regarding the scope and shape of hope. It's a tug-of-war with several fronts:

1980

You're a seventeen-year-old young man who is attracted to other men your age. You've never acted on it. You've read President Spencer W. Kimball's *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, you've read Elder Packer's talk "To the One," and you've heard the snide remarks by the adults in your life, and it's perfectly clear: homosexuality is a sin next to murder. You've heard comments about tying a millstone around a sinner's neck as an act of blood atonement, and you've thought many times about ending it all. But against your better judgment, you decide to talk to your bishop. He's a great guy—a spiritual giant—who has been with you at every important intersection of your life. You want some guidance, some reason to live. Unbeknownst to you, a kid in the next stake over was just excommunicated for having just this type of conversation. But you luck out: your bishop sits you down, then he sits down behind his large desk, putting as much room between you and himself as politely possible. He then promises you that if you complete an honorable mission, return and marry a good girl, all will be forgiven. He reminds you that with God all things are possible—if you have faith.

2016

You're a seventeen-year-old young man who is attracted to other men your age. You've never acted on it. A few of your friends at school are out of the closet, and you're wondering whether you should come out yourself—and what your future might look like. On one hand, you've visited mormonsandgays.org, read every page, and watched every interview; you've heard President Uchtdorf's multiple calls for a large and inclusive approach to building the kingdom of God; you've heard about the gay-straight alliance at BYU; and you know the Church was active in passing statutes in Utah that protected LGBT persons from discrimination in housing and employment. On the other hand, you remember President Packer's talks, and Elder Oaks's, and President Nelson's; you've watched as the Church has called for the children of gay couples to be denied the blessings that you—a gay kid—have so richly cherished; and then you cringe as you watched Elder Bednar declare that there are no homosexuals in the Church. You know that this is something about yourself that will never change. Not in this life, at least.



In the first scenario, you have soul-damning condemnation of your very being coupled with a glib promise that you'll be cured as long as you toe the line and have faith—a festering heap of hurt iced over with empty promises and false hope. In the second scenario you have brief glimpses of radiant hope, obscured by constant, damning reminders of your place as a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God. Sure you're welcome, but . . .

So, in the last three decades the Church has abandoned the carrot but kept the stick.

In Our Lovely *Oubliette*

Today, queer members like me, who remain, and queer children who have no choice in the matter are perpetual strangers in our own wards and homes: encouraged (or commanded) to stay, but otherwise told to bury our brightest emotions and sit out life's greatest moments—the walls of our faith shutting us up into well-furnished and cozy *oubliettes*.

What a haunting word, *oubliette*—French for “the forgotten place”—these small dungeons were meant as places to secret away troublesome enemies of the state. But look! Mine has a cozy chair, a small library, and large (but sturdy) windows. Outside, children play as if cheered on by the upbeat chords of Eliza R. Snow's “In Our Lovely Deseret,” which proclaims:

In our lovely Deseret,
Where the Saints of God have met,
There's a multitude of children all around.
They are generous and brave;
They have precious souls to save;
They must listen and obey the gospel's sound.

But through the thick glass, the music slows and strikes a minor key . . . and new lyrics speak to the irony of a Church that celebrates children and reveres the family, but willingly sacrifices so many of its children and families on the fires of Molech.

But I refuse to be forgotten, so I refuse to be silent. I work for that day the writer of Proverbs envisioned: “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12). A tree, which Nephi described as bearing the fruit of God's eternal love.

Thank you.



These remarks were given at the Mormon studies conference “Mormonism and the Art of Boundary Maintenance” at Utah Valley University on

April 13, 2016. In crafting my remarks, I focused almost entirely on the gay experience—because that is what I know best. And while I hope that my comments shed some light upon the experiences of the larger queer community, I understand that such comparisons can only go so far. Lesbians, trans persons, bisexuals will each have had different lived experiences, and queer persons of color, more different still.

Also, while I talk about the Policy of Exclusion in terms of how it plays out with regard to members of the queer community, it would be criminal if we forgot that it was modeled closely on the secret policy of exclusion targeting children of polygamist families. Let's not forget these innocent victims as we move toward undoing the damage wrought on November 5th.

THE MAMA DRAGON STORY PROJECT

About the Photography and Photographer

The photographs and essays featured in this issue of *Dialogue* come from Kimberly Anderson's *Mama Dragon Story Project: A Collection of Portraits and Essays from Mothers Who Love Their LGBT+ Children*, which is available at <http://www.magcloud.com/browse/issue/1105633>. Mama Dragons (<http://mamadragons.org>) is a support and advocacy group promoting "healthy, loving, and supporting environments for mothers of LGBTQIA children." They seek to protect and defend their LGBT+ children against the dogma inflicted by both religion and society. The Mama Dragons are predominantly Mormon or have a Mormon background, but all mothers are welcome, including those who have abandoned organized religion altogether. They aim to share and educate. She has photographed nearly eighty Mama Dragons within eight western states since February 2015. Using an old portrait lens from 1907 and 5x7 Tri-X film, Anderson makes AZO contact prints in a darkroom.



Her goal is to show these women without the slickness of digital technology. Just as they have an unconditional love for their kids, she accepts them as they come to the camera. The “average-ness” of this group of women serves to underscore just how widespread their stories are. The book features full-page images of the women with essays they wrote themselves. Their words bring to light some very real issues they face when their children finally come out to them. Confronted by the knowledge that their children identify with something outside cultural and religious norms, these women now must make a choice. For some it is easy, for others it is tragically difficult. Many of their stories are filled with heartbreak and sadness, while others are overflowing with love for their children as well as reconciliation with God. All express the unconditional acceptance and love of a true mother’s heart. The portraits themselves serve as a conduit to help the viewer want to learn more about each woman’s journey. Anderson’s goal is for the women’s fierce and loving voices and faces testify that hearts can be touched, attitudes can be changed, and lives can be saved.





Carla Brown—Atlanta, Georgia

Carla Brown—Atlanta, Georgia

“Mom, I’m gay.” Even two years later I can still remember that moment. The sun was beaming down and my porch was warm, but I suddenly felt like I could not feel the warmth anymore. I remember saying, as if I were looking from outside my body, “Are you sure?” I so regret those words; of course he knew he was gay! The next hour is in bits and pieces. I know that I told him that I loved him no matter what, and that everything would be all right because I would always be with him. That’s what came from my mouth, and I meant each word, but inwardly my heart was breaking.

Questions came at me at a fierce pace. Had I known and refused to see it? How will my family react? They are of Spanish and Italian descent and not open-minded. The “what will people think” of the Southern society suddenly seemed so huge. I had always thought of myself as a modern woman, but I was ashamed of what friends, family, and church would think of me as a parent. Would I be blamed for this? Why not when I was blaming myself? What had I done, or not done, to cause this in my child? I barely slept. I felt pain that I had not felt before.

I reached out to the one person I believed would give me the support and answers that I needed. I called my bishop and requested a meeting. I needed guidance, and he is the person I had gone to in the past to find solace. My bishop was kind but honestly shocked and clearly uncomfortable with my news. I poured out my fears and pain and I got nothing in return. He actually said that he had nothing to offer me. This was not something he had any knowledge of. I left his office feeling angry and disappointed. I went home and I railed at God. Why me? Why my child? How do we fit in your plan? I went through days of anger and confusion. I found it hard to sleep. Finally, exhaustion forced me to approach God in humble prayer. I gratefully received the answers that I had been seeking. Austin had been created by his Heavenly Father just as he is and that He loved him. A wave of

love and comfort filled me. I knew that it was not Austin who needed to change, it was me.

It was during this time of searching and learning that I learned that I would have a second battle. My youngest child, ten years old, sweetly explained to me that his guy friend had a crush on a girl in class, his girlfriends all had crushes on a boy, but that he liked a boy. This time I did not falter. I explained to him that he was perfect, that some liked the opposite sex, and some would like the same sex. That God had created him just as he is and that he was perfect. He smiled at me in the rear-view mirror. I had done it right this time.

I have a choice to make. I can be a voice of change in my church, or I can sit quietly. I have chosen to fight like a dragon for all of our children.



Anne Wunderli—Boston, Massachusetts

Twelve years ago my daughter was dating a girl in her Young Women class. I was in denial and desperate with longing to find any Mormon mothers with LGBTQ daughters with whom I could talk. In place of any flesh and blood mothers, I dreamed of women with whom I could cry, share, and learn. Perhaps it was the Spirit or Mother in Heaven who buoyed me up during that time, or maybe it was just the hope that there were other mothers out there like me. I'm grateful I found the Mama Dragons. Virtual and real-life friendships have made a tremendous difference in my life.

When our daughter, at the age of twelve, told me she might be gay, I did what I could to dissuade her from making a firm decision at what I felt was a young age. When she told me at fifteen that she and her girlfriend loved each other, I told her I didn't think she was gay. When our daughter attended college in Utah, she had a year-long relationship with another woman. During her years in Utah I spent many days, and

all Sundays, crying. I was grieving the loss of the future I had envisioned for her. I cried because I was concerned for her safety as an LGBTQ woman in Utah. I cried because I felt like I had failed as an LDS mother. Although I worked through our entire marriage at increasingly responsible and challenging positions, I was committed—pridefully—to being the mother of active, LDS daughters. I associated my entire success as a mother with that goal. The much-hackneyed phrase “No other success can compensate for failure in the home” became the cat-of-nine-tails with which I would lash myself. I have a journal I kept during that time that has that phrase written dozens of times.

Facebook groups like “I’ll Walk with You,” “Mormons Building Bridges,” “Feminist Mormon Housewives” and “Exponent II” helped me envision a new reality and a new identity. I came to see my success as a mother defined not by whether or not our daughters were active in the Church but by their self-confidence, compassion, and charity. I became a passionate supporter of my daughter and her wife, and about supporting in any way I could those in marginalized populations. Joining the Mama Dragons helped to make me feel whole and I was ecstatic to be part of this amazing group. Knowing other Mamas has been life and sanity saving. I’ve been able to share deep, dark feelings and experiences of reconciling a church I’ve loved with a daughter and daughter-in-law that I adore.

I’m a Mama Dragon because I want to help other Mamas walk this path with as light a step as they are able. My process of reconciliation has frequently been painful. In meeting women who’ve been able to experience joy while going through their own evolution, I’m learning from them how to find joy and peace. If I can help other mothers in a similar way, I would love that.



Anne Wunderli—Boston, Massachusetts



Leslie Cordon—Syracuse, Utah

Leslie Cordon—Syracuse, Utah

My son, Tyson, told me he was gay in the spring of 2011. I was not surprised when he told me, but I was scared. I always suspected he might be gay when he was growing up. I would think to myself, “What if he is gay?” I was worried for him, what his life would be, and if he’d be mistreated. Now that I look back on it, I’ve realized something: I didn’t think, “What if he chooses to be gay?” I just thought, “What if he is gay?” I knew deep down in my subconscious that it wasn’t a choice. But, after so many years of society and the LDS church telling me it was a choice, I believed it.

Tyson gave me a few books to read. These books helped me understand more fully that being gay isn’t a choice. He would periodically send me a video to watch. One that really touched me was called “Just Because He Breathes.” It is about a very religious couple and their journey with their gay son. It was heartbreaking. But it gave me permission to love and defend my son. It was a permission I was not getting from my church.

My son came out to the world on Facebook in January of 2014. He wrote an amazing essay about his life, his journey, and how he was a proud gay man. His bravery inspired me. I shared his post on my Facebook wall and said how proud I was of him and how honored I felt to be his mother. Watching his bravery gave me courage to speak up. I haven’t turned back. I am an advocate and an ally. I feel like being gentle and speaking from a place of love helps others understand the struggles this community faces. I feel very lucky to have an amazing and very supportive family.

In the summer of 2015 at the Utah Pride Parade, we had fourteen family members, spanning four generations, who marched together. Love from our family makes all the difference in the world. I see the joy it brings to Tyson and that makes my heart sing. I have come to the conclusion that this is what life is all about. Helping others on their journey. My new motto is “Whose journey can I make easier today?” My heart aches for all the years Tyson struggled alone. For all the things I may have said or done that broke his spirit. For him being so afraid that I wouldn’t love him if I knew. I think I love him more because he

is gay. He is so strong! He has taught me so much. He has opened my narrow mind and increased my capacity to love unconditionally tenfold. I would do anything to help him live a healthy and happy life.

I have had another realization: This is my mission. I will have no regrets. That is why I am a Mama Dragon. I will fight for my child to be treated equally and with the respect he deserves.



Shauna Jones—Idaho Falls, Idaho

My oldest daughter Annie sent us an e-mail several years ago saying, “I’m gay.” As I read her message, I was so thankful for the tender mercy of having known a man named Ben. Ben was the best man at my temple wedding. I didn’t know it at the time, but besides being a caring, considerate, and all-around compassionate guy, Ben was also a closeted gay man. He had been a close high school friend of my husband and was one of our favorite people. I knew the kind of loving, honest, decent, wonderful person Ben was, and I knew it didn’t fit my ideas of what it meant to be gay. After learning about Ben’s sexuality, it made me revisit everything I thought I knew.

As I read my Annie’s message, I knew immediately that I needed to love her unconditionally, emphasize her worth, and not discount her words and feelings. When I got her e-mail, I went down to Annie’s room and sat on her bed, hugged her, and told her it was all going to be fine. We’d figure out this new path. I will admit, when I was alone later in my closet, I cried desperate, tempestuous tears. Loving and supporting your gay friend is one thing. Realizing you have a gay child is an infinitely more complex reality. I had many misconceptions about homosexuality, and it was a difficult thing to reconcile.

Despite the tender mercy and change of heart I received many years ago, the grieving process is real. I realize that the dreams I had for Annie’s mission, her attendance at BYU, her temple wedding, her cute future husband, the adorable grandkids, the Mormon life map that I had in my head for her was gone.

My testimony is that God knows each of his children. I truly believe that he is big enough to have a plan for every single one of them. Every. Single. One. Just because we don't understand how our LGBT brothers and sisters fit into the plan does not mean that he hasn't known all along. I do not fear for Annie's place in heaven. I know she did not choose this part of her.

Having a gay child has been one of the greatest blessings of my life, and I will be forever grateful for my part as her mother. I'm reminded of the story in the Book of Mormon where the angel asks Nephi if he knows the condescension of God. Nephi's response is, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things." I, too, do not know the meaning of all things. But I know that God loveth his children, and I love my children, too. And that, for me, is enough.



Lisa Dame—Salt Lake City, Utah

As my daughter became a teenager, she went through some very rough times. It was so hard to watch this creative, intelligent girl struggle in so many ways. One of my strongest desires was for my daughter to be happy and joyous in the gospel. I prayed continually for this. There came a very dark episode that I not only felt worried and scared for her but it felt as if I had a continual pain in my heart that wouldn't ease. I was praying once again about this daughter when a feeling of amazing peace and stillness came over me. I heard words in my head say, "Everything will be all right." I felt strongly that it didn't mean it would be all right the next day, the next week or maybe even the next year, but I had this feeling that it would be all right in the future. It helped me immensely and I knew that I would have the faith and patience to wait.

As my daughter got older, she found a man that she felt she wanted to marry and they set a date to be married in the temple. When she broke off the engagement, I was devastated. It confirmed to me something that I had known at the edge of my consciousness all along. I knew that my daughter was gay. I kept this inside of me and didn't talk about it with



Shauna Jones—Idaho Falls, Idaho

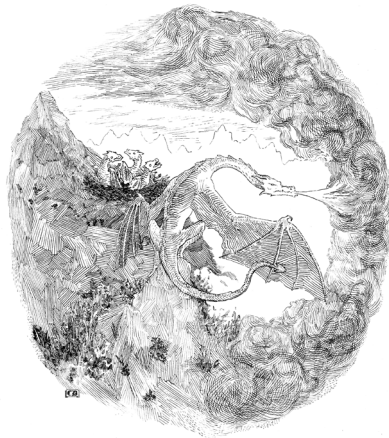


Lisa Dame—Salt Lake City, Utah

anyone, but I was in mourning. I started the process of letting go of things that weren't going to be. There wasn't going to be a temple marriage to a returned missionary. All of my own upsets became secondary in my mind as I watched her continue to struggle to find happiness and peace in her life.

That winter, on a cruise with my mother, I met a recently married lesbian couple. We were on an excursion together and I struck up a conversation with them. I wanted to talk to them about my daughter but my mother was with me and I couldn't say anything. After we were back on-board, I went for a walk by myself and ran into them on a quiet part of the ship. I was able to talk to them about my daughter and give voice to the thoughts in my head. I said the words "My daughter is gay" for the first time. I cried with these women whom I had just met and they were comforting and helpful to me. I grieved for what was not going to be and started the process of accepting what is. I turned away from the fear that I had felt for my daughter for so many years and moved toward hope.

Not long after that, when my daughter came for a visit, I was prepared. I told her that I was ready to hear her, that I wanted her to tell me her truth. The visit passed quickly, and finally, right before she was getting in the car to leave, she told me she was gay. We hugged and cried and I felt such a relief that she and I were both finally ready for this. After she left that day, I sent up a prayer of gratitude. The feeling from long ago that "everything is going to be all right," returned to me again. I knew that this was the plan all along. God was aware of, and loved, both her and me.



Tropical Butterfly House

Dayna Patterson

As we enter, me and my girl,
the delicate proboscis of her finger
unfurls, hopeful, even expectant.
She is a perfect, peach-soft landing.
An owl butterfly with luminous wings
swoops past, not noticing the nectar
of her pointer aimed at nothing
except Angel Trumpets blowing down
from the glass. We walk in slow circles,
lapping an island of outlandish flowers
where plates of rotten papaya, cantaloupe,
are left out to draw the Lacewings,
Pink Hearts, Swallowtails.
We're careful our footfalls
don't crush powdery wings,
the crisp tap of our shoes reassuring.
We know we must go soon. Humidity
weighs as much as the jilt.
By the exit, a blue morpho alights
on a man's bald head like a hat
at a jaunty tilt. Courteously,
he kneels, and her wispy hair
breezes back from her face,
her breath close enough to graze
an electric spree of scales.

Ordinary and Profane Poems

Ronald Wilcox

1. Cosmic Soup

Did you know everything all happened in one split microsecond after a cosmic pea exploded in a perfect vacuum? I will avoid the observation that all things we can observe therefore come from split pea soup much like Darwin concluded *we* did, (he seemed to think of us as primordial succotash), for that would be a cheap shot unworthy of the level of poetic insight I am attempting to attain but it is as true as true can be according to *Discover* magazine.

I am now going to describe the process going on all about us that we don't seem to notice or really give a poot about. First of all, there's no way to think of this subject so forget it unless you are a mathematical genius. You're just dreaming if you think you have it hooked like a rainbow trout, which is the nearest comparison to universal truth I can come to in lieu of quantum physics so let's be clear about it:

If you can drop a dry fly upon just the right spot and a rainbow snaps it leaping up out of the water and for a split second everything is being created like a scythe of light up from God's hand flashes, slashes the surface in myriad planes of iridescence, while the trout hovers an afterimage in the center

of your mind forever exploding like the first burst
of your being radiated outward cosmos upon
cosmos, then there's nothing I can tell you about
Creation in an instant because you've already seen
it for yourself.

2. Hyper-trout

I kicked myself as a dumb kid because I didn't
know trout fight for their lives before they arrive
on your plate any more than I knew we
implausibly do what rabbits do, but I knew at nine
I was learning fast, being primed by my life among
adults: *I just needed the right words!*

The first time I saw a cutthroat caught, Uncle Ken
had hooked him, fly-rod bent double as a wet
branch. I at the edge of a narrow stream viewed
the struggle though tangles & limbs & leaves in
sharp tableaux. I projected my senses inside the
bright fighting trout as he leaped and dove and
spun a thrashing web of nylon line cutting knives
of light into the stream. This was serious business,
not a game of love where the winner leaps the net
to shake the loser's hand. Uncle Ken meant to eat
him & the cutthroat knew it.

Finally, in the bend of his weight, the trout gave in.
Taken from the net it took to subdue his
movements, he struggled against the finger in his
gill & the hand that held him up to the light &

bragged of his size. Proud as a little god quelled in tranquility he let the gravity take him where he had never been in days of sheening underwater blue weightless splendor. He hung in Uncle Ken's hand unwilling as a stolen piece of heaven in a painting by one of the masters.

It seemed his gleaming scales glared like sullen eyes, the bright slash of red at his throat like a war medal. As it hung limpish and pinkish with no more to say, I realized kindly Uncle Ken had conquered him like slicing a king's tongue from the whispering stream. He smacked its head with the hilt of his hunting knife, tossed it into a wicker basket with the other dead fish.

I could never understand their pride, both of the trout and the man who had deceived him, for I knew then the trout was proud he slipped seemly as Narcissus back into the stream in my mind where he still swims. A net would scoop through the free running stream and he would struggle inside *waterlessness* even as we in limbic systems struggle in networks of nerves & veins & arteries & instincts we don't understand, foregone conclusions foregoing the logic of trout, for if Nature has a forethought, it *is* a cutthroat trout.

3. Tying Flies

My eldest brother, Irv, seventeen years my senior, I being thirteen at the time, taught me the mysteries of rainbow trout, how they hide in the inner places you might not expect in a million years where the dark currents swirl as they meet beneath surfaces brimming with quick little mirrors of themselves, how their eyes are alive with bright sights of you looking for them and to deceive them is illusion.

To catch them you must believe the same thing, that what you offer is real as your own life and then they may believe you and accept the barb. It seemed to me a deep agreement to die together, they at the end of your imagination, you with them beginning to absorb your own death. My brother Irv told me as man to man, Ronnie, if you want to feed on Rainbows or Cutthroats (also known as Natives) you must outwit them.

Tying your own flies is the key to everything. He told me to take a naked hook size eight or so, fix it sideways in the jaws of a clamp. There are two types of flies to consider making: wet or dry. Wet flies sink under the surface, dry flies float. I learned from Irv and took it from there myself, looked up various flies with all kinds of hackles, & tufts of feathers plucked from roosters' necks, intertwined all kinds of makeshift hair & fur.

I'd weave these with ease winding my threads to
prick at a lip and lick the pinched cheek of a
cutthroat; yet for the radiant rainbow I'd look up
exotic names: August Dun & Allerton, Brown
Adder & Black June, Beaverkill & Bluebottle,
Cinnamon & Royal Coachman, Cahill & Cow
Dung & Deer Fly & Dorset, Green Drake &
Golden-eyed Gauze Wing.

I'd be specific with Peacock & Iron-blue Dun,
Neversink & Orange Black, the Scarlet Ibis wound
blood red as a slap of bloated mosquito. Lady of
the Lake I'd make out-of-focus weave unlike
Jenny Spinner with a speck of discontent. A
Soldier Gnat I'd spin to pluck its little lyre & twist
a last kiss of Judas in a burst of cold fire!

[4. Unto the Watery Breach](#)

Oh I was gladiator now and invented my own
green sparks, purple burrs, splintered peacock,
wrapped silk of liquid ivory, pied with tiny eyes.
I'd speck the eddies in swift waters and riffles with
firecracker colors caught like still shots, the killing
flies like freeze frames of a tiny fireworks display
to the eyes of amazed trout.

Irv told me my odd inventions would confuse Utah
fish whose brains are so dull they don't really feel
pain when you yank them by the lip. Secretly I
never believed this. Nevertheless, I'd roll my

invisible thread of nylon line across the surface of a stream or deep lake swirling with the sputtering hits of trout like images in your mind as you try to find the exact word.

Writing poems is not unlike dry or wet skimming & dipping skillfully the depths, teasing your brain into snapping at insights, tricky ideas you tie yourself, barbed with killing truths you do not guess until you hook them upon alluring lies. You must expect success adrift the sky with each whipcast allowed as you break the water surface like a crystal dish into splinters, multiple glimpses tricked by appetite, a speck of a trick beckoned by dread and blink of wire sweet as courtesy to nettle the tongue in sweet seeming like flattery uncoiled.

Dangerous business this, fly-fishing and poetry. You always risk the poem will slip off the hook and dive deep back into its freedom. When that happens you can kiss your song goodbye, dine on beans instead of flakes of white manna, stand dumbly as an Israelite surprised to find his breakfast of pure white flashes vanished. Floating snowflakes melt but dead fish stink when unruly rainbow trout fall from the sky to those who don't know how to clean them properly or at least attempt an explanation.

5. Fireworks

I must warn you: to attempt to fly-fish or write poems, your disordered tortured thoughts will flit about you like a mini-fireworks show, each bursting with a feathered barb that kills.

Albeit and wherefore I'm in a warning mode I need say the foregoing was really prelude to what I don't want to talk about but must. Whereas I cannot find my words, I'm looking.

I play with rabbits or go fish for trout like a stream-side Grizzly all growls and grimaces. I wait to transmute pain into beauty as she the she-bear waits to transmute beauty into pain.

I say *she* not because of political correctness nor gender entrapments of my own devising, but because words sound like a slap of claws when I'm cranky at sights beyond my reach.

I clench two empty fists and I grind my jaws at night as I sit in my easy-boy chair and try to dream myself into being by flying blind with the most daring flashes of imagination.

Searching for creatures to realize my haze, I've likened trout to the instant when everything blew into being with a big assist by God and the big bang and that's just the beginning of persistence.

Poets are brothers of rainbows and cutthroats.

A LAUREL'S FIRST-NIGHT FANTASIES

Theric Jepson

Possibility one, extrapolated from what Betty, second clarinet, said about what Tabitha, first clarinet, did last Saturday:

They enter the hotel room, both of them shaking as only virgins can shake. Somehow he manages to place the Do Not Disturb and deadbolt the door. He tries to kiss her lips but ends up sliding down her cheek and into her ear. She bites back and, in a sudden flurry of inability to manage buttons or zippers, they tear both his tux and her dress (embroidered illusion neckline, cap sleeves, veiled corset bodice of Chantilly lace, mikado belt, tulle ball-gown skirt). She yells Yes!, he yells Yes!: his skin the color of inside a loaf of ciabatta, hers the outside; he screams her name as she gasps his. They're a mass of confusion and, at the end, they look to each other. But instead of wondering aloud if they are still virgins, they just laugh and decide to order in baked Alaska before trying again. And again. And again.



Possibility two, suggested ironically by what Sofia said about her new boyfriend while weeping in the bathroom:

The first time she stands naked before him, she knows just what he sees. She's seen it often enough herself upon stepping out of the shower, having kept the water as cold as possible to preserve the mirror. She knows her curves and proportions. She's browsed enough *Cosmo* online to know

where she stands. And although she doesn't yet know his face, she knows that his eyes are damp and his lips tremble and that he is awed. Absolutely awed. He never knew—he never dared hope—he would be so lucky. She can hear the prayer on his lips, and its words are Thanks, God.



Possibility three, from Sister Zhao's lesson back in October:

She lies naked on the hotel bed weeping tears different from those shed earlier, after a kiss, over an altar. Her hair is long and black, no longer done up but spreading away from her head like the rays of a medieval sun, hiding the skin of her shoulders, their skin mottled in the shadows but still lines of latitude darker than her now husband's. He is not on the bed, but laughing nervously out of sight, on the floor outside the bathroom, flipping through images on his phone, occasionally calling out to her that he'll be ready soon, that this site always works, that he's super embarrassed, that he was sure the reality of her, his wife, would be enough, any second now, any second, sorry about this, I love you, this'll never happen again, so sorry, I swear I've repented, this is different, this time's for you, only for you, so embarrassing, you're beautiful, this should do it, okay, I'm coming back now, just one more, just a couple more, just—just—just—



Possibility four, from the only point she remembers Mrs. Helmhotz making during those three awful hours of sixth-grade sex ed:

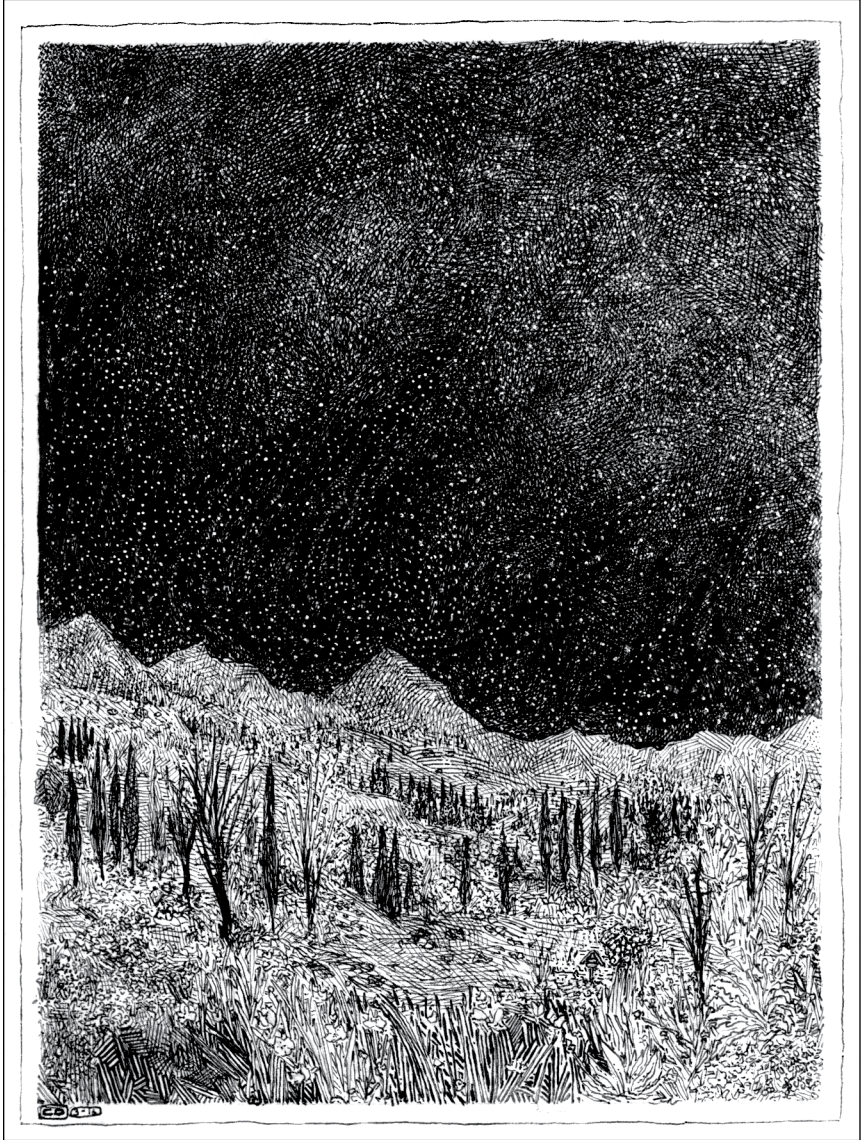
A moment of searing pain, then he's rolling off with a scratch and a sigh and a snore. She reaches down, but she hurts, *it* hurts. She can feel the trickle of blood, more like a nosebleed than anything else, puddling

below her. His body jerks. She turns away from him and stares into the patterns on the carpet as they swirl away into her future.



Possibility five, inspired by that one thing Mom whispered to Dad over ice cream when they thought she was in bed:

No, it wasn't what she expected. For all the passing thoughts and wondering moments and side-glances at other people's pants, she never imagined it would be—whatever it ended up being. But this part she had understood well enough to look forward to. His arm is around her shoulders, her head is on his chest, she can hear his lungs pumping life in and out, slower and slower as he squeezes her one last time before a half-second snort signals his slumber. She glances up through the line of black hair crossing her eyes and looks at his face. This close she can count his stubble, even in the light of the half-moon crossing ocean and sand to enter their window and color them blue. She smiles, closes her eyes, feels his body upon her cheek, and holds on with no intent to ever let go.



Christian Degn
Night
Ink on paper

KID KIRBY

Levi S. Peterson

His name was Reeves Kirby and he was eighteen that summer. He was small of stature and unlikely to grow bigger. Moreover, he had a mild temperament, blond hair, bland blue eyes, and a downy upper lip—truly an unlikely candidate for the fast-draw artist the public later made him out to be.

He came up to the ranch at Almy to help his dad, Tull Kirby. Reeves meant to go back to Tooele in the fall and marry his high school sweetheart, Mary Beth McAllister. She was the pharmacist's daughter. Reeves planned to go to pharmacy school over in Pocatello. He for sure wasn't going to be a rancher.

His dad's ranch at Almy was down the Bear River five miles from Evanston, Wyoming. Tooele was in Utah. The distance between the two towns was about eighty-five miles. Culturally, it could have been a thousand. Reeves didn't figure on stumbling into a gunfight that summer with the notorious killer, gambler, and bawdy-house proprietor Thomas Galt. Reeves didn't own a revolver; he didn't know how to load one. All he knew was that you had to pull the trigger.

The ranch at Almy was called the Elkhorn. Long ago somebody had nailed an elk antler to the barn. There were cattle to tend at the Elkhorn, also fields of alfalfa to irrigate and harvest. For maybe a week after he arrived, Reeves found the work tolerable. But when a rancher from upriver showed up wanting to hire him to some break some horses, he was ready to listen.

This fellow's name was Homer Blanchard and he had a contract to provide twenty-five well-broken horses to the US Cavalry stationed at Fort Duchesne by the middle of September. He had some prime

mustangs, and he needed someone who was extra good at breaking horses to take them. “I need them mustangs broke pronto,” he said, “and I need ’em broke right, and your granddad says you can do it.”

He had just been out to visit Reeves’s grandfather, Riel Kirby, who raised horses at the Narrows of the Bear River. “A horse has pitched your granddad onto a fence and he’s too stove up to take on my project,” Homer said, looking Reeves over as if he were inspecting him for blemishes. “He says his Ute helper ain’t up to the task, but he says you can handle it. Says you are extra good at breaking horses. Says you are a genius at it.”

Reeves scuffed the toe of his shoe in the dirt. It had been a while since he’d tried his hand at sweet-talking a bronco into letting him on its back without a lot of fire and fustian—ever since his grandfather had sold his ranch at Tooele. “I could give it a try, I guess, if my folks will let me,” he said.

“Let me fix it up with your dad and mom,” Homer said. “You come stay in the bunkhouse for a week and I’ll pay you triple. You gentle a couple of broncs and I’ll have my buckeroos finish them off. And no hard feelings if it don’t work.”

Tull was okay with this proposition, having found out that a neighboring rancher had some big sons willing to work for a lot less than Reeves would be making with Homer. Predictably, his mother, Eula, said an emphatic no, and it took several days for Reeves to overcome her objections by persuading her that, rather than allowing Homer’s cowboys to corrupt his morals, he would impress them by his resolute adherence to Mormon standards, thereby opening their hearts to becoming members of the Church. Moreover, he solemnly promised to ride home on Saturday evening in plenty of time to get a good night’s sleep and prepare for driving to sacrament meeting with his folks.

Reeves did as he had promised at the end of the first week, telling his mother with considerable pride that Homer was satisfied with his work and wanted to hire him for gentling the entire herd of twenty-five

horses. Reeves hoped she'd let him accept. It seemed like breaking horses was a gift Heavenly Father had given him and he ought to exercise it, especially since the pay was so generous and he'd have enough money to go forward with his plans to ask Mary Beth to marry him and to apply for pharmacy school at Idaho State University in Pocatello. Eula prayed about it that night and it came to her that, yes, Reeves should take advantage of Mr. Blanchard's offer and acquire the means to escape not only from the polluting influences of Wyoming but also from a rancher's hardscrabble way of life. As for Mary Beth, Eula would welcome her as a daughter if the Lord saw fit to make her Reeves's wife.

What Reeves didn't tell his mother at the end of his first week—largely because he hadn't taken it fully into account just yet—was that while his bunkmates, Homer's three buckeroos, Andy, Jack, and Morley, were respectful of his Mormon scruples, they had already influenced him more than he had influenced them. He was curious about their indifference to sin. They didn't seem to recognize there was such a thing. Profanity and bawdy stories, punctuated by raucous laughter, were as innocent with them as breathing.

For his part, Reeves was keenly aware of sin. From his own perspective, he was a soul who paid close attention to the costs of sin without being able to check his spendthrift ways in accruing those costs. His bad side got the upper hand all too often and he'd stroke his stack in the privy or some other private place. The solitary vice, as people called it, was a nasty business, and he knew if he didn't stop doing it he'd be called to account for it. In the meantime, if he were to suddenly die by accident or disease, his soul would certainly not ascend to the celestial kingdom. The best a fellow of such a flawed character as his could expect on the ladder of glory would be a middling position in the terrestrial kingdom. But at least—so he reasoned—sins of his sort wouldn't consign him to the telestial kingdom, the dreary abode of murderers, thieves, and whoremongers, which was where the three buckeroos were likely to spend eternity.

For a couple of weeks more, Reeves got home around sundown as expected on Saturday evening. A week later, however, he didn't. It happened to be the last Saturday of the month—the day when Homer paid his hands their wages and they customarily rode into Evanston to blow a portion of them. Gathered with Andy, Jack, and Morley in Homer's office, Reeves asked if he could accompany them into Evanston. The road he followed toward home was the same the three buckeroos would follow on their night in town, branching off at the outskirts of Evanston.

Homer looked at Reeves with astonishment. "So you're going to take up with booze and wild women!"

"I'm already part way home when I'm in Evanston," Reeves said. "I was thinking I'd just look around a little and then get on home."

"Well, I ain't in charge of nobody's morals," Homer said, "but I don't want your folks to pull you off my bronc-breaking project. So by damn, you other fellers make sure he gets on his way home at a good early hour."

"You bet," Morley said. "We'll do that."

As the small cavalcade jogged toward town, Reeves learned that the buckeroos planned on visiting a dance hall called the Buckingham, which featured a bar, a vaudeville theater, and a brothel, owned by a madam known as Flossie Kabane, whose bouncer was a Texas gunman named Tom Galt.

"Thing you need to know," Andy said to Reeves, "is when Tom Galt knocks on your door, you've got to leave your lady pronto. Also, if the police raid the place, the drill is we skedaddle quick out the window and drop down into the alley in the back, which runs right back up to the livery barn where our horses are tied up."

"I don't believe Reeves will want to go upstairs to the ladies," Morley intervened. "Mormons don't do that kind of thing."

"Is that so, Reeves?" Jack said. "Not even before you get married?"

Reeves, flustered, started to say something, but his voice died in a squeak.

"That's just the way Mormons are," Morley said.

“Eighteen and he ain’t ever shugged nobody!” Andy marveled.

When the road split, one branch heading into Evanston, the other branch heading toward Almy and the Elkhorn ranch, Reeves’s good side told him to just head on home, but his bad side wouldn’t let him disappoint his sturdy comrades, who were pleased with the prospect of showing him the vices of a western railroad town. They each quaffed a shot of whiskey at the bar while Reeves waited; then they went into the restaurant and had salmon and oysters that had been shipped in ice from San Francisco. Their waitress was a pretty, blue-eyed girl of maybe fifteen. A white apron was tied around her waist. Her blond hair was coiled into a tight bun, atop which a tiny tiara of starched white cloth perched. Her glances did strange things to Reeves, making him straighten his posture and assume what he hoped was a nonchalant look.

Following their meal, Reeves’s comrades took him into the vaudeville show. There was a dog that jumped through hoops with incredible speed and another that could pedal a tricycle. There was a magician from Albany, New York, who locked a lady in a cabinet and sawed her in two and then waved his wand and opened the cabinet and, lo and behold, he had put her back together without any harm. There was a minstrel with black paint on his face who sang “Old Black Joe” very soulfully, which set the audience to weeping.

The grand finale was dancing ladies who came onto the stage with flouncing skirts and high-kicking legs—each upward flounce revealing above their black, be-gartered stockings an expanse of white, sensuous flesh. It was those glimpses of white, sensuous flesh that caused Reeves to envy his comrades when they disappeared up the stairway that led to the brothel. Moments later, his moral compass swung back to true north, and he was ashamed of himself.

He stationed himself on a bench in the passageway between the theater and the restaurant to await his comrades. By and by, the cute little waitress who had served them at dinner came from the restaurant and chalked the following day’s menu onto a blackboard. That task

accomplished, she stood a moment, arms akimbo, gazing at Reeves. A strand of blond hair, loosened from the bun on top of her head, hung over an ear. He confirmed his earlier judgment as to her age—fifteen at most, maybe younger. Once again he felt compelled to appear manly. He straightened his slumping back and nonchalantly crossed one leg over the other.

Stepping close to the bench, the girl said, “Where are your friends?”

Reeves nodded toward the entrance to the brothel stairway.

“You’re too young to go with them, I guess.”

“I’m eighteen,” he said.

“You don’t look eighteen.”

“I know it,” he said. “I’m eighteen even if I don’t look it. Reason I didn’t go with them is I’m a Mormon. I’m not supposed to do that kind of thing.”

“I know some Mormons who do,” she said.

He flushed.

“But I’m glad you don’t,” she quickly added. “Me, I’m an Episcopalian. We aren’t supposed to do that kind of thing either.”

Eyes averted, Reeves picked at a thread on a cuff.

“I don’t go to church, of course,” she said. “Anybody who works for the Buckingham can’t go to communion.”

That wasn’t a big loss as far as Reeves could see. The Episcopal communion didn’t count for anything anyway.

“What’s your name?” she said.

“Reeves Kirby.”

“Reeves Kirby,” she repeated, appearing to savor the sound.

The flicker of intimacy in her voice disturbed Reeves. He planted both feet on the floor.

“I’m Jennie O’Brien,” she said. “I’m sixteen. I’m like you. People don’t believe I’m that old. But I am.”

Reeves gave a doubtful glance.

“I *am!*” she insisted.

He nodded acquiescently.

She tilted her head toward the brothel stairway. "Flossie wants me to work up there."

"Why don't you quit?" Reeves said. "Why don't you go home to your folks?"

"I can't. They're in Fresno. We had a farm in Nebraska. Uncle Dean told Daddy to come on out to Fresno. But we ran out of money by the time we got to Evanston. Daddy had to borrow from Flossie and Tom to go on. They made him put me up for collateral. My folks said they'd come back for me. But they won't. There are too many mouths to feed."

Reeves's eyes widened.

"I've got to go," she said. "Flossie will scold me if she catches me loafing out here."

She put a hand on the door handle. Suddenly she blurted, "You probably think I'm tarnished."

"Tarnished?"

"I'm *not*." She glanced back toward the brothel stairway. "If I worked up there, I'd have a room to myself. I could buy nice clothes. But I can't. I *won't*."

Reeves stared at his feet. A stitched pattern decorated the toe of his boots.

"I guess somebody like you wouldn't ever come calling on a girl like me even if I'm not tarnished," she said.

Just then the three buckeroos burst from the brothel stairway. "Reeves, little buddy," Morley hooted, "it's time to get you started on your way home."

Reaching the Elkhorn ranch a little after dawn, Reeves told his worried parents a lie about his horse throwing a shoe, requiring him to turn back to get the animal reshod, and when that task was accomplished, Homer's wife asked him to help her finish pressing whey from a tub of cheese curds that threatened to spoil before morning.

As expected, Reeves drove into Almy with his parents for sacrament meeting. He considered not partaking of the sacrament but, unwilling to rouse his mother's suspicions, he took the morsel of bread and sipped from the tiny cup when they were offered.

Thoughts, worries, stray emotions of all sorts swam frantically round and round inside him like minnows trapped in a tub. He had stepped down a few rungs on the ladder to glory—no question of that. He hoped he would still qualify for the terrestrial kingdom in case one of the Broncos stumbled and fell on him.

Moreover, he couldn't stop thinking about Jennie O'Brien. She said her parents had sold her. It seemed incredible, yet he believed her. She claimed she wasn't tarnished. He believed that too. In a sense, that just made matters worse. She was too forward, too bold. She supposed a fellow like him would never keep company with a girl like her, even if she wasn't tarnished. Well, that was a fact, and he resented her for making him feel guilty about it just now. For one thing, a Mormon boy couldn't keep company with an Episcopalian girl. For another, it wasn't a girl's place to invite a boy to pay court to her. And on top of all that, he had a sweetheart back in Tooele.

By the time sacrament meeting ended, Reeves had got back around to feeling sorry for Jennie O'Brien. He granted she was a virtuous girl who had reason to feel desperate. She needed a rescue, but he wasn't the fellow to provide it.

Things went along as expected for a couple of weeks, and then on a Monday morning Tull asked Reeves to take a day off from working for Homer in order to convey supplies to his grandfather at the Narrows ranch. He'd have to transport the supplies by packhorse because of a washed-out bank in the ford across the river. Tull normally would have taken them, but he was pressed to clear several fields of newly mown hay before an extended irrigation turn came round. Accordingly, Reeves saddled his gelding, cinched a pack frame on a mare, and with Tull's help loaded the frame with beans, flour, dried apples, and coffee.

Reeves had no difficulty following the trail, although the horses had a tough scramble up the bank at the washed-out ford. Approaching the ranch house, Reeves shouted, "Grandpa, it's me! Reeves!" Hearing no reply, he repeated the shout.

He dismounted and tethered the horses to the hitching rail. As he climbed the porch steps, he shouted again. He knocked, then pushed open the door and peered inside. There were unwashed dishes on the table and a frying pan with a burned pancake on the stove. He shouted again. He closed the front door and walked around the corner of the house. He paused at the barn and looked in. The loft on either side of the bay was full of grass hay.

"Grandpa!" Reeves shouted into the bay.

He heard a faint voice calling from behind the barn. About twenty yards past the barn, he saw his grandfather, sitting on the ground with his back to a wagon wheel. His shirt was drenched with blood and he held a crumpled felt hat, equally bloody, against his chest. A pool of gleaming blood gathered on the ground beside him. There was another pool of blood—considerably darker—maybe four yards away.

"I am dying, boy," his grandfather said. "I have been shot from the back."

Reeves knelt beside him, his breath sucked down to nothing. His head swung with the unreality of what was going on. It wasn't possible someone he knew would get shot in the back. It wasn't possible someone he knew would bleed to death in his own barnyard.

"I fell on my face," his grandfather rasped. "I played dead, tried not to breathe, blood draining out of me. Son-of-a-bitch who shot me gave me a kick. He said, 'You've had this coming for a long time, Riel Kirby.' I knew the voice—Tom Galt, no mistake about it."

Reeves remained in stunned silence, mouth agape.

"I let Lester go to a powwow on the reservation," his grandfather said. "Lucky thing he wasn't here. Galt would've shot him too. I had a chance to kill that son-of-a-bitch years ago. I should have done it. He

was running with a bunch of rustlers over in Grouse Creek. We lynched four of his compadres and let him go. Tell your daddy who it was, Reeves. Tell him it was Tom Galt who did me in.”

Reeves was trying hard not to sob, trying hard to suppress his surging panic, trying hard to comprehend each word and phrase as precisely as possible.

“I have been a wicked man, Reeves. I have visited whores. I have killed men that didn’t need killing. I have defied the promptings of the Holy Ghost many a time. I’m going to hell, Reeves. I’m headed for outer darkness.”

Soon his hands fell limp and the crumpled hat dropped into his lap, revealing a bloody crater of shredded flesh and bone where the bullet had emerged from his chest. Reeves looked into his face and saw what a dead man looked like. There was something emptied about a dead body. It seemed suddenly smaller.

Reeves stood and backed away. Giving in to panic, he turned and began to trot. He came to the tethered horses. He untied the gelding’s reins and prepared to mount. Then he realized it would be a desecration, a dishonor, to leave his grandfather’s body behind. Whatever was required, whatever postponement of panic and grief and self-recrimination might be necessary, he had to take the body with him.

He attached the gelding’s reins to the hitching rail, then untied the load from the pack frame and carried it into the house. He led the mare to the barn and exchanged the pack frame for a saddle. Dragging his grandfather into the barn on a tarp, he tied a loop of rope beneath his grandfather’s arms and hoisted him by means of a block and tackle dangling from a rafter. Having positioned the mare, he lowered his grandfather into the saddle, securing it by tying his hands to the saddle horn and his ankles to the fenders just above the stirrups.

Reeves led the mare from the barn, climbed onto his gelding, and urged the horses forward. At the ford, the mare stumbled and fell to her knees. With a strenuous lunge, she recovered and followed the gelding

from the ford. Looking back, Reeves saw that his grandfather's body dangled bizarrely out of kilter. There was nothing to do but proceed.

Reeves got to the Elkhorn ranch after nightfall. Tull came from the house with a lantern and stared at the grisly burden strapped to the packhorse. Over and over he muttered, "Merciful heavens! Merciful heavens!" Eula stood on the porch watching.

"He talked to me some before he died," Reeves said.

"You watched him die!"

"Yes, sir."

"Tough duty. Very tough duty."

"He was in the barnyard. He got shot from the back. He fell on his face and played dead. The man said, 'You've had this coming for a long time.' Grandpa said he knew the voice. He said it was Tom Galt."

"Tom Galt!"

"Yes, sir."

Eula left the porch, calling, "I'm coming down."

"Don't," Tull called back. "He isn't pretty."

"I intend to see him," she said.

The mare shifted nervously. Riel's body listed grotesquely to one side of the saddle, face downward. Eula took the lantern from Tull and raised it, illuminating Riel's drawn, grimacing face. The glazed eyes were open, and tiny stalactites of dried blood hung from his nostrils.

She stepped back, shuddering.

Tull saddled a fresh horse, took the lead rope in hand, and left for Evanston. Inside the house Reeves tasted little of his supper. At his mother's insistence, he recounted the event at the Narrows ranch, and when he had finished, he asked, "Will he be cast into outer darkness?"

"He lived a hellish life for as long as I knew him," Eula said, "but I doubt he ever knew enough about the Holy Ghost to be cast into outer darkness."

Reeves lay awake for a long time, rigid with anxiety. An hour or so after he fell asleep, he woke in a cold sweat and sat upright in bed,

shouting. He had dreamed of diving into a deep pool of blood. He had the shakes, no question of that. He couldn't help wondering whether he had denied the Holy Ghost without knowing he was doing it.

The next day Tull returned with the county sheriff, Orville Roberts, who asked Reeves to accompany them to the scene of the murder. Tull rode in lead, the sheriff just behind, and Reeves at the rear. Listening to the sheriff talk about local politics helped Reeves keep a grip on his emotions.

At the site of the murder, the sheriff paced off the distance between the pools of dried blood and the corral fence, recording it in a notebook he pulled from his shirt pocket. "That's where he fell when he was shot," the sheriff said, pointing to the first pool of blood. "Then he crawled over to the wagon to prop himself up. Lots of stamina, old Riel. Hard to kill."

Next they traced Galt's tracks to a trampled campsite in a grove of junipers about a half-mile from the ranch. "Looks like he staked Riel out for a couple of days," the sheriff said. "He wanted to kill him pretty bad." Reeves felt a rush of anger. Anger felt good. He saw he wasn't free just yet to quail and cower. He had to keep himself pulled together, had to do whatever was required to see Galt get his just desserts.

Early the next morning, Tull left on an overnight trip to Randolph, Utah, where his mother had made her more civilized domicile despite its considerable distance from the Kirby ranches. Tull hoped to persuade Hortense to return with him to the Elkhorn ranch, where she would occupy Reeves's bedroom. Reeves, for his part, agreed to sleep in a bunk in the tack room of the barn.

Soon after Tull left for Randolph, Reeves decided to ride upriver to the Blanchard ranch to let Homer know why he was taking a week off from bronco breaking. As he saddled his horse, his mother asked him to pass through Evanston on his return to buy maple sugar and baking powder at Rinsler's mercantile. "I have in mind some special desserts for your grandmother Kirby," she explained.

That's how it happened that on his return, Reeves tethered his horse at the livery barn in Evanston and crossed the street to the mercantile. He couldn't find the baking section right away. He entered an aisle featuring dry goods—denim jeans, jackets, bolts of brightly colored cloth. A girl stood at the end of this aisle, fingering some material. Approaching her, he saw it was Jennie O'Brien. She wore a drab skirt, and her hair was wound into an untidy bun upon her head.

Reeves halted, and they stood immobile and wordless before each other, as if their sudden encounter required a carefully considered response.

"You never came back," she said at last.

He took her statement as an accusation. "My grandfather has been killed," he blurted, as if his recent devastation justified the dereliction of a hitherto unrecognized duty toward her.

"What happened?"

"It wasn't an accident," Reeves said. "Someone shot him. I watched him die. Then I tied him on a horse and. . . ." His voice broke. He was wishing he hadn't told her.

"I'm sorry," she said, "really sorry." There were tears in her eyes.

She laid a hand on his arm. He looked at it. She had no right to touch him. He had no right to let her.

"I've had a bad turn too," she said. "I've caved in. I've said yes to Flossie. I'm going to start working upstairs." Her hand gripped his arm more tightly, and her eyes peered into his. "You probably think I shouldn't. But what else can I do? She'll turn me out onto the town. I've got nowhere else to go."

Her face remained impassive, but her grip on his arm became fierce; it was as if she were clinging to a branch to keep from falling into a river.

"It's too bad you are a Mormon," she said. "I would let you be the first one. For free."

Anxiety rippled through him, followed by confusion. Grief was giving way to something else. She lusted on him and he knew it. Furthermore,

he lusted on her. An animal inside him had come awake, had gone on the prowl, alert to a clandestine opportunity. His bad side had taken charge just now—a fact she must have sensed through some slight motion or inclination of his body that Reeves took no account of.

“We could cross the street,” she said, “and go around behind the livery barn. There’s a back door to a hayloft. Some of the ladies use it when they want to work on their own—when they don’t want Flossie taking her cut.”

She turned and walked from the store, Reeves close behind her. In a split second, he had made an irrevocable, cataclysmic, life-changing decision. Half an hour later, he emerged from behind the livery barn alone. He returned to the mercantile and bought the maple sugar and baking powder. Retracing his steps, he tucked the goods into his saddlebags. Mounting, he urged his horse into a trot. Passing the corner of the barn, he saw Jennie, looking forlorn. He noted a wisp of hay clinging to her tousled hair.

For a while, he felt numb and detached. Once again, things didn’t seem real. The world had taken on a different color. The midday sun blazed, yet its light seemed filtered as if by smoke from a prairie fire. After a while, his ideas coalesced, bringing him around to his desperate situation. He couldn’t understand what had come over him, couldn’t believe he had succumbed so easily. He recognized he had hitherto known next to nothing of sin, neither of its enticements nor of its consequences. Stroking his stack in the barn was penny-ante sin. In contrast, to pay for the dubious privilege of deflowering Jennie O’Brien, he had written an IOU pledging his salvation as a forfeit. How did a fellow repent of a sin like that? What currency would satisfy the debt?

Tull didn’t arrive back with Hortense until near noon of the next day. She descended from the buggy with her head held high. Her abundant grey hair was bunched about her head and her cheeks were deeply seamed. “Was it you then,” she said to Reeves, “who found my poor, beloved Riel shot in the back and dying?” She pulled Reeves to her bosom and wept.

After supper that evening, Tull and Hortense prepared a brief obituary of Riel for the Evanston newspaper. When Tull proposed one for the Tooele newspaper, she objected. "Riel was not dealt with justly in Tooele," she said. "I wash my hands of the people there. Knowing of Riel's service as a Union officer, stake authorities called him on a mission to halt rustling in the Grouse Creek country. But these self-same authorities turned on him for hanging the thieves—as if there were some other way of stopping cattle theft in a lawless region. And the disfavor of the authorities allowed the spirit of persecution against him to flourish in Tooele. Those we took to be our best friends turned against him, and we were forced to sell our ranch and our beautiful house and come to this godforsaken country."

The next day, Tull accompanied Reeves to the inquest in the Uinta County courthouse, which was overflowing with participants and curious onlookers. The inquest board, composed of the coroner and two upright citizens, occupied the elevated judge's bench. At another table, somewhat to the side, sat Reeves and Sheriff Roberts as witnesses. At a table immediately in front of the judge's bench sat Thomas Galt and an attorney, Galt having been subpoenaed on the basis of the sheriff's report. Tall and broad-shouldered, Galt was dressed in a handsome western suit. His expressionless face was accented by a thin, pencil-line mustache.

Pounding a gavel, the coroner called the meeting to order. "We are assembled here to inquire into the death of Riel Kirby, rancher, found within the precincts of this county by his grandson Reeves Kirby alive but dying from a gunshot wound on Monday, September 4, in the year of our Lord 1899."

The coroner first asked Reeves to testify. For a few moments, Reeves was paralyzed by stage-fright. Then, in a subdued voice he recounted the sequence of events from his arrival at the Narrows ranch to his departure scarcely an hour later. He ended by repeating the words his grandfather had attributed to Tom Galt. "The man who shot him said, 'You've had this coming for a long time, Riel Kirby.' Grandpa said he knew the voice."

Reeves paused for a moment. Eyes downcast, he continued, dropping his voice to little above a whisper. "He said it was Tom Galt."

The coroner next called on the sheriff, who ended his report by saying circumstantial evidence pointed toward Tom Galt as the perpetrator. Following that, the coroner called Tom Galt into the witness box. "We have subpoenaed you, Mr. Galt, to appear before this inquest because of the testimony of young Mr. Kirby. Are you able to provide evidence exonerating yourself in this matter?"

"Yes, sir."

Galt's attorney stepped forward at this point, asking permission to speak. The coroner nodded approval. "My client," the attorney said, "is employed as the chief security officer at the Buckingham, a resort offering the citizens of Evanston entertainment of the highest order. On the day of Riel Kirby's demise, Mr. Galt was on duty at this establishment and likewise during the preceding night, as his employer, Miss Flossie Kabane, and a number of other employees stand ready to testify. Miss Kabane, I will add, is among the spectators in this room and stands ready to so testify if the inquest board desires."

He turned and pointed to a woman sitting on the first row of spectator seats, only a few feet from Reeves. She wore a dress made of velveteen, having a high collar and long sleeves. Her lips and cheeks were rouged, her lashes were long and dark, and beneath those lashes, her eyes were restless and wary.

"Miss Kabane, you've heard what Mr. Geary has said regarding Mr. Galt's whereabouts on the day of Riel Kirby's assassination," the coroner said. "Are you able to verify that he was on duty at your establishment not only throughout that day but during the previous night as well?"

"Certainly," she said.

"Well, then, I don't see any need to prolong this hearing," the coroner said, turning to his two associates on the bench. These two nodded their agreement. "Sorry to go against your opinion, Orville," the coroner said to the sheriff, "but this board of inquiry finds that Riel Kirby died from

gunshot wounds inflicted by an unknown assailant. Thomas H. Galt, hitherto suspected as the assassin, is hereby declared cleared and exonerated. The board extends its condolences to the family of Riel Kirby.” And with that, the coroner struck the desk before him with a gavel and declared the inquest adjourned.

Outside, the courthouse was a busy scene—clusters of people talking, riders mounting, buggies pulling out of the hitching area onto the street. Reeves reached the Kirby buggy ahead of Tull. While he watched, Galt and Kabane got into a buggy, which Galt, who handled the reins, guided onto the street. Galt turned the buggy about and brought it to a halt within a few feet of Reeves. “You have run up a bill for entertainment provided by one of Miss Kabane’s employees, Jennie O’Brien. You owe Miss Kabane two hundred dollars for that session. That’s the going price on virgins. Miss Kabane is willing to extend your credit till next Friday. On that day she expects you to deposit two hundred dollars in gold coin with the cashier’s office in the Buckingham. If you don’t make it, what happened to Riel Kirby is going to happen to you.” He looked at Flossie Kabane and when she nodded, he added, “It appears Jennie has got balky on the idea of working upstairs with the ladies. If she don’t change her mind, we may be asking you to make up the deficit on that score too.”

Reeves’s stomach knotted. He looked at his hands. They shook violently. He had an impulse to climb from the buggy and run back into the courthouse. But of course he didn’t.

The next day, Saturday, a funeral was held for Riel in the Almy ward chapel, with burial in the Almy cemetery. At the viewing preceding the funeral, the Kirby family stood beside the coffin while members from the Almy ward filed by to pay their respects, most of them unknown to Reeves. Riel’s face struck Reeves as unnatural. It was peaceful enough, but shrunk and eerily pale.

To his surprise, Homer Blanchard and his wife filed by. “I had dealings with him,” Homer said. “If he agreed to sell me horses, I didn’t need a contract. I knew he’d deliver.” As he passed on by, he said, “I’m

counting on you showing up Monday, Reeves. I'm needing you to get on with them broncs."

"Yes, sir, I'll be there," Reeves said.

But he wasn't sure he would be. He'd have \$100 coming when he finished breaking the broncs. That was good money for a ranch hand for half a summer's work—about a quarter of his father's former nine-month salary as a schoolteacher. But he wouldn't finish the job for a couple of weeks. Then there was the problem of borrowing another \$100, and, along with that, the problem of talking Jennie O'Brien into going to work as a whore. All of which gave him reason to consider skipping the county, disappearing down in Arizona or maybe up in Idaho.

The funeral wasn't long. Tull read a sketch of Riel's life, composed the evening before by Hortense. The sketch made him out to be a man without flaws. Following that, the bishop of the Almy ward preached a sermon on the Resurrection, in which he assured his listeners that at the dawn of that glorious event, the kin of the deceased, here assembled, would be reunited with him. Reeves could see the bishop didn't know much about Riel Kirby, who by his own account had been a wicked man, at best destined to pass eternity in the telestial kingdom—unlikely, therefore, to be greeting any of his righteous relatives at the moment of the Resurrection.

This thought reminded Reeves that at present he himself was unforgiven of a sin meriting consignment to that lower realm. Wouldn't it be the damnedest thing if he got shot by Tom Galt and ended up in the telestial kingdom shortly after his grandfather? Could they talk to each other from time to time? Or would it be solitary confinement, worlds without end?

Come Monday, Reeves went back to work, unable to make up his mind about leaving the county. He skirted Evanston widely on his ride home the next Saturday night, hoping Tom Galt wouldn't anticipate his ruse. He accompanied his parents to church, knowing Galt's deadline had passed and therefore half expecting to be shot.

He finished working with the broncs on Thursday of the following week. That evening, Homer gave him a draft for \$120 drawn on the Stockmen's Bank in Evanston—\$20 more than Reeves expected. "For good, timely work," Homer explained. He went on then to advise Reeves to cash the draft at the bank it was drawn upon. An out-of-town bank, he explained, would likely discount it ten or fifteen percent.

Homer's draft put Reeves in a quandary. On the one hand, he didn't like taking a ten or fifteen percent discount on his summer wages. On the other hand, he was afraid—no, terrified—of running into Tom Galt in Evanston. Good sense dictated that he take the draft, ride home to the Elkhorn by an entirely different route, say goodbye to his parents, and continue riding on to some distant place before cashing his draft. Eventually, beset by greed, he failed to listen to good sense and stayed another night in the bunkhouse with the three buckeroos. By morning, he had worked out a plan for cashing the draft at the Stockmen's Bank before riding on down to the Elkhorn ranch. It wasn't an unlikely plan—except that, as Reeves learned later, Tom Galt had persuaded, through friendship and threat, a number of persons to inform him if Reeves Kirby should show up in town. These persons included an employee at the livery barn where Reeves tethered his horse a little before noon that fateful day.

Scarcely a half-hour later, in a stunning reversal of the usual dynamics of a confrontation between an armed and an unarmed opponent, Tom Galt lay dead in a growing pool of his own blood with an utterly dumbfounded Reeves Kirby standing nearby with a smoking revolver in his hand.

The action culminating in this, one of the most storied gunfights in Evanston's bloody history, devolved in a two-block area just west of the railway station, which stood at the head of Tenth Street. The Buckingham sat on this street as did—a couple of blocks down—the Stockmen's Bank. The livery barn, where Reeves tethered his horse, stood on the next street to the south. Reeves walked a roundabout

way, returning to Tenth Street well below the bank. After exchanging Homer's draft for greenbacks, he left the bank and retraced his steps. Approaching the livery barn, his limbs froze. Crossing the intersection ahead of him was Tom Galt, preoccupied with loading cartridges from his gun belt into the open cylinder of a revolver. Reeves wheeled about and retreated, hoping Galt would not look down the street and spot him, yet expecting at every moment to be shot in the back. Frantic, he returned to Tenth Street and headed toward the train station, supposing he might hide in some nook or corner there. However, as he crossed another intersection, he saw that Tom Galt had turned about and was scarcely thirty yards away.

Reeves broke into a run toward the station. As he approached the arcade sheltering the main entrance to the Buckingham, he remembered the advice from Andy on the night of his visit to the Buckingham. In case of a police raid, Andy had said, they were instructed to climb out a window into an alley leading to the livery barn—where, as Reeves now assumed, his horse, his means of escape, stood ready. Impulsively, Reeves swung into the arcade and shoved through the swinging doors. He ran down the hall and tried to open the door to the stairs leading to the brothel. It was locked. Looking back, he saw Galt coming through the entrance door. Reeves crossed the hall and pushed through the restaurant door. Waitresses were setting out napkins and silverware. One of them was Jennie O'Brien.

"Tom Galt is going to kill me," Reeves said hoarsely. "How do I get to the alley?"

"This way!" Jennie said, dumping silverware upon the floor with a clatter. She led him through a side door, down a dim, narrow hall, and into a dimly-lit room with a narrow bed on either side of the window. She shut the door and locked it, then went to the window, pulled a curtain aside, and raised the sash. "Climb out," she said, "and go left."

At that instant Galt began to pound on the door and shout, "Open up, by God, open up!" Jennie turned back to one of the beds and pulled

a hammerless revolver from beneath the mattress. She thrust it into Reeves's hand just as Galt kicked open the door and burst into the room. Two shots rang out and, as Galt tumbled to the floor, Reeves realized he had fired one of them. Galt emitted a sighing sound, twitched several times, and was still.

Reeves stared a moment at the hole in the wall where Galt's shot had struck. Then he stared at the hammerless revolver in his hand. He had never seen a revolver without an external hammer before. He threw it on a bed. He looked again at Galt on the floor. Blood flowed from a small round hole in his chest, drenching his handsome coat. Reeves was suddenly aghast. He had killed a man. The commandment said *Thou shalt not kill*. It didn't say *Thou shalt not kill except in self-defense*. He was at fault for not leaving town without trying to cash the draft. He was at fault for having gone into the hayloft with Jennie. He was at fault for signing on with Homer Blanchard in the first place.

Reeves sat on the bed beside the revolver. Jennie seated herself on the opposite bed, her face blank. What was she thinking, this girl whose father and mother and seven siblings had sold her, the Joseph of her family, into Egypt?

Reeves heard people in the hall. He heard a woman's voice. "Oh, my God, Tom's been shot!" Then a man shouted, "Clear out! He's just killed Tom!"

From outside the building came the clanging bells and the galloping hooves of horses drawing a police wagon. Shortly, someone entered the hall, and a man said, "That's Tom, there in the doorway. I think the kid who shot him is still in the room."

"I'll handle this," another man said. Reeves heard more steps in the hall. "Come out with your hands up!" the most recent voice said.

"All right," Reeves said, "I'm coming out."

He stepped into the hall, his hands high. "He came after me with a gun," he said. "I was trying to get away."

The cop locked handcuffs onto Reeves's wrists. A door opened and Flossie Kabane pushed into the hall.

"Where is he?" she cried hysterically. She threw herself onto the body. "Is he dead, is he dead? Say something, Tom, say something!"

She looked up. "Who did it?"

"Him," the cop said.

"Reeves Kirby!" she exclaimed.

"He came after me with a gun in his hand," Reeves repeated.

"The question is what were you doing in this room in the first place?" the cop said and led him away. Flossie threw herself back on the body and resumed her wailing. No sound came from the room where Jennie still sat.

The driver of the police wagon whipped the horses into a near gallop and, with warning bell clanging, transported Reeves to the county building where city as well as county prisoners were jailed.

After Reeves's personal effects—a pocket knife, a handkerchief, his sheaf of greenbacks, a small medallion given to him by Mary Beth—were inventoried, he was conducted into a cell already containing three men, all of them vagabonds, judging from the tattered quality of their clothing.

"He just killed a man," the incarcerating officer—a desk sergeant—told these three, who murmured uneasily.

For a while, Reeves sat on a long bench beside his fellow inmates, wanting to believe the shooting hadn't actually happened. But it had happened, and he was presently in a very bad way. He was bound to be tried for murdering Tom Galt, and how was that going to shake out in front of a jury? What could he expect by way of help from Jennie O'Brien? It was all very confusing, all very ominous.

About eight that evening, the prisoners were offered a bowl of cabbage soup and a slice of bread for supper. Having no appetite, Reeves gave his serving to one of the vagabonds. A little later, a door opened and Sheriff Roberts sauntered into the cellblock. Gazing through the

bars, he said, "Well, Reeves, I never figured on this. I'm told you have killed Tom Galt."

"He came after me with a gun in his hand," Reeves said.

"I didn't know you had took up packing a gun," the sheriff said.

"It was Jennie O'Brien's gun. She's a waitress. I was in her room."

"She gave you the gun?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing in her room?"

Reeves was silent.

"Are you sure she's just a waitress?"

Reeves could see he was cornered. He looked at his fellow prisoners, who listened intently. "I'll tell you the whole story," he said to the sheriff. "But not here."

"All right," the sheriff said. "I'll get the desk sergeant to let me take you into my office."

Shortly the sergeant led Reeves into the sheriff's office. "I wouldn't trust this boy," he said. "He's a desperado. Meaner than he looks."

"Leave the worrying to me," the sheriff said. "I'll bring him back in a half-hour."

"He broke into a waitress's bedroom," the sergeant insisted. "Tom Galt caught him in the act."

"I expect there's more to this story than meets the eye," the sheriff said. "I want to hear what the boy has to say."

After the sergeant had left, the sheriff said, "Now then, set me straight on what happened. How come you were in that room? How come Jennie O'Brien handed you a gun?"

Reeves flushed. He'd almost rather cut off a hand than tell what he and Jennie had done in the hayloft of the livery barn. But it had to be told. Nothing else would make sense if it weren't. So he started by telling about riding into Evanston with Homer's buckeroos and meeting Jennie in the hall of the Buckingham opposite to the stairs leading

to the brothel. Then he progressed to the hard part of the story, their meeting in Rinsler's mercantile and their subsequent visit to the hayloft.

He didn't try to soften the sordid story any. He told how Jennie had given in to Flossie Kabane and decided to start working as a whore, and when she met him in the store she said if he wanted to, he could be the first to have her and he could have her for free. With that he gave in to his lust, plain and simple, which being a Mormon boy, he had no right to do. What was worse, it had got him on the bad side of Flossie and Tom Galt, who told him he had five days to deposit \$200 at the payroll office of the Buckingham for ruining Jennie for some railroad nabob who'd pay that much for the privilege of being the first to have her, and if he didn't deposit it, Tom Galt would do to Reeves what he'd done to his grandfather. Reeves wouldn't have that much money on hand even after Homer had paid him off. So he figured he would disappear somewhere. But he had foolishly decided to slip into Evanston to cash Homer's draft at the Stockmen's Bank, because out-of-town banks would have discounted it ten or fifteen percent. As bad luck would have it, he had run into Tom Galt, and being in a total, senseless panic and not being able to think of anything smarter, he dashed inside the Buckingham because he knew its back windows opened onto the alley that ran to the livery barn where his horse was tied. Jennie took him to her room but before he could crawl out a window, Tom kicked the door down and when he came through, he had a gun in his hand.

At the conclusion of their interview the sheriff said, "What counts now is can we get this gal to verify your story. If she will, you will likely be let out on bail till the matter is cleared up. You ain't the first boy to pull a girl's skirt up when he had no business doing it, and she ain't the first girl to let him." That cheered Reeves up momentarily. But once he was back in his cell, engulfed in darkness and shivering under a thin blanket on a top bunk, he couldn't keep his mind off the possibility that she would make him out to be the unwanted intruder in her room that the other employees of the Buckingham claimed he was. This, of

course, led his thoughts around to the rapidly growing list of sins set down against him in the Book of Judgment. It seemed as if sinning was the only thing he was really good at, which led him to wonder if there were descending degrees of ingloriousness a fellow could sink to in the celestial kingdom. Likely there were, and he had just achieved a new level of degradation and ignominy by getting himself stashed away in jail. As for repentance, it seemed likely he had long since passed the point of no return. There was truly nothing he could do to come clean of the burden of sin he had accumulated. It just kept getting bigger and bigger.

Toward noon the next day the desk sergeant brought Reeves out of the cell and returned his personal effects. It turned out that Jennie had backed Reeves's story and, there being no other eyewitness to contradict it, Reeves was free to go—with the understanding, the desk sergeant emphasized, that Reeves would show up at an inquest, which was scheduled for the following day. He also said the sheriff would like to see him in his office.

The sheriff, leaning back in his creaking desk chair, said, "I've been up all night. I went back to the Buckingham and had a little chat with Jennie O'Brien. Lucky for you, she tells the same story you're telling. That ain't all. She asked me to fetch her away so I took her home to my wife. Now what I want to emphasize is Flossie and her bunch may still try to make out you are in the wrong at the inquest. So, like it or not, you're going to have to tell the whole story you told me. Don't try to leave any of it out, or you'll get tripped up."

Reeves sighed and rubbed a hand across his forehead.

"My advice is you ought to just go home and come clean with your folks right now. Then you can relax in the witness box and tell the story like it happened."

Thanking the sheriff, Reeves headed for the livery barn. When the desk sergeant had first told Reeves he was free to leave, he couldn't believe it. It seemed too good to be true. Well, now he saw it actually

was too good to be true. He was out of jail but he wasn't out of trouble, not by a long sight.

How would he go about confessing to his folks? There wasn't a soft way to do it. "Dad, Mom, Grandma," he could hear himself saying, "I have to show up at an inquest tomorrow at eleven because I have had carnal knowledge of a girl in the hayloft of a livery barn up at Evanston and I have killed a man on account of it."

This was pretty much how he blurted it out upon his arrival at the Elkhorn, except that he named the man he had killed. His folks, all three of them, stared for a moment, obviously unable to digest what they had just been told.

"You shouldn't joke about things like that," his father said.

Eyes downcast, Reeves said, "It isn't a joke. I wish it was."

His father scratched the back of his head. His grandmother sat bolt upright in her chair, her face becoming even more pale and drawn than before. His mother burst out, "You have killed a man!"

"Yes, ma'am. He was coming after me with a gun."

"And fornicated with a gentile!"

"Yes, ma'am," Reeves said.

"How could you? How could you?" Eula cried. "What did I ever do to deserve this?"

"You never did anything. I just got weak, I just got tempted."

With that, his mother stalked into her bedroom and shut the door.

On Monday morning Tull accompanied Reeves to Evanston in the buggy. Once again the inquest board was composed of the coroner and the same two upright citizens. At the witness table sat Reeves, Jennie, the city policeman who had arrested Reeves, and Sheriff Roberts. At the attorneys' table sat both the county and the city attorneys and Mr. Geary, the attorney for the Buckingham. In the audience, unknown to Reeves, sat a journalist from the East who happened to be passing through Evanston on a western tour. It was he who would create the myth of the fast-draw artist, Kid Kirby.

Pounding a gavel, the coroner called the meeting to order and declared that the board had been assembled to inquire into the death of Thomas H. Galt, security guard at the Buckingham pleasure resort. Mr. Galt had been shot through the heart at the entrance to the bedroom shared by two waitresses, one of whom was at the inquest in the capacity of witness to the shooting. Having examined the body of the deceased, the coroner went on to say, he had found Galt had expired from a bullet from a .38 special revolver, which penetrated his chest and perforated the left ventricle of his heart, resulting in near instant death. The Evanston police arrested Mr. Reeves Kirby on suspicion of illegally entering the bedroom of a waitress and shooting Mr. Galt, who in pursuit of his duty had accosted Mr. Kirby. Some hours later, the police released Mr. Kirby from custody on the basis of testimony of the waitress, Miss Jennie O'Brien, the only eyewitness to the actual shooting, Miss O'Brien's testimony having corroborated Mr. Kirby's claim that he shot Mr. Galt in self-defense. The stated purpose of the present inquest was not only to ascertain whether Miss O'Brien's testimony was accurate, but also, if her testimony was deemed accurate, to re-examine the alibi offered by Thomas Galt and Flossie Kabane at the inquest into the assassination of Riel Kirby.

"Shortly before I called this inquest to order," the coroner declared, "Mr. Geary, counsel and trustee for the Buckingham pleasure resort, informed me that Miss Kabane has withdrawn the assets of the resort from the Stockmen's Bank and, in the company of four of her female employees, has decamped from the city of Evanston for an unstated destination in Nevada, where she will presumably re-establish her entertainment enterprise. Mr. Geary informs me that Miss Kabane has left in his hands the sale of the Buckingham's remaining assets. It would therefore seem a useless endeavor to go further with this inquest, the testimony of both Reeves Kirby and Jennie O'Brien going uncontested. For reasons unknown, Mr. Galt assassinated Riel Kirby and attempted to assassinate his grandson, who defended himself by means of a weapon

handed him by Miss O'Brien. This homicide is therefore judged to be justifiable. This inquest is adjourned."

The sheriff and city cop stood and stepped away from the witness table. The sheriff had sat between Reeves and Jennie, who only now could turn and regard each other. Her eyes searched his.

She appeared ready to say something, but she didn't. Maybe she wanted him to thank her. He owed her a lot. He'd be dead if she hadn't handed him the pistol. He'd be in big legal trouble if she hadn't testified in his behalf before the authorities. However, she was the cause of his trouble in the first place, having offered to let him be the first to have her. He was a public shame now, his parents too. The bishop of the Almy ward would be calling him to account soon, and he'd likely be excommunicated. Moreover, he couldn't pretend to any future with Mary Beth McAllister, no matter what.

"Thank you for everything," he mumbled.

She seemed not to hear. "My blood hasn't come," she said, her cheeks flushing. There were tears in her eyes.

The sheriff's wife approached, a large, portly woman with a kind, motherly face. On the vertical, she outdid the sheriff by six inches—though sidewise the sheriff held his own, being plenty portly too. "It's settled, dear," the sheriff's wife said to Jennie. "You're to stay with us till your parents can be located."

Grasping Mrs. Roberts's outstretched hand, Jennie rose. She looked back as she walked away. Reeves saw disappointment on her face. What did she mean by "My blood hasn't come"?

Then it came to him with a rush of despair. She was pregnant.

On the ride back to the Elkhorn ranch, he told his father he was ruined. "Everybody knows what I've been up to," he said. "I'm thinking I ought to light out of this country. Maybe I ought to go find a job on a ranch in Idaho or Arizona."

"I hope you won't do that."

"I'm not respectable anymore," Reeves said. "Anybody that is halfway decent will look down on me. They'll cross the street so they won't have to meet me if they see me coming down the sidewalk."

"Why don't you take over the Narrows ranch?" Tull said. "It's out of the way. Nobody goes there unless they want to buy a horse. It would relieve me of a lot of worry if you were down there managing things. Lester will be back shortly and he can show you the ropes."

"I might do it," Reeves said.

That evening the ward clerk showed up at the Elkhorn to let Reeves know the bishop would like to have a chat with him before church on the following Sunday. Reeves said he'd be there. During the night he considered leaving the county again, but by morning he'd made up his mind to do one better on the bishop and ride over to his house in Almy and get the process of excommunication going immediately.

He found the bishop, a heavily bearded man, in his corral milking a cow.

The bishop said, "You have done some terrible things, Reeves—downright wicked things."

"Yes, sir, that's true."

"I hope you've learned your lesson."

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure."

"I have favored cutting you off the Church, but President Murdock has counseled otherwise." He was referring to his superior, the president of the Evanston stake. "President Murdoch wants you to groom yourself up for becoming an Elder shortly. He sets a priority on strengthening the Elders Quorum in the Almy ward."

Needless to say, Eula was vastly cheered up by Reeves's report. "An Elder!" she said. "Well, that does give me satisfaction."

Reeves didn't feel forgiven. In fact, he *knew* he wasn't forgiven. On top of all his other sins, he had managed to get a girl he didn't love

pregnant, and his intention was to disappear, vamoose, shuck out of the country. Sin *did* have a way of compounding itself.

However, in his bunk that night out in the tack room of the barn, he dreamed he saw his grandfather listing in the saddle during that long, grisly ride from the Narrows ranch on the day of his murder. Though he was dead, he could still talk. “What are you going to do to make it up to that girl?” he said to Reeves. He meant Jennie O’Brien. Reeves awoke in a fit of the shakes. He got out of bed and lit a candle. He sat on the side of the bed in his underwear, thinking about being married to Jennie.

He had no idea whether she would wake up mornings cheerful or foul, whether she’d have anything to talk about at the table, whether she’d want to keep house or make a garden or help out in the barnyard. Also, being an Episcopalian, she would likely take umbrage at a husband who, even if he couldn’t get squared up with God, figured God favored Mormons over all other kinds of believers. Also, his mother would object to his marrying an outsider for any reason whatsoever.

After a while, he blew out the candle and crawled into bed. He remembered then the night he had first talked with Jennie while he waited for the buckeroos to finish with their ladies. She had supposed aloud that somebody like him would never come calling on a girl like her, which implied a wish that he *would* come calling. What Jennie wanted, he could see, was for some decent-looking fellow to marry her, and as things had fallen out, Reeves happened to be the handiest candidate. He admitted he still lusted on Jennie, but lust wasn’t love, and it seemed like being married to her would just be one more sin piled on top of all the others he was guilty of. Nonetheless, there was nothing to do but ride into Evanston and call on her at the sheriff’s house.

Arriving in town, he asked the way to the sheriff’s house. He tied his horse to the picket fence surrounding the house, went through the gate, and knocked on the door. The sheriff’s wife answered.

“Mrs. Roberts,” Reeves said, “I’d like to come calling on Jennie O’Brien, if I may.”

She stared speechlessly for a long moment.

“I mean if it’s all right with her,” Reeves added.

Just then, Jennie crowded into the doorway beside the sheriff’s wife. “It’s you,” she said.

“Yes, it’s me.”

“I don’t feel at liberty to say yes or no in this matter,” the sheriff’s wife said. “You’ll have to ask Mr. Roberts’s permission. He’s at his office just now.”

An hour later, a lengthy deliberation was in progress in the Roberts’ parlor, the sheriff and his wife seated in easy chairs facing Reeves and Jennie and these two seated on opposite ends of a sofa. The sheriff and his wife both had round, cherubic faces, the sheriff’s sporting a bushy mustache. Their bulk loomed in the small parlor.

The sheriff seemed embarrassed. “Do I understand you have courtship in mind, Reeves?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Jennie, is this acceptable to you.”

“Oh, yes.”

The sheriff looked at his wife. “It might be a good idea—considering everything that has gone on, that is.”

“I’m not so sure,” Mrs. Roberts said. “To call a spade a spade, I’ll just say it: Jennie will regret tying in with the Mormons. They are a strange bunch.”

The sheriff coughed. “Well, yes—and another matter is are you ready to start making a living, Reeves?”

Reeves could see he needed to invent a livelihood in a hurry. He said he was going to take over the operation of the Narrows ranch. Drawing on things he’d heard his father say about it, he said he meant to expand the horse herd there by recovering a bunch of his grandfather’s branded horses running wild, and also by helping himself to some unbranded stock out on the public domain. He figured on shipping a carload down to the Ogden auction every spring and fall.

“The house down at that ranch ain’t no palace,” the sheriff said, turning to Jennie. “It’s more or less a shack—an outer room with a stove and table in it and a bedroom with a tiny closet. Water comes out of the river. Better count on cooking and washing the dishes, not just for you and Reeves, but for that Ute fellow too.”

“That’s all right,” Jennie said. “That’s what a woman’s supposed to do. That’s what I want to do.”

Nothing was said about Jennie’s pregnancy during this discussion. Moreover, as he rode back toward the Elkhorn, Reeves had no intention of saying anything about it to his folks. They’d find out about it soon enough. For the moment, all they needed to know was that he planned to marry Jennie. On that score, he knew he had to be assertive, knew he had to not sound like he was asking permission to marry her. But by the time he got to the Elkhorn, he had lost his valor and made no mention of Jennie. Furthermore, he was wishing he had acted on his notion of disappearing in Arizona or Idaho.

Nonetheless, he rode back to Evanston the next day as promised, leaving his folks puzzled as to his destination. Mrs. Roberts greeted him at the door and left the two of them, Reeves and Jennie, alone in the parlor, seated on opposite ends of the sofa. Jennie was silent and downcast, quite the opposite of her demeanor on the previous day. “I was mistaken,” she finally said. “You don’t have to marry me.”

He chewed on that for a while, uncertain of her meaning. Then it came to him. Her bleeding had started overnight. He was free. For a moment, his feelings surged. Then—as he viewed the tears rolling down her cheeks—his feelings dropped. He couldn’t walk out on her. He had to consider himself engaged. He told her so, and when Mrs. Roberts returned to the parlor, she found them seated closely together in the middle of the sofa. Just like that, by a transaction that had lasted no more than thirty seconds, Reeves Kirby and Jennie O’Brien were bound into a union destined to last for half a century.

Reeves announced his intention at the Elkhorn ranch that night. "This girl I did wrong with, Jennie O'Brien," he said, "her and me, we're going to get married. I want to bring her over tomorrow and have you meet her."

"You can't be serious!" his mother said.

"I am serious," he asserted.

"A gentile girl! My son marrying a gentile girl!" Eula said, bursting into tears.

"Is this definitely the direction the wind is blowing?" Tull said. "Is your mind truly made up?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Do you think she'll want to accompany you to the Narrows?"

"Yes, sir, she says she will."

Eula was weeping into a handkerchief.

"It's better he marry her, Eula," Tull said. "Just much better."

"I'd rather he was dead," she said.

"Well, he isn't, so we've just got to make the best of it."

"Please, dear," Hortense said, placing a hand on Eula's arm, "shouldn't we make her welcome?"

Eula stared morosely off into a corner of the room. "All right," she said in a weak, despondent voice, "bring her home to meet us."

A final obstacle to be overcome had to do with the construction of Jennie's wedding dress. When Reeves asked his mother to undertake the task—Mrs. Roberts having no skill in that business—she objected to the white, satiny material Jennie had chosen.

"It just won't do," Eula declared. "White stands for the purity of the bride."

What she said was true. Jennie had no claim on virginity. But after he had left the house and had a few minutes to think things over, Reeves decided to be firm. He went back into the house and said, "I'd like you to make it anyway. Jennie has her heart set on it."

Eula was startled. She looked at Hortense, who sat in an easy chair darning socks. "Should I do it?" Eula asked. Hortense put the darning into her lap and glanced back and forth between Reeves and his mother. "What would it hurt?" she said.

"All right," Eula said to Reeves, "bring her back so I can take her measurements."

At Eula's behest, Reeves asked the bishop of the Almy ward to perform the ceremony, which was conducted in the home of Sheriff and Mrs. Roberts. The bishop made no issue of the irregularity of this wedding. In attendance were not only the Kirbys and the sheriff and his wife but also Homer Blanchard, his wife, and the three buckeroos. The latter three were slicked up in their fanciest shirts and newest jeans. "Got to hand it to you, Reeves," Andy said admiringly at a private moment. "You had us plumb fooled. Never had no idea you was getting into Jennie O'Brien's britches."

Watching Jennie, luminous with joy, Reeves felt puzzled. He granted he might be mistaken, but it seemed he had come up a rung or two on the ladder toward glory.

Within days of their wedding, Reeves and Jennie made the Narrows ranch their domicile. Eventually, they became the parents of two daughters and three sons. When their first child reached the age of eight, her grandmother, Eula, persuaded her to be baptized a Mormon. As it happened, Jennie surprised her husband and in-laws by asking to be baptized too. By that time, Reeves was known as the provider of superior roping and cutting horses. With Tull's help, he enlarged and modernized the house at the Narrows ranch. It is to be noted that Tull's cattle enterprise at the Elkhorn prospered enough for Tull to build Eula a substantial two-story house—which included a bedroom and small parlor for Hortense.

Little remains to be narrated here other than Reeves's acquisition of the sobriquet of Kid Kirby. Although Reeves and Jennie at first lived in some isolation, they soon discovered that a small book written by the

eastern newspaper correspondent in attendance at the second inquest had placed Reeves at the center of a heroic legend. Titled *The Saga of Kid Kirby; or, The Wild West Lives among the Mormons!*, this book characterized Reeves as a fast-draw artist who had heroically avenged the assassination of his grandfather. With a surprising frequency throughout the remainder of their lives, Reeves and Jennie were annoyed by tourists and novelty seekers who made their way to the Narrows ranch to take a look at a Mormon Billy the Kid.



Christian Degn
Drake Study
Ink on paper

PALMYRA REDEMPTION

JULY 18, 2015

Neil Longo

Morning light pierces the green canopy. There is weightiness to this place.

This place has known God. Its very existence glorifies him, yearns for him.

I have come a long way to be here. Justin, Brooke, Sam, Serene, and I drove here from DC, through misty Allegheny darkness, winding through farm-country backroads of the forgotten corner of Pennsylvania. We stopped at a back-country gas station. My leather shoes and button-up shirt drew unwelcomed attention. The cashier asked why I was passing through. It was like being in a foreign country. I embraced the foreignness, responding, “I’m going to see where God spoke to Joseph Smith.” He silently bagged my beer and we went on our way.

Palmyra surprised me. After hours and hours of dramatic, beautiful country, it seems plain. The native soil of my community is little more than a bland village on flat land outside Rochester, New York. Hicks work the local 7-Eleven. Retirees sit on their porch swings. It’s the best and worst of America.

Last night, we arrived, exhausted, heads throbbing from the music, at about one o’clock in the morning. The GPS said we were passing the Sacred Grove, but it was inky black and we couldn’t see for a damn.

We parked by the side of a rural road, laid out a tarp in a furrow by the cornfield, and slept under the stars. Our spot, we would find in the morning, was situated beautifully between trees and the field. However,

our tarp was thin, I had only a thin sheet to wrap myself in, and I could feel roots and weeds pushing into my back. Immediately, we found that the mosquitos were insufferable, and around three in the morning a thunderstorm rolled in. It began to rain hard as we piled back into the car. The sky was lit by the most incredibly beautiful thunderstorm. It occurred to me that I had never known thunder that sounded like the wrath of God, whipping the fallen earth with light and power.

In the morning, after an hour or two of sleep, we woke up. The storm had passed; the dawn broke lavender over the fields and groves. The earth rolled gently around us, and the place no longer seemed the flat, desolate backwater it had appeared the night before.

Here I am, the Sacred Grove: boyhood haunt of the crippled, hook-nosed seer himself, ground zero of my life story. My friends and I stroll reverently through the wooded paths. I can't help thinking that my story is somehow wrapped up in what happened here. Like Joseph, I was a teenaged boy, a sinner, a seeker. Like him, I experienced God (though by no means in so dramatic a way). Like him, I could never have imagined how it would change my life. I could never have imagined the heartbreak and comfort, revelation and isolation, and, after it all, the stunned silence that awaits the seeker who finds an answer.

This is a place of peace. It is a place of refuge, reconciliation, recompense. Joseph came here to reconcile himself to God. God came here to recompense his children. I came here for refuge and reconciliation, from and with everything and everyone.

I think of Joseph. I picture him romping through the fields, sleeping under the stars, exploring the woods. I picture him with a striped orb, his seer stone, its earthy chocolate brown throbbing with ethereal light. The mundane made sacred. He carries it, holding it close to his chest. It lights his face eerily.

Driven by the beauty of it, haunted as only one who has seen God can be, he fled to Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and finally to heaven. He restored the temple rituals I've come to take such comfort in (oh, the irony!).

He raised his hands to God, clothed in great power and authority, and, pierced through, fell from the second story of Carthage Jail, fell into the earth from whence his precious light had come.

I don't look like him. My collared shirt and ready camera reek of the university. I'm more familiar with whiskey than with wisdom, more comfortable with marijuana than with mysticism.

And yet, something about Joseph has haunted me. He seems to stare up at me as he falls from that window. He has become the symbol of something inexplicable: the rapidity with which bright eyes and laughter flow to grief, frustration, and finally to that mysticism in which man, enwrapped in awe, deprived of himself, helpless in the hands of fate, comes at last to orbit silently around God, the fountain of light, who pours creation on the earth, rippling to the far reaches and reverberating to the far borders of the infinite dark. The whole universe dances to the rhythm of his poetry.

That Joseph saw such things from this boring frontier town is enough alone to stop me in my tracks.

I was born far too late to eulogize him. I know he was a polygamist. I know he was a fraud. I know about his banking ventures, his drama-ridden life, his naïveté and pretensions to greatness.

And yet, through all of it, my mind's eye focuses on one image: Joseph the man, brimming with life, laughing, eyes shining in the afternoon light, cutting to work in the woods. He was fated to grief, but also to jollity. He struggled for simple joy in the wake of his revelations. He struggled so greatly he earned the pity of God. That, at the end of the day, is what Joseph means to me.

He was human in the fullest and godliest sense of the term. Nothing higher can be said of a man.

Truth comes at great cost. It is most difficult to bear when that cost is incurred by innocent bystanders. That is a dilemma Joseph came to know. I, too, have come to know it.

So I sense in him a bit of myself. I sense in his story the human cost incurred by those who dare to ask big questions. I sense in him a man who struggled to balance the levity of friendship and the weightiness of God's truth—a man who, drenched in blood and Missouri mud, saw God and yearned only for bright eyes and simplicity.

After all (and it took me until sitting in the grove to realize this), the story of the Restoration is an object lesson in second chances. It wasn't a beginning at all; it was the crown that God placed on eighteen hundred years of Christian struggle and human failure. It is the fulfillment of, rather than the replacement of, the faith of my Irish Catholic ancestors. It is, in a sense, the apocalypse they longingly anticipated with monastic chants and liturgical prayer. It is the life of the world to come.

And so I know that as my Catholic ancestors yearned and unwittingly laid the seeds of restoration in my language and as my Catholic parents unwittingly laid the seeds of restoration in my worldview, so too the seeds of healing have been laid for me and for my mother and for everyone. Although I talk of doubt and smell of booze, already the ground is swelling with the promise of life, striving to break the soil and reach the light, and all will make sense and be at peace somehow.

I came here with my cup of irony.

I should be angry at him. It was he, after all, who set this whole amorphous Mormon experience in motion. Because of him my friends went forth with tens of thousands of their peers to preach the gospel to the infirm, the insane, the grief-stricken, the seekers of the world. Because of him temples are being constructed in Bangkok and Lisbon, Cedar City and Durban. Because of him an entire generation of young people abstains from sex and alcohol and profanity (or pretends to at least, which, after all, is something). Because of him we have the Mountain Meadows massacre and the Church welfare system, secret temple oaths, and heavily-publicized disaster relief efforts. Because of him suburban grieving parents are comforted and young seekers inspired. Because of him Joanna Brooks was wracked with sobs in the hotel restroom, and

all the converts' mothers are wracked with sobs across the world, and I am wracked with sobs for all the sobs I've wracked people with in the process of becoming Mormon. Because of him we have the restored hope that, through the empathetic God he showed us, it'll all be made all right somehow.

Would Joseph have done what he did if I could somehow go back and tell him what it would cost us?

I think so.

Would I have done what I did if, in the midst of my own sacred grove, I had known the pain and enlightenment rippling together throughout the rest of my life and the heartbreaking distance of this eccentric God?

I hope so.

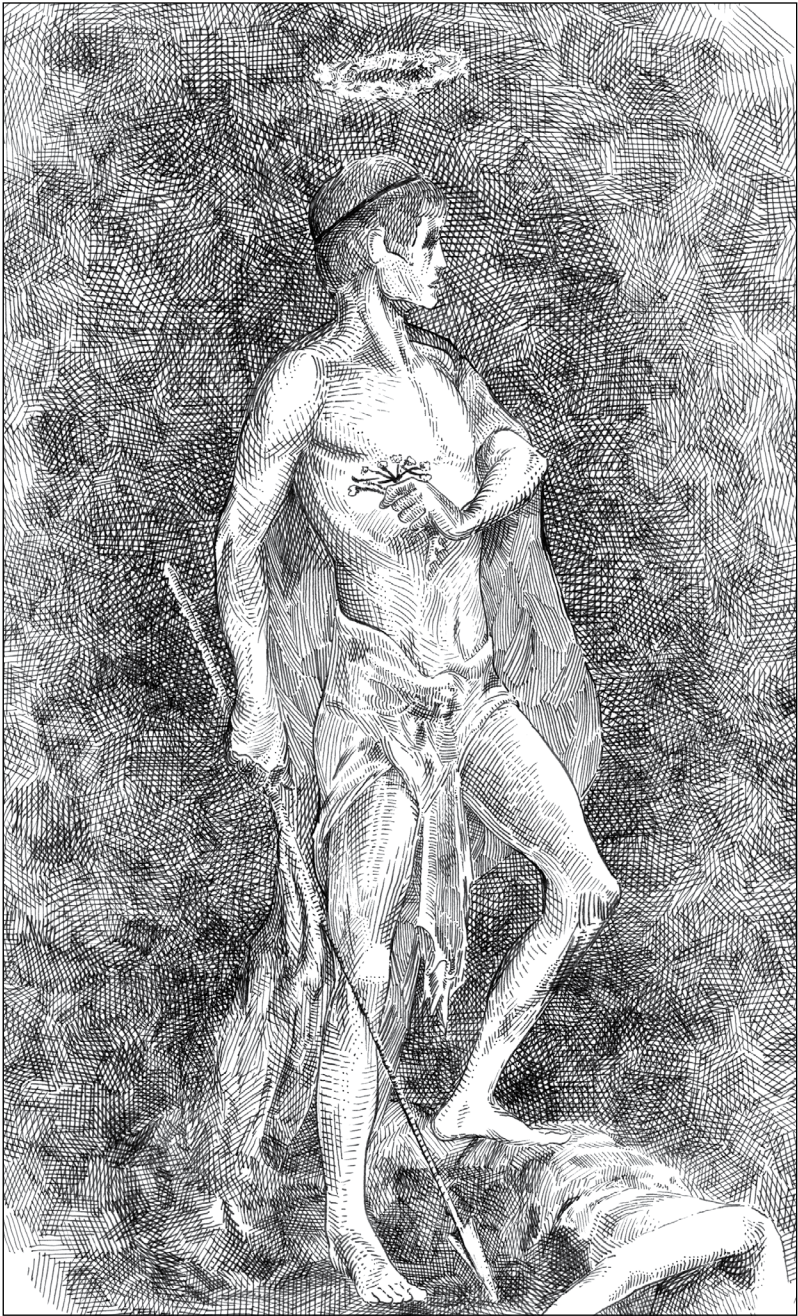


So I guess it comes down to faith.

In 1820, Joseph saw something.

In 2015, I felt something.

Today, I hold to that.



Christian Degn
Conquered Sphinx: Study After Levy
Ink on paper

EXPONENT II: EARLY DECISIONS

Claudia L. Bushman

Last year was the fortieth anniversary of *Exponent II*, a “modest, but sincere,” as we called it, little newspaper begun in Massachusetts written by and for LDS women. That brings it within two years of the lifetime that the old *Woman’s Exponent* was published from 1872 to 1914. All indicators suggest that *Exponent II* will last longer than the earlier paper.

A student at Berkeley who was doing a thesis on *Exponent II* recently contacted me asking for some basic information about the paper. I said that she should try to look at early accounts, as later ones tend toward the extravagant. I told her that the paper was my husband’s idea, that we wrote the paper for ourselves and friends, and that we were not trying to reform Salt Lake. She said I was wrong, that it was inspired by Susan Whitaker Kohler’s discovery of the *Woman’s Exponent*, and that we had sent copies to the wives of General Authorities to enlist them. What is more, she cited my writings as evidence. She said if I didn’t know how things had happened, could I please direct her to someone who did.

Well, history is malleable. I write history. Innocent little things in the past turn out to have big meaning. *Exponent II* is now old enough to have a mythic past. I add to it whenever I can. I don’t like to repeat myself, although I certainly do.

Exponent II was part of big movements of its day, an LDS expression of the then current women’s liberation movement and also part of the Church’s New Mormon History. The magazine was closely linked to the Mormon History Association and its founder Leonard Arrington. My husband was a founding member of MHA and one night after meetings,

Richard told Leonard about our LDS consciousness-raising group in Boston. None of us women would have presumed to attend meetings with those real professionals, but I soon received a long, detailed letter from Leonard offering suggestions, sources, and help. We could not believe that he actually was writing to us. We became an outpost of the Church History operation and the MHA. The MHA honored two of our early publications, the pink issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*¹ and our published essays, *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*,² with special commendations: not money, but honor. We dedicated *Mormon Sisters* to Leonard because, as we said, “He takes us seriously.” Not many people did then.

My husband was inspired to suggest a newspaper. I came home from one of our many early events and told him that we had had another great success. What could we do now? He suggested a newspaper like the old *Sunstone Review*. I related this idea at our next meeting and there was enthusiasm. There were, however, some bumps along the way. The one person in our group who actually had newspaper experience felt that she could not edit the paper. Carrel Sheldon, who was more responsible for the publication of *Exponent II* than anyone, turned to me and said, “Well, you’ll just have to do it.” I had a full plate then and suggested that we finish up *Mormon Sisters* first. Carrel said, “No! We have to begin right now.” And so we did.

1. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 2 (1971). See also Claudia Bushman, “A Wider Sisterhood,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 96–99; Claudia L. Bushman, “My Short Happy Life with *Exponent II*,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 179–92; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “The Pink Issue and Beyond,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 28–39; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Mormon Women in the History of Second-Wave Feminism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 45–63.

2. Claudia L. Bushman, ed., *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (Cambridge, Mass.: Emmeline Press, 1976).

I began to assemble some copy. Carrel worked on publishing possibilities. We actually had in hand the remains of a small grant that Leonard Arrington had given us to help with our library and copying expenses. I think we were given \$250 and, being very thrifty housewives, we still had \$234 left. Our first issue was printed with that grant from the Church History Department. In our first issue—which we sent free to everyone we could think of, with multiple copies to many to give out to their friends—we solicited subscriptions at \$2 for four annual issues. *Exponent II* was an innovation, a new development, and subscriptions poured in to see what we would do next.

It was a lively little sheet with news and features. We quoted from the original *Woman's Exponent*. We had a column called “The Frugal Housewife.” We had short news bits. We did profiles of interesting LDS women. Judy Dushku took on the longest-lasting column of the enterprise, “The Sisters Speak,” soliciting responses to a question she would pose in each issue. The paper still has that very popular feature. We invited articles and book reviews. We wanted wide participation. Carolyn Person did dashing illustrations, since described as subversive. I wondered whether I should hold back on material and good ideas, fearing that we might have nothing for our next issue, but my experience said to use up everything we had freely. There will always be more and plenty to say and print next time.

Many readers responded emotionally to our little sheet. Where had we been? How grateful they were to have the voices of sympathetic sisters, of friends. They sent donations. Their letters made us weep. We were meeting a need. It was a heady experience for us. Suddenly, people took us seriously. They asked our opinions. It was exhilarating.

I was naïve and made two costly mistakes early on. I was interviewed by the *Boston Globe* and spoke frankly and enthusiastically. I thought the resulting article was pretty good. I haven't seen it for forty years and do not remember the specifics, but I know that in my euphoria I stepped on some toes. A copy with sections highlighted in yellow appeared on

the bulletin board at church. People sent copies to Salt Lake City, and I understand that it was discussed in high places. Still enthused and exuberant, we sent copies of our second issue to the wives of all the General Authorities in care of the Church Office Building. We thought that they would be interested in what we were doing and wanted them to know about it. The staff at the COB was appalled by all this newsprint, and we received firm instructions never to do that again. I think they felt it unseemly that we should presume to send our grassroots musings to those at a higher level. They may have feared that we were seeking an implicit endorsement, something that had not occurred to us. I had honestly thought that they would be pleased. Ah, well.

Our group had never been exclusive and we constantly invited new people to come along with us. The talents of all could be utilized. People could spend some or a lot of time with us. I think we were really open. But some began to define us as illegitimate. Others said they were too busy, as we certainly all were. They disapproved of our taking on this public life when the domestic one was a woman's ideal. They perceived rebellion against leaders. Some even wrote anonymous letters to Church headquarters to warn them of this Cambridge rebellion.

Eventually there was some response from Salt Lake. My husband was the Boston stake president. He had not opposed the paper. After all, it was his idea. But some deemed it inappropriate that his wife should lead this marginal endeavor. Elder Robert D. Hales, visiting for conference and staying with us, made an appointment to talk to me. We stayed up until the early hours discussing the situation. He was a person we knew, who had been in our midst, and so a friend as well as an authority. He advised me to close down the paper which, he felt, would do us irreparable harm with the authorities. His repeated phrase was "No good can come from this."

I told the group of this encounter at our next meeting and suggested that we close down. But the feeling was strong against that. After much discussion, we decided that all active members should write letters detailing

what the paper had meant to them. A large sheaf of impassioned prose made its way to Elder Hales. I didn't write one of those letters, but they still exist somewhere and would make very interesting reading today. We need to find them.

Our visitor took the letters to Elder L. Tom Perry, then a new General Authority, who had been our previous stake president and said that he thought that these women deserved a response. And so forty years ago, the now late, great Elder L. Tom Perry made a special trip to Boston to talk to this little group of housewives, urging caution, saying that better things would come our way if we gave up the paper.

From these two encounters I took away two major phrases that I remember and frequently think about. The first was "No good can come from this," a damning judgment of our little venture. Can that be right? One supporting reason was that we would be damaged in the eyes of the people in Salt Lake when important and interesting opportunities came for women. I agree that we had been damaged in some eyes, and that it was already too late. But what are those good opportunities that would arise for women? Did I miss them?

I cannot agree that no good has come from it. There have been forty years of deep friendship in the changing group. The paper has provided interesting positions for many women, working together over the years, encouraging writing and publication, always a good thing. It is a voice for women in the Church when women's public voices in the *Relief Society Magazine* and Relief Society classes have been hushed. And it includes many voices, many points of view.

I had faced the fact that, although leaders would never act to close the paper down, I could not be involved in it because my participation suggested support from the Boston Stake because of my husband's position. The other takeaway was that, "It's just the facts of life." That one I agree with.

Elder Perry told us that he could find no fault with the early issues of the paper, which he had read on the airplane on the way out. But he, and

other brethren, he told us, were concerned with what it might become. They hoped that the workers would be wise enough to discontinue it when it began to do harm. Again, they feared that involvement would do damage to our good names. But it is just the facts of life. And of course, they were right. Just look at all the terrible things I have done since.

Leaving *Exponent II* was very painful for me, but I don't engage in wars that I cannot win. Instead, I try to keep my head down and shift to other projects. My leaving to save the reputation of the stake calmed the minds of our visitors, and they said no more. *Exponent II*, wiser and more careful about what they say and how they say it, has survived for forty years, remaining useful to the many people it serves as a vehicle for expression and information. I do not believe that anyone has bothered the publication again over these forty years.

The whole episode with *Exponent II* and the women's group was hugely transforming for me. I was not a writer. I did not like to write. I could not write. But in those activities, I had to write. So I wrote. I still don't like to do it, but I write a lot. *Exponent II* changed my life. I do things now that I never thought I would or could do. *Exponent II* was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

KEY TURNING POINTS IN EXPONENT II'S HISTORY

Nancy Tate Dredge

In her editorial in the very first issue, Claudia Bushman wrote “*Exponent II*, posed on the dual platforms of Mormonism and Feminism, has two aims: to strengthen The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and to encourage and develop the talents of Mormon women.” Years later, in an attempt to be welcoming to women wherever they were on the spectrum of belief and activity in Mormonism, we, as a board, vehemently discussed and re-wrote our mission statement, changing the phrase “Our common bond is our *commitment* to the Church and the women of the Church” to “Our common bond is our *connection* to the Church and our *commitment* to women.” So, even though we questioned and diluted somewhat that first platform, we have always firmly adhered to the second, that of feminism. But Claudia was unknowingly throwing down a gauntlet by declaring our “modest little paper,” as she called it, to be feminist.

We were a little naïve about the paper’s reception. On the one hand, our ambitions about *Exponent II* were low; in the fifth issue of the paper, Claudia’s editorial stated that we had imagined eventually having perhaps 500 women who would be interested in, and subscribe to, the paper, but in less than six months we had 2,000 subscribers. By the end of that year it was 4,000—from all fifty states and several other countries. All subscriptions came by word of mouth with no advertising. On the other hand, we had a missionary zeal about sharing all we had found out about our own Mormon “herstory” through reading the original *Woman’s Exponent* (which none of us had ever heard of prior to its discovery in Widener Library) and the research we had done to

publish *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*. One of the things we did was to send copies of one of the early issues of the paper to the wives of all the General Authorities, straight to the Church Office Building. We sincerely thought they would be thrilled to read what some Mormon women were thinking and doing. We were informed, however, that our paper was not welcome and that we should never do that again. We began to have Woman's Exponent Day dinners, which highlighted influential Mormon women as speakers, in honor of that original Mormon women's newspaper, of which we called ourselves "the spiritual descendants." We invited many local women to join with us at these dinners and to become subscribers. Again, we were rebuffed by many of them (although the dinners themselves were wonderful and well attended). I asked one friend in our ward why she didn't want to become involved, and she replied, "I've already dealt with all that and have decided that my place is in the home," an interesting response considering that we had never advocated that women leave their homes to go to work. But from the very beginning, it was assumed that that was our agenda. In fact, for years we bent over backwards trying to keep a balance in the paper between women in the workplace and women in the home. Many assumed, however, that *Exponent II's* very existence was forcing women to take sides on the feminist question.

We chalked this mistrust up to being unwelcome prophetesses in our own country, but I believe it was much more than that. *Exponent II* first came out in 1974. This was the era of the Vietnam War and protesting students. We lived in Cambridge and had seen buildings on Harvard's campus taken over by students, protesting the war with sit-ins. It was also the beginning of second-wave feminism in America. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* had been published just ten years previously. I believe many Church members—including the General Authorities—saw students with beards protesting the war, pot-smoking hippies advocating free love in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, radical feminists burning their bras, and jumbled all these images together in their minds. They

did what most conservative groups do: retrench, long for an idyllic, more orderly past, and decry cultural change. Beards are still suspect by many in the Church, and the word *feminism* has always been an “F word” to the Mormon population at large. Some members even thought Carolyn Person’s wonderful artwork in *Exponent II* resembled protest tracts from the sixties and seventies.

Once we lost some of our naïveté and figured a few of these things out, we then had the task of navigating this part-hostile, part-welcoming environment. Some issues we took on directly. For example, the Equal Rights Amendment had been passed by both houses of Congress in 1972, just before *Exponent II*'s beginnings, and the ratification process by the states continued on until 1979. In the beginning, it was unclear what the Church’s position on the ERA would be. In its very first issue in July 1974, *Exponent II* came out with an article titled “What the ERA Will Mean to You,” trying to dispel fears that it would mean mandatory military service for women, unisex restrooms, and legalization of gay marriage while losing women’s protective labor laws and financial support in marriage and/or divorce. However, in a move that surprised many, the Church officially came out against the ERA in the spring of 1976, their stated reason being that they deemed it to be redundant because women’s rights were already protected—along with men’s—in the Fourteenth Amendment. Readers voiced their opinions on the pros and cons of the ERA in *Exponent II*; by publishing both viewpoints, we established a pattern that was to continue for years. We felt that we had a readership made up of women of all ages, from many different backgrounds, and with both conservative and liberal politics. We wanted the paper to be relevant to all of them. So we aired the feelings of women all along that spectrum, trying to maintain a balance.

The debacle surrounding the International Women’s Year¹ happened at about the same time. The national sponsors of the IWY went from

1. The International Women’s Year was the name given to 1975 by the United Nations. The IWY was part of a larger United Nations program and included

state convention to state convention, trying to come up with a consistent platform of proposals that would protect or promulgate women's rights. Although the General Relief Society president, Barbara Smith, encouraged women to attend, her urging was just part of the Relief Society's push to get Mormon women involved in their communities and in important political issues. However, feeling that they had been called to defend hearth and home against those supporting the ERA, the Mormon women delegates voted down most of the proposals the National IWY put forward, even innocuous ones like those having to do with child care, in an attempt to show that Utah was not pro-ERA. As we had done with the ERA, *Exponent II* published letters from women who both supported and were aghast by how the Utah convention was handled.

Exponent II was like the original *Woman's Exponent* in that it reported on notable meetings of Mormon women throughout the country. The *Woman's Exponent* reported on Relief Societies throughout the Utah territory as well as women's suffrage meetings held by sisters in the territory; oftentimes women's suffrage meetings were held right after Relief Society meetings or in conjunction with them. In every issue of *Exponent II*, we reprinted excerpts from the original *Woman's Exponent*, partly to let modern LDS women know about these wonderful women and their newspaper and activities, and partly to show how involved they were in the suffrage movement of the 1800s. We identified greatly with those women and their fight to advance the cause of women, and even felt that they justified our own concern for women and their rights. We thought modern Mormon women would be amazed that these early Utah women

the drafting of the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." In the United States, each state had its own convention to adopt the proposals about stopping discrimination against women. For background on Mormon involvement in the IWY convention, see Dixie Snow Huefner, "Church and Politics and the Utah IWY Conference," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 58–75, and Martha Sontag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake: Signature Books, 2005), 155ff.

were involved in the movement; that they were doctors, politicians, and managers of farms; and that the Relief Society was a totally independent organization that raised its own funds and had its own industries to do so.

Other than the reports on meetings and some poetry and fiction, the format of the two papers was not that much alike. Because of the backlash against the women's movement, which came out in the form of both disparagement (calling feminists "women's libbers") and suspicion by many Church members of the faithfulness of anyone aligned with the movement, I had a firm resolve during my tenure as editor to try to help women feel as comfortable being feminists as they were being Mormons. However, we felt that we had to be careful not to alienate women who were more conservative. Therefore, although every issue of the newspaper contained at least one article with a feminist viewpoint, the paper was by no means militant. We even offended some women with our policy of "gently, gently" leading people to their own comfort zones with feminism.

Whereas the content of the *Woman's Exponent* centered on political and religious issues with some poetry and fiction thrown in, *Exponent II* has always published articles on all aspects of Mormon women's lives. The paper consistently featured pages devoted to poetry and fiction, as well as a page called "The Frugal Housewife," which was like a page out of *Woman's Day* magazine. It presented housewifely tips and recipes; typical was one titled "The Thanksgiving Feast," with a full menu to use for that holiday. Although there was no sports page, we included articles about women in sports, notably tennis (Emma Lou Thayne), jogging, skydiving, and unicycling. The "Cottage Industry" column featured women who had developed successful occupations originating in the home. "The Sisters Speak" column posed a question of interest to our readers that they would respond to in a subsequent issue. Here are just some of the topics we've covered over the years: birth control, working women, stay-at-home women, body image, infertility, mothering, sexuality, pregnancy, spiritual power, lesson manuals, raising sons, raising daughters, step-parenting, adoption, being single in a married

church, dealing with infidelity, drug usage among Mormons, dealing with grief, growing older, family size, women and the priesthood, interfaith marriages, eating disorders, war, disabilities, role models, dealing with cancer, widowhood, becoming grandmothers, the international church, sister missionaries, women in politics, women in the theatre, women in teaching, OCD, PMS, menopause, friendship, marriage, the socialization of women in the Church, healing, music, cooking, Mother's Day, women's relationship to the temple, and Mormons and politics.

Some historians and commentators have noted the fact that the *Woman's Exponent* and *Exponent II* had their beginnings in similar times and circumstances—in the midst of a movement for women. Similarly, the editorial in the third edition of *Exponent II* declares, in response to the question “What do you hope to accomplish” by publishing a newspaper for Mormon women, that we hoped to give women “a little status.” Claudia goes on to say: “No one thinks of Mormon women today as exploited slaves [as they did in the nineteenth century] but few people realize what extraordinary people they are. Is there another group that can touch them for service to others, efficiency, devotion, imagination, intelligence, education, beauty? Yet modest and supportive by long training, they limit their aspirations. . . . *Exponent II* wants to shed light on the achievements of the sisters.” The other two reasons given for the paper were “to disseminate useful information” and “to keep in touch.” Claudia famously described the paper as “like a long letter from a dear friend.” In an attempt to give women status, we accepted articles from both experienced writers and those who sent us their first attempts at writing. Our editors worked with authors to help them improve their written work.

One of *Exponent II*'s landmark contributions was our issue on depression.² Depression and other mental illnesses still have a stigma attached to them, but at that time depression just wasn't talked about. This was true in the general culture as well as in Mormondom, but Mormons were supposed to be a happy people because they had the

2. *Exponent II* 5, no. 3 (1979).

true religion. Admitting to depression was practically a sin among God's chosen. In 1979, Salt Lake City's KSL TV aired a documentary produced by Louise Degn about Mormon women and depression. The response in Utah was overwhelming; suddenly it was all right to talk about depression. We received a copy of the documentary, watched it, solicited articles by women who had experienced depression, and had a "Sisters Speak" column where women wrote in about their experiences. We continued what the Utah documentary had started, helping to create a sense of acceptance for people suffering from depression.

And, over the years, *Exponent II* has stayed abreast of—or even led the way in—current movements and concerns among Mormons. In our board meetings, we debated whether or not to publish articles on very sensitive topics such as abortion and LGBTQ Mormons. We always felt the tension between publishing what needed to be talked about and keeping our broad range of readers. We always heard from women who thought we were too far out there and women who thought we were not forthright enough.

Jan Shipps gave a talk about *Exponent II* in 1999, comparing the paper to "stealth bombers." She noted that, like those bombers, we had kept under the radar of the Church's notice by letting women's voices speak for themselves rather than taking stances on issues. She says, "What I discovered [in reviewing the content of *Exponent II* was that the articles in the paper] are direct and candid accounts of experience. . . . What the *Exponent II* editors did is to add immeasurably to what Latter-day Saints in the future will be able to discern about what being a Mormon woman was like in the last quarter of the twentieth century."³

The current magazine (no longer a lowly "newspaper") has taken on some controversial topics, but *Exponent II* has tried to remain balanced and fair on both sides of the major issues, publishing articles in women's own words. The publication's greatest effort has been to

3. Jan Shipps, "Exponent II: Mormonism's Stealth Alternative," *Exponent II* 22 (Summer 1999): 28–33.

provide a forum for Mormon women to speak their minds, to share their thoughts, and to help each other by doing so. This has always been what *Exponent II* is all about.

NEGOTIATING CONTROVERSY OVER FORTY YEARS

Judy Dushku

Because we are Mormons, it did not initially occur to us to look at the organization we established (in order to publish our paper) as having features in common with other organizations that normally went through developmental cycles—sometimes characterized by conflict, while at other times by tight cohesion. Trusting that we were about the Lord’s work, we behaved as if we were an arm of the Church, albeit a revolutionary arm, intending to “wag the dog.” With radical ideas about improving women’s lives in order to enhance their abilities and reach their full potential, we proceeded over the years with an expectation of shared single-mindedness—particularly about the importance of the paper’s survival. After publishing our first few issues and getting such positive feedback, we were convinced that we were doing something important, “of good report,” and “praiseworthy.” We spoke of how it felt like a “calling” and we expected it to go on for a long time. We could differ on what went into it, but to the end, we stood by a determination that the paper needed to be preserved. This approach worked extremely well. To those curious about how we got along within *Exponent II* over forty years—when we have attracted to our embrace very strong-willed women coming in at different times and representing different generations and perspectives on what should be our priorities—we can honestly claim that we have not been wracked by factions. We have worked with genuine harmony. Those who have been part of it since the beginning, as well as those who have come and gone and contributed to the paper

for a more limited time, nearly always comment on how genuinely *Exponent II* has worked with one accord. We call it sisterhood.

We admit, however, that there were times when the pot we stirred together came to a boil—even a roiling boil that threatened to topple the whole thing. Since our mission was always to invite divergent points of view on any subject, we did not attempt to silence those suggesting quite different directions for our paper from time to time. It was not unusual for us to learn that couples had moved to Boston so that he could pursue a degree, while *she* would become involved with *Exponent II* with the expectation that this would be her big year to “shake things up.” Some women, of course, came alone with comparable intentions to join us and help us alter the Church or Mormon culture. When *Exponent II* was thus chosen as the scene for large personal ambitions, the impact on us was sometimes unexpected. We admired shakers and movers, and we were reluctant to discourage any woman who came to us wanting to be a part of our community of feminists—any woman wanting to make some important difference. Harnessing big expectations, however, was a task none of us relished. Sadly, some of the things that newcomers to Boston wanted to address had been tried before. “Let’s organize a march on the Church Office Building and not leave until the GA’s come out and talk to us,” or “let’s organize a letter-writing campaign to get garments redesigned,” were examples of some proposed actions. With recurring challenges for an ever-changing editorial board and staff, we worked hard to try to welcome any and every idea, but not run with the ones that we original members sensed might not work. If we could not fully embrace a newly-introduced cause, we tried to channel the energy of the new sister into some other direction that felt more realistic. Yes, we were sometimes accused of being too conservative, but we did well at incorporating fairly disparate project proposals into our group’s overall effort. There have been, however, several issues that briefly threatened to tear the carefully stitched seams that held *Exponent II* together.

One such topic accompanied the 1975 visits from Elders Robert D. Hales and L. Tom Perry, which led to Claudia's resignation. What did her resignation mean for the paper? We were simply told that we must "never seek to counsel the Brethren." Otherwise, they were indifferent to our carrying on. The official blessing we had expected and hoped for was not forthcoming, and our plan to explain that we did not want to become an official organ of the Church, but rather an independent voice for Mormon women, was now made null. We were insulted. Our enormous efforts to launch *Exponent II* were acknowledged as only tolerable. We argued over how to respond. In the end, we took a decisively passive approach and did not respond at all. Any counsel for the Brethren would be indirect.

The next topic that riled us came after exciting successes. With over four thousand subscriptions and upon receiving letters from women around the Church suggesting articles or asking if they could write for us, we realized that our open invitation to be a place where LDS women could be heard without censorship had resonated. This brought to our attention other Mormon feminists, even feminist groups elsewhere. One such group that met in Washington, DC, was Mormons for the ERA. We learned of Sonja Johnson and were eager to know about her and the group that supported expanding legal equality for women and exposing the Church's efforts to stop the ratification of the ERA. To us, Sonja and Mormons for the ERA appeared to be like-minded sisters. We were shocked at how quickly Sonja's efforts brought on the wrath of her bishop and, apparently, Salt Lake leaders. She was threatened with excommunication, and, after public accusations and counter-accusations, she was, indeed, excommunicated in 1979. Since we were an organization that neither endorsed nor condemned any one policy or person, but rather an open forum that encouraged wide-ranging opinions on items of interest to LDS women, we decided to devote a full issue of our paper to Sonja and to her excommunication. We put out an open invitation to anyone to write an opinion piece for *Exponent II*.

We waited for the pieces to come in. They came, and they represented wide-ranging perspectives. We were thrilled to play the very role we had envisioned. Our editors worked to shorten submissions or to help some authors clarify points in their papers, all with the aim of getting every possible point of view into the special “Sonja Johnson Issue” for winter, 1980.¹ Several of us acted as an editorial board and tried to decide how to fairly place the submissions in the paper so as to honor each one and not take a particular side. We felt we were impartial, careful, and respectful. Some of us felt protective of Sonja and argued for a more Sonja-affirming position. Others in our group held the opposite position and felt protective of the Church, and were uncomfortable publishing articles criticizing Sonja’s bishop.

After hours of heated discussion, with some of our group digging in on one side or another, we voted on each article. It was late at night. There were tears, with some accusing others of betraying either our commitment to marginalized women who felt ignored, or our commitment to the Church. But all agreed to accept the will of the majority, and the majority went for publishing all the finely-tuned articles that were ready to print. We went home. But in the early morning, phone calls revealed that two women had pulled their names from the masthead. They did not want to be seen as criticizing the Church. One left the board. I was furious and felt our laboriously achieved group decision had been forsaken. It was suggested that the two who withdrew believed they feared excommunication themselves. Most of us thought this was ridiculous. We removed the dissenting names, and the issue was published. But before it came out, others among us acknowledged fear of punishment. I saw my bishop and asked if I was “safe.” I was, as were the rest, but it had been an upsetting incident. Those who dissented did not return with the same enthusiasm. Afterward, we knew that while we had successfully maneuvered *Exponent II* over a necessary bump in

1. *Exponent II* 6, no. 2 (1980).

the road, we must reaffirm our determination to sincerely consider all feelings, trusting group decisions to include representation of as many positions as possible, but then move on and not let a disagreement or some resignations stop us from publishing. But we should not belittle the feelings or decisions of those who chose not to stand with us. Our decision not to judge those who decided to leave *Exponent II*, whether out of fear of punishment or because they disagreed with a decision the editors made, was made very consciously and has remained a central tenet of our broad group of women. We reaffirm a belief in this way of thinking whenever even a loosely affiliated group of “*Exponent* women” is called to our attention.

In 1987, President Ezra Taft Benson gave an infamous talk about the importance of mothers not working outside the home.² This talk went viral even in an age before things were said to “go viral.” It seemed that everyone soon had a story of someone somewhere who either quit her job after prayerfully asking the Lord for guidance, and then her husband got a promotion, or someone who had quit her job and her family lost everything. We took no stand and tried to portray an *Exponent II* that did likewise—that truly did not take sides—but there was contention. Any of us who continued to work were expected by our “sisters” to be clear that our decision was a personal and individual one. Because we have observed that the divisiveness of the working mother versus stay-at-home mother discourse has been played out all over the Church, often to great destructiveness to ward and family unity, we look back at our decision to not place our paper in one clearly-marked camp as important. And that kept any dissent from dividing the editorial board, which has always had some of each kind of woman on it.

I edited a section of *Exponent II* called “Sisters Speak” where in one issue a topic was presented and readers were invited to submit opinions in short personal responses for the upcoming issue. We had not yet

2. Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Mothers in Zion,” Fireside for Parents, Feb. 22, 1987, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcjeLC88x1Y>.

addressed the subject of abortion. We knew it was time. We used “Sisters Speak” to pose the topic and waited, expecting a variety of experiences and views. We were not disappointed. But, again, there were divisions among us on the board. We had some new people and a different editor and a smaller editorial board, but we still represented a broad cross-section of perspectives that all agreed that we needed an expansive range of writers. Some felt, however, that there were boundaries beyond which we should not go, given our identification as a Mormon women’s paper. We also debated whether or not we could or should allow anonymous submissions. We argued; some women decided to drop off the board, temporarily or permanently, since they felt so strongly for one position or another. We weathered this storm, too, and a deadline forced us to go to press with the hope that where we were in the process would at least satisfy a majority. We made it clear that any questions raised by articles in the paper should be seen as an invitation to any readers who wanted to continue the discussion in later issues. Our abortion issue in 1990 was one that we are most proud of.³ The feedback we got was encouraging, as women who had had abortions told their stories of either relief or regret, and parents of young girls who had had abortions shared their experiences with our readers. Later, readers wrote to us of having gained important new insights from *Exponent II*. I remember one bishop telling me at an MHA conference how the issue on abortion had greatly helped him counsel women about having an abortion with more understanding in his calling. Our “little paper” was having the impact we hoped for.

In the history of feminism in the LDS Church, 1993 was a turbulent year. Elder Boyd K. Packer gave a speech where he labeled feminists, intellectuals, and homosexuals enemies of the Church.⁴ We were

3. *Exponent II* 15, no. 4 (1990).

4. Boyd K. Packer, “Talk to the All-Church Coordinating Council,” May 18, 1993, retrieved from <http://www.zionsbest.com/face.html>.

unapologetically feminists and, more modestly, intellectuals. And most of us felt that the Church's position on homosexuality needed altering. Thus, on all counts we were thrown into the "enemy" camp. In September of that year, friends of *Exponent II* were among the September Six that were excommunicated. Lavina Fielding Anderson had been particularly supportive of our paper since its inception, and most "*Exponent* women" shared views she had articulated in writings for which she was expelled from the Church. Without making Elder Packer's talk a specific item of debate, we invited readers to write opinions about his views, which they did. At that time, *Exponent II* was still one of the few places where those wishing to engage in open discourse on Church-wide issues could expect to be published.

In Boston, where our editorial board and most *Exponent*-affiliated women lived and met frequently, we knew it was neither our style to take on the speech directly, nor to shrink from Elder Packer's designation of us as enemies of the Church. It was time, rather, to take on the now increasingly divisive and unavoidable reality of how there were gay people in and out of the Church who had been maligned in our name. His talk emboldened and motivated us to make our paper a place to deeply explore the as yet unaddressed issue for *Exponent II*: gay people in the LDS Church. We needed to go beyond mere references to gay members and contribute to opening up the Church to a deeper discussion of this powerful reality. Lesbian women who had been board members and subscribers had wondered when we would allow our wonderfully opinionated sisters and readers to weigh in on the subject. In 1996, we pulled it together.⁵ It was one of our finest experiences, in my opinion. Because some of us were gay, it was challenging to push through difficult, emotional meetings where we discussed readers' submissions. But over some months of discussion, we learned a great deal and we determined

5. *Exponent II* 20, no. 1 (1996).

to share what we learned with readers of *Exponent II*. We did it. It was a great issue. I believe we remain united in our pride in that issue.

After celebrating the success of our issue on homosexuality, our unity was challenged by the emergence of different camps within the “core” Boston group over editorial style and vision and necessary skills for editing a paper with a worldwide readership and a complicated set of changes required to get in sync with publishing in the internet world. In 1997, Sue Paxman (later Sue Booth-Forbes), who had been editor since 1984, was ready to retire from the post. While those involved in the paper were fast personal friends, the actual work of putting the paper together had become concentrated into small committees. Unwittingly the women playing various roles in getting the paper out had become somewhat divided from one another. It was clearer and clearer that our largely informal organization suffered from having no rules for who votes on content, positions, and assignments. And the recently discussed topics that had absorbed our mental and emotional energies had exaggerated some differences in perspective in our long-harmonious way of working. So, faced with the challenge of choosing a new editor and moving ahead with *Exponent II*, we argued. Our different points of view on the various decisions we had to make were amplified by the fact that we were now a big enough enterprise that readers from all over the country were offering their opinions on which new directions we should or should not take. Should we become more radical? Did we have a more vital role within the mainstream of the Church? Should we identify regional leaders and rotate the editorship among different Mormon women’s groups around the country? Was the age of the founders causing them to fall behind in identifying critical issues for women facing the turn of the century? Should we fold up our tent, call it a successful day, and go home? There were strong-willed women representing each viewpoint. We scrambled to find an acceptable process for deciding what to do next.

Previous editorial changes had been precipitated by a change in the editor’s life that made her resignation natural, such as the editor

moving away. Sue was changing her life, but not leaving town. The role she would play for *Exponent II* after stepping down was in question. Should she choose her successor, if some board members supported her choice? Should an entirely new person come in as editor with a fresh perspective? The issue of succession became personal and hard to untangle from questions about future content. While it was a stretch to portray the alternative candidates for Sue's replacement like this, one way the dilemma was unfortunately described among ourselves was that each of the two final candidates represented extreme cases in the "married/at-home-mom/outwardly-appearing-establishment" candidate versus "single/childless/working-woman-career-path" candidate. These dichotomous symbolic alternatives are at the core of most Mormon women's culture wars, so this was a frightening conflict to come up within our group. After weeks of arguing and looking for other ways out of this dilemma, we ended up taking a vote at a meeting that was rather capriciously constituted as representative of "the membership." *Exponent II* has never had earned or elected membership, even on the board. When the single, career-path woman got the most votes, another round of debate began about the flawed process. But quietly we all decided that re-making a choice was not worth the greater threat to our unity it would pose for any to pursue what was wanted.

Jenny Atkinson became the fifth editor of our paper. She struggled with a smaller staff, which was convenient to where she lived, and some problems with training new people to move into challenging roles. All this reminded us all of how fragile our organization could be if we were not mindful and eager to bend over backwards to put aside differences and go back to our reliable determination to keep the paper going, even if it meant compromising strong personal views in behalf of consensus. The paper came out. We weathered the storm, and Jenny Atkinson served for three years. Nancy Dredge, a steady manager who had been the second editor, took the helm again, and *Exponent II* emerged healthier than ever. Our few years of turmoil had pushed us to actively recruit and engage a new

generation of women to take on tasks previously performed by founders and other “old timers,” and our paper moved into the twenty-first century.

Nine years later we decided as a group that this new generation of writers, editors, and managers should take over the bulk of all decisions regarding the paper, and Aimee Hickman and Emily Clyde Curtis became co-editors with a pledge to serve for five to six years and to train and put in place their own successors before they wound down their service. We have now changed editors six times since Claudia stepped down and each change involved some pain and an acknowledgement of differences. Usually we did not admit how painful the process was until years after it was over. But to my mind we never lost sight of the fact that we knew we had to change some in order to stay the course and keep publishing a paper that an expanding group of readers would want to read. This year we are changing editors again and it is less difficult. Outgoing editors picked their successors and chose women who have worked closely with the paper in collaboration with them. We are all glad that this process has been made so painless and has left us optimistic. Pandora Brewer has been a vocal part of *Exponent II* for decades and we trust her. Margaret Olson Hemming worked closely with Aimee on art, design, and content for four years.

Our harmony internally, as well as among our readers, is an achievement that we do not take for granted, as we have continually worked at it. At the same time we have worked to include opinions of all who wanted to write for us even when they seemed extreme in some way, and we have even sought out reluctant writers that might otherwise hold back. Some say we have been too cautious, but we continue to flourish and believe it is in large part because we have lived what we preach: to maintain a serious respect for a breadth of perspectives among opinionated LDS women.

DISCOVERING THE WOMAN'S EXPONENT

Susan Whitaker Kohler

As a sixth-generation Latter-day Saint, I've grown up with Church history—it was a frequent topic of conversation whenever our extended family gathered. My second-great-grandfather, George Whitaker, wrote of working as a teamster for Parley P. Pratt when Nauvoo was abandoned in February 1846. Essentially, he'd crossed the ice with a load of Brother Pratt's wives. The story of George Whitaker is well known. Carol Madsen used his story as an introductory chapter in her book *Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail*.¹ Other family histories whetted my appetite for more information about Church history.

While I was at the University of Utah (BA Elementary Education 1962), I took a Mormon history class from T. Edgar Lyon. He was a marvelous teacher whose enthusiasm for Church history was contagious. After admiring my own pioneer ancestors and their stories, I now began reading the stories of others. During the five years (1962–67) that I lived near the University of Chicago with my husband, I found a trove of aging library books on the theme of LDS history that I read with great interest. Among them I read Vardis Fisher's *Children of God* and novels by Virginia Sorensen.² I read as many books as I could find. Another book that I read at this time that altered my world was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.³ In those years I literally felt surrounded by

1. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).

2. Vardis Fisher, *Children of God* (New York: Harper, 1939).

3. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963).

important current events. We lived in a neighborhood just blocks from a lovely LDS chapel that had been sold to a black congregation during the “white flight.” As a result my family had to drive many, many miles to attend a ward in a white suburb. Many of my students in the *de facto*–segregated elementary school in Hyde Park where I taught had older brothers who were being drafted into the Vietnam War. And I voted for Margaret Chase Smith in the 1964 Republican primary. She was a long time senator from Maine who was the first woman to be placed in nomination for the presidency. That year I served as a poll watcher at the request of the Chicago political machine as one of the only registered Republicans in my neighborhood.

In 1969 I moved with my husband and two small sons to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where my husband joined the chemistry faculty at Harvard University. As a faculty wife, I had access to the vast collection of books at Widener Library. The stacks at Widener were open and a paradise for someone who loves books but doesn’t know what she’s after. There on the lower shelves were these large, bound volumes of the *Woman’s Exponent*. The first issue was dated June 1, 1872, a time when my great-grandparents were living in Salt Lake City. Dragging a large volume into an unused carrel at the end of the corridor, I began by looking for family names. Every article I read was fascinating. I couldn’t stop reading. The *Woman’s Exponent* amazed me. These articles were written by articulate, opinionated women about a broad spectrum of women’s issues. These women were feminists! They seemed so forthright, so sure of themselves, so liberated! I couldn’t believe my good fortune. Furthermore, these volumes weren’t stashed away in Widener’s Rare Books Department; they could be checked out and taken home and pored over. I couldn’t wait to share what I’d discovered with my sisters. Here we had a treasure trove of early LDS documents, a bi-monthly newspaper issued from 1872 to 1914 that promoted the points of view of LDS women and discussed issues of current interest to them. The early editors, Lula Greene Richards and Emmeline B. Wells, supported

universal women's suffrage. Their feminist newspaper provided valuable source material and inspiration for us LDS sisters in the Boston area to examine the enormous contribution made by our LDS foremothers. For us all, it was a very stimulating find. Almost a century after the *Woman's Exponent* began publication, the women's movement in our country was just taking off again. Our interests led to the presentation of a series of classes on LDS women's history at the LDS Institute and ultimately to the publication of *Exponent II* in 1974. All of us who participated in *Exponent II's* creation benefited from the experience. I learned from the ground up what it takes to create a sustainable organization: incorporation papers, a bank account, a mailbox, and "clients." I learned the give and take of group discussions and the importance of making decisions. I loved participating in all the *Exponent* activities: managing the subscription list, helping with typing or "paste-up," loading the car with bundles of newspapers to take to the post office. I was also exposed to other points of view and took pleasure in sharing ideas and experiences that resonated with others. I met fascinating people—Leonard Arrington and Juanita Brooks, just to name two—whom I never would have otherwise. However, I was truly blindsided by the negative reactions we began to receive. I couldn't see how anything we were doing in Boston wouldn't be pleasing to our sisters and brothers who lived in other parts of the mission field or in Zion itself. The idea that the phrase "women's liberation" was threatening or insulting was unimaginable to me. My grandmother, Gertrude, was so proud to be in the first generation of American women to vote for a president. That was a right, she reminded me, that was hard fought for and to be taken seriously. She definitely identified with "women's liberation." After her husband left for a two-year mission in 1901, my grandmother, Clara, the mother of an infant child, ran for county recorder in Beaver, Utah, and won. The idea that educated women should be limited to housework at the expense of contributing to broader community interests seemed unreasonable to

me. Why not equal pay for equal work? Why not “women’s liberation”? Why not the ERA?

It was glorious to be in the midst of articulate women who didn’t see themselves as hindered by pursuing education, careers, or motherhood. But in 1975, after seven glorious years in Boston, our family moved to settle in Connecticut. My active involvement with *Exponent II* ended. What a golden period that was!

THE PHYSICAL PROCESS OF CREATION

Carrel Hilton Sheldon

I grew up in the Cambridge Ward. Wonderful student wives were my Mutual teachers. Unmarried graduate students sat around our family dinner table every Sunday. I was raised in Cambridge Mormondom. Latter-day Saint culture, scripture, history, words of the prophets, all were to be studied, examined, explored, pondered, interpreted, reinterpreted. If there was anything “lovely, virtuous, of good report, or praiseworthy” we sought after those things. I was comfortable with it all, and I loved learning, even though I hated school. At my school, kids were mean. Teachers were mean. Rules were stupid. I could hardly stand to attend regularly enough to graduate. But church I loved. To me it was social, spiritual, and intellectual manna. Church was my haven.

Later I met with the Cambridge women’s group and had the best time of my life, discussing women’s issues, studying early Mormon women, looking at our own lives, and feeling the energy of change. There was an important movement for greater equality going on—a movement that affected me personally. It was a thrilling time. And it felt so good that I was sure it was God-inspired. I was a young LDS woman in my early twenties, temple marriage, growing family, and active in the Church. I wanted to do something to contribute to that, something more than be a good wife, a good mother, and a good Church worker. But I still wanted to remain close to home. I saw my part of making the world a better place by working on *Exponent II*.

My wonderful women friends and I had talked about *Exponent II*. It was a big project, but we were the women to do it! Something lit up in me and I knew we had to do it. I couldn’t contribute to the writing or editing or poetry or art; our group clearly had that covered. But I

could do all the other necessary work, the business side. What I didn't know how to do, I would learn. I wanted to share some of what we had in our little Cambridge women's group with other LDS women, and we could do that with *Exponent II*.

There were lots of us, smart and capable women to do the work. We had time—most of us were mothers and homemakers. And we had smart husbands with skills we could use. Connie's husband was a lawyer. My husband was a computer programmer. We'd need them. I had every confidence that we'd discover what we needed to know as we went along. But many were cautious. How would we pay for it? Would anyone buy it? Did we have anything to say? Who would write for us? We wanted to keep the cost low for poor students and student wives, and we could do this if we did all the work we could do ourselves and recruit a few more volunteers. Once convinced the paper would pay for itself, everyone was enthusiastically on board. Creating *Exponent II* felt so right to me. So necessary. So inspired. It felt like I'd been given a divine calling. I had a testimony of *Exponent II*.

We never worried even for a minute that we could possibly offend anyone or needed to be careful. We were sharing our talents. We were good LDS women doing a good thing for good LDS women everywhere. We decided to call ourselves Mormon Sisters Incorporated. We made lists of necessary tasks. We needed to incorporate as a non-profit. We needed an address and mailbox. We needed a checking account. We needed to apply for a bulk mailing permit and learn the rules for mailing our papers. We needed to settle on a print shop and establish a relationship there. We needed a place to paste up the paper and someone who could show us how to do it and what supplies we'd need. We needed to type up the paper and find artwork. We needed to manage a subscription list. We needed to spread the word about our wonderful project. Claudia was soon off collecting content. Laurel and Judy and others were doing writing assignments. Carolyn Peters (Person) produced our cover art. Bonnie Horne and Joyce Campbell managed layout and paste-up.

Connie Cannon worked on our legal filings. Susan Kohler investigated bulk mailings. I opened the bank account and the post office box.

We decided to give away our first issue. We started to collect names and addresses of people we knew, friends and family, people who would hand out copies to their friends. We'd send a bundle to each of them. We asked if we could pass around copies in Relief Society. We asked if we could designate representatives in all the wards of the stake. We asked if we could leave stacks in the ladies' room at the church. We asked *Dialogue* to share their mailing list with us, and we sent copies to all subscribers.

Our first paste-up was on a hot day in June 1974. Mary Ann McMurray was moving soon, so she was willing to have her place trashed. Her backyard was enclosed, so the kids played outside. There was a wading pool and an unlimited supply of popsicles. Mary Ann was pregnant, so she spent her time lying on the floor with her feet up against the wall. Bonnie set up the lightboards, large pieces of frosted glass, in the living room. Each rested on two large wheat cans, part of the McMurrays' year's supply. Lamps were placed on the floor underneath the glass so we could see through the pages of typed text and follow guide markings on the flipchart paper beneath. Bonnie had marked the tops and bottoms of the newspaper page and the front edges of the three columns. We knelt on the rug to lay out and attach the articles on these big sheets of paper.

We later moved paste-up to my big house where it could take over the dining room and spread out to the parlor and kitchen and living room as necessary. My husband built frames to hold the frosted glass so we could stand up to do the paste-up. Children were then banned at paste-up. We worked mostly in the evenings when husbands could tend children. Infants came and slept under the table, waking occasionally to nurse. I kept my family out of the downstairs rooms so all our *Exponent II* work could stay where we left it all week long. The layout crew could drop by and work whenever they were able. The front door was never locked.

The only way to get big or bold or fancy titles was to buy sheets of plastic letters and stick them on, one by one, handing them to the paste-up person working on that page. Every title was done this way, choosing from a variety of sizes and styles.

The typewriter was set up for last-minute edits and corrections. Claudia determined the order of articles in advance, but things could be moved around. Our layout people designed the pages and looked for art as our paste-up people cut and fitted and attached things. We wanted art in advance, but we didn't know our needs until the page was pasted. Linda Hoffman Kimball, one of our artists, sometimes came to paste-up and drew things to fit our spaces as needed. When a page was done, we hung it on the wall so we could stand back and get a good look. I loved to see the pages going up.

It was a busy place with lots of activity. And we felt a real camaraderie as our paper took shape. Paste-up took about a week. If we hadn't all read the articles in advance, sometimes a paste-up person would read aloud as she was pasting and ask what we thought. Could this be misinterpreted? Should this word be changed? Edits would be called for. Sometimes on the themed issues we'd all realize that an important experience or point of view was missing and we knew just who could write it. Quick phone calls requested additional copy tomorrow. Sometimes one of us would just go in the other room and write.

Finally, our art editor would check the "bluelines": the pale blue printed proofs reduced to the size of our finished paper. We found mistakes on the clean blues that couldn't be seen on the relatively messy pasted-up pages. We devoured each new issue of the paper as if we hadn't written, edited, typed, or pasted every word, and proofread it twice. It was delicious!

I loved to tend the mailbox. I was the first to read the "Letters to the Editor." I spread them out across my bed while I sorted and read and re-read them. We got checks to deposit and subscription information for the keypunchers, bills, article submissions, and "Sisters Speak"

responses. The Letters to the Editor were full of heartfelt thanks. Later I would watch the response of other *Exponent II* women as the letters were passed around and read. Those letters told us we were appreciated. They confirmed that our work was important. We did it all and we got better at it. Many people helped with the work and the writing. It felt good!

After we had been publishing for a little more than a year, we heard a rumor that the Church leadership wanted us to stop publishing. I thought it must be a mistake. The rumor was true. One of the Brethren told Claudia to close down the paper. We decided we needed to respond. We each wrote our feelings about the paper and included many of our best readers' letters as well as copies of the paper in an attempt to persuade them of the worthiness of our cause. I thought they would understand and thank us. But that's not what happened. They sent Elder L. Tom Perry out to meet with us all. Since her husband was the stake president, Claudia was told to resign as editor so no one would assume we were an official publication. The rest of us could continue if we chose, but we were cautioned to be careful because the Brethren thought we would mess up sooner or later.

We had long and anguished group discussions. Some thought we should quit. We began to plan the "dead bird" issue, envisioning our last cover art as a crow on its back with its feet in the air, Xs for eyes. But some understood Elder Perry's words as giving us the OK to continue, that they had found nothing wrong with the content. It was obvious that the General Authorities didn't have confidence in us, but we had confidence in ourselves. I still had a testimony of the value of *Exponent II* and felt it my calling to work for our paper. We needed to focus on how we could carry on without Claudia.

So I privately talked with Claudia and asked her who else in our group could edit the paper. Nancy Dredge, a very competent editor, was her answer. I talked to other board members about Nancy's editorial skill and her willingness. *Exponent II* now had name recognition. We had four thousand subscribers and people were sending us articles unsolicited.

This support encouraged us to continue. We remained mystified and saddened by the meeting with the Brethren, but we were thankful that *Exponent II* would go on. We would publish. We would make our good little paper better. And we would be careful.

Planted: An Earthy Approach to Faith and Doubt

Patrick Q. Mason. *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015. 215 pp. Paperback: \$15.99. ISBN: 9781629721811.

Reviewed by Brian Whitney

Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt by Patrick Mason is part of the Living Faith series by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University. Announcing the series, the Maxwell Institute wrote: “Each [book] will contain the voice of a scholar who has cultivated a believing heart while engaging in the disciplines of the Academy.”¹ Other titles in the series have included *Letters to a Young Mormon* by Adam S. Miller, *First Principles and Ordinances* by Samuel M. Brown, and *Evolving Faith* by Steven L. Peck.² Among these titles, Mason’s *Planted* earned the distinction of being published jointly with Deseret Book, making it a natural follow-up to the critically-praised *The Crucible of Doubt* by Terryl and Fiona Givens.³ *Planted* adds to a growing body of Mormon literature that directly engages topics of faith, doubt, and reason. A historian respected for his scholarship on anti-Mormon

1. Blair Hodges, “Announcing the ‘Living Faith’ book series,” Neal A. Maxwell Institute Blog (Jan. 3, 2014), retrieved from <http://mi.byu.edu/announcinglivingfaith/>.

2. Adam S. Miller, *Letters to a Young Mormon* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2013); Samuel M. Brown, *First Principles and Ordinances: The Fourth Article of Faith in Light of the Temple* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2014); Steven L. Peck, *Evolving Faith: Wanderings of a Mormon Biologist* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2015).

3. Terryl L. Givens and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014).

prejudice during the nineteenth century,⁴ Mason serves as the Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University and has been popular among national media outlets as a public authority on Mormonism.

Deviating from dispassionate academic writing, *Planted* offers a pastoral dialogue, empathetically conceding that Mormons are not immune to skepticism toward religious institutions in the “secular age” (13). In the introduction, Mason distinguishes between those who feel “switched off” and those who feel “squeezed out.” The switched off, Mason writes, “[a]re those who encounter troubling information online or somewhere else, usually regarding our history or doctrine” (2) while the squeezed out “feel alienated by things like the dominant political conservatism among members . . . or the sense that church membership is an all-or-nothing proposition” (3). Those who are switched off may be triggered more by historical issues, such as polygamy or racism, while those who are squeezed out may be triggered more by contemporary cultural issues, such as support for feminism or LGBT equality. Mason clarifies that his approach to doubt is from a position of belief and certainty but humbly admits that “certain aspects of the church’s past and present” still trouble him (10). Mason’s tone of humility and candidness throughout is what sets *Planted* apart on issues of faith and doubt and distinguishes the writing as pastoral rather than apologetic.

Planted can be divided up into “acknowledgments” and “admonitions,” with the first two-thirds of the book focused on the reality of pain, struggle, and the issues that cause them. Mason normalizes doubt, acknowledging that it “seems deviant” within Mormonism (17), but quipping that “[h]onest doubt is not just a phase, like teenage acne or disco” (19). At the same time, Mason’s stance is that knowledge will always be imperfect and that members must learn to both “live with loose ends” and “have hard conversations” in our present age (23). In the chapter titled “Foolishness

4. See Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

and Scandal,” Mason admits, “Mormonism does demand a willingness to appear the fool in the face of exclusivist rationalism” (57), which is not to suggest that belief is foolish but rather that it is the nature of religion to depend upon belief in the extraordinary. Nuancing *The Crucible of Doubt’s* call to “commitment that is born of faith freely chosen rather than certainty compelled by evidence,”⁵ Mason reasons, “There are many people for whom faith or doubt appear more as an unearned inheritance than a personal choice” (33). Acknowledgments such as these lend a pragmatic earthiness to *Planted*, showing that Mason is not afraid to dig his hands into sacred soil that other writers may fear too hallowed to stir.

Mason makes his most profound plea in the chapter “In All Patience and Faith.” Following two chapters on candid approaches to Church history, the topic shifts to prophetic fallibility. Mason asks, “Can a prophet be inspired and in error, even on the same day or in the same sermon?” (110); “Can I believe that God leads the church through flawed prophets?” (113); and, profoundly, “Can I forgive prophets for their faults, even their occasionally severe ones, and be patient with my brothers?” (113). Following this, *Planted* shifts in tone from acknowledgment to admonition. Mason declares, “We do not place our ultimate hope in prophets and priesthood leaders. We do not place our ultimate hope in the church. We place our ultimate hope in Christ and his atonement” (125). “The church,” he states, “is not a final product delivered straight from heaven to earth”; rather, it is “inseparable from, and defined by, the lives and actions of its members” (135). Using as a blueprint Eugene England’s influential personal essay “Why the Church is as True as the Gospel,” Mason spends the remaining pages of *Planted* calling for a local-centric approach to Church membership, with the attendant challenges and joys of participating in a local congregation.

Where *The Crucible of Doubt* is poetic and grounded in romanticism, *Planted* is pragmatic and applicable to a postmodern age of skepticism,

5. Givens and Givens, *Crucible of Doubt*, 144.

thus making it a nice complement. Those who may have found the Givenses' prose too lofty may find Mason's utilitarian style more relatable. Significantly, the publication of *Planted* shows a continued interest from Deseret Book, as well as scholars, to reach out to members who may find themselves marginalized due to their sincere questions and doubts. I recommend *Planted* for those who need an empathetic voice and those who want to develop an empathetic voice for others.



[Walking the Narrow Path](#)

Patrick Q. Mason. *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015. 215 pp.
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Reviewed by Brad J. Tharpe

The following comments were delivered at a book launch event held on the campus of Claremont Graduate University on January 16, 2016. This version retains the oral nature of those original remarks.

While reading *Planted* one evening, I turned to my wife, Sara, and said, "I think that we are in the book." I was reading an anecdote that Patrick shares near the end about some non-LDS Christian friends who attend a ward Christmas party. As they observe people talking and children running around, the friends comment on how much they admire the community because it feels like a real family (170). I remember making those comments. The reason that we did so is that, in our nearly four years in Claremont, Sara and I have not only observed, but we have experienced, the authentic connection and the faithful commitment of the Mormon community. Whether it be working alongside the stake president on the Claremont Interfaith Council, observing the work of the

LDS Institute director with Claremont students, attending a ward event, or talking with friends while our children misbehave, we have seen and been embraced by this engaged, compassionate, and thoughtful family of faith. Because of this experience and because I find his work to be so essential and timely, I am very grateful to Patrick for the opportunity to engage with this powerful text, and I am privileged this evening to be here with you. Thank you.

Though written primarily to the Mormon community, Patrick states in the second sentence that some of what this book addresses is “applicable to all people of faith trying to chart a course in the modern world, so other people are welcome to listen in” (1). As I read this book, I attempted to do just that—to “listen in” for the similarities, for the patterns, and for the approaches that are applicable to my own faith community. I want to briefly share some of what I heard and how it connects with my own observations and experiences.

To follow Patrick’s lead, some self-disclosure here is important: I am a mainline Protestant Christian, an ordained Baptist minister. As I often say to others, particularly once they pick up on my accent, I am a Baptist from the south, but I am not a Southern Baptist. The overall arc of my story is not uncommon. I was raised in a rural southern cultural milieu in which everyone was Christian. Out of my own experience as a college student, I was attracted to, then studied, then served, in mainline Protestantism. The vast majority of my work has been done in higher education, working with both undergraduate and graduate students in secular institutions. Though rooted in my own tradition, my role has always been to support persons of all faith traditions or no faith tradition. I read *Planted* from this perspective, which is shaped by my own community and my experience with college students. Like Patrick, however, I hope that many of the patterns I describe can apply to other traditions and communities as well.

As I have “listened in” through this text, I feel that I have gained a good deal of information and insight; I feel that I have learned more

about Mormon theology, polity, Christology, and ecclesiology. Though I have a long way to go, this book helped me learn how to ask better questions of my Mormon friends, colleagues, and students. The true gift of this book to me, however, is not the content around any particular set of issues but in the method that it clearly articulates. Here, Patrick offers us not so much a set of answers to difficult issues as he does a strategy, a method, an approach, for being people of faith, for being a religious community, in the modern world. He encourages us, he teaches us, he may even be admonishing us, to make room for doubt, for faith struggle, in our families and churches. He calls on us to ask, *How can we make ourselves and our communities more embracing while remaining true to our sense of God's calling and to the Church?* He is asking us, with integrity, to open our arms to those who are asking deep and difficult questions, and he outlines for us a method, an embracing approach, for doing so.

The first place of deep resonance that I find in this embracing approach is accepting, even valuing, doubt. In many ways, Patrick's affirming, but not glorifying, view of doubt is the foundation for this book and his methodology. He notes that some people have a kind of gift of faith that does not include major questions or times of doubt. Others, however, struggle with faith, particularly at various times in life. After making several persuasive arguments, he states, "Doubt is thus less a problem in need of a solution than a common part of the mortal experience that should, like all things, be treated with charity and ultimately consecrated to God" (7).

In college chaplaincy, what I often felt was my most sacred task was to sit down with an individual to discuss their faith struggles, to walk with them through times of doubt and deep questioning. After listening, my first response is to offer empathy; experiences of doubt can be painful and displacing. My next response, however, is to value and affirm their questions, and I believe that God does as well. For people to ask questions, to engage fully in a difficult experience of doubt, means that they are taking their faith, and by extension taking God, seriously. An experience

of doubt means that one believes enough, and more importantly *cares* enough, to ask difficult questions. When a father is asking Jesus to heal his son in the Gospel of Mark, the worried parent cries out, “I believe, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). As in that story, an honest and faithful statement by one who is struggling can lead to healing and wholeness.

In this context of accepting and even affirming doubt, Patrick uses Richard Bushman’s aptly-named categories for what might inspire or encourage doubt: people can become “switched off” or “squeezed out” (2). Let me take just a few moments to explore with you how I see these overlapping categories embodied in my experience and in my community.

As Patrick describes them, persons who are “switched off” have been turned off by a part of the Church’s history or doctrine. These persons learn new information or have new experiences that cause them to question the Church’s teachings or past. For my broader community, persons get “switched off” for a number of reasons. For instance, many people struggle to align the methods and conclusions of science with their understanding of Christianity; this includes, of course, issues around creation and evolution. More subtly and often more substantively, however, apparent contradictions between science and faith lead persons to ask deep questions about the authority of scripture and the role and place of humanity in the world. Another major issue that “switches off” people is the apparent exclusivity of faith and the potential of eternal damnation. Someone meets a sincere, loving person of another religious tradition and sets this experience against an understanding of the Christian tradition that places such people in eternal punishment. Lastly, and perhaps common to us all, is the question of the existence of evil. Often around the time someone is in college or graduate school, they are experiencing, or are being confronted with, the reality of suffering for the first time. Perhaps a parent or close family member or friend dies. Perhaps they put themselves in a situation where they see real people, not just images on a screen, in deep, deep suffering. This not only inspires questions

about “why bad things happen to good people” but also questions about God’s sovereignty and God’s ability to work in the world.

Often connected to being “switched off,” doubt is inspired or encouraged in others because they are “squeezed out.” People who are “squeezed out” do not feel that they “fit in” in the religious community. This is often, though not always, about more present issues than past issues. Here I think the difficulties span many religious traditions. To name just a few: there are deep divisions over the role of women, the nature of marriage and the family, and questions about how to minister to and with our LGBTQ sisters and brothers. In my experience, however, a less-discussed divisive force that “squeezes” persons out is the perceived and sometimes real correlation of political ideology with a religious community. This linkage, again sometimes real and sometimes perceived, between religious belief, church affiliation, and political persuasion has alienated many. When others, including fellow church members, assume that you are a Republican because you are a member of one church or a Democrat because you are a part of another, people often find it difficult to feel that they have a place in church.

In addition to persons who are “switched off” or “squeezed out,” the embracing approach that Patrick lays out for us applies to another growing group: those who were never “switched on” or who were never “in.” When I first started working in college chaplaincy, most of the students who did not identify with a faith tradition were reacting against something; they were rejecting, or had been rejected by, a set of religious beliefs or a religious community. They doubted something or Someone. Now, more and more, students aren’t rejecting a faith or religious community; they simply don’t see why faith is important at all. Neither they nor their families have been religiously engaged in any way. Their only impressions are formed by broader media influences, and those often aren’t positive images. Faith or participation in a religious community is not even something that they have seriously considered; it isn’t a salient question in their lives. For them, faith isn’t a struggle; it

is simply irrelevant. Patrick's embracing approach, his methodology for walking alongside those who are experiencing doubt while maintaining one's own integrity, is applicable both to those who are "switched off" or "squeezed out" *and* to those who were never "on" or "in."

In addition to what he describes explicitly, however, there are two underlying dimensions of his book that I think are helpful and necessary when dealing with those experiencing doubt or those who haven't even considered faith. The first is that faith asks everything of us. Religious commitment should be the center around which all of our lives are built. Faith calls us to engage our lives fully in following God and living in service to others. Too often, faith gets relegated to one dimension of wellness—it is only as important as eating well or exercising. Particularly in my own community, we have tried to accommodate people's schedules and needs so much that we hesitate to ask too much of them. Faith is so much more than a wellness practice or an activity to place alongside the swim team, the orchestra, or Sunday football. Our faith commitment should be the very core of our lives. None of us does this perfectly (at least I do not), but the call of God is one that demands it all. God asks nothing less from us than everything.

Patrick illustrates this point many times in the text but perhaps never more explicitly than when discussing some of the people who have influenced his own faith and displayed deep commitment to the Church. For instance, consider Richard Bushman's statement, "What I believe is not distinct from what I am" (138) and Lowell Bennion's focus on practical theology and the interplay of theology and religion. In these places and many others, Patrick reminds us that faith is the very framework for life and should be our starting and ending point. The all-encompassing nature of committed faith—the idea that faith comes with costs—can be attractive to people and maybe particularly to young people. In my experience with students, they want a higher calling; they want something to which they can give themselves fully. The Church should be and could be just that.

The second underlying and strong dimension of Patrick's book that I see as essential to this embracing approach is to create contexts for "beholding." Like the all-encompassing nature of faith, people who are struggling with doubt or those who have never even explored faith want and need to behold—to behold the wonder, the greatness, the mystery, the awesomeness of God. In our often hyper-rational, over-medicated, media-numbed world, some of us need to behold again; others of us need to behold for the first time the Great I AM, the Alpha and the Omega. Barbara Brown Taylor, a renowned Episcopal priest, professor, and preacher, describes beholding in her book *Leaving Church*. She states, "Whether the narratives starred hayseed shepherds confronted by hosts of glittering angels or desert pilgrims watching something like a dove descend upon a man in a river, . . . Christian faith seemed to depend on beholding things that were clearly beyond belief."⁶ You may have heard some of these words:

"Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Jesus." (Matthew 1:23)

"Behold, there came wise men from the east." (Matthew 2:1)

"Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

After placing a crown of thorns on the head of the Savior, Pontius Pilate says, "Behold the man!" (John 19:5)

In his book, particularly when he speaks of the necessity and wonder of hope, Patrick leads us to behold the Source of all hope (126ff). When he writes of the centrality of Christ and Christ's sacrifice, he leads us to behold the Crucified One (119ff). Though present more subtly, beholding undergirds the belief and belonging that helps us all to be rooted, to be planted, and it can help others to do the same.

In conclusion, the young people with whom I have worked long for a connection with others that is deeper than having a photo or post

6. Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 109–10.

“liked” online. They long for an affirmation of their worth larger than their grades or their résumé. They long for something that will ask more of them than their money, their fleeting attention, or a good review. The people with whom I have worked of any age, and frankly of any background, want a place where they can fully engage the complexities of belief, they want a community in which they can belong without having to hide a part of who they are, they want a vision and a mission that will demand nothing less than everything, and they want to behold something or Someone so wondrous that it will take all of this life and eternity to stand in The Presence.

In this book, Patrick is inspiring and instructing us to walk “the narrow path”—not a path between two theological or ideological poles, but the faithful path of being true to one’s self, true to one’s community, true to God, and yet able to fully embrace others. As one who is striving to follow Jesus, I pray that my community and I will have the wisdom, courage, and passion to follow this narrow path as well.



[Mormonism from Varied Fictional Perspectives](#)

William Morris. *Dark Watch and Other Mormon-American Stories*. A Motley Vision, 2015. 124 pp. E-book: \$2.99. ISBN: 1230000389716.

Reviewed by Jonathan Langford

Short story collections are a medium well suited to explorations of Mormonism as a culture and what it means to be Mormon. They allow for diversity. They impose few limitations. They permit an author to change focus and perspective as desired, zoom in on specific details,

follow a subject for just long enough to see him or her in an interesting context and then cut away.

William Morris's collection of sixteen Mormon-themed short stories (some of them very short indeed) takes full advantage of this potential. Varying in setting, style, and genre; with male and female, young and old, human and possibly alien/digital protagonists; and mostly without shared characters or settings, there is not much these stories have in common with one another. Even the Mormon element varies widely, from mainstream small town—Utah in the 1970s—to a dark-future setting where the Church is an outlawed body that must remain hidden even to its own members.

What all (or nearly all) of these stories have in common is that they are concerned with what it means to be Mormon and, in particular, the tension between the requirements of Mormon faith and competing identities and demands, whether of the academic world, middle school social hierarchy, or a post-apocalyptic “confederation” where Mormon belief must be explicitly renounced. All of the stories are about liminal experiences—except that the focus is not on moving into or out of Mormonism but on maintaining a sometimes-precarious position of holding on to both identities.

The collection starts with “Warning,” the story of a preteen accompanying his father, a lawyer practicing in a small town in Utah, on a home teaching visit that he slowly realizes has actually been arranged as a chance for his father to try to persuade the father in the family they're visiting to pay their taxes:

My father moved on to the threat of losing city services, including those of the volunteer fire department. I was astounded. It wasn't like my dad to be quite this forceful. I had never seen him try to scare people before. In every situation—at church, at work, at home, out in public—he was always the voice of calm and reason, of civility and dignity. . . . I felt sorry for him for lowering himself to such a coarse confrontation—for sullyng his integrity by enacting this argument in front of his son and in front of this man's family.

For the narrator, the incident provides both an introduction to a world-view that “seem[s] very foreign” to him as well as a new perspective on his father. At the same time, we as readers are invited to consider how gospel ministering somehow gets mixed up with other, more ambivalent agendas.

Particularly noteworthy in this 1,400-word vignette is its communication of the main character’s developing sense of social rules and the complex world of conflicting expectations. Here is what he writes about a daughter his own age in the family they are visiting:

Her family was poor and uneducated and proud. Therefore, in the cruel calculus of small town sexual politics, she was someone not to be encouraged romantically because the proper thing for someone of my status—the smart, shy kid who had the slightest hint of big city sophistication—was to admire from afar the unapproachable rich girls who were smart but not bookish, the ones who wore jeans and skirts instead of homemade dresses, who wore their hair feathered and with bangs.

Such recognitions are precocious for a (probably) eleven-year-old. And yet while the language is that of a highly literate adult narrator looking back on his childhood experiences, the perceptions are spot-on for the preteen Morris has created. Such skill in characterization is a hallmark of these stories, most of which feature characters who are intelligent, reflective, and aware of the ambiguities in their own faith.

Perhaps the most interesting realistic/contemporary story in this collection is “Lost Icons,” in which the narrator—Elder Esplin, a missionary in Romania—befriends Colin Petrescu, an “Irish-Romanian art historian” who is obsessed with the history of a peasant mystic icon-maker. At one point, Esplin and his companion enlist other missionaries to help Petrescu illicitly use Church equipment to copy documents for his research. After his mission, Esplin discovers—to his surprise—that following a miraculous healing, Petrescu joined the Church and (apparently) gave up his obsession after admonishment by a local priesthood leader.

The story fits well in the genre of missionary fiction, featuring the kinds of off-the-wall characters, zany experiences, and warm connections

many of us cherish from our time in the mission field. What raises this above the level of typical missionary vignette is the missionary's own conflicted feelings about Brother Petrescu's conversion, a nagging sense of loss for part of what had made him previously so unique. And yet if Petrescu is content, what right does Esplin have to wish otherwise for him?

It's perhaps a sign of a misspent graduate program in English that I find myself reading into "Lost Icons" questions about authenticity, privilege, and missionary work as cultural imperialism. Even if Morris didn't intend to raise these issues, it's a credit to the story's realism, complexity, and power of engagement that it did so for me.

And then there are the science fiction stories.

Morris's realistic stories (the first eleven out of sixteen in this collection, by my count) are well-crafted, satisfying, and insightful: the kind of thoughtful fare you might offer to anyone who is open to high-quality Mormon fiction. His science fiction is more challenging. A prime example is "PAIH" (short for "Praying Always In Heart"), which consists mostly of exchanges (real-time and electronic) among four "undercover" Mormons—two couples who appear to have banded together for mutual legal and economic support. The partnership faces difficulties because one of them is likely to lose his job, endangering their chances to have children. The best answer for them is to find another couple, also undercover Mormons, to join them in their partnership. But given the society in which they live, the chances for this seem slim and even trying to do so involves real (though mostly unspecified) risks.

The story is rife with potentially jarring details. One of the couples is gay. The inspiration to seek out another couple comes while attending a "pop-up temple." The story is interspersed with selections from *A Practical Guide for the Upwardly Mobile Mormon American*, a samizdat-style underground publication. An early scene features characters getting excited over the arrival of a sexbot, which they purchase solely for the sake of maintaining appearances in case they have to invite outsiders into their home. Late in the story, a member of one of the partnerships

communicates with the others about a couple she has encountered who might be willing to join them:

“I found a couple. Both high earners. Broke off from other partners recently.”

“Wow. The rare of the rare. Good find, Kat. But: how does that help us?”

“They are ready to prodigal. Re-covenant.”

“You sure? They could be scandalmongers. Plants. etc.”

“HG has confirmed.”

On the one hand, the language here is chatty, in-group, almost irritating in its apparently gratuitous insider-isms, such as the use of “prodigal” as a verb. Most jarring is that abbreviated invocation of the Holy Ghost in the last line. And yet that same line drives home for me the underlying seriousness of the characters’ attempts to bring spiritual reality into the aggressively secular idiom of their lives.

I first took this story for a clever science-fictional parody on Mormons trying to “pass” in an increasingly secular and materialistic world. Reading further, I realized that while this may be part of what Morris is doing, this particular story is also about real people in a seriously conceived future society where membership in the Church is genuinely perilous doing their best to live their faith in secret.

Morris’s experience as a missionary in former Soviet-Bloc Romania (and as a Mormon studying literature in Berkeley and San Francisco) may underlie his fascination with the theme of undercover belief and “passing” in a hostile culture, which features strongly in these stories. For example, in “Dark Watch,” a Mormon couple has to explicitly renounce their beliefs in order to keep assisting Mormons traveling to where (rumor has it) the Church may still exist in the tops of the Andes mountains. In “Release,” this is taken further, to a setting where membership in the Church must be concealed even from the conscious knowledge of its own members in order for the Church to survive.

Whether the strangeness and unlikelihood of these settings get in the way of enjoying the stories will depend largely on the individual taste of the reader. Case in point: while I found “Release” both powerful and heartwarming, three other members of my family (all science-fiction readers) found it too far-fetched. One, for example, thought that by acting subconsciously on its members, the Church in this story denies agency in much the same way as the hostile state—or Satan.

This illustrates why Mormon science fiction is such a fraught endeavor. Even among those of us who like science fiction and have no problem thinking about alternate futures and realities, the Church itself is to some extent a set value—one that can’t change in fundamental ways before it stops being the organization to which we owe our allegiance. (Which in itself raises interesting questions in light of our belief in ongoing revelation.)

And so I have to say, in the end, that while I think this is a very good, finely crafted collection, and one well worth reading, the science fiction stories in particular will appeal only to a subset of readers. Still, at \$2.99 (at the time of this writing), it’s certainly worth a try. And if a particular story doesn’t appeal to you, skip to the next one.



[A Cluttering of Symbol and Metaphor](#)

David G. Pace. *Dream House on Golan Drive*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2015. 300 pp. Paperback: \$24.95. ISBN: 9781560852414.

Reviewed by Eric W. Jepson

How to represent lived religious experience without either underplaying its reality or slipping into the magical-fantastical is an ongoing difficulty in Mormon literature. David G. Pace, in his novel *Dream House on Golan*

Drive, has decided to lean hard into that latter option. The story is narrated by Zedekiah, one of the Three Nephites assigned to watch over young Riley Hartley. What makes Riley special enough to deserve this honor is never clear. Also unclear is just how much of an “honor” it is to have Zedekiah acting as, essentially, his guardian angel. Although loyal to Riley, Zedekiah is not as pious as one might expect of an immortal servant of Jesus Christ. In fact, far from pious, Zedekiah has become almost agnostic on questions of right and wrong, sin and righteousness. He mostly just observes, and when he does engage, it’s largely to provide Riley (or someone close to Riley) with a sense of the sublime, of the eternal, of being loved. But while these experiences may strengthen Riley for moments or years, faith itself remains fragile. Even Zedekiah, who sat at the feet of Jesus, cannot keep his relationship with deity as defined as it once was. Current knowledge is a weak predictor of future faith.

Perhaps Latter-day Saint thought itself is to blame. Throughout the novel, the characters who embrace personal revelation as their right are the characters most likely to run into difficulty with the Church. Riley’s father is a professional preacher who has built up a cult of personality around himself as he serves in student stakes and earns a living speaking at Know Your Religion. He emphasizes LDS reliance on personal communication with God, yet when he publishes a book to this effect, he is confronted by the Church hierarchy. He is able to accept this chastisement and eventually becomes a General Authority himself.

Other characters are not so successful at harmonizing God’s will as revealed to them and God’s will as revealed to the Church. Lucy, for instance. Lucy comes into Riley’s life when she receives a revelation that she should live with the Hartley family. As Riley’s father’s teachings are part of the reason she follows this prompting, the family can hardly tell her no even though their home is already packed with kids surnamed Hartley. While Lucy lives with the family, she persists in asking difficult questions and forcing them to either confront or bury disparities between correlated truths and individually-received truths. Later, after marrying

and moving to California, Lucy receives revelation to engage in sexual relations with another man—a spiritual husband. Additionally, Riley’s own wife, Dina, receives a revelation to leave him. For a religious people defined largely (within the confines of the novel) by their successful families, these aberrations carry weight.

Whether personal revelation or hierarchical adherence is ultimately more important, the nature of characters’ faith is represented by their misaligned sexualities: Riley’s adolescent dabblings in homosexuality, Riley’s never-recognized love for Lucy, Lucy’s polyandry, Riley’s sister Candace’s sexual attraction to her father—a man whose sexual charisma draws in every woman in the novel, least obviously his wife, the former Miss Utah. Indeed, were it not for their ten kids, there’s barely evidence of attraction between them.

Everyone is faking it, sexually speaking, and hoping no one will notice (most of all themselves). But everyone is also faking it religiously in hopes that playing their allotted role will lead to a greater certainty within that role. This is perhaps most obvious in the novel’s conflation of temple ordinances and sexual experience. The connection is made explicit a few times, such as when Riley’s non-Mormon father-in-law recites rumors of Mormons having sex upon the altars of the temple, or in this description of Riley’s visit to a massage parlor/brothel:

“And there was someone behind a curtain who reached for you,” I say.

“Yes.”

“Like in the temple back home . . .” (293–94)

The massage-parlor-as-religious-rite performs on multiple levels. For one, Riley’s patronage leads to his contracting a venereal disease that he shares with his new wife; he plays Eve in their relationship, bringing her a fruit that means they will surely die. He also, eventually, requests a male masseur—in one respect a signal of his growing spiritual failure, but equally a sign that he is returning to the Edenic glory of his first experiences with friends in the home he grew up in.

Finally, this discussion of being brought through the brothel curtain allows Zedekiah to reintroduce Riley to temple ordinances on the New York City subway. This final scene is a massing of symbols as Pace removes Riley from realism and plunges him into the supernatural. As Riley and Zedekiah interview on the subway car, Riley sheds layers of armor. Some of the armor seems real (“the backpack Riley is wearing as a breastplate” [291]) and some is more clearly figurative (“chain mail gloves” [292]). What does Riley’s shedding of this armor mean? Is it the armor of righteousness? Is it the barriers he’s set up between himself and his faith?

Riley believes he is dying—why else would a supernatural figure be testing his knowledge of sacred handshakes?—and he is still Mormon enough to see that it is right and proper to leave his life in this way. But he’s unable to follow the ritual exactly as he learned it, and Zedekiah does not correct him or steer him away from confronting fear and anger. Which is not surprising, as we have seen Zedekiah observe both temple ordinances and sexual encounters without particular emotion—have too many years as an immortal robbed him of his passion? He watches the barely-pubescent Riley swap handjobs with the same (dis)interest as he does Riley and Dina’s first sexual encounter after their marriage. That latter scene is sanctified, however, by Zedekiah’s being convinced to turn away by a fellow immortal. The encounter begins with the sweetness expected of Mormon innocents but is also the final stage of months of contained animal lust. Only by ceasing to observe them can it become something beautiful rather than just another crude, terrestrial, human act. Beauty, it seems, can only exist in mystery.

Zedekiah does not turn away in Riley’s final scene—in fact, he is a participant—but his description of these moments is layered with so much symbolism and uncertainty and confusion that even the most painful honesty is obscured and we can’t know exactly what we are seeing or what it means. Whether this explosion of symbol and metaphor is intended to reveal meaning or to sidestep it, what’s certain is that

Zedekiah, at least, is feeling something. Whether Riley is lost or saved is only a question of the moment, for this moment too will move inexorably into the distant past and we will again have to find comfort in the simplicity of Church or seek more complex answers in the uncertainty of speaking directly with God.

Ultimately, *Dream House on Golan Drive* suggests that life may have meaning, but it hesitates to take a stand as to what that meaning might be. This hesitation comes off not as a pleasing ambiguity or a compelling question but as a kind of wariness against taking a stance. The cluttering of the final pages with weighty symbols and obscured emotions, then, is the literary version of having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.



[More than a Different Color](#)

W. Paul Reeve. *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 352 pp. Hardcover: \$34.95. ISBN: 9780199754076.

Reviewed by Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp

Three decades after the LDS Church lifted the priesthood ban on African Americans, scholars are offering readers a host of new studies that address the legacy of racial thought and practice in the LDS Church. One of the latest and finest is Paul Reeve's *Religion of a Different Color*, a work that traces Mormon understandings of race as they developed in the nineteenth century. What sets this book apart is that Reeve is not simply concerned with how Mormons thought about other races, although that plays a role here. Nor is he focused simply on how

Mormons incorporated racial minorities into their midst. Instead, he uses the lens of whiteness studies to explore the concomitant Mormon desire to be categorized as “white” and the strivings of other Americans to label them as less than equal racial partners (“non-white”). In other words, he reveals the mechanisms through which Mormons simultaneously sought acceptance into a mainstream or “white” culture and differentiated themselves from Indians, African Americans, and others that they deemed their inferiors.

If this sounds complicated, it is, but no more so than the intermixture of racial understandings articulated by early Mormon leaders. Reeve employs an intricate narrative structure to illuminate the tangled, contradictory skein of racial thinking and practice that characterized the first decades of Church growth. He details the birth of Mormonism within a new nation obsessed with the specter of cultural and physical decline. Virtuous citizens, inspired by classical republican ideals, assiduously policed racial borders, and with the opening of western territories and increasing sectional strife over slavery, their fears of moral declension caused by “race-mixing” increased dramatically. Mormons, meanwhile, moved the other way, incorporating American Indians into their sacred worldview and leaving room for racial others in a cosmological hierarchy. Such beliefs had dramatic social consequences. As Reeve explains it, reports of early Mormon willingness to “ingratiate” themselves with American Indians and even African Americans through strategic alliances, including sexual ones, only confirmed for outsiders that the Saints were “beyond the pale” of civilization. Whether such accounts were true was beside the point (although Reeve provides evidence that some probably were true, as in the case of tolerating or even promoting interracial marriage); what mattered was the appearance of openness to boundary-crossing that many other whites found abhorrent.

The meatiest section of the book provides an outstanding narrative of shifting and divergent views within the Mormon community about African Americans and their legal and theological status within

the community. Digging through multiple layers of Church history, using accounts that often recorded events that had occurred years earlier, Reeve does an outstanding job of untangling the combinations of scriptural justification, historical interpolation, and speculation threaded throughout Church leaders' speeches in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1852, in a series of three speeches, Brigham Young clarified the second-class status of Utah's African Americans before the territorial legislature, effectively implementing both a "servant code" (a form of indenture that applied to white debtors as well) and the priesthood ban. While the US Congress would nullify the servant code within ten years, the priesthood ban within the Church lasted over a century, becoming the *de facto* position on race. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century a process of willful forgetting would wipe clean the memory of early battles.

While clarity with regard to the Mormon embrace of white racist attitudes may have been resolved, aligning the LDS Church more closely with its segregationist critics, the story of external condemnation did not end there. The nearly simultaneous public announcement of polygamy only affirmed Mormon barbarism in the eyes of outsiders and encouraged mainstream Americans to "racialize" Mormons as non-white (despite their physical appearance). Just as the institutional Church, then, fell in line with prevalent white racial views, the full exposure of plural marriage moved the bar yet again, distancing the Saints from the assimilation they sought. The final chapters of Reeve's book focus attention on "Oriental" others and the eventual acceptance of Mormons in the twentieth century into the status of being suitably white—although ironically, their ultimate acceptance, in a post-Civil Rights Movement nation, would later be seen as evidence of their backwardness. By the time Mitt Romney was labeled by one prominent critic as "the whitest white man to run for president in recent memory" (271–72), the play on words was no longer a term of endearment.

There is much to praise here. *Religion of a Different Color* traverses an admirable array of historical fields, including US western history,

Mormon studies, and race theory. It demonstrates, to masterful effect, the author's abundant scholarly strengths: careful reading and consideration of archival sources (including some that have, to my knowledge, never been examined this closely before); clear exposition of major themes; graceful and imaginative historical writing; and an attention to the ethical dimensions of his subject matter that injects the work with humility and generosity. Equally valuable is the skill with which he parses the various elements of racist practice: racism was never a unitary concept, his story explains. There were multiple iterations and gradations of racial thought to which Mormons subscribed, from anti-slavery, on the one hand, to Brigham Young's advocacy of "Utah slavery" (what he called "good wholesome servitude," a form closer to the gradual emancipation laws of northern states that Young insisted was more humane than southern chattel slavery), to the question of the relevance of legal and economic status, to sacred standing within the Mormon priesthood. Reeve is exceptionally careful in outlining the precise role played by Brigham Young in the priesthood ban on African Americans, but he does not shy away from making clear the leader's culpability in setting the ban into place. This careful contextualization raises intriguing questions: Would racial restrictions eventually have been imposed if sectional hostilities in Missouri had not blunted anti-slavery sentiments within the Church? At what point did Brigham Young's thinking about race shift, and why? Was there any viable alternative to the collective forgetting of an earlier era of relative racial equality within the Church, or are such lapses in communal memory necessary components of historical change?

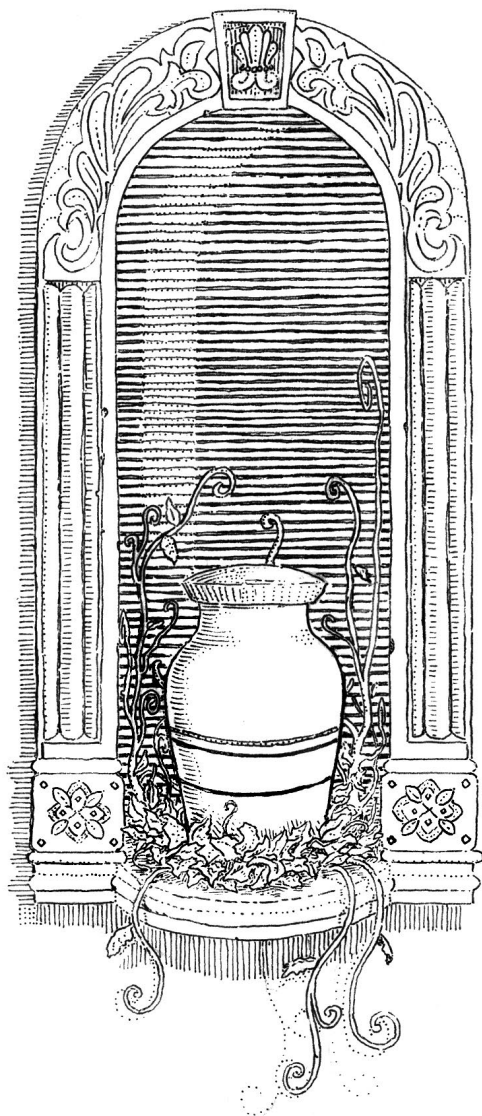
The use of whiteness studies has clear benefits. It allows Reeve to keep discussion of Mormon racism and Mormon persecution in the same narrative frame. Mormons were simultaneously oppressors and oppressed, caught, alongside other Americans, in a complex web of racial significations. "Becoming white," for Mormons, meant crossing a line to a status of religious acceptance, patriotism, and class belonging. In less deft hands, calling all of these various identities "white" risks flattening

out the significance of race itself, enfolding all into a vague longing for acceptance into an undefined “mainstream” that has less to do with the realities of legal, social, and biological components of race. It can also overplay the similarities among different kinds of discrimination, especially those based on class or religion.

For the most part, Reeve does a terrific job avoiding those confluences. But occasionally the reference to “whiteness” obscures more than it reveals, as in the claim that Brigham Young announced a race-based priesthood restriction as a purposeful move toward “whiteness” for the community through racial purification. While this is true in a biological sense, it is also the case that Mormons retained a sense of their own superiority to mainstream American society and thus didn’t want to be “white” at all—if being white meant religious assimilation. In other words, the agency of Mormons in creating a “non-white” identity is more dialectical than the focus on whiteness allows, obscuring the role of Mormons in creating their own distinctiveness. White Americans did not simply “raise the specter” of racial amalgamation and “project it onto the Mormons” (120); Mormons raised it, too, inasmuch as they still *wanted* to be different. The Saints were complicit in sustaining their identity as a “peculiar people.”

Part of the challenge, of course, is that Mormons have never agreed among themselves about how peculiar they want to be. Although the author concludes that the Saints were unable to “escape the consequences” of a fluid racial culture (262), this phrasing underplays the extent to which Mormons helped create that culture and have always demonstrated some ambivalence about their own participation in it. In other cases, most notably in the decades-long embrace of plural marriage, LDS leaders actively chose to swim against the much stronger currents of monogamy. So it is abundantly clear that they were capable of exercising choices that bucked cultural norms. That they did not do so in the case of race-based discrimination is not a condemnation of their weaknesses as much as an acknowledgment of their continued

power of self-determination and refusal to fit their worldview neatly into received racial or religious categories. Reeve's fine account and prodigious research reveal a dynamic that cannot be contained by the binaries of race or theories of whiteness. That he lets messy and fractious languages of early LDS leaders speak to that complexity is laudable. The Mormon religion was more than a different color: like the world seen through a kaleidoscope, it contained hues that entirely subverted the color spectrum.



Christian Degn
Reliquary
Ink on paper

LEVELING THE EARTH, EXPANDING THE CIRCLE

Eunice McMurray

Hi, my name is Eunice McMurray. I'm married to Peter, who is an ethnomusicologist, and I'm a mom to four-year-old Penny, who is currently my job. We've been in the ward about ten years. I was originally asked to speak last week, but I was in Korea visiting my grandfather who is sick. He and my grandmother raised me on a chicken farm until I was five and I moved to the US with my parents. I joined the Church when I was twelve and, not having had the public speaking training from going to Primary, I am perpetually terrified of giving sacrament meeting talks. I even asked Penny to give this talk for me, but she said no because this pulpit is too big for her.

Questions

After Christ came to the Americas following his resurrection, he gave the people the new law and outlined his doctrine and emphasized its simplicity. He starts with this exhortation and then follows with essentially the Sermon on the Mount.

And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine.
(3 Nephi 11:28–31)

He continues, in sum: believe in me (Christ), repent, be baptized.

Why does Jesus begin by talking about contention? Presumably because there was contention among the people that was very important to resolve. He says, “there shall be no disputations among you” concerning the points of his doctrine, stressing that the “spirit of contention” that “stirreth up the hearts of men” is of the devil.

At first glance, this passage seems to be saying we should all avoid disagreement.

Certainly, our ward has seen its share of what some would call contention. In my ten years in the ward, I’ve seen camps and cliques form, firesides held to address disagreements, and many become offended and even end up leaving the Church. I think if there were a clear way to resolve our differences, to convince the other of our own right-ness, we would have welcomed the solution. We have gathered as believers and members bound by baptism and commitment to repentance, so why can’t we all just get along?

With contention over right and wrong ever increasing in the world, how can we ensure that our faith remains based upon Christ’s doctrine? How might we focus on the simple truths he offers when life seems to grow more complicated?

This topic is a tricky one for me, since—as Peter will tell you—I have a genius-level ability to break down even the simplest notions into a trillion tiny little problems. At one time, I was so astounding in my problematizing and catastrophizing daily trivialities that he suggested I would be an excellent asset for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency).

Not only am I unable to grasp the simple truth of most things, but I have been conditioned through many years of rigorous academic training to consistently employ critical thinking, which boils down to disagreeing with others pretty much all the time. So as a pretty contentious, complex person, I will speak to you today about simplicity and how really, really bad contention is.

Answers, Part I

Part of the answer, I believe, lies in the scriptures and the Other in our community. The part of the answer in the scriptures reveals itself through a close look at the wording of the text: “And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.” As I hope will become clear as I continue, I believe what Christ is saying here is not that the disputations are the real problem, but that there’s a clear, right way that precludes disputation.

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.” Again, Christ is talking about the pride underlying disagreement rather than disagreement itself. So if you’re following my argument, there is something underlying the disputation that is the real source of evil. This becomes clear as the record unfolds. After Christ instructs and leaves the people of Lehi, we are told in the first chapter of 4 Nephi that amazing things happen: the people repent, are baptized, and Mormon tells us, “there were no contentions and disputations among them” (4 Nephi 1:2). Again, these were the very words Christ himself used: contention and disputation.

Furthermore, the scriptures state that “they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi

1:3). The record continues by saying there were literally miracles among them: healings and even people raised from the dead. And the Lord blessed them all spiritually and temporally.

Which brings us to the trouble. Mormon writes:

And . . . there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.

And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.

And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ. (4 Nephi 1:24–26)

We see here that the contention that Jesus decries stems from inequality, specifically of material wealth. I am no scriptorian, but reading about the ills of class division in the Book of Mormon is pretty startling. And also kind of amazing. And also deeply uncomfortable.

This idea of economic disparity in Christianity is a difficult topic, and one which I am utterly fascinated and perplexed by. I remember a few months ago a friend brought this up in Sunday school, and I was so grateful when he—who is so well-versed in scriptures and doctrine—said, in effect, “Is it bad to be rich if you’re a follower of Christ? The scriptures say so. But also, I want to be rich some day.” (Which, by the way, I think he meant as a joke because he’s in the humanities.)

Aren’t many of us striving to get to a point in our careers where we don’t have to worry about our student loans, or debt, or bills, and can enjoy the life we feel we’ve earned?

Well, while many of us enjoy temporal blessings, I believe we do have a moral imperative to constantly recognize that our relative wealth—like other aspects of privilege—is not earned by our skill or righteousness but, rather, won via the lottery of circumstances of our lives or gifts of grace. And while I doubt many of you here today will devote your lives to

eradicating poverty, I urge you to keep in mind this very uncomfortable but core tenet of Christ's doctrine as you work, play, and vote.

As a practical starting point, I present to you the famous philosophical scenario of the drowning child from Peter Singer's 1997 article, "The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle" (as adapted by philosophy-experiments.com¹):

Your route to work takes you past a shallow pond. One morning you notice that a small child has fallen in and appears to be in difficulty in the water. The child is crying in distress and it seems is at risk of drowning. You are tall and strong, so you can easily wade in and pull the child out. However, although you'll come to no physical harm if you rescue the child, you will get your clothes wet and muddy, which means you'll have to go home to change, and likely you'll be late for work.

In this situation, do you have a moral obligation to rescue the child?

As part of the interactive scenario activity, the website then encourages the visitor to click a radio button next to one of two options: "I have a moral obligation to rescue the child" or "I have no moral obligation to rescue the child."

The first answer seems as if it must be the right one, right? Noted ethicist Peter Singer has stated that his students, when asked about this scenario, unanimously respond that they have a moral obligation to save the child. Okay, now suppose that there are other people walking past who would equally be able to rescue the child but are not doing so. Does the fact that they are not doing what ought to be done mean that you're no longer obligated to save the child? How about if there were a degree of uncertainty of a successful rescue, or if your expensive hipster bike might be stolen during your attempt, or if you rescued a child last week and you ruined your shirt doing it, or if this particular

1. "The Drowning Child," Philosophy Experiments, retrieved from <http://www.philosophyexperiments.com/singer/>. The experiment is based on Peter Singer, "The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle," *New Internationalist*, no. 289 (April 1997), retrieved from <http://newint.org/features/1997/04/05/drowning/>.

effort won't eradicate the problem of drownings in general? What if the child were far away, in another country perhaps, but similarly in danger of death, and equally within your means to save, at no great cost—and absolutely no danger—to yourself?²

The final question of the hypothetical scenario is based on this fact: Research estimates that 16,000 children under the age of five die each day from preventable causes associated with extreme poverty. Given that, “Are you morally obliged to make a relatively small donation, perhaps to the value of a new shirt or a night out at a restaurant, to an overseas aid agency such as Oxfam [or, I would add, LDS Humanitarian Services] within the next few days (and even if you have previously made such a donation, perhaps even recently)?”³

Recent figures put out by efficient aid organizations estimate that it costs roughly \$2,000 to save a human life.⁴ We could contribute that much today if every adult in the room gave \$25. This would be a miracle just like the miracles we read about in 4 Nephi—healing the sick, causing the lame to walk, and quite literally bringing the dead back to life. And I say all this as the mom of a child who thinks the two best things in the world are jewelry and money. More seriously, some of the toughest discussions Peter and I have are about precisely this issue.

Answers, Part II

So that's the first answer: the scriptures say the source of contention is economic inequality. A second source of contention would seem to

2. These questions are based on those found in the scenario activity from “The Drowning Child.” Each is asked with corresponding radio buttons with variations of the responses “Yes, I am morally obliged” or “No, I am not morally obliged.”

3. Ibid. This question appears on the last page of the scenario activity before the respondent is invited to answer questions about his or her gender, nationality, age, and religion.

4. Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2010), 111.

be ourselves, or rather, our imperfect ability to accept inherent differences among us. I hope you'll consider this thought exercise and its humble request.

Certainly there are times when pride and the spirit of contention underlie disagreements, but I also believe that the members of this ward often truly want to share their understanding of the truth with others in the ward. Sometimes, the sums of our bloodlines, environments, and experiences don't lead us to the same conclusions, and I would argue that that's not a bad thing.

Confrontation is not contention. Avoiding confrontation is not inherently right or even peaceful. I hold dear the sometimes prickly discussions that pepper our lessons. We all care deeply about believing and doing the right thing, and, like Jesus cleansing the temple, sometimes we get riled up. There should, of course, be a balance between having a safe space to be devotional as well as a space to question and push. But it's up to us as a community—as the body of Christ, as Paul says—to figure out what that balance is.

Last week, the Pope and Donald Trump started a Twitter war (no, really!) when Pope Francis said, “A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian.” His namesake, Francis of Assisi, was so inclusive in embracing the gospel that he called all creatures his brothers and sisters and even preached to the birds. If we are truly a global church community, we have to recognize that there is an unprecedented diversity of backgrounds and thoughts among Church members and consequent change and growth in the Church today—both qualitative and quantitative. We have diversity and representation in ways that couldn't even be addressed in the scriptures, and for that I'm deeply grateful.

It also means that some of our church conversations may be more complex. They may require more empathy than we're accustomed to. But with open ears and open hearts, those conversations aren't doomed to be “contentions.”

My Truth

In preparing this talk, I tried to isolate the simple truth of the gospel that I turn to when things get complicated, but I couldn't. Frankly, what I love about hearing others' testimonies is recognizing that many of us hold dear different facets of the gem that is the gospel. For some, it's the truthfulness of the scriptures, for others it's their beauty. People variously seem to hold dear a living prophet, modern-day revelation, the Restoration, connection to the dead, promise of eternal progression, and the benefits of ward charity each as *the* heart of the gospel. Ultimately, I guess the simple truth of the gospel for me is its universality—that it's for everyone.

I am a member of this church because I desire light and a bigger sense of purpose, a community that expands the circle of people that I care about. A group of which I am part deserves my devotion and sustaining efforts using my God-given faith for devotion, my intellect for questioning, and my hands for good works.

We are different. We each have thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the literalness of the scriptures and also about whether you should mix prints in your church outfit. About whether giving snacks to your kids during sacrament meeting is acceptable, about whether choosing a career making less than \$100,000 a year is not responsible family planning, whether working in the private sector helping the rich become richer is immoral or not, whether we should Feel the Bern or Make America Great Again.

As these things suggest, ours is a temporal and spiritual gospel. All of the things you could possibly bear your testimony about or say over the pulpit—including the above—are, in fact, part of God's great plan and thus are aspects of the gospel for us to ponder, discuss, and mindfully consider. We are gathered here in hope and yearning for meaning and purpose, to do good work, to find a space that allows for devotion and exploration of the biggest questions. Whatever the angle of our approach, we are here, we belong here, and I am grateful for each one of you.

I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL BARKER {oregonortho@hotmail.com} works in orthopedic surgery as a Physician Assistant and lives with his wife and two daughters in beautiful Southern Oregon. He is a competitive mountain biker and is a lover of bow ties and non-white dress shirts. He and his two brothers are the proprietors of the Rational Faiths blog.

CLAUDIA L. BUSHMAN {claudia.bushman@gmail.com}, a lady in retirement, continues to enjoy the culture of New York City. Her next book, *Going to Boston*, will be published in 2017.

CHRISTIAN DEGN is an art student at Utah Valley University. His work has been *included in printed publications like Black Metal of The Americas, Touchstones, and Dead Wood and Rushing Water*. He has also worked alongside musicians locally and internationally to provide illustration and visual direction for a number of releases.

RONI JO DRAPER, PhD {Roni_Jo_Draper@byu.edu} is professor of teacher education in the Department of Teacher Education of the McKay School of Education at Brigham Young University. Her research interests include literacy education, multicultural education, and teacher education. In particular, much of her research has focused on the preparation of teachers for supporting the literacy development of children and youth. Her published work has appeared in the *Journal of Teacher Education*, the *Harvard Educational Review*, the *Journal of Literacy Research*, the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and the *American Educational Research Journal*. She is the editor and contributing author to the book *(Re) imagining Content-area Literacy Instruction*, a co-publication of Teachers College Press and the National Writing Project. She is also an editor and contributing author to the book *Arts Literacy and Education* as part of Routledge's Research in Literacy series. As a teacher educator critical of the curriculum and pedagogy used to prepare teachers, Dr. Draper's primary methodological approach to her work has been action research, content

analysis, and narrative inquiry. Recently, Dr. Draper has turned to queer pedagogical approaches to her work with teachers to help them rethink their taken-for-granted notions about teaching, learning, literacies, and the children and families they serve in schools.

NANCY TATE DREDGE {nancy@organizationsunlimited.com} was the second (1975–1981) and sixth (2000–09) editor of *Exponent II*. She was a contributor to *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah* (ed. Claudia Bushman, 1976), for which she also acted as an assistant editor. She credits her experience editing *Exponent II* with the beginnings of her career in educational publishing, during which she worked as a content editor for such companies as Houghton Mifflin, Prentice Hall, and Pearson Publishing. With her business partner, Sue Booth-Forbes, she founded Editorial Associates, Inc., and acted as supervising editor for literature, grammar, history, reading, and art textbooks. Nancy lives with her anthropologist *cum* business consultant husband Paul in Arlington, Massachusetts, as do several of her five children and their families.

JUDY DUSHKU {judydushku@gmail.com} was a “founding mother” of *Exponent II* in 1974 and remained involved with the quarterly until recently, serving on the Board of *Exponent II* twice as President. She edited the “*Sisters Speak*” column. Her writings about Mormon women include: Judith Dushku, “*Feminists*,” in *Mormon Sisters*, ed. Claudia Bushman (Cambridge, Mass.: Emmeline Press, 1976); Eaton-Gadsby, Patricia Rasmussen, and Judith R. Dushku, “*Emmeline B. Wells: I have risen triumphant*,” in *Sister Saints*, ed. Vicky Burgess-Olsen (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978). She received a BA in political science in 1964, then a MALD from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1966. She was Associate Professor of Government at Suffolk University in Boston, Massachusetts for forty-seven years, where she taught comparative politics, African politics, women and politics, international law, and American government. She participated in the United Nations Conferences on Women in Nairobi

(1985) and Beijing (1995). She was a Fulbright Senior Specialist, lecturing on “Politics of Post-Communist Transition.” She served as Dean of Suffolk University–Dakar (Senegal) campus from 2001 to 2003. She is the Founder and President of THRIVE-Gulu, an organization that addresses issues of child soldiers, sex slavery, and other post-conflict concerns in Uganda. Part of the work there involves collecting stories of formerly abducted women to support their healing from the trauma of war with Joseph Kony’s LRA.

D CHRISTIAN HARRISON {christian.harrison@gmail.com} After serving in the Canada Montréal Mission, Christian attended BYU, where he studied International Relations, French, Mandarin, and Danish. At the start of his junior year, Christian co-founded a software company that pioneered online shopping systems. Today, Christian works in the fields of strategic and visual communications and is active in Salt Lake City regional political circles—advocating on behalf of urban dwellers, transit users, and the homeless. When he’s not working, politicking, or preparing for his EQ lesson, he’s traveling, hosting dinner parties, or catching something at the theater. You can follow Christian’s musings on Mormonism at *By Common Consent*.

ERIC W. JEPSON and THERIC JEPSON {theric@thmazing.com} are, respectively, the editor of *Dorian: A Peculiar Edition with Annotated Text & Scholarship* and *Monsters & Mormons*, both from Peculiar Pages. They are also, off-page, the same person. As this issue goes to press, one of them is presenting at the San Diego Comic-Con International on Mormon Comics. Additional relevant scholarship, fiction, poetry, and other peccadilloes can be found by searching for and clicking on anything thmazing.

BENJAMIN KNOLL {benjamin.knoll@centre.edu} is the John Marshall Harlan Associate Professor of Politics at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. He is the author of several scholarly articles on the intersection of

race, religion, and American politics and is currently a permablogger at RationalFaiths.

SUSAN WHITAKER KOHLER {susanwkoehler@gmail.com} is a retired teacher who taught elementary school for twenty years in Illinois and California. For a decade she worked in alumni relations and development at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. She lives in Midway, Utah and Provo, Utah.

JONATHAN LANGFORD {jonathan@langfordwriter.com}, a freelance writer and editor living in western Wisconsin, moderates Dawning of a Brighter Day, the blog of the Association for Mormon Letters. He is the author of *No Going Back*, a Whitney finalist novel about a gay Mormon teenager, and co-edited *Let Your Hearts and Minds Expand: Reflections on Faith, Reason, Charity, and Beauty*, by Thomas F. Rogers, published as part of the Maxwell Institute's Living Faith series in June 2016.

NEIL LONGO {neil.longo@verizon.net} was raised in southern California and graduated from Brigham Young University in 2015 with a degree in Political Science. While at BYU, he was baptized into the LDS Church, and began negotiating a synthesis between Mormonism and his native Catholic faith. After graduating, he completed an internship with Senator Orrin Hatch, then began working for the Intercollegiate Studies Institute as a Regional Director. His primary academic interests are the history of the American West, Native American tribal law, the history of conservative thought, and poetry. He hopes to attend graduate school and gain a PhD. He enjoys writing, reading, hiking, kayaking, hosting parties, taking road-trips with friends, and attending the Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Mormon communities in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where he lives.

LAURIE F. MAFFLY-KIPP {maffly-kipp@wustl.edu} is the Archer Alexander Distinguished University Professor in the Humanities at Washington

University in St. Louis, and director of the Program in Religious Studies. Her research and teaching focus on African American religions, Mormonism, and religion on the Pacific borderlands of the Americas. Her publications include *Religion and Society in Frontier California* (Yale University Press, 1994) and *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Harvard University Press, 2010). Currently she is working on a survey of Mormonism in American life that will be published by Basic Books. Prof. Maffly-Kipp is a past president of the American Society of Church History and served in 2015–16 as the president of the Mormon History Association.

EUNICE McMURRAY {eunice.mcmurray@gmail.com} was born in South Korea and joined the LDS Church after immigrating to the United States with her family. While studying biology and later medicine at Harvard, she became involved in community activism and organizing, with particular focus on issues of health care and social justice. She currently lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband and daughter.

DANIEL PARKINSON, MD {danielparkinson@yahoo.com} is a psychiatrist in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has been involved with the intersection of LDS and LGBT issues for several years. His primary projects have been the blog No More Strangers, the podcast Gay Mormon Stories, and the I'll Walk With You video project, which focuses on LDS parents of LGBTQ people (ldswalkwithyou.org).

DAYNA PATTERSON {daynaepatterson@gmail.com} is an MFA candidate at Western Washington University. She is Managing Editor for *Bellingham Review* and Poetry Editor for *Psaltery & Lyre*. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *North American Review*, *REAL*, and *Weave*, among others, and her chapbooks, *Loose Threads* and *Mothering*, are available from Flutter Press. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and two daughters.

LEVI S. PETERSON {althlevip@msn.com} is a retired professor of English presently living in Washington state. He is the author of many essays and stories on Mormon themes. He is the author of two collections of stories, *The Canons of Grace* and *Night Soil*; two novels, *The Backslider* and *Aspen Marooney*; a biography, *Juanita Brooks: The Life Story of a Courageous Historian of the Mountain Meadows Massacre*; and an autobiography, *A Rascal by Nature, A Christian by Yearning*.

CARREL HILTON SHELDON {carrelsheldon@gmail.com}, one of the founding mothers of *Exponent II*, brought critical business skills and huge enthusiasm and commitment to the success of the paper. She later published the group's book, *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*. Carrel worked on the paper and served on its board of directors for twenty-nine years until she left the Boston area to move to Seattle. She recently retired from the University of Washington Medical Center, where she published patient and family education materials.

BRAD J. THARPE {tharpebj@gmail.com} serves as Director of Career Services at Pitzer College in Claremont, California. He has worked in college chaplaincy at The Claremont Colleges and at DePauw University. Brad also has worked at Wake Forest University, most recently as Associate Director of the Master of Arts in Bioethics program and earlier as the Assistant Director of the *Pro Humanitate* Center, where he facilitated vocational discernment among students. Brad lives with his wife, Sara, and three energetic children.

BRIAN WHITNEY {bwmwhitney@gmail.com} earned a BA in history from Weber State University and is currently applying for graduate studies. He has interned as a research assistant with the LDS Church History Department, and has worked as a historic site interpreter and research fellow at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois. He currently works as a history editor and publicist for Greg Kofford Books and is co-

editing the David O. McKay office diaries. Brian lives in Brigham City, Utah, with his wife and four children and blogs at Worlds Without End.

RONALD WILCOX {iamron2@verizon.net} was born in Holladay, Utah, in 1934. Educated at Brigham Young University, he later received a Masters Degree of Arts from Baylor University, where he studied experimental drama with theatrical innovator Paul Baker. He played the lead role in Thomas Wolfe's *Of Time and the River*. This ground-breaking, mixed-media rendition of the novel became the premiere production of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Dallas Theater Center. As a Resident Artist in the Professional Repertory Company for twenty-three years, Ron appeared in over sixty plays. Four of his own plays were produced in Dallas, San Antonio, New York City, Hollywood and Los Angeles. He designed and directed the premiere of his multi-media poetic drama, *The Tragedy of Thomas Andros*. He has published a novel, *The Rig*. He has contributed to *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* since 1967. His latest poetic narrative, *Mormon Epic*, tells the story of Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the Gospel. *Ordinary and Profane Poems* is extracted from a book-length poetic sequence (Chapters 16 and 17) entitled *True Stories from a Fictional Life*. At eighty-two years of age, Ron continues to write lyric poetry, concentrating on the sonnet form.



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