DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

DIALOGUE

57.3 fall 2024

EDITORS

EDITOR	Taylor Petrey, Kalamazoo, MI
WEB EDITOR	Emily W. Jensen, Farmington, UT
PERSONAL VOICES	Charlotte Hansen Terry, Salt Lake City, UT
FICTION	Ryan Shoemaker, Cedar City, UT
	Joe Plicka, Hau'ula, HI
POETRY	Teresa Wellborn, Salt Lake City, UT
REVIEWS (non-fiction)	Caroline Kline, Irvine, CA
REVIEWS (literature)	Andrew Hall, Fukuoka, Japan
ART	Margaret Olsen Hemming, Chapel Hill, NC

BUSINESS & PRODUCTION STAFF

BUSINESS MANAGER	Emily W. Jensen, Farmington, UT
COPY EDITOR	Richelle Wilson, Madison, WI
ASSISTANT WEB EDITOR	Adam McClain, Storrs, CT
PRODUCTION EDITOR	Daniel Foster Smith, Ogden, UT

EDITORIAL BOARD

Brian Birch, Draper, UT
Rebekah Perkins Crawford, Athens, OH
Ignacio M. Garcia, Provo, UT
Brian M. Hauglid, Spanish Fork, UT
Michael D. K. Ing, Bloomington, IN
James C. Jones, New York, NY
Fanna King, Tahlequah, OK
Becky Reid Linford, Leesburg, VA
Mike MacKay, Provo, UT
Nathan B. Oman, Williamsburg, VA
Sara Patterson, Hanover, IN
Randall Paul, Holladay, UT
Steven L. Peck, Provo, UT
Darron Smith, Memphis, TN
Stephen Taysom, Cleveland, OH
John Turner, Fairfax, VA
Thomas Wayment, Provo, UT
Richelle Wilson, Madison, WI

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Christian E. Kimball,
Wolf Creek Ranch, UT—Chair
Michael Austin, Evansville, IN
Molly McLellan Bennion, Seattle, WA
Matthew Bowman, Claremont, CA
Stephen L. Bradford, Los Angeles, CA
Aaron Brown, Seattle, WA
Zachary Davis, Somerville, MA
Andi Pitcher Davis, Orem, UT
Rebecca de Schweinitz, Provo, UT
Rebecca England, Salt Lake City, UT
Blair Hodges, Salt Lake City, UT
Linda Hoffman Kimball, Woodland, UT
Josh Penrod, Orem, UT
J. Kirk Richards, Woodland Hills, UT
Jana Riess, Cincinnati, OH
Karla Stirling, Bountiful, UT
Morris Thurston, Villa Park, CA

On the front cover: Lasisi Richard Olagunju, *Motherhood*, 2023, beads on wood panel
On the back cover: Lasisi Richard Olagunju, *Melody Maker*, 2023, beads on wood panel

DIALOGUE
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.

Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought is published quarterly by the University of Illinois Press for the Dialogue Foundation. *Dialogue* has no official connection with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Contents copyrighted by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Print ISSN 0012–2157; electronic ISSN 1554-9399. *Dialogue* is available in full text in electronic form at www.dialoguejournal.com and JSTOR.org and is archived by the University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections, available online at www.lib.utah.edu /portal/site/marriottlibrary. *Dialogue* is also available on microforms through University Microfilms International, www.umi.com.

Dialogue welcomes articles, essays, poetry, notes, fiction, letters to the editor, and art. Submissions should follow the current Chicago Manual of Style, using footnotes for all citations. All submissions should be in Word and may be submitted electronically at https://dialoguejournal.com/submissions/. For submissions of visual art, please contact art@dialoguejournal.com.

CONTENTS

REVIEWS

GETHSEMANE AND ATONEMENT AGAIN

Grant Adamson

In his 2022 *Dialogue* article "The Garden Atonement and the Mormon Cross Taboo," Jeremy Christiansen adds to a fuller understanding of LDS reception history of the Lukan account of "Gethsemane," namely Jesus' agony and sweat/blood in the garden on the eve of the Crucifixion (Luke 22:43–44; Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:15–19).[1] He surveys and synthesizes a wide range of sources not limited to early Mormon scripture. Further, Christiansen astutely associates this aspect of LDS Christology with certain social factors: anti-Catholic animus such as opposition to the cross/crucifix in art and jewelry, among other things, and the need for religious movements to distinguish themselves from their rivals. With respect to the cross taboo in Mormonism, he builds on Michael Reed's book *Banishing the Cross*.[2] Concerning Gethsemane, one of the previous articles he engages with is mine, which gives me a chance to refine my own ideas.[3]

1. Jeremy M. Christiansen, "The Garden Atonement and the Mormon Cross Taboo," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 55, no. 4 (2002): 89–116. As often noted, the placename "Gethsemane" technically only occurs in the Markan and then Matthean accounts of the garden scene, not the Lukan or Johannine, and the place is actually only called a "garden" in the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, even in biblical studies it is standard practice to refer to those pericopes collectively; see Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (New York: American Bible Society, 1985), 297–98.

2. Michael G. Reed, *Banishing the Cross: The Emergence of the Mormon Taboo* (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2012).

3. Grant Adamson, "Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus: Protestant Past, KJV-Only Present," *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 9, no. 1 (2022): 57–73.

After careful consideration, I find Christiansen's treatment of early Mormonism to be insufficient, and I'm unconvinced by the grand narrative, according to which the LDS movement started with a "cross-centric" understanding of "the" atonement and only shifted toward a garden atonement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Besides responding to Christiansen's article specifically, I will also propose and deploy a system of classification that should be of general utility for categorizing the importance of the garden relative to the cross within the soteriology of any denomination. Before I conclude, I'll hazard a sketch of how Mormon belief in garden atonement developed out of Anglophone Protestantism from the 1820s and '30s to now.

Categories

My first disagreement is with Christiansen's binary framework, which either involves "the cross," meaning "cross-centric atonement," or "the garden atonement." Likewise, his analysis suggests either that Jesus' suffering and bleeding in the garden are anticipatory of the Crucifixion (thus no atonement in Gethsemane at all) or expiatory (hence "the garden atonement"), not both. Christiansen seems to allow for little to no gradation and only the slightest overlap between the garden and the cross.[4]

Moving beyond a binary either/or, I propose a sliding scale of five increments that I will label as:

- garden-excluded (with the cross alone in sight),
- garden-included (with the cross in central view),

4. His most common usage is "garden atonement" (thirty-nine times altogether, twenty-one times with "the"). As for his use of the phrase "garden atonement theory," that is a would-be neologism, to my knowledge. In the history of Christian thought, the various theories of atonement have not been named for theological events from the life of Jesus (incarnation, passion, descent to "hell," resurrection); rather, they have been named for conceptual models, often entailing metaphors (e.g., the fishhook). Different models may focus more on this or that Jesus event, while holding them all in some tension, especially the crucifixion and resurrection, but the theories are named for the conceptual models not the events. See Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories: A Way through the Maze* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014).

- garden-included and -balanced (with the cross in equal focus),
- garden-included and -centered (with the cross to the side though hardly out of sight),
- garden-only (with the cross excluded).

The extremes at the opposite ends of the spectrum are rarely attested in the global history of Christianity, I would guess—that is, garden-excluded versus garden-only. If the total evidence from all Christianities, ancient to modern, were categorized according to this scale, I expect the majority would fall along the three middle increments, gradations of both-and, not binaries of either/or: that is, garden-included, -balanced, -centered. The upshot is that even an understanding of Christian salvation that has the cross in central view and that merely includes the garden does still include a form of garden atonement; it's just that Jesus is understood to atone more on Calvary than Gethsemane in that case.[5]

5. I know of no comprehensive much less exhaustive treatment of Gethsemane in Christian belief and practice, but see Karl Olav Sandnes, *Early Christian Discourses on Jesus' Prayer at Gethsemane: Courageous, Committed, Cowardly?* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Kevin Madigan, *The Passions of Christ in High-Medieval Thought: An Essay on Christological Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chaps. 6–7; as well as Adam J. Johnson, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 216, 220, 470; Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 26, 30. Two Western European textual landmarks were written by the Dutch and English humanist friends Erasmus (b. 1466, d. 1536) and Thomas More (b. 1478, d. 1535), in Latin. Translation of Erasmus: "A Short Debate concerning the Distress, Alarm, and Sorrow of Jesus," in *Collected Works of Erasmus: Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, volume 70, edited by John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 13–67. Translation of More: "The Sadness, the Weariness, the Fear, and the Prayer of Christ before He Was Taken Prisoner," in *The Essential Works of Thomas More*, edited by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2020), 1251–1301. Among other points made in that pair of treatises, Erasmus rejects the distinction between the "propassion" and the "passion," thereby merging the garden and the cross, while More likewise stresses the unity of Jesus' salvific suffering: "both bodily" torment on Calvary "and mental" torment in Gethsemane.

Pre-Mormon Commentary on the Bible

In order to argue for LDS novelty, Christiansen downplays, even disregards, the existence of any garden atonement in or outside of LDS belief before the late 1800s. He thinks "the first appearance . . . is likely in John Taylor's 1882 book, *Mediation and Atonement.*"[6] The classification system that I propose above may help to clarify our discord about the evaluation of examples of belief in garden atonement from the late 1600s, 1700s, and early 1800s. Engaging with me, Christiansen writes: "Adamson contends that other Christians [prior to Joseph Smith]," namely, well-known Protestant exegetes Matthew Henry, Philip Doddridge, Thomas Scott, and Adam Clarke, "may have held a garden atonement theory."[7] How much uncertainly are we dealing with here? Can we be more confident than "may have"? Using my sliding scale, I'll rehearse the evidence from these biblical commentators and hopefully eliminate some confusion.

I'll go in chronological order, by the commentator's date of birth, and I'll quote reprint editions that were circulating closer to Joseph Smith's day. These were widely read commentaries, far from obscure.[8]

Matthew Henry (b. 1662, d. 1714):

> We have here [in Luke 22:39–46] the awful story of Christ's agony in the garden. . . . In it Christ accommodated himself to that part of his undertaking which he was now entering upon—the making of his soul an offering for sin [see Isaiah 53:10]. He afflicted his own soul with grief for the sin he was to satisfy for [see Isaiah 53:4, 7], and [with] an apprehension of the wrath of God to which man had by sin made himself obnoxious, which he was pleased as a Sacrifice to admit the impression of, the consuming of a sacrifice with fire from heaven, being the surest token of its acceptance. In it Christ entered the lists with the

6. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 103.

7. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 102.

8. Their popularity: Adamson, "Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus," 56n9.

> powers of darkness, gave them all the advantages they could desire, and yet conquered them. . . . Sweat came in with sin, and was a branch of the curse, Gen. 3. 19. And therefore when Christ was made Sin and a Curse for us, he underwent a grievous sweat [see Luke 22:44], that in the sweat of his face [see Genesis 3:19] we might eat bread [i.e., the Eucharist], and that he might sanctify and sweeten all our trials to us. It is some dispute among the critics, whether this sweat is only compared to drops of blood, being much thicker than drops of sweat commonly are, the pores of the body being more than ordinarily opened; or, that real blood out of the capillary veins mingled with it, so that it was in colour like blood, and might truly be called a bloody sweat; the matter is not so great. Some reckon this one of the times when Christ shed his blood for us [i.e., the other time being the crucifixion], for without shedding of blood there is no remission. Every pore was as it were a bleeding wound, and his blood stained all his raiment.[9]

On my sliding scale, I would categorize this understanding of atonement in Henry's exegesis as garden-included and perhaps garden-balanced, though not garden-centered. Note how he blends the garden and cross together so that Jesus' sweat is associated with the reversal of the curse of Adam in Genesis 3 and with the presumably eucharistic bread symbolizing Jesus' crucified body. Note also how he imports the terminology of "sacrifice" for "sin" into Gethsemane: he identifies the Lukan Jesus sweating blood in the garden with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Via paraphrase of even earlier exegetes, Henry describes Jesus' bloody sweat as a "shedding of blood," thus collapsing any firm distinction between the garden and the cross. Yes, Jesus is "apprehensive" about his death, and of course the rest of the atonement will soon follow, but much more is going on than fear and anxiety; Jesus already starts to shed blood and atone in Luke's garden, as his clothing is saturated with bloody sweat.

---

9. Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament . . . with Practical Remarks and Observations* (repr., New York: R. Carter, 1827) 4:541–42. For Henry's commentary on the Lukan crucifixion, see 4:547–52.

Philip Doddridge (b. 1702, d. 1751):

> If even Christ himself was so depressed with sorrow and amazement, and the distress and anguish he endured were such, that in his agony the sweat ran from him like great drops of blood [see Luke 22:44], when our iniquities were laid upon him, and it pleased the Father to bruise him, and to put him to grief [see Isaiah 53:5–6, 10]; how must the sinner then be filled with horror, and with what dreadful agonies of anguish and despair will he be overwhelmed, when he shall bear the burden of his own iniquities, and God shall pour out all his wrath upon him?[10]

By itself, this statement could be classified as garden-centered since the cross is not immediately mentioned, but naturally the genre must be kept in mind: verse-by-verse commentary on the Bible. Doddridge is not writing a theological treatise on atonement, and so things should not be pressed too far. Nevertheless, this is another example of the Lukan Jesus, bleeding and atoning in the garden, as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. What is more, Doddridge warns the sinful that they will suffer as Jesus did—in Luke's agonizing garden!

Thomas Scott (b.1747, d.1821):

> The appearance of a holy angel to our Lord, in this conflict with the powers of darkness, and when he was weighed down with the feeling of the wrath of God against our sins, was an intimation of approaching victory. . . . We cannot expect to escape tribulations and ill usage, in a world which numbered the Lord of glory with the worst of malefactors [i.e., at the crucifixion], if indeed we profess his truth and obey his commandments: but if we pray fervently that we "may not enter into temptation" [e.g., Luke 22:40], we shall either be preserved from the severer trials, or be enabled under them to say, "Not my will but thine be done" [Luke 22:42]. And surely, when we contemplate the Redeemer "in an agony, praying more earnestly" [Luke 22:44], and "his sweat like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" [Luke 22:44], while "he was bruised for our iniquities" [Isaiah 53:5]; we shall pray also to

10. Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor; Or, A Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament, with Critical Notes, and a Practical Improvement of Each Section* (repr., Charlestown, Mass.: S. Etheridge, 1807), 2:485.

> be enabled "to resist unto blood, striving against sin" [Hebrews 12:4], if we should ever be called to it.[11]

This strikes me as garden-balanced at the least. It could be categorized as garden-centered. Scott has the cross in sight, to be sure; he plainly alludes to Jesus being crucified with the two bandits, thieves, or malefactors. But the garden is just as much the focus of Scott's view, if not more. Here yet again, the Lukan Jesus sweating blood in Gethsemane is identified with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Alongside the soteriological thought, Scott's moralizing lesson for the reader is to be prepared to meet with trials in life, even to bleed and die like Jesus as a martyr. Notably, though, the only blood of Jesus in near sight is his bloody sweat.

Adam Clarke (b. 1762, d. 1832):

> Now, the grand expiatory sacrifice begins to be offered: in this garden Jesus enters fully into the sacerdotal office [see Hebrews 4:14–5:10]; and now on the altar of his immaculate divinity, begins to offer his own body—his own life—a lamb without spot, for the sin of the world [see Revelation 5:6, 8, 12–13, etc.; John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19]. St. Luke observes, chap. xxii 43, 44. that there appeared unto him an angel from heaven strengthening him; and that being in an agony, his sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground. How exquisite must this anguish have been, when it forced the very blood through the coats of the veins, and enlarged the pores in such a preternatural manner, as to cause them to empty it out in large successive drops! In my opinion, the principal part of the redemption price was paid in this unprecedented and indescribable agony.[12]

---

11. Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, According to the Authorized Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References* (repr., Boston: S. T. Armstrong, 1827) 5:431, 434.

12. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Text Carefully Printed from the Most Correct Copies of the Present Authorized Version . . . With a Commentary and Critical Notes. Designed as a Help to a Better Understanding of the Sacred Writings* (repr., New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1825), 1:237.

There isn't the slightest ambiguity here. Clarke has Jesus perform an expiation, a priestly offering of his own blood, right in the Lukan garden. Clarke even ventures that this bleeding outweighs that of the cross. The commentator's understanding of atonement is unmistakably garden-centered. It does not merely include the garden, since Clarke estimates that Jesus pays "the principal part of the redemption price" in Gethsemane rather than on Calvary. Nor is it garden-only, with the cross excluded, since Clarke allows for some lesser portion of the price to be paid during the subsequent crucifixion. To repeat, Clarke's understanding is manifestly garden-centered.

So just within this small sample set of data from popular Anglophone commentaries on the Bible, we have the garden overtly centered by one commentator (Clarke), either centered or balanced by another (Doddridge), balanced by yet another (Scott), and either balanced or at least included by one more (Henry). All of these understandings of atonement are gradations of both-and, involving both the garden and the cross. This evidence of pre-Mormon examples should then challenge the claim that "the garden atonement" appears in Mormonism late, at the end of the 1800s, somewhat coincident with the initial rise of the LDS cross taboo at the turn of the century.

Joseph Smith's Parabiblical Emphasis

My third critique is that I think Christiansen does not adequately interpret LDS scripture. His analysis suggests that references to garden atonement in key passages within the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, Mosiah 3 and D&C 19, are outliers, separate from Joseph Smith's teachings. The reality is that they are foundational: both were dictated if not also composed by Smith and both are early, from the year 1829.

When Mosiah 3 and D&C 19 are situated properly, chronologically, the picture that emerges is one of continuity with garden-inclusive Protestant understandings of atonement. Biblical commentators before

Smith had included the Lukan garden in their soteriological statements, distributing the atonement between Gethsemane and Calvary. Some of them went so far as to balance the garden with the cross, while others went even further by making the garden the center of view. If Smith and other early Mormons also believed in a form of garden atonement, that ought to be small wonder. I find no reason not to assume that the Latter-day Saint prophet was influenced by such commentators, supposing he had access to them and/or heard them read and adapted in sermons and preaching.[13] A product of his era, in any event, Smith also understood Jesus' suffering and bleeding in Gethsemane as an atonement in these two important passages from Mosiah 3 and D&C 19.

Mosiah 3 contains an angelic prophecy of Jesus that is iterative in that it loops back to the advent. Iteration one, in verses 5–7, spans the incarnation/birth and the passion/atonement:

> 5. For behold, the time cometh and is not far distant that with power the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, which was and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay [see John 1:1–2, 14] and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. 6. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwelleth in the hearts of the children of men. 7. And lo, he shall suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore [see Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.[14]

13. For examples of possible influence, see Adamson, "Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus," 59n24, 60n29.

14. Quotations from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

Iteration two, in verses 8–10, does the same, spanning the incarnation/birth and the passion/atonement, but then proceeds to the resurrection and eschaton as well:

> 8. And he shall be called Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning [see John 1:3]; and his mother shall be called Mary. 9. And lo, he cometh unto his own that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith on his name [see John 1:11]. And even after all this, they shall consider him as a man and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him and shall crucify him. 10. And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world. And behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgement might come upon the children of men.

The chapter continues with references to the blood and atonement of Jesus: "his blood atoneth" (Mosiah 3:11); "the atonement of his blood" (Mosiah 3:15); "the blood of Christ atoneth" (Mosiah 3:16); "the atoning blood of Christ (Mosiah 3:18); "the atonement of Christ" (Mosiah 3:19).

Christiansen thinks atonement in Mosiah 3 is limited to "Christ's death, crucifixion, and resurrection in verses 9, and 11;" he does not think verse 7 is included.[15] His interpretation misses the iterative structure of the prophecy, where Jesus bleeds "from every pore" in the first iteration, in verse 7, and then is crucified in the second, in verse 9. Moreover, Christiansen has to overlook that the only bleeding mentioned in either iteration is the bloody pores in the Lukan garden of verse 7. Technically, there is not a word about blood in connection with the crucifixion in verse 9. The most obvious antecedent for all the references to the blood and atonement of Jesus in the rest of the chapter (verses 11, 15, 16, 18, 19) is verse 7: "for behold, blood cometh from every pore [see Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people," verbiage that is synonymous with suffering and atonement for sin.

15. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 101.

On my sliding scale, I would categorize the understanding of atonement in Mosiah 3 as garden-centered, although it's not as pronounced as the example from Adam Clarke's commentary. The garden emphasis is most apparent when the words about the passion/atonement in both iterations and verses are set next to each other:

> 7. And lo, he shall suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore [cf. Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.
>
> 9. . . . and [they] shall scourge him and shall crucify him.

There's no denying the emphasis. Verse 7 is longer, even if we skip over the initial sentence and begin at the semicolon. It's more descriptive. It mentions Jesus' profuse bleeding. None of that applies to verse 9. Please note that I am not pushing for another dichotomous interpretation. Joseph Smith hasn't excluded the cross here, much as Adam Clarke didn't exclude it when he commented that the harrowing night in Gethsemane was the time and location at which "the principal part of the redemption price was paid." The atonement in Mosiah 3 is distributed, albeit unevenly, between the garden and the cross: Jesus suffers, explicitly bleeds, and implicitly atones in the garden in verse 7; he also suffers, implicitly bleeds, and implicitly atones on the cross in verse 9. Smith's understanding in Mosiah 3 is both-and, involving both the garden and the cross, not either/or. Once more, I would classify this as garden-centered.

D&C 19 comes from the same year as Mosiah 3. Smith dictated them within a few months of one another.[16] Instead of a prophecy set centuries in the past, however, D&C 19 contains a revelation from the resurrected Jesus, who speaks retrospectively about the suffering and atonement he underwent some two millennia ago:

> 1. . . . I am he, the beginning and the end: Yea, Alpha and Omega, Christ the Lord, the Redeemer of the world: 2. I having accomplished

16. Larry E. Morris, *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 486.

> and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father: Having done this, that I might subdue all things unto myself: 3. Retaining all power, even to the destroying of satan and his works at the end of the world, and the last great day of judgment . . . . 4. And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I God am endless . . . .
>
> 15. Wherefore, I command you by my name and by my Almighty power, that you repent: repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore: How sore you know not! How exquisite you know not! Yea, how hard to bear you know not! 16. For behold, I God have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer, if they would repent, 17. but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I: 18. Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore [see Luke 22:44], both body and spirit: And would that I might not drink the bitter cup [e.g., Luke 22:42], and shrink: 19. Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men [i.e., at the crucifixion]: 20. Wherefore, I command you again by my Almighty power, that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.[17]

The revelation then concludes with sundry directives for Smith's scribe, Martin Harris, the addressee of the text.

Christiansen argues that D&C 19 "represents, at best, a proto-teaching [of garden atonement]," and that it is "an odd vehicle for revealing such a distinctive doctrine in such an oblique way."[18] So there are two points at issue: (1) the teaching's underdeveloped status and uniqueness and (2) the indirectness of the reference to it. As to the former, Christiansen's reading overlooks Adam Clarke and other Bible commentators who stated belief in some form of garden atonement before

17. Revelation, circa Summer 1829 [D&C 19], *Book of Commandments* pp. 39–40, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org. Verse numbers from the current edition.

18. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 101–02.

Smith. The doctrine wasn't distinctive in Smith's era, at least not among Anglophone exegetes, and thus we should not be shocked to encounter it in the parabiblical scriptures dictated by Smith. This revelation does not represent a departure into novel terrain. It is of a piece with Protestant commentary and with Mosiah 3:7: "blood cometh from every pore [see Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people." In both Mosiah 3:7 and D&C 19:18, Jesus suffers and bleeds "from every pore" or "at every pore." And Smith's Jesus is not just suffering from human anxiety in the face of his own impending death on the cross. He suffers, he sweats blood, "for the wickedness and abominations of his people" (Mosiah 3:7), for the "sins" of the penitent (D&C 19:20). With regard to the latter issue, the reference to garden atonement in the revelation isn't all that oblique. When Smith's Jesus wishes to avoid "the bitter cup" (D&C 19:18), it's a plain reference to the garden prayer in the synoptic gospels: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42 with parallels in Mark and Matthew). And when Smith's Jesus bleeds "at every pore" (D&C 19:18), it's a plain reference to the Lukan garden: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus' oozing skin does not feature anywhere in the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. His sweat like blood and thus the imagery of his pores is limited to Luke's Gethsemane. Statements from biblical commentators of the time—Henry, Doddridge, Clarke—confirm and make the blood literal.

Like Mosiah 3, I'd categorize D&C 19 as a garden-centered understanding of atonement. No, the cross is not excluded; Jesus certainly does drink the cup in verse 19: "I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men," i.e., at the crucifixion. But according to the emphasis of the passage, it's before that, in the Lukan garden, that he suffers and bleeds for sin so that those who repent can be forgiven. D&C 19 says nothing about the blood of the cross—not because Jesus

doesn't bleed there but because his bloody pores in the garden are much more extraordinary. Anyone would bleed if crucified. Whereas for a person to sweat blood while praying, that kind of pan-dermic hemorrhage would be "preternatural," to quote Adam Clarke.[19]

Taking the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as a whole, Christiansen claims that these volumes of scripture are centered on the cross and may be focused on it alone; therefore any apparent emphasis on the garden in Mosiah 3 and D&C 19 would be anomalous: "[R]eferences to 'atonement' are overwhelmingly, indeed seemingly exclusively, connected to the cross, not the garden."[20]

He cites seven passages in support.[21] They are . . .

> One: "[Jesus] was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:33).
>
> Two: "[R]edemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah. . . . [H]e offereth himself a sacrifice for sin. . . . [He] layeth down his life according to the flesh. . . . [H]e shall make intercession for all the children of men . . . to answer the ends of the atonement" (2 Nephi 2:6–10).
>
> Three: "[Jesus will] die for all men . . .; it must needs be an infinite atonement" (2 Nephi 9:5–7).
>
> Four: "[Jesus will] take upon him the transgressions of his people and . . . atone for the sins of the world. . . . For it is expedient that an atonement should be made . . . that there should be a great and last sacrifice . . . an infinite and eternal sacrifice . . . a great and last sacrifice . . . a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled" (Alma 34:8–13).
>
> Five: ". . . Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the Great I AM, whose arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins" (D&C 29:1).
>
> Six: "But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ" (D&C 74:7).

19. As quoted above, Clarke, *New Testament*, 1:237.

20. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 103.

21. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 100–101n56–59.

> Seven: ". . . Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood" (D&C 76:69).[22]

These passages are not enough to support the assertion that "references to 'atonement' are overwhelmingly, indeed seemingly exclusively, connected to the cross, not the garden." The cross is not mentioned at all in two of Christiansen's seven passages (D&C 29:1; D&C 74:7). The cross is mentioned explicitly in one (1 Nephi 11:33) and implicitly in four others that technically refer not to the cross but to Jesus' death, his sacrifice, or the shedding of his blood (2 Nephi 2:6–10; 9:5–8; Alma 34:12–13; D&C 76:69). But they are rather nondescript, and in none of them does Smith take any steps to exclude the garden. They cannot be used to dismiss Smith's garden references in Mosiah 3 and D&C 19, which are much more intensely descriptive of Jesus' suffering, I maintain, and so arguably much more emphatic.

In keeping with his overall framework, Christiansen's assertion rests on a false dichotomy between the garden and the cross. To illustrate in more detail: he argues that the language of atonement as "sacrifice" and as the "shedding of blood" (e.g., 2 Nephi 2:6–10; 9:5–8; Alma 34:12–13; D&C 76:69) can only refer to Jesus' death, which is admittedly the primary referent.[23] However, earlier exegetes of Smith's day had also applied that language to Gethsemane. Recall Henry's comment on the bloody sweat of the Lukan garden: "Some reckon this *one of the times when Christ shed his blood for us*, for without shedding of blood there is no remission."[24] Recall too how Henry and then especially Clarke phrased Jesus' suffering and bleeding in the garden in terms of sacrifice. Here's Clarke repeated: "Now, the *grand expiatory sacrifice* begins to be

22. Doctrine and Covenants quotations from the 1835 edition published in Kirtland, Ohio. Verse numbers from the current edition.

23. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 100–101.

24. Henry, *Exposition*, 4:541–42, my italics.

offered: in this garden Jesus enters fully into the sacerdotal office; and now on the altar of his immaculate divinity, begins to offer his own body—his own life—a lamb without spot, for the sin of the world."[25] I'm not suggesting we read all mentions of the sacrifice and shedding of Jesus' blood in Smith's scriptures as exclusive references to the garden. My point is that once we get past the garden/cross binary, the language is not incompatible with an understanding of atonement that includes or even centers on Jesus' bloody sweat in Gethsemane.

Last comes the issue of how variably, or not, Mosiah 3 and D&C 19 have been read by prominent Latter-day Saints over the decades. Christiansen argues: "[N]umerous high-ranking LDS leaders . . . [have] connected the sweating of blood in Doctrine and Covenants 19 to the *crucifixion, not the garden*."[26] But if you check the footnotes, "numerous" turns out to be three: a statement from John Taylor in 1879, one from James Talmage in 1899, and another from Mark Petersen in 1979.[27] Furthermore, there is nothing in any of these three statements that excludes the garden. And on other occasions, all three leaders also

25. Clarke, *New Testament*, 1:237, my italics.

26. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 103, italics in the original.

27. John Taylor, Mar. 2, 1879, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:259: "And as I have said, Jesus himself sweat great drops of blood [see Luke 22:44], and in the agony of his suffering cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast though forsaken me?' [see Mark 15:34 // Matthew 27:46]." It seems that, as reported anyway, Taylor has compressed the garden and the cross without necessarily conflating them, by extending Jesus' Lukan agony from Gethsemane to Calvary, based in part on a topical and maybe muddled association between Jesus' garden prayer for the Father to remove the cup and Jesus' later cry of dereliction on the cross. The topic of Taylor's discourse is trials, not atonement, hence his statement: even Jesus was tried.

James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899), 76–87, esp. 80–81, where Talmage writes about "The Atonement" in terms of Jesus' death and sacrifice. He seems to understand Jesus' agony to refer to the crucifixion and does not mention the garden even though he quotes D&C 19:18, and even though the agony and sweat like blood come from the Lukan account

made plain statements of belief in garden-inclusive atonement: Taylor in 1882 in *Mediation and Atonement*, Talmage in 1915 in *Jesus the Christ*, and Petersen in general conference in 1971.[28] At maximum, then, what we have here is indication of three leaders changing their minds. A more likely scenario is that the variation is a matter of the different topics and rhetorical purposes of their speaking and writing. Whatever the situation, their plain statements of belief in garden-inclusive atonement indicate a consistency of interpretation stretching back to Smith and even further back to Protestant commentary on the Bible.

Sketch of Development

Christiansen also provides some statistical analysis and a basic bar graph of LDS references to the Garden of Gethsemane from one century to the next.[29] Assuming the data have been coded well and that the stats are representative, references to Gethsemane in LDS discourse

---

of Gethsemane. Apparently, he did not recognize the influence of Luke 22 on D&C 19 then, but nowhere does he state the garden should be excluded.

Mark E. Petersen, "O America, America," *Ensign,* Oct. 1979, page 13: "What does the broken bread represent? The torn flesh of Christ! What does the cup represent? His blood shed on the cross in the midst of suffering of infinite proportions, suffering which made himself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain and to bleed at every pore [see Luke 22:44] and suffer both in body and spirit (see D&C 19:18)." It seems Petersen has conflated the bitter cup from the garden prayer with the LDS sacrament cup, perhaps deliberately, for rhetorical purposes of stressing Sabbath observance, the dangers of "the world," etc.

28. Christiansen discusses the statements from Taylor's *Mediation and Atonement* and Talmage's *Jesus the Christ* (see "Garden Atonement," 103–104, 108–109) but not the 1971 statement of belief in garden atonement from Petersen: Mark E. Petersen, "Honesty, a Principle of Salvation," *Ensign*, Oct. 1971, page 74: "The Savior knows the great burden of sin. He bore that burden in Gethsemane and on the cross for each one of us." Petersen's understanding there clearly includes both the garden and the crucifixion.

29. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 114, fig. 1.

have indeed risen dramatically in the 1900s and 2000s. Yet here too a nonbinary approach is helpful. The jumps and spikes do not mean there was no belief in a garden-inclusive atonement within early Mormonism, or that it arose and developed as a Christological tenet unique to Latter-day Saints. To reiterate, other denominations got there first. Nevertheless, the question remains: why the subsequent jumps and spikes in LDS references? If I were to sketch heuristically the development of belief in garden atonement among Mormons, from the 1820s and '30s to now, in terms of the big picture I would stress initial continuity with Protestantism first and then within Mormonism second. For precision and nuance, I would deploy my sliding scale in order to categorize soteriological statements (e.g., garden-included, garden-balanced, garden-centered). The scale would allow for gradation and overlap as well as some internal differences and debates. Despite the trends I see, I recognize that at least some Latter-day Saints at one time or another stated that Jesus did not bleed actual blood in the garden and/or that his suffering in Gethsemane was more anticipatory than expiatory. With an eye to the historical context of Mormonism past and present, I'd expect to find several factors that may explain the increase in references to Gethsemane in the 1900s and 2000s. According to graphs like Christiansen's, the biggest jumps and spikes when the numbers roughly doubled and then doubled again and again were around the 1910s, the 1940s/50s, and the 1980s; after that the numbers dropped some during the 1990s and 2000s before bouncing back in the 2010s.[30]

One factor, however large or small, is surely Christiansen's charting of the rise and development of the LDS cross taboo, as it intersected with the continued development of LDS belief in forms of garden atonement. He has shown that to be the case with James Talmage's *The Great Apostasy* and *Jesus the Christ*, and with the works of Joseph

30. Christiansen follows John Hilton III and Joshua P. Barringer, "The Use of Gethsemane by Church Leaders, 1859–2018," *BYU Studies* 58, no. 4 (2019): esp. fig. 1, minus their stratification in figs. 2.1, 2.2.

Fielding Smith and Bruce McConkie, where (1) the cross taboo and (2) belief in garden atonement clearly coincide. But anti-Catholic sentiment among Mormons does not account for all those jumps and spikes, commencing as the sentiment does already with the harsh polemics against Catholicism in the Book of Mormon.[31] No mono-causal theory is likely to make sense of all the statistics.

Changes in modern biblical scholarship are another factor that might help explain these developments in Mormon discourse. For instance, the KJV was revised as the RV in 1881–1885; then as the ASV in 1900–1901; as the RSV in 1946 (New Testament) and 1952 (together with the Old Testament), republished in 1971; revised again as the NRSV in 1989; and again as the ESV in 2001. A separate but wildly successful translation, the NIV, rivaling and even outstripping the KJV of late, was published in 1973 and 1978, then revised and republished in 2011. All these English translations of the Bible have democratized the erudite text-critical reasons for doubt concerning Luke 22:43–44, the angel, the agony, and the sweat like blood. The verses were already contested in Joseph Smith's day, but for the most part readers of the KJV had to search in biblical commentaries and other reference works in order to discover that information in print then.[32] By contrast, in these newer translations, the dubious nature of the verses in the ancient manuscript tradition has been flagged for Bible readers right there in the translation via one editorial convention or another, be it the use of a marginal

31. 1 Nephi 13:1–9, 20–29; 14:1–17; 22:13–14; 2 Nephi 6:12; 10:16; 28:18. Compare, e.g., the anti-Catholic reading of Revelation in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* which became a bestseller in Protestant America; Grant Adamson, "Early Christian Literature," in *The Bible and the Latter-day Saint Tradition*, edited by Taylor G. Petrey, Cory Crawford, and Eric A. Eliason (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2023), 317–318, 322.

32. In Smith's day, the historicity and authenticity of the verses had been challenged, and so had the literalness of the blood in Luke's or at least the Lukan interpolator's simile; see Adamson, "Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus," 59, 62–64.

note, full excision of the verses, and/or the placement of double square brackets around them. Here's a tally:

- RV (1881–1885), marginal note: "Many ancient authorities omit ver. 43, 44."
- ASV (1900–1901), marginal note: "Many ancient authorities omit verses 43, 44."
- RSV (1946, 1952), marginal note: "Other ancient authorities omit verses 43 and 44."
- RSV (rev. 1971), full excision, that is, the translation skips from verse 42 to 45, plus marginal note: "Other ancient authorities add verses 43 and 44."
- NIV (1973, 1978), marginal note: "Many early manuscripts do not have verses 43 and 44."
- NRSV (1989), double square brackets in the translation plus marginal note: "Other ancient authorities lack verses 43 and 44.
- ESV (2001), marginal note: "Some manuscripts omit verses 43 and 44."
- NIV (rev. 2011), marginal note: "Many early manuscripts do not have verses 43 and 44."

The multiple jumps and spikes in LDS references to Gethsemane may have something to do with the influence of these multiple post-KJV translations and with Mormons' overarchingly negative response to modern biblical scholarship, especially the solidification of Mormon KJV-onlyism.[33]

33. For these and other Anglophone translations, see F. F. Bruce, *History of the English Bible* (1961; New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible, from the KJV to the NIV: A History and Evaluation* (1981; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991); Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003). On the diverse reactions to biblical scholarship by LDS laity and leaders, including the Mormon brand of hyper-conservative KJV-onlyism, see Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112–198; and most recently the collection of essays in *The Bible and the Latter-day Saint Tradition*, esp. Petrey's

Let me highlight a possible link. In 1956, LDS apostle and First Presidency counselor J. Reuben Clark published his defense of the KJV. Within that single work, he deemed it requisite to buttress Luke 22:43–44 nearly a half dozen times against what he considered the godless machinations of the RV, the ASV, and the RSV.[34] In the preface, Clark tells of his personal and anti-intellectual faith journey, leading to this apologia for the KJV: "All his life the author has rebelled against the effort of the 'higher critics' to dilute and sometimes destroy the Word of God."[35] So the Mormon leader's project was, by his account, a lifelong labor, not just triggered by the publication of the RSV in 1946 and 1952. Nevertheless, the dates are notable, both that of Clark's *Why the King James Version* and of his 1954 general conference address, which gave Church members a précis of his forthcoming book.[36]

He opens his 1954 sermon with a summary of the publication of the RV, ASV, and RSV. In his preferred shorthand parlance, these translations are "the revisions," that is, revisions of the KJV, while the translators and editors are "extreme textualists," though it's worth pointing out that most of these so-called extremists were committed Christians themselves, albeit of more progressive theological temperament. They are not to be trusted, the fundamentalist Clark says, because they have dared depart from the sixteenth-century Erasmian Greek textual base

---

introduction, chap. 1 by Philip L. Barlow and Stephen T. Betts, and chap. 2 by Thomas Wayment. For KJV-onlyism: Jason A. Hentschel, "The King James Only Movement," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, edited by Paul C. Gutjahr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 229–41.

34. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Why the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 70, 119, 305, 331–34, 411. Above all, here Clark relies on the Anglican cleric John William Burgon, whose scholarship was already conservative when it was published in the 1880s in reaction to the RV.

35. Clark, *Why the King James Version*, vi.

36. Further discussion of the circumstances and aftermath: D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 173–79; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 173–98.

of the KJV New Testament. For the core of his talk, Clark chooses "a very few only (some sixteen) of the thousands of new renderings in these revisions, particularly the latest—the Revised Standard Version." Branding them heretical per early Christian bugaboos, whether "Arian," "Gnostic," or "Marcionite," he recurrently warns Church members to beware of the marginal notes in the RV, ASV, and RSV. His refrain: "the Church cannot accept" anything that does not align with Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, all of which are dependent on the KJV for content and language.[37]

Among these approximately sixteen unacceptable alterations to the KJV is the "doubt-raising marginal note" on "[t]he agony in the garden and the ministering angel (Luke 22:43–44)," from "Luke's record of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane." In striking candor, and for all his fellow leaders to hear, Clark inadvertently itemizes what's at stake: "These two verses contain our sole record of this event found in the New Testament." No other gospel has them, not Mark, Matthew, or John. Clark continues: "The Inspired Version [of Luke 22:43–44] . . . follows the King James Version;" as for the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, the ancient Nephite ruler known as "Benjamin predicted this specific suffering (Mosiah 3:7)," and "the Lord himself recounted it in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph" in "D. & C. 19:19." With so much hanging in the balance, Clark declares that "the question is settled for us. . . . We cannot accept the elimination of any part of the record of this great moment of almost unbearable agony" in the Lukan garden of the KJV.[38]

I'm only able to speculate what impact Clark's address may have had on other contemporary and future leaders of the Church and their views of Luke's Gethsemane. Despite his intention to steer them away

37. *One Hundred Twenty-fourth Annual Conference . . . April 3, 4, 5 and 6, 1954* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 37–47.

38. *One Hundred Twenty-fourth Annual Conference*, 43–44.

from the evil marginal notes in post-KJV translations, he exposed his audiences to the very doubts he considered so troubling. Did anyone hear and read between the lines of his 1954 talk followed by his 1956 book and thus realize how much of a vulnerability Luke 22:43–44 was to the Church? In subsequent generations of LDS leadership, was anyone reminded of that weakness as more and more translations of the Bible were released wherein Jesus' agony and sweat like blood were doubted, excised, or double-square bracketed? Is there any pattern at all between the publication of Bible translations and the jumps and spikes in LDS references to Gethsemane around the 1910s, 1940s/50s, 1980s, and 2010s, or is this possible 1950s link in Clark just an aberration?

Conclusion

The relationship between the garden and the cross within the history of soteriological thought, Mormon in particular and Christian in general, is best conceptualized on a sliding scale, such as the one I have proposed, not according to a binary framework. Belief in garden atonement did not originate among Mormons, and the LDS cross taboo was not the only factor in the shaping of Mormon varieties of that belief. Although they intersect here and there, starting in the early 1900s in LDS literature, they are not reducible to the same impetus and timeline. Protestant commentators on the Bible were already stating belief in garden-inclusive atonement long before Mormons. The Methodist exegete Adam Clarke even subordinated Gethsemane to Calvary in the early 1800s. Joseph Smith himself emphasized Jesus' suffering and bleeding for sin in the garden too, in Mosiah 3 and D&C 19, without excluding the crucifixion. LDS disapproval of the cross and crucifix in art, jewelry, and so forth was a relatively late development in Mormonism, to be sure; but belief in some form of garden atonement was not.

If we want to explain the exponential rise in LDS references to Gethsemane in the centuries after Joseph Smith, another factor worthy of attention besides the LDS cross taboo is Mormonism's reaction to

modern biblical scholarship and post-KJV Bibles in which doubt about Luke 22:43–44, the sole account of Jesus' agony and sweat like blood in the garden, was publicized to millions of readers like the Mormon anti-intellectual and KJV defender J. Reuben Clark. At any rate, the jumps and spikes we see in statistical analysis are informative but ultimately impressionistic. Basic bar graphs alone don't tell us whether the increased references to Gethsemane involve statements of belief in garden atonement as such. The raw numbers must be stratified, which reveals that quite a lot of the references are "incidental," not thematic of Jesus' suffering for sin.[39] In other words, Mormon belief in garden atonement may have stayed more constant than the raw numbers suggest, at least until the 1970s and '80s.[40] In addition, I think we need to know more in order to analyze these LDS statistics—more about other denominations, which ones hold or have held any belief in a form of garden atonement, and whether their references to Gethsemane over the centuries have also fluctuated. For all its eccentricity (and KJV-only regression), Mormonism is rarely if ever as unique or independent as it seems.

39. Hilton and Barringer, "Use of Gethsemane," figs. 2.1, 2.2, and p. 58: "[F]rom the 1920s to the 1960s, the most frequent reason for using *Gethsemane* [in the discourse of LDS leaders in general conference and suchlike] was to mention it in passing."

40. Hilton and Barringer, "Use of Gethsemane," figs. 2.1, 2.2, and p. 58: "One key insight provided by these [stratified] data is a remarkable increase in statements regarding Christ atoning for our sins in Gethsemane, beginning in the 1980s." That's far removed from the happenings of the early 1900s that Christiansen thinks are pivotal: the publication of Talmage's *Jesus the Christ*, and the controversy over erecting a cross on Ensign Peak in Salt Lake City.

GRANT ADAMSON {gwa1@arizona.edu} is a senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and Classics at the University of Arizona.

BRIGHAM YOUNG AS PASTOR: COMPASSION AND MERCY DURING THE UTAH WAR, 1857–1858

William P. MacKinnon

Will I run from the sheep? No. Will I forsake the flock? No. . . . I want you to understand that if I am your earthly shepherd you must follow me, or else we shall be separated. . . . I am your leader, Latter Day Saints, and you must follow me; and if you do not follow me you may expect that I shall go my way and you may take yours, if you please.

—Brigham Young announcing the Mormon Move South, Salt Lake Tabernacle, March 21, 1858

Much has been written about Brigham Young's involvement in the origins, prosecution, and impact of the Utah War of 1857–1858.[1] Some of

1. In brief, the conflict was the armed confrontation over power and authority between the civil-religious hierarchy of Utah Territory led by Governor Brigham Young, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the administration of President James Buchanan. In the spring of 1857, soon after his inauguration, Buchanan perceived rebellion and set out to restore federal authority in the territory by replacing Young as governor and installing a successor to be escorted west by a large army expedition. It was a change Young contested through his territorial militia, the Nauvoo Legion, and the use of hit-and-run guerrilla tactics. The result was a conflict that brought not only casualties but federal treason indictments for Young and hundreds of other Latter-day Saints. For the former governor and a few others, there would also be indictments for murder. With thousands of troops and camp followers involved, it was the nation's most extensive and expensive military undertaking during the period between the Mexican–American and Civil Wars.

For the most recent scholarship on the Utah War, see Richard E. Turley Jr. and Barbara Jones Brown, *Vengeance Is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023); Brent M. Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Mormons and the Federal Management of Early Utah*

this analysis includes stiff criticisms of Young's leadership in this conflict as well as spirited defenses of his stewardship.[2] At times my own observations have been among the more critical ones.[3] But one of the things that I have learned from my sixty-five-year association with Latter-day Saints and their history is that there are at least two sides to every story.

In pursuit of that observation, the purpose of this essay is to share four little-known vignettes about Brigham Young's leadership behavior during the tensest moments of the Utah War and the Steptoe Expedition immediately preceding that conflict. They reveal the pastoral side of his character—one far different from what students of the war usually discuss, preoccupied as they often are with military matters of tactics, strategy, and accountability for atrocities such as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

I begin with the case of Miss Elizabeth Sarah Taunton Stayner, a wayward nineteen-year-old British-born Latter-day Saint who, with

---

Territory (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); William P. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point: A Documentary History of the Utah War, Part 1 (to 1858)* and *Part 2 (1858–1859)* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2008 and 2016); David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, *The Mormon Rebellion: America's First Civil War, 1857–1858* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850–1859* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960).

2. Emblematic of these extremes is a joint article by two of the Utah War's leading but now deceased historians: Will Bagley and Ronald W. Walker, "Did Brigham Young Order a Massacre?" *True West* 50 (Apr. 2003): 31–34. My own position on Young's culpability for Mountain Meadows is that of a Scotch verdict: not proven. See MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 608.

3. My most severe criticism of President Young has focused on his unrestrained public rhetoric and actions as Utah's governor during the 1850s, a form of negative leadership permitting a culture of violence to arise in the territory and its militia. This deterioration in societal tone led to murder and looting in Utah. See William P. MacKinnon, ed., "'Lonely Bones': Violence and Leadership," chap. 7 in *At Sword's Point, Part 1*, 295–328. For a good analysis of the episodically rough language of Young's public discourses, see Ronald W. Walker, "Raining Pitchforks: Brigham Young as Preacher," *Sunstone* 8 (May/June 1983): 5–9.

dozens of other married and single women, chose to accompany the US Army troops of the Steptoe Expedition to California when they left the Salt Lake Valley in the spring of 1855. Brigham Young was initially enraged by this departure under such provocative circumstances. However, when Elizabeth asked Young for help through her father in 1856, Young went to considerable effort through a Church agent in San Francisco and apostle Orson Hyde in Carson Valley to facilitate her return to Utah. Elizabeth ultimately declined the help and stayed in California. Why she never followed through on (or even acknowledged) these arrangements is unknown. In 1857 she married Luman Wadhams in San Francisco. He was from a respectable, venerable Presbyterian family from upstate New York and worked as a teamster and accountant. Elizabeth and Luman remained in San Francisco, survived the 1906 earthquake and fire, and had five children. Elizabeth died in Oakland as a widow at age eighty-seven in 1923.[4]

Elizabeth's motives for leaving Utah with the army in 1855 are murky. However, for others her motives were hopelessly entangled with the controversies surrounding the social interactions and sexual peccadilloes of Colonel Steptoe's officers and men with Latter-day Saint women and girls, at least one of whom was Brigham Young's daughter-in-law. Immediately after the Steptoe Expedition and its entourage departed for California, Governor Young summoned Chief Justice John F. Kinney to his office and grilled him about reports of gambling, drinking, and womanizing by army officers and others at a Salt Lake City hotel Kinney owned. Surrounded by Young and a gathering of eleven senior Church leaders, businessmen, and Nauvoo Legion officers, a

4. See Ardis E. Parshall, "Random Reasons Why I Like Brigham Young: Two," *Keepapitchinin* (blog), Aug. 19, 2009, http://www.keepapitchinin.org/2009/08/19/random-reasons-why-i-like-brigham-young-two/; William P. MacKinnon, "Sex, Subalterns, and Steptoe: Army Behavior, Mormon Rage, and Utah War Anxieties," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 227–46; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Runaway Wives, 1830–1860," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 2 (Apr. 2016): 1–26.

beleaguered Kinney responded to the governor's interrogation with several remarkable disclosures recorded by an office stenographer:

> There was considerable drinking in my house by my clerks and other[s] staying in my house, & sometimes by others visiting my house. And I confess that I have got high. I expect that I drunk more liquor last winter than I have done in all my life. And almost all about my house drank considerable last winter. . . . Miss [Elizabeth] Stayner & Miss Potter were very much at my house, and much to the annoyance of my family. And indeed I was disgusted at their conduct. The [army] officers have been in my house and met the girls, but I was not responsible for all acts done in my house, being but a boarder in the house and having a manager over the business of the Hotel.[5]

In her old-age reminiscences, Kinney's daughter Ellen limned a more benign picture of Elizabeth's conduct and state of mind. At the time she knew her, Ellen Kinney was fourteen years old, and Elizabeth Stayner was both her governess and tutor in French and English. From this perspective, young Miss Kinney described Elizabeth as "a very interesting young English woman . . . well educated and an accomplished musician. But she was most unhappy, she had found everything so different from the way she had expected it to be. She had come over with relatives, with high hopes that the new life in a new country, would offer opportunities she could not find in congested old England, she came from. How heartily she wished she were back there. Her music was a resource but not an asset. There seemed to be no opening for her or any of them. They were all discouraged and homesick, in reduced circumstances with nothing to do."[6]

When Elizabeth decamped for California, Ellen Kinney believed that "having made a little money, she decided to go on to San Francisco,

5. David O. Calder, transcript of interview, John F. Kinney by Brigham Young, et al., July 10, 1855, CR1234/1, box 47, folder 44, reel 61, Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter CHL).

6. Ellen Kinney Ware, "Crossing the Plains in 1854," unpublished typescript, pp. 69–71, Hall-Kinney Collection, RG2939AM, sub 3, box 4, folder 3, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln.

thinking she could make her living there with her music" and later asked herself "what became of her, for she was womanly and attractive." As a grandmother in Nebraska City, Ellen naively believed that Elizabeth had traveled to California in 1855 "alone." Whether she really did so in this way and for this reason or instead left Utah out of promiscuity, a sense of adventure, disillusionment, or simple boredom is unknown and beyond the scope of this article's purpose. What is important is that when Elizabeth's family reached out for Brigham Young's help during February 1856 "in recovering our (at present) lost child," Young immediately swung into action and did so without recriminations. In seeking Young's assistance, Elizabeth's father Thomas had not mentioned the circumstances under which she had departed Utah, but Young was well aware that she had been part of Colonel Steptoe's California-bound entourage. Without reference to his earlier anger over Elizabeth's behavior, he sent her a sympathetic letter in San Francisco and then one to apostle Orson Hyde asking him to arrange her travel from Carson Valley to Salt Lake City on a Church wagon train so that "she will find [with you] a way for her to return to her much afflicted parents." It is telling that Young's pastoral request of Hyde was part of a letter dealing with the more urgent matters of food shortages and destitution in Utah, Native American raids, and the launch of a Mormon-owned newspaper in San Francisco.[7]

In contrast to the spirit of Brigham Young's efforts to help the Stayner family was the rant of Heber C. Kimball, his first counselor, to son William Kimball, then absent in England:

> Col. Steptoe . . . sent a part of his command south, while he went with part north. He took some of our "silly women" in his command viz., Mrs. Wheelock, Mrs. Broomhead and her other daughter, Miss Stayner, Miss Z. Potter, with several others, and then several went south with the

7. Thomas Stayner to Brigham Young, Feb. 26, 1856, box 25, folder 8 (reel 35); Brigham Young to Elizabeth Stayner, Mar. 1, 1856, Letterbook 2, p. 619; Brigham Young to Orson Hyde, Mar. 3, 1856, Letterbook 2, pp. 622–23, all Brigham Young papers, CR1234/1, CHL. According to Ellen Kinney, Thomas Stayner had earlier traveled to San Francisco in an unsuccessful attempt to find his daughter.

> other portion of the troops; one of Thos. Tanner's daughters, making three of his daughters gone to California, one of whom only lived three days after arriving in California. Emily Frost went with the soldiers north, starting for California, went as far as Boxelder [Brigham City, Utah], and then turned back to the city, giving as her reason for so doing, "they were too hard for her."[8]

Next comes a scene in the Wasatch Range during the brutally cold, snowy third week of November 1857. There, from a cave near the eastern end of Echo Canyon, Lt. Gen. Daniel H. Wells, Brigham Young's second counselor in the First Presidency, commanded the Nauvoo Legion. Wells pondered what was then the critical issue of the Utah War: Would the US Army's Utah Expedition, led by Col. Albert Sidney Johnston, move beyond the charred ruins of Fort Bridger to enter the Salt Lake Valley? There was a great deal at stake at this juncture, including the safety of Latter-day Saint women and the Church's leaders, who were widely believed to be targeted for molestation and summary execution, respectively. There was also the potentiality of wholesale bloodshed beyond what had already taken place in southern Utah at Mountain Meadows. During October and November President Young had secretly

8. Heber C. Kimball to William Kimball, May 29, 1855, CHL. In a parallel incident of non-forgiveness, Apostle John Taylor, then in New York, castigated Brigham Young for not having summarily executed his adult daughter, Mary Ann Taylor, after permitting her to marry a non-Mormon merchant in a civil ceremony and flee with him to San Francisco from Salt Lake City. Young defended his live-and-let-live behavior to the irate father, his church subordinate: "She seemed determined to go with the gentiles, and keep their company regardless of the remonstrances of her friends. And when Sister Taylor came to me to know what should be done about it, I told her that if he [the suitor] wanted to marry her, and she was a daughter of mine, I should let him do so, and I believe yet that it is much better for her to do so as she has, than to do like some others [not marrying] that I could mention. I do not believe that a faithful Elder as you are, and have been, will lose their children, when she has experienced enough of the world, she will be glad to return, and perhaps bring her husband with her." Brigham Young to John Taylor, April 30, 1855, CHL, unprocessed collection, John Taylor Papers.

replaced his no-bloodshed orders of September with authorizations for the Nauvoo Legion to use lethal force if the army continued to advance toward Utah settlements. Army officers and their civilian mountaineer guides were to be targeted first by snipers and raiders. Accordingly, President Young and General Wells issued orders that if the army moved past Bridger, the killing in northeastern Utah was to start.

While dealing with this grim prospect, General Wells had other worries, for although he was one hundred miles from his several families, he also thought like a father. In this role he worried about an ailing son and a deathly ill infant daughter, one-year-old Luna Pamela Wells, his child by wife Hannah Corilla Free. On November 6, Wells received a letter from Young filled with military advice. But Young's message also contained quite different news: "Br. Wells, your little daughter Luna is still very unwell, and there is but little prospect of her recovery."[9] A few days later, Young reported to Wells:

> Br. Heber C. Kimball, myself, Bishops Lorenzo D. Young and Woolley and several of the neighbors attended the funeral of your little daughter Luna. Myself and others of the brethren present made a few remarks upon the occasion, and your family appeared reconciled and comfortable under their bereavement, recognizing and acknowledging the hand of the Lord in that as in all things. The rest of your family are in the enjoyment of pretty good health, but [your wife] Talitha's child is still very unwell.[10]

Overcome by Brigham Young's compassion as well as by his own loss, General Wells responded to this news with what must be one of the most remarkable war dispatches to emerge from the American West:

> I cannot close without expressing to you Bro Brigham, my thanks and kind regards for your acts of friendship and Fatherly care extended to

9. Brigham Young to Daniel H. Wells, Charles C. Rich, and George D. Grant, Nov. 4, 1857, CHL.

10. Brigham Young to Daniel H. Wells, Charles C. Rich, and George D. Grant, Nov. 6, 1857, CHL. Luna's mother was the younger sister of Emeline Free, one of Brigham Young's wives.

> my family during their affliction in their recent bereavement. It gives me greater satisfaction when I reflect that it is only one of many such, for you have always and uniformly been a kind Parent to me and mine.[11]

The third vignette took place a few weeks later, also in Echo Canyon not far from General Wells's headquarters at Cache Cave. There Wells assembled his troops to hear the sentence of a general court martial he had convened to try Nauvoo Legion Private James Drake for a capital offense. Drake's crime, bestiality, was so heinous that a panel of legion officers heard the evidence and immediately found Drake guilty, sentencing him to death. As snow fell, General Wells presented these facts to his assembled troops and asked them, in typical Latter-day Saint fashion, to sustain Drake's sentence. They did so, and consequently Private Drake was to face a firing squad with only the date of his execution to be determined.

Here too the pastoral side of Brigham Young's leadership came to the fore. Young and Nauvoo Legion leaders were so shocked by Private Drake's offense that even the records setting forth what happened were heavily redacted.[12] However, on December 1, 1857 Young couriered his wishes to General Wells: "It will be best to release Drake and give him a severe reprimand, and let that suffice for his past conduct, and inform him that it may be permitted to sleep in silence, unless future like acts should require further proceedings."[13] This news arrived on December 3 just as Drake was being tied to the stake before a legion firing squad. And so, because of this judgment, Private Drake went home for the winter in disgrace followed by anonymity rather than to a grave in northeastern Utah's Echo Canyon.

The fourth vignette illustrating President Young's wartime mercy came after a threat from a member of his own extended family. Briefly

---

11. Daniel H. Wells to Brigham Young, Nov. 21, 1857, CHL.

12. A summary of the proceedings and eyewitness accounts in the Drake case may be found in MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 1*, 373–75.

13. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 1*, 373–75.

stated, on June 4, 1858, near Provo, James Valentine Young, a sister-in-law's son, unexpectedly lunged at his uncle and struck him several times, administering "a whipping" until bystanders subdued him. At times Brigham Young boasted that he could bring about the destruction of a miscreant or enemy with the crook of his finger. What James Valentine, like Private Drake, received was not summary judgment but the compassion of a man who was a pastor as well as his relative.[14] Shaken and embarrassed, Brigham Young dealt with this attack by directing that his assailant "be furnished with a horse and necessary equipment to let him have his desire which he had cherished for some time of going to the States." Thus disgraced and banished (but still alive), James Valentine Young rode to Fort Bridger and dropped from historical notice.[15] It would be fascinating to know what prompted such an attack on Brigham Young, but sources of the period are silent on what drove James's conduct.

In thinking about these incidents, it is well to remember that although during the conflicts of the 1850s Brigham Young was the Nauvoo Legion's supreme commander, his first rank in the legion years earlier in Illinois was as its chaplain, not as a combat leader. Small wonder that when war pressures prompted Young to evacuate northern Utah and put thirty thousand Latter-day Saints on the road to Mexican Sonora, he explained his role not in terms of military authority[16] but by proclaiming, "I want you to understand that . . . I am your earthly shepherd."

When considering Brigham Young's wartime pastorate, it is also worth remembering the extent to which he later was able, in a sense,

14. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 1*, 81, 493.

15. President's Office Journal, June 4, 1858, CHL; documents of David Candland, June 2–9, 1858, Utah State History Collection. James Valentine Young was the son of Jemima Angell Young, the sister of Brigham Young's wife, the former Mary Ann Angell. With his father dead, James had traveled to Utah with his mother in 1848 under the protection of Brigham Young's wagon train. He subsequently returned to Utah and died there in 1909.

16. "A series of instructions and remarks by President Brigham Young, at a special council, tabernacle," Mar. 21, 1858, CHL.

to recognize, if not admire, the long suits of those who had been his adversaries during the Utah War. Col. Albert Sidney Johnston and virtually the entire leadership of the US Army's Utah Expedition had been trained at West Point. Thirteen years later, President Young sent his eleventh son, Willard, to the US Military Academy, as he did one of his grandsons, Richard Whitehead Young. In setting apart these lads to serve as "missionaries" to the army as well as West Point plebes, Brigham Young began a tradition in which four consecutive generations of his descendants earned army commissions at the academy.

Willard Young, who entered West Point in the summer of 1871, faced an especially difficult challenge as the first Latter-day Saint in this role, one accompanied by national news coverage of his appointment and hazing from fellow cadets titillated by the presence of the son of a polygamous marriage involving one of the most famous men in America. In sending his son east aboard the Union Pacific Railroad he had just helped to build with Mormon labor, Brigham Young gave Willard advice in a letter that was as pastoral as it was fatherly, filled with admonitions about dealing with temptation, homesickness, bad companions, and the need for recreation and exercise. Along with his cautionary language, Young assured Willard that West Point would prepare him "to take a place even in the foremost ranks of the great men of the nation" and that "any assistance you need that I can furnish will be provided." It was not quite a patriarchal blessing, but close to one; no son could have asked for a better send-off, irrespective of his religious affiliation.[17]

Occasionally during the Utah War a few of Brigham Young's "flock" tried to take advantage of this compassionate side of his nature, apparently mistaking it as a sign of vulnerability to exploitation. It was risky behavior but apparently irresistible for adventuresome types such as J. V. Vernon, a Latter-day Saint given to flattery, compliments, and perhaps even deviousness. For example, on March 12, 1858, Vernon began a

17. See Appendix A.

note to Young written from the Utah Territory–Oregon border with the salutation "Esteemed Sir" and then went on to declare, "It is my duty to acknowledge in grateful terms your pastoral solicitude for my welfare." Having tipped his hat to Young's pastoral inclinations, Vernon proceeded "to solicit a further favor." He wanted permission from Brigham Young to leave wartime Utah Territory in company with five other people whom he described ambiguously as "wayfaring men whom fortuitous circumstances have thrown together in this vicinity." It was the type of travel Young had explicitly banned upon proclaiming martial law during the preceding September. That Vernon's destination was Vancouver Island via the Columbia River and Oregon City was especially provocative given the British Crown's nervousness about rumors of a mass Mormon migration to its Pacific Coast possessions. Queen Victoria's ministers would soon shore up the island's defenses by dispatching a frigate of the Royal Navy to the area and creating the Crown Colony of British Columbia to supersede the weak administration of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Young replied that it would be far safer to reach the Pacific by way of California rather than Oregon. Then the gloves came off, with Young telling Vernon, "If you was not so dark in your mind that you cannot understand right from wrong, I should have caused you to return to this place and take care of your family. But I know that a whip is just as good as [a] nod to a blind horse." He closed with the observation, "I would respect and love you and do you good, if you would let me." It was a message no Latter-day Saint wanted to hear in those terms. Vernon beat a hasty retreat, telling Young that he would delay his trip for two or three months, travel by a different route, and take his wife and daughter with him.

Vernon did not seem to have learned his lesson for long. He eventually turned on Young. In January 1859 Utah's chief justice, Delana R. Eckels, informed US secretary of state Lewis Cass that Vernon was an "apostate" and was writing letters undercutting the viability of Utah's governor, Alfred Cumming. Vernon's criticism was directly contrary to Brigham Young's policy of protecting Cumming from political

opponents like Eckels and from potential removal from office by President Buchanan.[18]

In 2013 Craig L. Foster captured well the multidimensional and complex nature of Young's presidential style in trying to bring what he viewed as a need for balance to John G. Turner's much-noticed biography: "In spite of a celebrated temper and strong sermons, Brigham Young was known for having a loud bark but not a strong bite. In spite of raining pitchforks and preaching blood-curdling threats, Brigham Young tended to be kind, sagacious, and forgiving when dealing individually with sinners and [Church] members with problems. This did not, however, mean there was no bite. Brigham, like other leaders of his time could be hard when needed."[19] As another historian commented about the vignettes described here, "they are a gentle reminder to those who would dismiss Brigham Young as a moral monster that there were other sides to his personality, and sides that endeared him to the [Latter-day] Saints."[20]

---

18. J. V. Vernon to Brigham Young, Mar. 12, 1858, Brigham Young Collection, CR1234/1, box 26, folder 15, reel 36; Brigham Young to J. V. Vernon, Mar. 16, 1858, Brigham Young Collection, CR1234/1, box 18, folder 11, reel 37, CHL; and J. V. Vernon to Brigham Young, Mar. 29, 1858, Brigham Young Collection, CR1234/1, box 26, folder 15, reel 36, CHL; Delana R. Eckels to Lewis Cass, with Vernon attachments, Jan. 15, 1859, State Department Territorial Papers, Utah Series, vol. I, Apr. 30, 1853–Dec. 24, 1859, microfilm 491567, Church Family History Library, Salt Lake City.

19. Craig L. Foster, "New Light and Old Shadows: John G. Turner's Attempt to Understand Brigham Young," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 3 (2013): 208.

20. Comment by anonymous reviewer of this article in draft form, Apr. 2023. The author is grateful for the insights of this reviewer and a second unidentified reader as well as the guidance of *Dialogue*'s editor. He also thanks Salt Lake genealogist-historian Ardis E. Parshall for her research and administrative assistance. Much of this essay is derived from the author's unpublished remarks at the devotional meeting, Mormon History Association Annual Conference, Assembly Hall, Temple Square, Salt Lake City, May 27, 2007 as well as his study of the Utah War during the last sixty-five years.

Appendix A

Brigham Young to Willard Young, May 19, 1871[21]

Salt Lake City, U.T.

May 19, 1871

Mr. Willard Young,

My dear Son;

As you are about to leave home for a season and those with who you have been in the habit of associating for years, many of whom are near and dear to you, a few words of advice may not prove unseasonable.

In entering the Academy at West Point, you are taking a step which may prove to you of incalculable advantage. You are thereby enjoying a privilege which falls to the comparatively few. You will do well to treasure up the instructions so abundantly provided there, that in after years you may be prepared to take a place even in the foremost ranks of the great men of the nation.

Experience will teach you that the greatest success does not attend the over-studious, and a proper regard must be had to physical as well as intellectual exercise, else the intellectual powers become impaired, and, therefore bodily recreation and rest are as necessary as they are beneficial to mental study.

Every facility will be afforded you at home by your friends in the furtherance of your studies, and I have no doubt that a straightforward, manly, upright course on your part will give you favor with and ensure you valuable aid from your fellow students.

Bear in mind above all, the God whom we serve, let your prayers day and night ascend to him for light and intelligence, and let your daily walk and conversation be such, that when you shall have returned home, you can look back to the time passed at West Point and see no

21. Brigham Young to Willard Young, May 19, 1871, CR1234/1, Letterbook 12, 687–88, CHL. Transcription courtesy of Ardis E. Parshall, Salt Lake City. Text may also be found in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1974). A summary of Willard Young's army experiences may be found in J. Michael Hunter, "The Youngs at West Point: Duty, Honor, Country—A Lifelong Pledge of Faith," *Pioneer* (Summer 2002): 26–31.

stain upon your character. You will doubtless have your trials and temptations, but if you will live near the Lord, you will hear the still, small voice whisper to you even in the moment of danger. Attend strictly to your own business, be kind and courteous to all, be sober and temperate in all your habit, shun the society of the unvirtuous and the intemperate, and should any person ask you to drink intoxicating liquor of any kind, except in sickness, never accept it. Select your own company rather than have others select yours.

If at any time you feel overtaxed or home sick, seek relaxation in the Society of our Elders in New York, or in other places where they may be travelling, that is, when the rules of the Institution or special license, permit you leave of absence.

Write to me frequently and any assistance you need that I can furnish will be provided. May God bless you and preserve you from every snare and give you His Holy Spirit to light your path before you, and help qualify you for usefulness in His Kingdom.

Your Affectionate Father

Brigham Young

WILLIAM P. MACKINNON of Montecito, California, has published extensively since 1963 about the American West, especially Utah's turbulent territorial period, in five books and 130 journal articles. He is the author-editor of the two-volume documentary history of the Utah War, *At Sword's Point* (2008, 2016), and in 2022 he co-edited (with Professor Kenneth L. Alford of BYU) *Fact, Fiction, and Polygamy*, a study published by the University of Utah's Marriott Library in its Tanner Trust Series. He and Professor Alford are at work on a study of the overland trails to be published in 2025 by the University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books. MacKinnon served during 2010–11 as president of the Mormon History Association; he has also been chairman of the Yale Library Associates and Children's Hospital of Michigan. He is a fellow and honorary life member of the Utah Historical Society. MacKinnon is an alumnus or veteran of Yale, the Harvard Business School, and the US Air Force. This is his seventh article or book review for *Dialogue*.

"I AM COMMANDED TO STAND AND TESTIFY UNTO THIS PEOPLE THE THINGS WHICH HAVE BEEN SPOKEN BY OUR FATHERS": LEHI'S AND NEPHI'S INFLUENCE ON ALMA 5

Matthew Scott Stenson

> *Yea, he saith, come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life.*
>
> *—Alma 5:34*

One of the most referenced sermons in the Book of Mormon is Alma's discourse to the church in Zarahemla in about 83 BC. Alma 5 seems to derive its narrative structure, distinctive language, and symbolic imagery from Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision. Alma's sermon in this chapter twice directly references the "tree of life" (5:32, 62). These references constitute two of the six times the symbol is mentioned by Alma in the Book of Mormon (Alma 32:40; 42:3, 5–6). The only other prophets to use the phrase are Lehi and Nephi. This fact seems significant. Famously, the tree of life is a key symbol in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision. The tree of life is not the only parallel between Alma 5 and these early revelations, though, suggesting that Alma is dependent on these texts in his sermon. Lehi's influence on Alma 5 has been discussed for over a decade, but no one to my knowledge has described the full extent

of this influence.[1] A thorough study of this influence is thus in order. I demonstrate here that Alma uses Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision to arrange his address.

In 2022, four Book of Mormon scholars published a brief survey of the field of Book of Mormon studies. Their survey identifies seven common methodological approaches to the Book of Mormon, all of which, more or less, have been applied to other forms of sacred literature. The seven approaches include these: (1) textual production, (2) historical origins, (3) literary criticism, (4) intertextuality, (5) theological interpretation, (6) reception history, and finally, (7) ideology critique. Of these, I am most interested in intertextuality (how one text influences another). The authors of the survey explain that although intertextual approaches to sacred literature have been around since at least the 1970s, in the case of the Book of Mormon, intertextuality "has come into use . . . only recently." They caution that commonality between texts may imply "deliberate dependence," but it doesn't necessarily mean more than "suggestive interaction in the mind of a reader."[2] Here, I will argue for deliberate dependence while not ruling out suggestive interaction.

In addition, neither the elements of Lehi's dream nor Nephi's vision nor, for that matter, much else in the record can perfectly be disentangled from its associated material. This is because one of the qualities of

1. Daniel L. Belnap, "'Even as Our Father Lehi Saw': Lehi's Dream as Nephite Cultural Narrative," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision*, edited by Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2011), 214–39; Daniel L. Belnap. "'There Arose a Mist of Darkness': The Narrative of Lehi's Dream in Christ's Theophany," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, edited by Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 75–106.

2. Daniel Becerra, Amy Easton-Flake, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Joseph M. Spencer, eds., *Book of Mormon Studies: An Introduction and Guide* (Provo: Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University, 2022), 31–62, here at 46.

great literature, and thus divine scripture, is what may be termed poetic fusion. This literary convoluting of associated parts within a given text is a common aesthetic of not only the most symbolic texts but also, to a lesser degree, prophetic sermons such as Alma 5. That is, although my analysis attempts to neatly divide Alma 5 into three distinct parts, the complexity of it will of necessity challenge that endeavor with overlap and intersection.

Accordingly, to make this intertextual argument, I will do my best to demonstrate the direct and indirect intersection between three aesthetically challenging texts: 1 Nephi 8 (Lehi's dream); 1 Nephi 11–14 (Nephi's vision); and Alma 5 (Alma's sermon to Zarahemla). In the first of these texts, Lehi emerges from a dark wilderness to partake of the fruit of the tree of life. He sees many others also wandering toward and away from the tree. Many in his dream inhabit a great and spacious building. In the second text, Nephi beholds the things that his father saw and more. In a series of juxtaposed episodes, he sees redemptive history unfold from the time of Christ to nearly the end of the world. The third text, Alma's sermon to Zarahemla, contains Alma's remarks to the Nephite church after he has relinquished his role as the chief judge. In his bold sermon, Alma calls many in the church to repent and be born again that they might be prepared for what is to come.

In what follows, (1) I will suggest that Alma 5, somewhat like Lehi's dream, begins with an account of the forefathers (men and women) passing through a wilderness only to find a special tree and its fruit; (2) I will demonstrate the allusive presence of the tree of life in Alma 5 and attempt to get at the language's redemptive implications; and (3) I will demonstrate the allusive presence of the great and spacious building (or its inhabitants) in Alma 5. This particular order is important because it follows the order of events and symbols as we receive them in Nephi's account of his father's dream and in his own vision.[3] My primary claim

3. Amy Easton-Flake, "Lehi's Dream as a Template for Understanding Each Act of Nephi's Vision," in *The Things Which My Father Saw*, 179–213.

is that the three-part shape of Lehi's dream, more or less, appears to dictate the shape of Alma's significant sermon.

Lehi's and Nephi's Influence on the First Part of Alma 5

To further get at Lehi's influence on Alma 5, we will first need to turn our attention to Alma's intriguing prologue (Alma 5:3–13). In Lehi's prologue he seems to be spiritually struggling in darkness before happening upon a tree with joy-inducing fruit (1 Nephi 8:4–12). Similarly, Alma emphasizes his forefathers' experiences in temporal captivity and their deliverance from spiritual darkness. He couches this spiritual deliverance in terms of emerging from "darkness" unto "light" (5:7). Alma's "invok[ing] of the fathers" is consistent with the angelic admonition he received at the time of his own conversion and, for reasons that will be forthcoming, seems noteworthy (Mosiah 27:16).[4] Lehi's own dream experience is emblematic of the more recent historic deliverances described by Alma to those assembled to hear him in Zarahemla. Thus, Lehi's prologue seems to more or less parallel Alma's prologue in at least seven ways.

First, in each account a dark and difficult wilderness serves as the setting for the action involved. Although Nephi's account of Lehi's dream prologue is brief and likely incomplete, the setting of the wilderness is referred to variously as a "dark and dreary wilderness" and as a "dark and dreary waste" (1 Nephi 8:4, 7). The implications of finding himself in this place caused Lehi to "fear exceedingly" (8:4). Nephi only recounts Lehi's dream for his reader after he says that "my father tarried in the wilderness" south of Jerusalem (8:2). Once delivered from

4. Robert A. Rees, "Alma the Younger's Seminal Sermon," in *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown*, edited by Andrew C. Skinner, D. Morgan Davis, and Carl Griffin (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011), 329–43, here at 337. Rees points out that in his sermon Alma transitions from the phrase "'my father' and 'your fathers,' to the collective 'our fathers'" (337, referencing Alma 5:21).

his ordeal, Lehi, we are told, stumbles upon a "large and spacious field" (8:9). The vastness implied by this last detail suggests that Lehi experienced the darkness of his wilderness as an oppressive and smothering mist.[5]

Alma's prologue also describes a wilderness. It is directly referred to in Alma 5:3–5 as that wilderness "in the borders of Nephi" (Alma 5:3). It is there that Alma, after fleeing Noah's court, establishes a church "in the wilderness" (5:5). Alma explains that while yet among Noah's people, "they [Alma's followers] were in the midst of darkness" (5:7).[6] To be more specific, before their conversion, "they were encircled about by the bands of death and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them" (5:7). "[N]evertheless," we are told, "their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word," and "their souls did expand" (5:7, 9).[7]

Second, in each account the dark and difficult wilderness is traversed by a father (or fathers). Nephi tells of his father's dream as part of a more extensive abridgment of Lehi's prophecies and revelations (see 1 Nephi 1–10). Presumably out of respect for his father, Nephi begins his overall record stating he was "taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father" and that he makes his record "in the language of [his]

5. Hugh W. Nibley suggests that Lehi's dream wilderness likely borrows from his own reality. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites*, edited by John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister, vol. 5 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book Company, 1988), 43–46.

6. According to Royal Skousen, there is reason to think that "midst of darkness" should be rendered as "mist of darkness," though he does not adopt the latter phrase in his work *The Earliest Text*. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 292.

7. Daniel L. Belnap perceives suggestive resonances here between the early Nephite revelations and Alma's imagery. Belnap, "Even as Our Father Lehi Saw," 224; Belnap, "There Arose a Mist of Darkness," 93.

father" (1 Nephi 1:1–2). It is no wonder therefore that Lehi's dream as recounted by Nephi begins with his father's experience in the wilderness. Indeed, Lehi's dream begins and ends with his fatherly concerns for his sons, Laman and Lemuel, and by implication, their posterity (1 Nephi 8:4, 36). Lehi appears to discover (while beholding the abyss of his wilderness) that he himself was lost in it (8:7).

Alma begins his sermon with the account of his own father in the wilderness. From the time of his own conversion, as mentioned, the son Alma had been admonished to remember his forefathers' captivity (Mosiah 27:16). This may be because he and the sons of Mosiah had fought against the authority and teachings of their fathers earlier in their history (27:14–15). Accordingly, Alma asks his own people if they have "sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of [their] fathers" (5:6). He is emphatic on this point. Further, early in his sermon Alma describes his father's own conversion and reminds his people that their fathers also were delivered out of their wilderness and ultimately saved from the "bands of death, and the chains of hell" that did encompass them before they came to a knowledge of the truth (Alma 5:7–9).

Third, in each account a father or fathers are granted the inspired word of an angelic or prophetic guide to help them through the wilderness. In Lehi's dream, after seeing the "dark and dreary wilderness," he is joined by "a man" who guides him. The unidentified man is described as "dressed in a white robe" (1 Nephi 8:4–5). The white robe reference is reminiscent of the theophany in 1 Nephi 1:8–13. It certainly is suggestive of the man's positive guiding presence. In Lehi's early vision, after God and angels are observed, one descends "out of the midst of heaven" (1:9). His "luster was above that of noon-day" (1:9). Further, "twelve others" followed him; their "brightness did exceed that of the stars" (1:10). The man in the white robe in Lehi's dream first stands "before [him]," and then bids Lehi to "follow him" (8:6). Thereafter, he is not mentioned anymore. This robed figure seems to be an angel or prophet, one who prepares the way for Lehi to reach the tree and taste the fruit

that "filled [his] soul with exceedingly great joy," even though he says little in the account (8:12).

Similarly, in Alma's sermon Alma explains that the fathers (his own included) were delivered from their wilderness by following the words spoken by a "holy prophet" (Alma 5:11). Alma asks the members of the church, "did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi?" (5:11) Alma follows this question up with a statement about the effect of his own father's words upon the fathers of those whom he addresses: "And behold, he [my father] preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was wrought in their hearts" (5:13). The result of Abinadi's and Alma's preaching was that they "humbled themselves" and "their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love" (5:9, 13).

Fourth, in each account a father (or fathers) seeks heavenly help and finds deliverance through prayer. Due to the brevity of the account of Lehi's dream, much must be inferred about Lehi's experience in his dark wilderness. What seems clear, though, is that in seeking deliverance from his ordeal he undergoes a transformation. It has been suggested that Lehi, the traveler, is "lost and helpless," even confused, as if by a "mist of darkness (sultry and thick)."[8] Only once Lehi begins to follow his guide does he perceive his real situation. After presumably trailing his guide for "many hours in darkness," Lehi appears to hunger for divine deliverance (1 Nephi 8:8). As a result, he reports: "I began to pray unto the Lord" (8:8). Due to his prayer, Lehi is delivered from his wilderness into a "large and spacious field" (8:4, 9). The fervent prayer offered in despair and darkness (not the guide per se) seems to be the primary means of deliverance.

Alma also alludes to their fathers' deliverance from King Noah and later Amulon (priest of Noah). The account of these deliverances is most fully recorded in Mosiah 23–24. In those chapters we learn that

8. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 43–46.

Alma and his newly converted people had been "delivered out of the hands of King Noah" (Alma 5:4) only to fall victim to Amulon (Mosiah 23:39). While in bondage to Amulon in the wilderness the members of the church were not permitted to pray to God vocally, so they "did pour out their hearts to him" (Mosiah 24:12). Through "their faith and their patience" they were ultimately delivered from their captivity and were able to travel to Zarahemla. Alma's people sought help and found temporal and spiritual deliverance by means of prayer.

Fifth, in each account a father or fathers is eventually delivered by a merciful act of God. In 1 Nephi 1:20, Nephi promises his reader that he "will show unto [him or her] that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he has chosen . . . to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance." True to his word, Nephi describes Lehi while yet in darkness praying unto the Lord "that he would have mercy on [him], according to the multitude of his tender mercies" (8:8). As indicated, Lehi's deliverance out of his wilderness follows. Further, Nephi wraps up the account of his father's dream by returning to the theme of mercy. Lehi's post-dream hope for his eldest sons, Laman and Lemuel, is recorded as follows: "that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off" (8:37).

Mercy also figures in Alma's sermon. Indeed, Alma says that his fathers were delivered from their wilderness by an act of divine mercy. Speaking of the church's deliverance from Noah, he writes, "And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God" (Alma 5:4). In the next verse, we learn that the earlier merciful deliverance (out of Noah's hands) and the subsequent deliverance (out of Amulon's hands) came "by the power of [the Lord's] word" (5:5). Alma then searchingly asks his audience, "Yea, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them [fathers]?" (5:6)

Sixth, in each account the fruit of the tree of life is seen and then tasted, the tree being an emblem of renewed spiritual life and the

attendant joyful hope of redemption. Once Lehi enters upon a "large and spacious field" (1 Nephi 8:9), he beholds a tree that is later identified by Nephi as the "tree of life" (11:25). Lehi sees that the tree's "fruit was desirable to make one happy" (8:10). Once Lehi approaches and partakes of the fruit of the tree, he discovers that it is "most sweet" and "white, to exceed all the whiteness that [he] had ever seen" (8:11). The fruit "filled [Lehi's] soul with exceedingly great joy" (8:12). Thereafter, Lehi invites his family to the tree to partake of the fruit with him. About this time, he learns that some of his family members are willing to "come unto [him]," but some are not. (Lehi also sees many other symbols in and around the tree, we are told, including a path, a rod, a river, a mist, a building, etc.)

In Alma's sermon, the tree of life is suggested early on (as early as Alma 5:7) but not explicitly referenced until later. As indicated, Alma invites his audience to the fruit of the tree in these unmistakably allusive words: "Behold, he [Lord] sendeth an invitation to all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent and I will receive you. Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread of life freely" (5:33–34). Further, after Alma speaking by way of commandment implores the members of the church to come and partake, he ends his sermon addressing those not of the church who are also present on the occasion in these words: "and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life" (5:62).

Seventh, in each account the tree of life is emblematic of sweet and pure redeeming love. Redeeming love is implicit in the tree of life's description and in Lehi's actions relative to his family members (1 Nephi 8:11–12). This becomes more explicit, however, in Nephi's vision when the tree is clearly associated with the "love of God" (11:21–22, 25). And, as the account says, Nephi sought to behold the "things which

[his] father saw"; this, at least initially, especially includes the tree his father saw (11:3). Nephi later receives that privilege (1 Nephi 11–14; see also 15:21–22). The tree of life, introduced in Lehi's dream, is explicitly discussed during Nephi's vision and thereafter alluded to often. There, it takes on many allusive resonances, as we shall see. Nephi directly references Lehi's tree early and, at first, often (11:4, 7–9, 21). Thereafter, though, he mostly only suggests it using certain descriptive words and phrases (as did his father) such as "white" and "exceedingly fair and beautiful" (13:15). White, or a white exceeding anything earthly, has described the tree from 1 Nephi 8 (8:11; 11:8). In his vision, Nephi variously associates Lehi's tree and its fruit with the righteous across time (11:8, 15; 12:10–11; 13:15–16; see also 15:26–36). In Nephi's revelation, the tree of life is most plainly associated with redeeming love. That is, after Nephi asks his first guide for the "interpretation" of the tree, he is shown the fair, white, and beautiful virgin birth of the Son of God, according to the "love of God," which is "most desirable" and "most joyous," even "precious above all" (11:9, 11–23). Lehi similarly describes the fruit of the white tree as "desirable to make one happy"; indeed, when Lehi partook of the tree's fruit "it filled [his] soul with exceedingly great joy," and he began to be "desirous" that his family should partake of it also (1 Nephi 8:9–12).

Alma speaks of redeeming love in a similar symbolic context. As we have seen, Alma's prologue points out that the fathers were delivered from their wilderness when they emerged from darkness and began to experience light and love. Hearkening to the words of the prophets, Abinadi and Alma, the fathers' hearts were changed, Alma says, and "their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love" (Alma 5:9, 26). Alma refers to the "mighty change" of heart that fills them with the "song of redeeming love" twice in his sermon (5:14, 26). He does so in context with his discussion about how the fathers obtained mercy and the initial hope of salvation. Redeeming love is what one feels when one has freshly emerged from the wilderness. Once Alma's prologue

is concluded, then, he points his people to the prospect of salvation through Christ. The imagery at the midpoint of Alma 5 becomes ever more suggestive of the tree of life, the same periodically described or suggested in 1 Nephi 8 and 11–14 (see also 1 Nephi 15:21–22, 36).

To summarize, there are seven ways in which the beginning of Lehi's dream parallels Alma's opening sermon in Alma 5. Each account begins in a difficult wilderness. There, a father (or the fathers) struggles for deliverance. In process of time, he is delivered from his circumstance by the mercy and power of God. In Lehi's case, he follows a man robed in white; in Alma's case, he says the fathers (including his own) obtained salvation by heeding the words of a prophet. Further, we have seen that both accounts allude to the tree of life and God's "redeeming love," as manifest toward those who choose to come unto him and be "saved" (5:9–13). That is, the first part of each account, directly or indirectly, introduces us to the tree of life.

Accordingly, in what follows I will (1) demonstrate how Alma in the middle part of his sermon symbolically suggests Lehi's and Nephi's tree of life more fully using the word clusters referenced earlier and (2) show how in the last part of his sermon Alma suggests the great and spacious building that we are introduced to in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision. Doing this will conclude my case that Alma has inventively shaped his sermon in Alma 5 on the three-part pattern found most clearly in Lehi's dream.

Lehi's and Nephi's Influence on the Second Part of Alma 5

After Alma's prologue, the theme that dominates Alma 5 (verses 14–36) is that of qualifying for salvation or eternal life through the Lord's atonement. Throughout this middle section of the sermon, we are to equate Alma's earlier discussion of salvation and reference to redemptive love with the tree of life. While delivering his sermon, Alma sees

himself, much as Abinadi and Alma once did, figuratively inviting his wandering people to the tree of life where they can find redeeming love, and ultimately salvation, if they "humble . . . themselves" enough to repent and remain there with the others gathered to the "true and living God" (Alma 5:13, 7:6; Mormon 9:28; Ether 2:8; see also 3 Nephi 30:1; Mormon 5:14).

The following examples demonstrate how Alma directly alludes to and adapts certain distinctive words and phrases we first find in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision, particularly references to the tree of life (but also the building's inhabitants). Some references are more explicit than others. The less-than-obvious echoes may require explanation, but the direct references should make the less precise references more plausible. Indeed, the explicit references (Alma 5:34, 62) invite the reader to consider the possibility of the more subtle connections. Significantly, the more explicit borrowings allow for the less obvious resonances to be perceived—and, in time, appreciated—as belonging to this further simplified pattern of the entire sermon: (1) the wilderness and father (or fathers) led to the tree, (2) the tree of life itself, and (3) the great building.

Having analyzed the seven prologue/wilderness parallels between Lehi and Alma, we will now examine certain additional tree of life parallels between Lehi's dream (and Nephi's vision) and Alma's sermon.

First, as indicated in each account, the tree of life and its fruit are explicitly and implicitly referenced using similar words. The tree of life and its fruit are explicitly referenced in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision. In 1 Nephi 8, the tree's fruit is described as "desirable to make one happy"; "most sweet, above all"; and "white, to exceed all whiteness" (8:10–11). The tree's fruit, we are told, filled Lehi's soul with "exceedingly great joy" (8:12). Nephi's first guide (the Spirit of the Lord) also remarks on the tree's "whiteness" (11:8). Not much later, Nephi compares the tree and its fruit to the "love of God," which he explains is "most desirable" and "most joyous" (11:22–23, 25). The Spirit employs additional

descriptors when referring to the tree such as "exceeding of all beauty" (later "exceedingly fair" and "most beautiful") and "precious above all" (11:8–9, 13–15). In Nephi's vision, the tree and its fruit are associated with the Lamb of God and his life (11:21, 34–36). The Lamb is equated there with the Good Shepherd (13:41). The righteous are also associated with the tree and its fruit, including groups such as the Jewish twelve apostles (11:29–36), the Nephite twelve disciples (12:6, 10–12), and the latter-day Gentiles (13:15–16).

Though the tree of life is directly described by Nephi and Lehi, many of the above references to it are only allusive. Nevertheless, they are identifiable by tracing distinct word clusters. For instance, in 1 Nephi 12:10–12 the tree of life is suggested by phrases such as "they [the Nephite twelve] are righteous forever" and "their garments are made white in his [Lamb's] blood" (12:10–12). (Alma will rely more on the Good Shepherd identifier for the divine figure in his sermon.) This reading of 1 Nephi 12:10–12 is reasonable for three reasons: (1) The twelve apostles have recently been associated with the Lamb of God (after crucifying him, the world fought against them from the "great and spacious building," 11:36). (2) Speaking of chapter 12 specifically, this special imagery has been invoked *after* allusions to "a mist of darkness" (12:4–5) and *before* references to the "river" and the "large and spacious building," so one suspects that other symbols from Lehi's dream such as the tree of life are likely implicitly present (12:16–18). (3) Phrases such as "made white" and "were white" are repeated three times in 12:10–11. This concentrated repetition of these phrases so soon after the tree's description in 1 Nephi 11:7–9 and so proximate to the other recycled symbols obliges the reader to scrutinize the cluster of words and to follow them forward with Lehi's dreamscape in mind.[9]

A careful perusal of the words associated with the tree of life and its fruit first introduced in Lehi's dream and/or Nephi's vision along

9. Easton-Flake, "Lehi's Dream as a Template," 179–213.

with those new terms accumulating through 1 Nephi 11–14 (and even 1 Nephi 15) yields interesting results. As indicated, Alma directly refers to the "tree of life" on three separate occasions: he directly uses the phrase "tree of life" twice while preaching to the church in Zarahemla (Alma 5:34, 62); he employs the phrase one time while preaching among the poor Zoramites (Alma 32:40); and he deploys the phrase three more times while teaching his wayward son Corianton (42:3, 5–6). However, most of Alma's allusive references in Alma 5 that echo Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision are less obvious, and thus require attending to contextual clues, as well as being willing to compare Alma 5 with other passages ascribed to Alma. As this is an important point, I will return to Alma's choice of characteristic words after I establish their salvific context in Alma 5. For now, it should be noted that certain words that directly refer to and/or suggest the tree of life and its fruit are shared by Lehi, Nephi, and Alma. These are the only prophets in the Book of Mormon who use the phrase "tree of life."

Second, in each account the theme of final judgment and salvation provides the backdrop for the direct reference to the tree of life. It is plain from Nephi's abridgment of his father's dream that Lehi understands what he has seen in reference to the tree of life and the great and spacious building to represent the possible cutting off of his sons (if not their posterity) from the blessings of ultimate salvation in the kingdom of God. According to Nephi, Lehi prefaces his dream by speaking of the salvation of his sons in these words: "And behold, because of the thing which I [Lehi] have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved" (1 Nephi 8:3). However, this reference to ultimate salvation is immediately followed by Lehi's concern for his older sons: "But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you" (8:4). His fear for these sons is not made known until the dream has been recorded. Nephi records Lehi's delayed conclusion in these words: "because of the things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly

feared for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord" (8:36).

Given the immediate dream context for this statement, it must be understood that to be cut off from the tree of life and its fruit is to be "cut off from the presence of the Lord" and, if we include the next verse in the equation, from his redemptive mercy (8:37). Nephi reports that after Lehi imparted his dream to them, he preached to them, exhorting them to keep the commandments of God. It appears, though we do not have the sermon, that Lehi's dream was the basis for a sermon he delivered to his sons, one in which with some urgency he exhorted them and prophesied. (This is essentially what Alma does in Zarahemla. He appears to use Lehi's dream to construct a three-part prophecy that his people might return to the Lord and partake of the goodness and mercy of God as made available through his infinite atonement.) Lehi understands his dream to suggest the ultimate salvation of Nephi and Sam and the final fate of his other sons if they do not turn their course and partake of the redemptive blessings extended to them.

Alma also situates his direct and indirect references to the tree of life and its fruit within the context of final judgment and ultimate salvation. Like Lehi, he perceives that his people will not be saved unless they repent and come unto Christ through his (Alma's) words to partake of what elsewhere is called the goodness of God. Judgment and salvation are major themes running through the early and middle portions of Alma's sermon. While yet discussing their fathers' experiences in the wilderness, he asks his people, "on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation?" (Alma 5:10) Later, after asking his people to look forward to the day of their final judgment, he asks, "can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?" (5:20) He immediately answers his own question: "I say unto you, ye will know at that day ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white" (5:21). No one can gain salvation "or sit

down in the kingdom of God" unless they repent and come to the tree of life (5:24).

Third, in each account a significant person invites others to come and partake of the fruit of the tree of life. In Lehi's dream, a figure in authority invites others to come to where he stands to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, which represents Christ and the redemptive blessings he extends to the repentant who are washed clean and pure through him. In Lehi's dream, he as husband and father to the family invites his wife and sons in sequence to come to the tree by which he stands to partake of its most sweet and exceedingly white fruit: "And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit" (1 Nephi 8:15). As we have seen, some in the family heed Lehi's invitation while others do not. In consequence, some are cut off from the presence of the Lord. Lehi's dream, being prophetic in nature, truly predicted what later actually occurred. His older sons (and others who followed them) were "cut off from the presence of the Lord" around the time of his death (see 2 Nephi 5:20–21). Nephi saw in his vision the troubles among his people and his brothers' seed and was distraught at the prospect (see 1 Nephi 15:4–5). He also saw that the Lord would in a latter day invite all to come unto him by means of bringing forth "other books" (13:39–41). This divine person who invites "all men . . . to come unto him" in the account is referred to as the "Lamb" and "Shepherd" (13:41).

Alma implores his people to come unto the Lord and partake of the blessings of his redemption through repentance and baptism. He stands before his people and extends to them the Lord's "invitation" (an invitation extended to all within his hearing and beyond). The invitation: "Repent, and I will receive you" (Alma 5:33). Alma continues speaking for the Lord: "Yea, he [the Lord] saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely. Yea, come unto me and bring

forth works of righteousness" (5:34–35). A similar invitation to those not of the church is repeated in the final moments of Alma's sermon. He declares: "Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life" (5:62).

In Alma's role as high priest over the church of God, he stands before the church in Zarahemla commanding and/or inviting the people present to come unto him and partake of the salvation and goodness of God. In Lehi's dream, Lehi "stood" (the word is repeated at least four times in 1 Nephi 8:13–21) to issue his invitation to his family members to come unto him and partake of the fruit. It appears that Alma, who stands before the church in Zarahemla, sees himself as doing what Lehi did. Both Lehi and Alma invite the others to come and partake of the tree of life.

Alma relinquished his role as the chief judge to dedicate more time to the preaching of the word according to his "order" (Alma 5:43–44, 49). Thus, he declares this to those present in the "energy of [his] soul": "I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by my fathers" (5:44). Alma's figurative invitation unto his people is not to come to the tree of life so much as it is an invitation to come unto Christ through his doctrine. As indicated, Alma suggests that the act of partaking of the tree of life's fruit means to repent and be baptized and to bring forth righteous works.

Fourth, in each account the editor/abridger uses uncommon atonement imagery to describe the blessings associated with the tree of life and its fruit. Before wrapping up these observations, it may be useful to state again that certain representative passages contain word clusters allusive of the atonement. These uncommon word clusters suggest that the characteristics of the tree of life and its cleansing effects are used in a salvific context. In Nephi's vision, the tree of life and its fruit acquire manifold symbolic meanings. Nephi is the first to employ the word clusters spoken of here. He uses them for one purpose: to refer to the righteous (those made white through the blood of Christ) who, by implication, partake of the fruit of the tree of life in their generation.

For instance, Nephi refers in these exclusive terms to Mary (1 Nephi 11:13–15), the twelve Nephite ministers (12:10–11; see also 2 Nephi 5:21), and the Gentiles (1 Nephi 13:15).

After mentioning the tree of life to his brothers who dispute his father's teachings, Nephi suggests that the "righteous"—those he calls the "saints of God"—are separated from the filthy (those not made pure through the blood of Christ) (1 Nephi 15:28, 36). The filthy, he says, inherit a "place of filthiness," while the righteous inherit the "kingdom of God" (15:34). He concludes this part of his account with another reference to the symbolic imagery of his father's dream: "Wherefore, the wicked [filthy] are rejected from the righteous [the purified or white] and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (15:36). In Alma 5, Alma, drawing on Lehi and Nephi again, directly exhorts the righteous to separate from the filthy in explicit context with the tree of life and its fruit that produced, as Nephi understood, the redemptive love of God and eternal life (see 5:57).

In Alma 5, we learn that Alma conjures up in similar words the whole image of the tree of life as suggested by his predecessors using more or less the same imagery that is found in the revelations and writings of his fathers, Lehi and Nephi. Alma especially adapts a phrase that is perhaps best associated with 1 Nephi 12:10–11.[10] There Nephi recounts the history of Lehi's seed, including the sacred history concerning the twelve Nephite disciples and those righteous generations after them who were visited by the Lord as recounted in 3 Nephi. Here is the relevant language and imagery referencing the tree of life from 1 Nephi 12:

> And these twelve ministers whom thou [Nephi] beholdest shall judge thy seed [in that final day of judgment] . . . for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their *garments are made white in his blood*.

10. The whiteness of the tree is first introduced in 1 Nephi 8:11 and runs well beyond 1 Nephi 14, as Belnap has demonstrated. Belnap, "Even as Our Father Lehi Saw," 214–39.

> And the angel said unto me: Look! And I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in *righteousness*, and their *garments were white* even like unto the Lamb of God. And the angel said unto me: These are *made white* in the *blood* of the Lamb, because of their faith in him. (1 Nephi 12:10–11)

Like Nephi, in Alma 5, Alma creatively adapts this distinctive language cluster and tree of life/atonement imagery from Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 8:11; 12:10–11; see also 15:21–36). He uses certain suggestive words in a concentrated way such as "garments," "white," "purified," "cleansed," and "blood" in context with the final judgment and salvation of his people (Alma 5:21).

Further, Alma teaches his people that on the day of judgment they will stand before the Lord and receive according to their works. The combination of select terms is added to in ways reminiscent of Lehi's and Nephi's revelations. To familiar terminology, Alma adds "filthiness," "kingdom of God [or kingdom of heaven]," "spotless, pure and white," and even "redeeming love" (5:22, 24, 26). These words remind us of Nephi's relevant teachings. In 1 Nephi 15, while explaining his father's dream symbols, Nephi repeats the word "filthiness" (or a variation of it) nearly ten times in context with the bright "justice of God," the final judgment, and the unclean being "cast off [or cast out]" from the "righteous" (1 Nephi 15:30, 33, 35).

In Nephi's explanation of Lehi's symbols (including the tree of life, rod of iron, and river of water), the phrase "kingdom of God," or its variant, "kingdom of heaven," is repeated five times in the course of only three verses (1 Nephi 15:33–25). Indeed, the symbol of the filthy river that Lehi saw is described as if the tree of life itself. After explaining that the river "separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God," Nephi says to his brothers, "our father also saw that the justice of God did divide the wicked from the righteous; and the *brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire*" (15:30, 35; emphasis added). As did Alma when adopting this imagery, Nephi then speaks about the final judgment and the "kingdom of God"

and its opposite, "a place of filthiness" (15:34). Nephi's explanation concludes as it began: with a clear reference to the tree of life (15:21–23, 36).

This invitation to repent from "all manner of filthiness" and be baptized suggests that Alma views partaking of the fruit of the tree of life as symbolically equivalent to partaking of the blessings of the Lord's atonement (5:22). For Nephi, until one repents and is baptized, he or she may not access forgiveness and the exceeding joy of redemption. "Happiness" is the "end of the atonement" (2 Nephi 2:10). For Alma, through the "blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers," the repentant and baptized person may be "washed white; yea, purified until cleansed from all stain" and find life in Christ (5:21). In this way, the repentant may find access to the blessings of the Holy Ghost, including sanctification. Alma understands that it is by the blood of the Lord that one's "garments are cleansed," enabling them to find "redeeming love" (5:24, 26). Thus, Alma refers on occasion to the blessings of the Lord's blood atonement without directly mentioning the fruit of the tree of life. The effects of the Lord's blood atonement, including becoming "spotless, pure, and white," implicitly refer to partaking of the tree's fruit and the result of experiencing redeeming love (5:24). The tree of life and its fruit are suggested by words that remind Alma's reader of the blessings of salvation from sin and its consequences. It also represents the blessings of sanctification and ultimate salvation in the "kingdom of God" (5:24–25).

Accordingly, as demonstrated, this concentrated language and atonement imagery is situated by Nephi and Alma in a context connected with final judgment and salvation in the kingdom of God. Alma asks his own rebellious brethren, "can ye think of being saved" in your current "state of . . . unbelief?" (Alma 5:20; 7:6) Without a verbal signal, his response to those in this circumstance takes the form of an allusive warning (italicized are words and phrases that appear to be borrowed from Nephi):

> I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his *garments* are *washed white*, yea,

> his *garments* must be *purified* until they are cleansed from all stain, through the *blood* of him of whom it has been *spoken by our fathers*, who should come to redeem his people from their sins.
>
> And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your *garments* stained with *blood* and all manner of *filthiness*? Behold, what will these things testify against you? . . . .
>
> Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have place to sit down in the *kingdom of God*, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose *garments* are *cleansed* and are *spotless, pure, and white*?
>
> I say unto you, Nay . . . (Alma 5:21–25)

When we compare 1 Nephi 12:10–11 and 15:21–36 with Alma 5:21–25, we see that Alma evokes the imagery we associate with Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision as it regards the tree of life and its redemptive fruit. Alma pulls together many of these early Nephite terms throughout his teachings (see Alma 7:14, 25; 13:11–12; 34:36), including a reference to faith on the "Lamb of God" (Alma 7:14; see 1 Nephi 12:10–11). The cluster of atonement words that first appear in Nephi's vision (i.e., "garments," "white," and "blood") when he recounts the angel's efforts to describe the humble righteous assembled under the tree of life and partaking of its fruit are almost exclusively found in Alma's teachings in the Book of Mormon. However, they are especially concentrated in Alma 5.

Lehi's and Nephi's Influence on the Third Part of Alma 5

Alma seems to have in mind Lehi's and Nephi's revelations and teachings when he invites his people to "Come [and] partake of the fruit of the tree of life" (Alma 5:34; see also 5:62). This tree of life imagery reflective of the Lord's cleansing atonement follows Alma's discussion of his fathers' sojourn in the dark and dreary wilderness. The parallels suggest that he loosely shapes his sermon on the three-part pattern laid out by Nephi in 1 Nephi 8, where Lehi's dream is first recounted in abridged form. If so, one should expect the third part of Alma's sermon

to echo what Nephi called the "great and spacious building," or at least the specific flaws and characteristics of its proud inhabitants. These proud persons are presumably not gathered at the tree of life and thus not washed white in the blood of Christ, remaining ever separate from and in opposition to him and his people who "humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God" (Alma 5:54).

As early as Lehi's dream, we learn of the proud inhabitants who occupied the "great and spacious building . . . high above the earth" (1 Nephi 8:26–28, 31–33). In Nephi's vision this "strange building" is again plainly referred to as the "large and spacious building" inhabited by those who "fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 11:34–36). The building is again directly mentioned in 1 Nephi 12:18 and beyond. After chapter 12, it appears that the building transforms into the "great church," a "church most abominable above all other churches" (13:4–9, 26, 28, 32, 34). The "great and abominable church" also appears in 1 Nephi 14, again in opposition to the "church of the Lamb of God" (14:3, 10, 12). There it is referred to as the "whore of all the earth" and as the "great mother of abomination" (14:11, 13). In Lehi's and Nephi's accounts, it is a universal church.

If Alma's sermon tracks Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision as I have claimed, it may be suggested that the "great and spacious building" (or its proud and scoffing inhabitants) may also find its way into the sermon's imagery. This specific imagery presumably would come in the latter part of the sermon as it does in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision. It would come after the wilderness and tree have been invoked. Indeed, that is what happens. Near the second half of Alma's sermon, we see Alma employ the general imagery of the large building that serves as opposition to the tree of life and those who partake of its fruit.[11]

11. We see Mormon signal this early and often in the framing of Alma 5 where he describes the most arrogant members of the church as variously "lifted up" or as "lifting themselves up," or conversely, as needing to be "pulled down" (Alma 4:6, 8, 12; Alma 6:3). Alma himself uses the term "puffed up" (Alma

Near the middle of his sermon, Alma stacks three of his people's sins on top of each other in patterned language that suggests that they are of a piece. These sins—pride, envy, and mocking of others—seem to be representative of those who once inhabited the great and spacious building seen by Lehi; or, we might say, the symbol of the building was indicative of those who were proud, envious, and disposed to mock others. As indicated, this has been the case since the strange building was first introduced to Nephi's reader in 1 Nephi 8:26–33 and 11:35–36. After invoking the clustered imagery of the tree of life and its redeeming power, Alma asks his audience these penetrating questions:

> Behold, are ye stripped of *pride*? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly: for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, *and such an one hath not eternal life*.
>
> Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of *envy*? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.
>
> And again I say unto you, is there one among you *that doth make a mock of his brother*, *or that heapeth upon him persecutions*?
>
> Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent *or he cannot be saved* [tree of life]. (Alma 5:28–32)

This three-level rhetorical pattern (three similar questions in succession accompanied by the phrase, "I say unto you . . .") alludes to the proud and contentious members of the church who were among the "old and young, both bond and free . . . the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation" (Alma 5:49).

This series of coordinated phrases in part matches with what Nephi said his father saw. The proud in the large building, according to him, were "old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress

---

5:53), which like the other terms is suggestive of the inhabitants of the building reaching back to Nephi and his teachings (see 1 Nephi 22:13–15, 22–23). Moroni also uses these types of "up-terms" to suggest the building in his teachings in Mormon 8–9 (see Mormon 8:28, 32–33, 36, 40).

was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit" (1 Nephi 8:27). Accordingly, Alma cries to all within the sound of his voice that they must repent and be born again or they cannot gain salvation or partake of the "tree of life" (Alma 5:34, 62; see also 1 Nephi 15:36).

Further, we learn in Alma 5 that the unrepentant who were "puffed up in the vain things of the world" were fully separated from the righteous (Alma 5:37). The proud had persecuted the humble and poor among them (5:53–55). These church members insisted on "wearing costly apparel and setting their hearts on the vain things of the world, upon [their] riches" (5:53). Nephi explained that the worldly inhabitants of the building had an inordinate interest in fine apparel and indulged in "vain imaginations of the children of men" (1 Nephi 8:27; 12:18; 13:7–8). In Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision, the worldly and proud despised the humble followers of God; similarly, Alma admonishes the proud among his people to cease to persecute the humble (Alma 5:53–54). Alma, after this manner, interrogates the worldly and proud of the church:

> Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance—
>
> Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them? (Alma 5:54–55)

After these questions addressed to the proud, we learn that Alma calls for the humble to separate (Alma 5:57–60). Alma exhorts those who will hear the Shepherd's voice to "come . . . out from the wicked, and be ye separate and touch not their unclean things" (5:57). Those who do not hear Alma's invitation will be cut off from the church: "the wicked shall not be numbered among . . . the righteous," Alma declares (5:57).

This language is reminiscent of Nephi's vision where we learn that the Gentiles who hear his word and come unto the Shepherd "shall be numbered among the seed [of Lehi]" (1 Nephi 14:2). Both Nephi and Alma suggest that hearkening to the Good Shepherd's voice leads to salvation, whereas not hearkening to his voice is grounds for separation. As already indicated, this full separation between the proud and humble (the wicked and the righteous) is discussed extensively in 1 Nephi 15, where symbols of the early revelations are explained in context with the tree of life and its fruit.

Finally, it would appear that Alma borrows from Lehi's and Nephi's symbol of a large and spacious building occupied by the proud and well-dressed when he confronts the pride and materialism rampant in the church in Zarahemla. Most of the evidence for this claim appears in the second half of Alma's sermon, especially in the latter third of it. As before in the earlier revelations, again in Alma 5 the tree of life and its redemptive fruit stand in opposition to the building and its inhabitants. These early Nephite symbols (tree and building) appear to have been suggested to the audience in Alma 5 shortly after Alma recites the history of their fathers emerging from their wilderness to become "illuminated by the light of the everlasting word" (Alma 5:7). Alma's discussion of concepts such as pride, apparel, and persecution in this distinctive three-part arrangement alludes to Lehi's and Nephi's great and spacious building or its inhabitants.

Conclusion

Alma appears to structure his first great sermon to the church in Zarahemla using Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision as a guide. Alma seems to imagine himself standing at the tree of life extending to his people an invitation to come unto the Lord and partake of his salvation and goodness. In his three-part sermon, Alma attempts to persuade the most proud and combative among his people to repent of their sins

against the humble members of the church. He warns them to repent and become clean and pure through the blood of Christ's atonement. This prophetic invitation to repent and be born again is equated to partaking of the redeeming love of Christ.

Specifically, I have attempted to demonstrate that Alma's allusive three-part arrangement (a lose arrangement with overlapping aspects) echoes Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision as follows: (1) using an intertextual method, we have seen that as Nephi represents his father's deliverance by the mercy of God from a wilderness, so Alma represents his fathers' deliverance from their historical and spiritual wildernesses; (2) observing relatively rare verbal clusters, we have seen that as Lehi invited his family to partake of the fruit of tree of life that they might find salvation, so we have seen that Alma invited his people to partake of the fruit that they might sit down in the kingdom of God; and (3) we have seen that the proud and mocking inhabitants of the great and spacious building from Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision were alluded to in the way Alma spoke to his audience. In short, Alma shapes his great sermon using early Nephite revelations and language. Truly, there remains much in the Book of Mormon to be done on this and related subjects, as we are only beginning to emerge from the wilderness of assumptions we have made about the landscape of the Nephite record.

MATTHEW SCOTT STENSON {scottstenson14@gmail.com} holds a PhD in English from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Scott teaches composition and literature at Tennessee Tech University and serves on his stake high council. He has published articles in such journals as *Christianity and Literature*, *BYU Studies*, *The Interpreter*, and *The Religious Educator*.

FIFTY YEARS SINCE LESTER BUSH, "MORMONISM'S NEGRO DOCTRINE"

Editor's Note: On June 9, 2023, the Mormon History Association held a session honoring the fiftieth anniversary of Lester Bush's 1973 article in Dialogue*, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview." This roundtable is a publication of the panelists' remarks and remembrances. In addition, the editor solicited a remembrance and comments from Robert A. Rees, the editor of* Dialogue *who published Bush's landmark research. A great deal has changed since then, including terminology now considered offensive. Care is taken to use and consider this language in context.*

~

An Appreciation

Darius A. Gray

Lester Bush's 1973 *Dialogue* article is the focus here, as it brought much-needed clarity to the convoluted, deeply entrenched Mormon attitude toward race.

We all know the story. Prior to June 1978 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had held that Negroes, Black people of African descent, were a lesser people, having been cursed by God himself and therefore denied ordination to the Church's priesthood and limited in attendant temple ordinances. However, a review of the

nineteenth-century minutes of the Church's First Presidency unpacks the uncertainties of that historical policy. Though a frequent topic, the responses to such inquiries varied greatly contingent upon who was asking, who was responding, and when.

An old truism offers that "you cannot teach that which you do not know." That reality challenged well-intentioned Church leadership and membership alike as Lester undertook the daunting task of researching primary sources to unfold what actually had been said and done.

The perspective provided by Lester Bush's article "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview" was not only significant, it was necessary! The history of Black people in the Church has been convoluted and fractured, thereby lending itself to faded memories and "bones to bury." Thankfully, Lester took the time, committed the energy, and applied the necessary skills to shine light on a muddled subject. Ultimately, Lester's work provided Spencer W. Kimball the roadmap with which to undertake his own research.

A most grateful,

Darius A. Gray

~

A Tribute to Lester Bush on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Article that Changed the Church

Gregory A. Prince

When the *Dialogue* office moved from Stanford to Los Angeles, it found a home in the University Religious Conference, which was kitty-corner from the UCLA School of Dentistry, where I was a student. Occasionally, I would drop by the office to see what was happening in Mormon studies. One time, I noticed a thick, black, bound volume with the intriguing title "Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism." I thumbed

through it and was fascinated to see what its author had assembled on a topic that had been only on the periphery of my consciousness until I went to Brazil in 1967 on an LDS mission. There, I encountered not only the policy excluding Black men from priesthood ordination but also the impossibility of determining accurately whether someone had "the blood," as we indelicately called it, in a country that was a racial melting pot. Indeed, that impossibility weighed heavily on Spencer Kimball after he announced the construction of a temple in Brazil, entrance to which would have been denied to anyone with Black African ancestry. I wanted a copy of the compilation.

It had the mailing address of the compiler, Lester Bush, who had sent the volume plus a manuscript. I sent a letter to the address, which was an APO box. It was forwarded to Lester in Saigon, where he was on assignment from his employer, the Central Intelligence Agency. He soon wrote back and told me he had prepared a very small number of the compilations and was not able to comply with my request. I quickly moved on to other interests.

Two years later, having completed graduate studies at UCLA, my wife and I moved to Maryland for a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health. We purchased a home in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC and began to attend the Gaithersburg Ward.

Several weeks later, we were asked to speak in our new congregation. After the service, a gentleman approached me and said, "I enjoyed your talk. I'm Lester Bush." He and his family had moved into the ward the previous year. A month later, we were invited to join a new study group that met in his home—one that still meets in ours, nearly a half-century later. Lester soon became, and has remained, my closest friend. For more than forty years, we spent countless hours together, discussing every imaginable topic within Mormonism.

His interest in Mormon teachings about Black people was initiated by George Romney's gubernatorial victory in Michigan in 1962 and further fed by four events in 1963: the announcement (which turned

out to be premature) of a proselytizing mission to Nigeria, aspirational comments by First Presidency member Hugh B. Brown about the possibility of admitting Black men to the priesthood, a pro-civil rights statement read by Brown in general conference, and a statement by Joseph Fielding Smith that the Church was *not* about to change its priesthood policy. Lester later wrote, "Like many others, I started a file on this increasingly awkward and public subject. Unlike others, with me the topic became an obsession."[1] Indeed, he told me he thought one needed a certain amount of obsessive-compulsive disorder to be a good historian. He published his findings in the hope that others would come to a similar understanding that might change the Church's policy, not as an overt act of advocacy.

Raised in Virginia and having attended the University of Virginia for undergraduate and medical schools, Lester had no access to Church archival materials until his medical internship at LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City in the late 1960s. Conversations at the hospital with two of David O. McKay's sons—Llewelyn, a patient, and Edward, a physician—informed him that there was more latitude on the subject within the hierarchy than he had supposed. This was an era when Joseph Fielding Smith was still Church Historian and kept a tight lid on sensitive resources in the archives. Although Lester had limited success in penetrating the curtain there, he found a trove of documents at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah, including a 1968 letter from Sterling McMurrin to Llewelyn describing a 1954 meeting with President McKay where the president spoke of the issue as "a practice, not a doctrine, and the practice will someday be changed."[2] Lester was

1. Lester Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998." *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 229–71.

2. Sterling M. McMurrin to Llewelyn McKay, Aug. 26, 1968. Photocopy of original letter sent by McMurrin to the author, Oct. 30, 1994.

able to flesh out a compelling story that bore little resemblance to the official narrative, one that remains intact to this day.

Eventually, Lester arranged his sources chronologically in the four-hundred-page compilation I first saw at UCLA and began to write his article while stationed in the US embassy in Saigon. In the spring of 1973, he sent his manuscript to *Dialogue*. He also sent a copy to LDS apostle Boyd Packer, who, through intermediaries, had expressed interest in it. Very soon after receiving it, Packer sent word through those intermediaries that he and his colleagues were anxious that Lester "not publish the material until after [he (Bush)] had talked with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve."[3]

Through phone and in-person conversations with Packer, Lester learned that he had no issues with the data in his manuscript—indeed, Packer knew far less about the details than Lester—but was trying to delay or block its publication without saying so directly. Packer said to him, "If those people"—the *Dialogue* editors—"thought we were interested in delaying, they would just hurry faster to get it published."[4]

Nonetheless, direct pressure was applied to Bob Rees, the *Dialogue* editor, by Robert Thomas, academic vice president of BYU and a former professor and mentor to Rees. Thomas said there might be "consequences" for Rees, but he was not specific about what those consequences might be. Rees recalls telling Thomas that he and his editorial team had discussed the fact that there might be disciplinary action taken against them, but after praying about it, they felt confirmed in their decision to publish the article.[5] It is likely that pressure was also put on John Carmack, president of the Los Angeles stake, who contacted Brent Rushforth, the *Dialogue* associate editor living in his ward, and told him "the Brethren" were concerned about the

3. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 251.

4. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 253.

5. Robert Rees, personal communication to author, Aug. 1, 2023.

article being published. Rushforth told him he would be happy to speak directly with "the Brethren" and gave him his phone number.[6] The call was never made, and after considerable discussion among the *Dialogue* editorial staff, including the decision to include responses from three respected scholars, the article was published without further incident. Brent learned many years later that pressure had been put on the stake president to discipline him and Rees, but no such action was ever taken.

Leonard Arrington's tenure as Church Historian, which began in 1972, was several years after Lester began his research, and so Lester did not meet Arrington and other professional Church historians until he had completed the manuscript. The enthusiasm with which they received him was genuine, in part because he had done what they had not been able to do. Many years later, Lester learned that even at the height of the freedom Church-employed historians had called "Camelot," they were prohibited from researching core topics that included Black members and priesthood. Lester was their avatar.

Two years after the article was published, Packer told Scott Kenney, the editor of the newly launched *Sunstone* magazine, that he was still displeased that Lester had published it "against General Authority counsel during a time of threats and violence against the Church."[7] Six months after it was published, Lester passed through Salt Lake City en route to Washington, DC, and met with General Authority Hartman Rector, who told him all the General Authorities had read it—something Lester dismissed as an overstatement—and there had been no groundswell of opposition following its publication.[8]

When Lester and his family moved to Maryland in 1974, he received a note from General Authority Marion D. Hanks, who told him Lester's work "probably had a far greater effect than was acknowledged to

6. Brent Rushforth, multiple conversations with author, undated.

7. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 262.

8. Lester Bush to author, Oct. 10, 2005.

you or than has yet been evidence[d]. Recent conversations suggest that this is so."[9] Two decades later, when I interviewed Hanks for my biography of David O. McKay, he reiterated this thought by telling me, "[Lester's] article had had far more influence than the Brethren would ever acknowledge. . . . It started to foment the pot."[10]

Reaction among the LDS historical community was uniformly favorable. Shortly after the article was published, Leonard Arrington said there was "a relief that it was finally out in print where it could be discussed, and [he] made an analogy to the relief felt when *Mountain Meadows Massacre* was published by [Juanita] Brooks."[11]

Although the article will always be regarded as Lester's most important—indeed, I believe it was the most consequential article in the field of Mormon studies published in the twentieth century—it was only the beginning of his contributions to the field. Shortly after Lester moved to Maryland in 1974, *Dialogue* moved to nearby Virginia, and he became associate editor.

He soon recruited me as book review editor, and I saw firsthand how he shaped much of Mormon scholarship during his years in that position. My wife, JaLynn, and I would go to his home every Sunday evening for dinner, followed by wide-ranging discussions of topics that needed scholarly treatment. Then, he either would go to the person most expert in the field and request an article for *Dialogue* or, if no one was expert, he would recruit someone. Resulting from the scholarship he nurtured were unprecedented and definitive articles on the Adam–God doctrine, the second anointing, and Tony Hutchinson's landmark study, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered,"

9. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 266.

10. Marion D. Hanks, interview with the author, May 27, 1994.

11. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 267–68; Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1950).

which, more than anything preceding it, defined the revelatory process of Joseph Smith.[12] The articles published during his tenure, in the aggregate, represent a high-water mark in the journal's six decades of existence.

A medical doctor, Lester also wrote a definitive article on birth control among the Mormons; an underappreciated book commissioned by religious historian Martin Marty, *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-day Saints*; and, in his final contribution to Mormon studies, a timely and probing *Dialogue* article with the provocative title "Gerontocracy and the Future of Mormonism."[13]

Prior to 1978, he and I rarely discussed his article on Black men and priesthood. Publishing the article had been secondary to his own quest to understand the policy, and he felt his work was accomplished with its publication. I once asked if he thought the policy would ever change. "Perhaps," he answered, "but not for at least fifteen years"—an oblique reference to men he assumed would need to "graduate" before it could change.

He spoke frequently on the topic to groups in the DC area, always with a good number of African Americans in the audience. He told me he could predict the point in his presentation at which there was an aha moment: "Oh, now we get it! This is just White guys being racist. We were worried God hated us."[14]

On June 8, 1978, Lester's wife Yvonne called me at work and said she had just heard, on good authority, that Spencer Kimball had received a revelation allowing all worthy men to receive the priesthood. Lester was

12. Anthony A. Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash?: LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 4 (1989): 11–74.

13. Lester E. Bush Jr., *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense and Scripture* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Gregory A. Prince, Lester E. Bush Jr., and Brent N. Rushforth, "Gerontocracy and the Future of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 3 (2016): 89–108.

14. Lester Bush, personal communication to author.

doing some medical work at Bethesda Naval Hospital, and his brother managed to reach him before Yvonne could, to give him the good news.

My wife JaLynn and I spent the evening at the Bush home. My diary entry was brief:

> Lester has had such an intense interest in the Church policy on Blacks that the shock and delight of this announcement is nearly overwhelming. He received phone calls all evening, from all over the country. We can't help but think that his monumental paper on the 'Black policy' had something to do with the turn of events.[15]

A quarter century later, Lester told me he assumed his article's impact was probably in "preparing the way" by raising doubts in the minds of leaders about the established doctrine and conventional wisdom about the issue.[16]

The revelation was the good news. But beneath that good news was a gradual, covert effort to shun Lester—an embodiment of the aphorism "No good deed goes unpunished." While Lester never complained and few recognized the process, I saw it up close.

Its first embodiment surfaced in the mid-1970s. In 1975, President Kimball announced the reconstitution of the First Quorum of the Seventy. In elevating the office to General Authority status, he discontinued it at the local level, a move that resulted in the ordination of all local Seventies to the office of high priest. The move simultaneously redefined the role of high priest, which had been one of presidency. With the change, nearly any man over the age of thirty who was an active Church member became a high priest—except Lester. A decade or more older than the next oldest member of the elders quorum, he became an obvious outlier.

I spoke several times to his stake president, who was my neighbor and a close friend, and urged him to rectify the situation. I told him we were at great risk of losing Lester if he continued to be shunned. He

15. Gregory A. Prince diary (hereafter GAP diary), June 8, 1978.

16. Lester Bush to author, recorded in GAP diary, Oct. 10, 2005.

said he would investigate it, but he never acted on it. I knew him well enough to read between the lines: someone at a higher level had sent a message.

Among those who took an interest in Church history, the euphoria of the 1978 revelation was gradually replaced by anguish over the disintegration of what was being called the "New Mormon History," which was an evolution from devotional to data-based history. Although we were enthralled with the "Camelot"-era early output of Leonard Arrington's history division, it set off alarms at Church headquarters.

Unwilling to concede the writing of the Church's history to professional historians, senior apostles Ezra Taft Benson and Mark Petersen, with ample assistance from junior apostle Boyd Packer, set about to undermine Leonard Arrington's franchise. Because of his *Dialogue* article and his editorship, Lester was a clearinghouse of information regarding Church history. In mid-1981, he told me there had been a "secret" meeting the prior week at the historical department that included all historians working for the Church. G. Homer Durham, its executive director, told them they were no longer to conduct any research except what was specifically assigned to them by the Church. The archives would be closed to them for personal research, even after hours.[17] Without any discussion, he closed the meeting and announced that he would not be available for comment, as he was leaving for a five-week vacation. It was another step in the ending of Leonard Arrington's franchise: his demotion from Church Historian, cancellation of the sixteen-volume sesquicentennial history, transfer of the historical department to BYU, and now closure of the archives to independent research by Church employees.

By 1982, the work of Benson, Petersen, and Packer was done. Those who hungered for the truth about their religious history became part of Boyd Packer's triad of "enemies of the Church," along with feminists

17. GAP diary, July 19, 1981.

and gay people.[18] The decade-long era referred to above as "Camelot" (so named by former Assistant Church Historian Davis Bitton) was gone.

Buoyed by his success, Mark Petersen unilaterally turned his attention to historians whose paychecks were not signed by the Church. He had two assistants draw up a list of eight men—later expanded in number—whose writings he saw as threatening to the Church and personally called the stake president of each. His instructions were to call in these men and check on their "worthiness." Seven of the eight stake presidents responded with varying levels of adverse action.

The eighth stake president was different. I knew something about it because he was also my stake president, a man I had gotten to know well over the four years I was an elders quorum president and to whom I reported directly, Bill Marriott.

In late March of 1983, as word of Petersen's phone calls spread, Lester debriefed me about meetings he had attended in Salt Lake City concerning medical issues. He was approached privately by a high-ranking Church bureaucrat and asked if he would offer advice on a new section of the *General Handbook of Instructions* devoted to policy and ethical issues, with a particular focus on medicine. The man emphasized to Lester that no one must know of his collaboration, given Lester's reputation at Church headquarters.[19] Although the man had worked with an internal committee to draft a statement on technological breakthroughs in reproductive medicine including artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogate motherhood, he was not satisfied with the draft document. Lester put in a lot of effort and completely reworked the draft he was given. The eventual published version contained virtually everything Lester had recommended—something that only four people

18. Boyd K. Packer, Address to the All-Church Coordinating Council, May 18, 1993, available at https://archive.org/details/coordinating_council_1993_boyd_k_packer.

19. GAP diary, Mar. 28, 1983.

in the Church knew: the Church bureaucrat, Lester, his wife Yvonne, and me.

The same night he told me about the medical issues, and with irony you can't make up, Lester received a phone call from our stake executive secretary asking that he meet with the stake president the following evening. By then, we knew the identity of Petersen's other targets. The executive secretary gave no indication of the agenda, and neither he nor the stake president knew, or would ever know, of Lester's high-level collaboration on medical ethical issues. We speculated that the message might be that he must stop writing and speaking, or, worse, that he might be the subject of formal Church discipline for what he had already published.[20]

Immediately after the meeting with the stake president, Lester drove to my home and gave me a full account of a rather surprising conversation. Marriott began by saying he had become aware that Lester had written important articles, and he wondered if Lester would tell him about them. Having assumed he would be on the defensive, Lester was prepared. He gave a two-hour, in-depth summary of his writings, with particular focus on "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine" and a detailed account of the problems he had encountered along the way. Marriott listened intently, and as the meeting ended, he invited Lester to meet with him anytime he wished to talk about historical issues. We had heard of the experiences of others who were on Petersen's list and were surprised and pleased that this one was different.

In May 1983, six weeks after their initial meeting, Lester took Marriott up on his prior offer of being willing to meet again. In the second meeting, Marriott spoke to the genesis of their prior meeting, saying Petersen had pressed him to be harsh with Lester. Marriott later told me "he received a phone call from an Apostle"—Petersen—"in which he was asked if one Lester Bush lived in his stake. 'Yes,' he replied. 'Take

20. GAP diary, Mar. 29, 1983.

his temple recommend away,' was the response, whereupon the Apostle abruptly hung up the phone."[21] Upon consulting with the local regional representative of the Twelve, who also was one of his employees, Marriott decided to comply with the letter of the law by meeting with Lester but avoiding vindictiveness.[22] Knowing of my friendship with Lester, he later told me of the directive from Elder Petersen. His words to me: "I wouldn't do it, because it was wrong." Would that all Church leaders had the moral compass of Bill Marriott.

Two days after Lester's second meeting with Marriott, we met for lunch. He said he had been asked to prepare, without attribution, a policy statement concerning medical ethical issues that would be released with the signatures of the First Presidency.[23] Apparently, the left hand had no idea what the right hand was doing. As an aside, the bureaucrat who had requested Lester's input told him that the secretary to the First Presidency, with whom he met frequently, "admitted that the First Presidency read *Dialogue* regularly, though they were 'not pleased' with some of the articles."[24]

In late April 1983, the bureaucrat called Lester and invited him to a meeting with the Special Affairs Committee at which the policy statements would be presented for approval. He offered to pay Lester's way. It was a tempting invitation, but Lester knew he could not attend without causing a backlash. He conveyed his appreciation but said he wanted to see the statement adopted more than he wanted to attend the meeting, and he knew it must be one or the other.[25]

Two weeks later, Lester and I attended the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association in Omaha, Nebraska. Shortly after we

21. GAP diary, Nov. 16, 1986.

22. GAP diary, May 15, 1983.

23. GAP diary, Mar. 31, 1983.

24. GAP diary, Mar. 31, 1983

25. GAP diary, Apr. 23, 1983.

arrived, I ran into Leonard Arrington. The first thing he asked me was, "What do you know about the rumors we've heard about Lester?" As we compared notes, he filled in the missing pieces of the puzzle: Mark Petersen, upset at *Seventh East Press* (an independent student newspaper at BYU) for publishing an interview with Sterling McMurrin, instructed two of his aides, Tom Truitt and Roy Doxey, to compile a "hit list" of people associated with the newspaper. When they came up with four names, Petersen decided to expand the list to cover other suspicious characters. The completed list contained eight names, including Lester's.

Although Marriott had not taken adverse action, the shunning Lester received from other quarters, including remaining an elder and never having a Church calling after the late 1970s, took a cumulative toll. By the mid-1990s, he had withdrawn completely from Church activity, as had all three of his children.

In June 1997, I met with Marlin Jensen, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy who later became Church Historian. He told me of his interest in learning more about unresolved issues regarding Black members and the Church. I did not know at the time that he had been assigned by the First Presidency to chair a committee to review Church-published materials that might still contain racist content. I conveyed his interest to Lester, and later that year, he came to my home and gave me a two-hundred-page manuscript he wrote in response to Jensen's inquiry, which described the writing of his *Dialogue* article. When I met with Jensen and showed him the manuscript, he asked if Lester had ever been subjected to formal discipline. I said he had not, that all the action taken against him was sub rosa. His reply: "That's the worst."[26] (Lester later transformed the manuscript into an article published in the *Journal of Mormon History* on the silver anniversary of his original article.[27])

26. GAP diary, Feb. 4, 1998.

27. Lester E. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine.'"

In 2000, Lester was writing a family history and asked if I would give him extracts from my diary that detailed our interactions over the prior quarter century. Those extracts amounted to one hundred pages. One entry speculated that his withdrawal from Church activity was caused by the cumulative pain of shunning. Upon reading it, he said it was less a matter of having endured too much pain and more one of seeing the Church change its colors concerning things of the mind such that there was a decreasing amount of room for people like him.[28] He later allowed that one of the reasons he had finally walked away from Church activity was that he had never been invested socially in the organization; that is, he had not received any significant Church calling.[29] Shunning.

One month after the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009, we hosted a dinner in our home that included Lester and Brent Rushforth, associate editor of *Dialogue* when Lester's article was published. During dinner, Brent said he had had house guests for the inauguration, Jordan and Rebecca Kimball. Jordan was a grandson of Spencer Kimball. Brent told Jordan he had wondered for years whether Lester's article had any influence on his grandfather. Jordan replied, "You don't need to wonder." He then told a story that his wife later put on the record for me. It began with a conversation between Jordan, Ed Kimball (his father), and Rebecca:

> Ed brought up that he had been contacted regarding a rumor floating around about a Kimball grandson having discovered the Lester Bush landmark article in *Dialogue* heavily marked up in Spencer Kimball's home office after his death. It stood out because it was the only article among the *Dialogue* issues heavily underlined in red, which was consistent with SWK's style of marking up. We told Ed that we could confirm that rumor. . . . Jordan and I haven't told many people (maybe only a couple) over the years about our discovery until we were at the

28. GAP diary, Apr. 12, 2000.

29. GAP diary, July 6, 2000.

> Rushforth's in January 2009. . . . I remember Brent saying that he and others had wondered if *Dialogue* publishing Lester Bush's article might have made any difference in influencing church leaders before the 1978 revelation. And then both Jordan and I assured him that we thought it had and shared our discovery.[30]

In 2023, Chris Kimball, another grandson of Spencer W., spoke at our home and confirmed that he, too, had seen his grandfather's copy of *Dialogue* and that it was annotated as Rebecca described.

In late 2014, I sent an email to Elder Jeffrey Holland, whom I had known for over forty years, asking if anything could be done to affirm to Lester that his work had been beneficial to the Church. He promptly replied that although he had no official reason to reach out to Lester, he would look for an opportunity.

In February 2015, Lester was invited to give the Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture at the University of Utah. He called me the following day and said he was on the fence as to whether to accept the invitation, in part because he had had virtually no contact with the Church for many years. I pointed out that I could think of only two people in the history of the Church who would forever be considered the founders of scholarship on important topics: Juanita Brooks on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and he on race and priesthood. Everything that had been written since their initial works had built on them without materially changing their findings. Lester could not name a third person.[31]

The lecture was in October. I thought it might be the opening for a meeting with Elder Holland, and so I wrote to him. In September, Lester and I received an invitation from his secretary to meet him for breakfast the morning after the lecture.[32]

30. GAP diary, Apr. 14, 2014.

31. GAP diary, Feb. 2, 2015.

32. GAP diary, Sept. 21, 2015.

The night of the lecture, Lester, Yvonne, and I had dinner with Marlin Jensen, then emeritus Church Historian. He listened intently as Lester told the story of how he came to write about race and priesthood and was visibly pained to hear of the harsh treatment and shunning it caused. At several points along the way he told Lester how much his writing had meant to him and how much it had meant to the Church. Although Elder Jensen did not attempt to apologize on behalf of the Church, the fact that the prior Church Historian was so affirming went a long way toward healing wounds that had festered for four decades.[33]

The four of us then drove the short distance to the University of Utah campus for Lester's lecture. Bob Goldberg, chair of the event, ushered Lester and Yvonne to the green room, and a short time later, when I saw Darius Gray enter the auditorium, I gathered him and Marlin and told them they were about to witness history. I then took them to the green room, where Lester and Darius met in person for the first time.

The following morning, we met Elder Holland for breakfast. As Lester told him about his life and about the article on Black people and the priesthood, it became clear that Elder Holland knew only the broadest outlines of the story, and nothing of the shunning by Church leaders in general and the adverse action taken by Mark Petersen in particular.

Elder Holland said Juanita Brooks had been his English teacher when he was a student at Dixie College, and he idolized her for what she had done. He compared Lester to Juanita, saying, "You two are pillars on which important parts of Church history rest." As he walked us to our car, he put his arm around Lester's shoulder and said, "Lester, you have made Church history, and I am grateful for that."[34]

Hours after the breakfast, Elder Holland sent me an email: "I loved every minute of my time with you and Lester. I found him to be

33. GAP diary, Oct. 8, 2015.

34. GAP diary, Oct. 9, 2015.

delightful. I hope he felt my genuine interest in and true admiration for his work."[35]

A few days later, Elder Holland copied me on an email:

> Lester, I don't know when I have enjoyed a morning more than the one I had with you and Greg. I only wish we had had another hour or two together. I hope you will stay in touch with me and share anything you write. I will be edified and blessed by it.[36]

Three years later, Lester and I flew to Salt Lake City for the fortieth anniversary of the 1978 revelation. The morning of the anniversary celebration, I took Lester to the Church History Library, which he had never seen. Hearing Lester was in the building, Steve Snow, then Church Historian, came down from his office to greet us. He was most cordial, and he reiterated how grateful he and others were for the scholarship that Lester had done. The wounds were healed, and just in time.[37]

It turned out to be my last trip with Lester. Early signs of dementia, which had taken the life of his father, had begun to appear. One year later, he and Yvonne moved to California to be close to their sons. Within a year of their arrival there, Lester entered a memory care facility. He passed away on November 23, 2023.

We are all indebted to Lester, upon whose shoulders others have stood and will continue to stand. An "amateur" with no professional training in historiography, he set a standard that many will admire but few will surpass—or even reach. Perhaps deep within his memory remained the knowledge that he changed the Church.

~

35. Jeffrey R. Holland email to the author, Oct. 9, 2015.

36. Jeffrey R. Holland email to Lester E. Bush, copied by Holland to the author, Oct. 13, 2015.

37. GAP diary, June 1, 2018.

Lester Bush's Journey as Seen by His Wife, Yvonne

Yvonne Bush

Those of you who have paid attention along the way know quite a bit about Lester's 1973 article, particularly because of the follow-up article he published in the *Journal of Mormon History* in 1999 that gave a detailed account of how he did it.[1] Additional details have continued to come forward. Since often I was the only other person "in the room," I offer my reminiscences and reflections.

Lester and I started dating when he was in his second year of medical school and I was still in high school. For some reason—I still don't have any idea why—he decided that I was going to be his girlfriend. But I knew, even at eighteen, that he was going to be my partner.

He was the only person in my life, up to that point, who took me seriously and looked deeper to know who I really was. He became my closest friend and confidant.

I also became his "project." I would find he would always have projects and plans, both short and long term. He took the summer before I went to Brigham Young University to educate me and promote my interest in politics, current and foreign affairs, history, and, of course, the burning issues facing the Church. He also warned me that BYU was a difficult place to be and that I had to be on my watch because it was all about getting a partner out there—and getting married—and I needed to pursue a more academic approach.

Even then, he was already researching resource materials on race/priesthood history and had started a file.

1. Lester E. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (1999): 229–71.

At this point, there was much talk about Elijah Abel and the curse of Cain. It was a big time. We were seeing Church statements come out, and intriguing rumors about Hugh B. Brown predicting the end of the policy. That was 1966. We were married the following year.

A year after we were married, we went to Salt Lake City for Lester's medical internship at LDS Hospital. It was a bit of a rude awakening to start a second year of marriage that way. He was an intern, so his hours were such that we didn't have much time together. Though he was tired and exhausted, he spent every moment he could in various libraries, in archives, whatever he could get himself into, talking to people and getting more and more material. I was taking courses at the University of Utah and remember not being very happy with the fact that I was not his project anymore. I was wife No. 2, if not No. 3, after his research and medicine!

When Lester was in Salt Lake City, he came across Stephen Taggart's small book on *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins*.[2] Lester could see that his own research, to this point, was indicative of a more complex narrative. He got in touch with *Dialogue* and wrote an article in the winter of 1969 that was a commentary on Taggart's book.[3] This was his first published work on the subject.

After his internship, Lester would spend three years in the US Navy, first being stationed in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and then a two-year tour in Cyprus (Middle East). While we were in Cyprus, he began to type and mostly complete his four-hundred-page compilation of resource material on race and the priesthood. However, he wanted to

2. Stephen G. Taggart, *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970).

3. Lester Bush, "A Commentary on Stephen G. Taggart's *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins*," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 4 (1969): 86–103.

do more than just have a compilation. My diary entry from July 1971 says,

> The other day, Lester was reading a *Dialogue* advertisement that they planned to do a special issue on minority groups. . . . This, once again, stirred him to [want to] write a definitive article on the Church and The Negro. I know that this is so important to him. He wants to do something well and authoritative; he also wants to be of some service to the church on this matter and help facilitate some change in policy, hopefully. He also wants to get through with it so he can pursue other matters. I told him that I would support him and help him when I could. . . . So today, he asked me to "hang in there" and help for six months. I think this is asking quite a bit, since the baby is due in three and there is so much to do beforehand. However, I have given the matter some thought, and I think it would be better for me to do as he says. I think this will result in a stronger emotional and spiritual bond between us when he realizes that I love him enough to help him in every way. It will certainly be a challenge.

While in Cyprus, Lester never stopped. He kept getting letters and information from here and there, from his brother Larry, from every place he could, to keep the door of information open. Those were the six months he was hoping I could hang in, the six months when he started typing it all up and putting it together chronologically into his compilation.

He really hoped his work would help the Church move forward. He thought that if he knew and understood the issue, it would be OK—that we would have a better understanding and be able to problem-solve things. This was his main thing. He wasn't interested in being polemical or forcing the Church to do this or that. He wanted to work within the system and be able to effect change if that was possible.

There is a letter I came across recently that he wrote to his brother Larry at around this same time. Larry was outraged about what was going on in the Church. I didn't see Larry's letter; I was just reading Lester's response. Lester went through each of Larry's concerns. It was

really beautiful. He wrote of his belief and faith in the gospel, that as far as problems with the Brethren were concerned, there were good things there, and we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Then, he wrote, "To me, operating from within feels much more comfortable. Nobody has ever made a significant impact on the church from without, excepting the U.S. Congress, the Supreme Court, and a handful of assassins."[4]

While we were in Cyprus, we were visited by President Edwin and Sister Janath Cannon, who were presiding over the Swiss mission, which included Cyprus. Sister Canon took a keen interest in Lester's work, and after months of correspondence between them, Lester gained her trust and support. Lester presented her with a bound copy of his mammoth compilation. She, in turn, and with Lester's permission, sent it to Elder Boyd Packer with the hope that it would help move the Church forward. In a note to Lester, she said, "I will be rather glad to be relieved of the responsibility of personal possession of this treasure. It's a little like owning the Hope Diamond—one's pleasure in gloating over it is always dimmed by the vague fear of disaster."[5]

But instead of welcoming a documentary source unlike any the Church had ever compiled itself and handing it over to the Church Historians to review, Elder Packer apparently "shelved it" until receiving a lengthy letter from Lester in April 1972. This letter detailed his search to understand the historical and substantive development of Church policy. Lester also included a copy of his prepublication *Dialogue* article. What ensued were urgent phone calls and a remarkable window of opportunity for Lester to meet with Elder Packer in Salt Lake City. Since that history was already presented in Lester's 1999 article, I won't dwell on it here.

Only to say, and I remember as if it were yesterday, that when Lester returned to Saigon (where we were later stationed), he started right

4. Letter dated Aug. 1971.

5. Letter postmarked Nov. 14, 1872.

in, recounting the hours he spent with Elder Packer, almost before he put his bags down! With a rueful expression and a furrowed brow, he said, "It went OK. I wasn't kicked out, but curiously he told me I was a 'unique duck.'"

Lester took this to mean that Elder Packer didn't know *what* to think of him or his work. Perhaps it was an indication that Elder Packer could not reconcile questions raised in the upcoming article with Lester's obvious and sincere willingness to discuss and even incorporate Elder Packer's suggestions should there be "anything which is particularly out of order."[6]

In the autumn of 1972, while transitioning from Cyprus to Saigon and months before his meeting with Elder Packer, Lester had conversations with two editors of *Dialogue* that resulted in him moving from the compilation to what he called "A Short Historical Overview of the Negro Doctrine." Most of the writing was done in Saigon over a period of what he called "four exhaustive, prayerful months."[7]

During all of this (while in Cyprus and Vietnam), Lester was also very active in the Church. He was the leader of the small LDS group in Nicosia, and then the second counselor in the Saigon branch presidency. In Saigon, he aided the efforts to advance the "Vietnamization" program in all the Church auxiliaries (at the time, there was no American serving in a position higher than second counselor), per the mission president, Bill Bradshaw.

While we were there, things opened up—there was a ceasefire—and then with a lot of preparation, missionaries could come in. Preparation and planning were Lester's responsibilities, along with two other American contractors who were his "buddies in arms." They had a whole list of things they sent to the mission president that needed to be put in place before the missionaries would be safe and able to work once they "landed." Though the climate was hot and humid, Lester insisted that

6. Letter to Elder Packer, Apr. 16, 1973.

7. Letter to Bush Sr., 1973.

"for their health and well-being" they needed to play football with him regularly! The mission president also joined in the games during his visits.

While all of this was going on, Lester continued to frantically work on his article. A two-hour "siesta" provided him enough time to rush home, eat a quick lunch, and then pound away at the typewriter until rushing back to the clinic. The clacking of the typewriter would resume after dinner and well into the night.

Once the article was published and we returned home from Vietnam, "plans and projects" continued at a frenetic pace. Lester settled into work at CIA headquarters and was the associate editor at *Dialogue* from 1977—when it moved to Virginia—to 1984, when it moved to Salt Lake City. I believe *that* was the most gratifying, exhilarating, and happy period in his life. It was just an exciting time. Lester was a prolific contributor to Mormon history literature. He published two articles in 1976, one in 1977, one in 1978, five in 1979, and ten more between 1981 and 1998.

In 1983, Lester accepted the commission to write *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-Day Saints* (a book commissioned by religious historian Martin Marty). Around that time, Elder Mark Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve initiated what became known as the "Witch Hunt" that attempted to intimidate LDS scholars. Petersen compiled a list of people who he considered "problems," and those people were named and dispatched if possible.

I remember Lester getting that call to say that Bill Marriott, president of the Washington DC Stake, wanted to talk to him. He hung up the phone, and I could see the situation was clearly anxiety-provoking. We fasted, and he prayed to have the ability to be able to convey his sincere intent to bring understanding, not discord. Lester told me afterward, with great relief, that President Marriott was open and willing to let him go through his findings in detail. The meeting was very friendly and there were no repercussions for Lester at the stake level, unlike for others on Elder Petersen's list.

However, there were repercussions for Lester at a "sub-rosa" level. Lester supported our boys in their callings and Scouts, but other than the occasional request to substitute teach elders quorum, there were no official callings or active fellowship offered. Eventually, Lester felt that he would do more harm than good if he did participate. He said, more than once, "How can I honestly sit quietly while misrepresentations or just straight-out untruths are being promulgated, even if innocent, without standing up and voicing a more truthful understanding?" Moreover, he did not want to harm another member's testimony.

Ironically, I believe if he had been welcomed and given a calling, he would have made it work with all his might and mind. But no one ever asked him. Only later did we find out why.

Shortly before moving to California, I went to our bishop for a temple recommend. He asked, "How long has it been since your husband was disfellowshipped?" This was 2017. I gasped and answered, "He has never been disfellowshipped. That confuses me." He said, "Oh, that's just been the general knowledge handed down." This just broke my heart.

The bishop subsequently came by and talked with Lester. They talked and talked, and the bishop came by more than once to get to know him. He asked Lester if he would be willing to take on an elders quorum assignment, but by then Lester was sadly not able to entertain such an offering. It now generated too much anxiety, as he was experiencing the effects of moderate dementia. If it had only been twenty-five years earlier, that would have been great.

From 2000 to 2015, when Greg Prince asked for his collaboration in writing a *Dialogue* article on "Gerontocracy and the Future of Mormonism," there was a seemingly unaccountable break in Lester's research and writing.[8] This was puzzling to me until I realized he still had been very much "knee-deep" in his projects. He could hardly wait

8. Gregory A. Prince, Lester E. Bush Jr., and Brent N. Rushforth, "Gerontocracy and the Future of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 3 (2016): 89–107.

to finally retire from the agency so he could work on his and my family histories.

In his usual obsessive-compulsive way, he didn't wait. Efforts to access library materials and historical societies and to take field trips got seriously underway by the year 2000, only interrupted by world events such as 9/11 and its aftermath. In 2015, he finished the "Snow/Dean Family History," a comprehensive, detailed, and compelling narrative filled with genealogy charts, census data, illustrative appendices, and footnotes—a lasting gift of incomparable value to me and my whole family.

Furthermore, upon retirement from the CIA in 2005, he convinced himself and the agency that with all the resources he had available to him at the agency, and a good working knowledge of the medical department over the past thirty years, perhaps he could come back as a "contractor" and write the history of the Office of Medical Services—a history from which he said he would have greatly benefited as director. It should only take a year or two.

Ten years later, after exhaustive work, he finished an eight-volume history that began with the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency) and extended through the 1990s. You can be sure it had more footnotes than narrative! Only one of the eight volumes is unclassified, and it is titled, "The Fighting Doctors of the Office of Strategic Services."

Sadly, Lester's cognitive faculties were noticeably on the decline by 2015. However, he looked forward to attending the study group sessions and dinners with invited Church leaders and scholars at Greg and JaLynn Prince's home. It was a critical thread that brought him a sense of community and fellowship. Furthermore, through Greg's heroic efforts, opportunities for healing and light were brought back into Lester's understanding of his life's journey.

The first was in 2015, when Lester was invited to give the Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture at the University of Utah. This is a prestigious, endowed annual lecture. At first, he hesitated to accept the honor since he had been away from the field for so many years. He said, "I just don't

know if it's right, whether I should do this." I would always say, "You can do this. This is a true honor, and this will be a good thing for you to do." As it turned out, he was so pleased that after all these years, "Rip Van Winkle awoke," and he found that his work was being acknowledged as relevant.

More light and healing as we had dinner with Marlin Jensen and Greg Prince prior to the lecture that evening. In my diary, I wrote of the dinner that it was "singular and profound." Elder Jensen could not have been more affirming, and the effect on Lester was visible. And the lecture was wonderful. It was the first time Lester and Darius Gray met—a truly historic event.

Lester's spirits continued to soar the morning after the lecture, when Lester and Greg had breakfast with Elder Jeffrey Holland. My diary note said, "Breakfast with Elder Holland—confirming beyond any expectation." That evening, Lester and I walked around Temple Square, retracing our steps from the night before we were married and recounting the overwhelming emotional impact of the last two days. It was clear Lester felt that his life and work did have meaning and was seen as a valuable contribution. That's when Lester said, "Maybe *this* was my mission. Maybe this is why I was meant to do this work."

This brought all the goodness back together. His hope to bring light, truth, and understanding was realized. That was just a beautiful moment for me. I truly believe that it was for him as well.

More light and healing occurred three years later, when Lester and Greg traveled together to the fortieth anniversary celebration of the 1978 revelation. The morning prior to the celebration, they went to the Church History Library. Upon hearing that Lester was in the building, Elder Steven Snow, who was then Church Historian, came down from his office and spent several glorious minutes with Lester, letting him know how great his contribution to the Church had been and how grateful he was, personally, to have had the privilege of meeting with Lester.

Though the light would fade from Lester's eyes, I believe that the heartfelt acknowledgement of the contribution of his life and work brought sustaining light and love to his spirit and heart.

Being able to look back over the past fifty-plus years of this journey with Lester has been a gift to me and has given me even more appreciation for his dedication to truth and his mission. He never once expressed bitterness or regret nor lost sight of his faith or the support and encouragement from his fellow scholars and devoted friends.

~

The Impact of Lester Bush's *Dialogue* Essay

F. Ross Peterson

When I received a copy of *Dialogue* volume 8 in the spring of 1973, my mind was immersed in Watergate, Vietnam, and civil rights. Lester Bush's article on the evolution of a policy relative to any individual of African heritage was a capstone in my personal journey relative to Black Mormons and the priesthood. There is no doubt, each paragraph felt like intellectual "manna from heaven" that filled my soul with promise. The journey had not ended, but a gauntlet had been tossed gently into the halls of 47 East South Temple Street in Salt Lake City.

My struggle with accepting second-class citizenship in a Christian religion based on Jesus' teachings started early. I found it impossible to get my head around a judgment coming out of the premortal existence that determined a person's status at birth. On its best day, the Old Testament and the Pearl of Great Price, save predictions of the Savior's birth, test my concept of a loving God. When I was a ninth grader attending seminary, the instructor was explaining how the King James Bible was put together. I wondered who made the decisions about what to put in and what to leave out. So, I chose to work on the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus the next year.

Five years later, in 1962, as a missionary, I found myself forced to look the policy on race and the priesthood squarely in the eye. Professor

Richard Brown of Michigan State University's history department called our apartment and asked to visit with us. A call requesting a meeting was a rare occurrence, so my companion Robert Pommerville and I eagerly went to his home at the appointed hour. Dr. Brown introduced us to Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* and Juanita Brooks's *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, but our conversation focused on the priesthood policy.[1] An activist for civil rights, he kindly suggested that we consider the policy of priesthood denial as a product of the historical times. Using the books by Brodie and Brooks, he postulated that Brigham Young had made a huge miscalculation. Dumbfounded, we listened. The early Mormons, like the Adventists, thought the Second Coming was at hand as they faced a pending civil war. Brown took us to school and reminded us that a church that was so revolutionary in the 1830s should be at the forefront of the civil rights movement, not a defender of the status quo. Pommerville and I left, went straight to MSU's library, checked out the books, read them, and came to the conclusion that God's chosen leaders had some repenting to do.

During our quest, we asked Dr. Glen L. Taggart, a Latter-day Saint and the dean of international studies at Michigan State, how he explained the policy. His answer: "Just tell them it is wrong." Taggart had been involved with establishing a university in Nigeria and had been in Germany on a mission when war broke out in 1938. He told us straightforwardly that Christianity had failed Jesus by embracing racism and white supremacy.

As the 1960s progressed and the civil rights movement unfolded with assassinations, the March on Washington, murders of girls in Birmingham, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, more assassinations, voting rights, and continual demonstrations, two events added to my personal foundation and helped me develop an active voice. While I was in graduate school at Washington State University, *Dialogue* published a letter

1. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1945); Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950).

to the editor written by Stewart L. Udall, the Secretary of the Interior under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.[2] Udall, a World War II veteran, returned missionary, and former congressman, felt a need to "lecture the Brethren." Tired of trying to explain the policy in the middle of a civil rights revolution, he boldly advised his ecclesiastical brothers to change the policy and be part of the right side of history. It was not well received.[3]

One of Udall's political allies, Idaho Democratic Senator Frank Church, offered me some advice during the late summer of 1968. Senator Church was campaigning in our hometown of Montpelier. After his speech, he went to my father-in-law's barbershop for a trim. While talking about Udall's letter and how we, as Mormons, were going to navigate racial issues in the South, I said something about not being as active in the Church. Senator Church, who was not LDS, said, "Well, you'll never change it if you leave it." Idaho was not a bastion of liberalism, but the senator had never ducked his support for civil rights or his opposition to the war in Vietnam. The lesson was learned.

Two years later, in early 1970, Stephen G. Taggart's book, *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins*, was published.[4] Stephen, Glen Taggart's son, had died in 1969 of Hodgkin's lymphoma while finishing a PhD at Cornell. The small volume was a heartfelt plea to the Church for whom he had served as a missionary in Germany to accept the fact that a policy could be changed. We had moved to Texas in 1968, and the Taggart book was quickly circulated among my university colleagues so they might understand the significance of the ninth article of faith: "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He

2. Stewart L. Udall, "Letter to the Editor," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1967): 5–7.

3. F. Ross Peterson, "'Do Not Lecture the Brethren:' Stewart L. Udall's Pro-Civil Rights Stance, 1967," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 272–87.

4. Stephen G. Taggart, *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970).

does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." I also shared the book with an African American student, Curtis McLean, who was the one nonmember allowed to play on our church basketball team. We had won the regional tournament and were going to Salt Lake City to play in the all-church tournament. Udall and Taggart provided pillars for discussion and gave a sense of the need for change.

When Bush's article and the responses to it were published, we were back in Utah at Utah State University. I had taught African American history every year and told the class on the first day each time that I was LDS and active, but I disagreed with the policy of denying the priesthood to Black men. Suspicions were obvious, but the message of the class was clear: Change happens, and history records those changes as making a difference. Lester Bush took the best of what had been written by predecessors and analyzed the history, the culture, and the changing attitudes. Although some of the other writers in that issue tried to firmly stand behind the policy and what it meant scripturally, Bush's approach was very simple and the conclusion clear: If you believe in Jesus' teachings and the concept of continuous revelation, then all of God's children are equal in His eyes.

I honestly believe that Lester Bush, Armand Mauss, and others had a significant influence on changing the policy. Practical realities in South and Central America contributed as well. In my experience, the path to liberation is always fraught with difficulties. However, a heavy millstone was removed from the figurative neck of the LDS Church when President Spencer W. Kimball announced the policy change in June of 1978. Lester Bush had the courage of his convictions to challenge openly and kindly and provide documentation that testified to the accuracy of his work. He and *Dialogue* deserve our gratitude and praise.

~

Lester Bush's Pioneering Contribution on Mormonism and Race: Some Personal Reflections

Newell G. Bringhurst

On this the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Lester E. Bush's landmark *Dialogue* article "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," I, along with other knowledgeable students of Mormon studies, gratefully acknowledge the crucial role his seminal 1973 work played in the ultimate lifting of the priesthood and temple ban. On a personal level I found Lester's help and encouragement invaluable as I struggled to deal with this complex, elusive topic in my own work.

I first encountered Bush's *Dialogue* essay while in the midst of researching and writing my PhD dissertation on Mormonism and Black people. In initially reading his carefully researched and precisely written description of the evolution of Black priesthood denial, I immediately despaired: What more could be said about the Mormon–Black issue? I was dismayed, disheartened, and depressed. I feared that all the research I had done over the past three years was for naught.

Indeed, his fifty-seven-page *Dialogue* article containing some 219 footnotes constituted by far the most comprehensive examination of Mormon–Black relations published up to that time. It drew heavily from a four-hundred-page compendium of primary and secondary documents Bush had carefully compiled over a ten-year period. Bush's "Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism" covering the period from the 1830s to the 1970s, contains First Presidency minutes, Quorum of the Twelve meeting minutes, and other General Authority interviews and writings.

Bush's carefully written article, which quoted a wide range of Church leaders, found *no* evidence whatever to support the Church's claim that the priesthood ban was the result of divine revelation. He

further discovered that the ban itself did *not* originate with Joseph Smith but was implemented by Brigham Young following the death of Mormonism's founder. Bush summarily dismissed the ban itself as the unfortunate product of social historical forces—indeed, prejudices in the larger America to which Young and other Church leaders were exposed.

However, after carefully examining Bush's essay, I determined that Bush had not sufficiently probed the fundamental origins of the ban—specifically certain systemic factors within Mormonism itself. Indeed, he completely ignored the Book of Mormon and downplayed the critical role played by Joseph Smith through his other writings, especially the Pearl of Great Price, in the initial formation of innate LDS racist attitudes. Bush also overlooked the emergence of Mormon ethnic "whiteness," which affirmed that Latter-day Saints as the literal seed of Abraham were a divinely favored people, whereas Black people were the literal descendants of Cain, Ham, and Caanan and therefore belonged to an accursed race.

This being said, my own work benefited greatly from Bush's pioneering work. I found most useful his carefully crafted chronological framework tracing evolving Mormon attitudes from the 1830s to the 1970s. Bush, moreover, unselfishly shared his extensive "Compilation on the Negro within Mormonism," which enabled me to fill in significant gaps in my own research, in particular the period from 1880 to 1945, which was largely ignored in my original study, a dissertation completed in 1975. Most important, Bush carefully read and extensively critiqued that work, prompting me to make significant revisions, which I ultimately incorporated into my published 1981 book, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism*.[1]

Indeed, Bush continued to encourage me in my own scholarship. As a co-editor of *Dialogue* during the late 1970s, he solicited from me

1. Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

an essay entitled "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism," which was initially published in the Summer 1979 issue of *Dialogue* and subsequently reprinted in a 1984 volume entitled *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, an anthology he and Armand L. Mauss co-edited.[2] This work also contained previous published essays written by Bush and Mauss that had appeared in *Dialogue* spanning the period from 1967 to 1981.

Also, in *Neither White nor Black*, Bush carefully critiqued my own *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, noting its strengths and weaknesses as he saw them. He acknowledged the validity of my assertion that "the metaphorical and sometimes literal racism of Mormon scripture [was] a logical precursor to an increasing lineage consciousness among the early Mormons" and the concurrent emergence of Mormon "whiteness" as a divinely favored ethnic group versus "blackness" associated with apostasy and Black biblical counter-figures. But he took issue with what he claimed was the book's lack of "in-depth consideration of either the relevant Mormon scriptures or the personalities that interpreted them," further asserting its failure "to analyze systematically . . . [certain] crucial later developments" contributing to the ban.[3]

As for Bush's own 1973 *Dialogue* article, the author as an active, practicing Latter-day Saint hoped—indeed, anticipated—that his essay would convince Church leaders to lift the ban, given its central thesis that the ban did *not* originate with Joseph Smith *nor* was it based on divine revelation. Further undermining the ban's legitimacy, Bush asserted that Brigham Young in implementing it was primarily influenced by

2. Newell G. Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism," as reprinted in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confont the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, edited by Lester E. Bush Jr. and Armand L. Mauss (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1984), 130–48.

3. Lester E. Bush Jr., "Whence the Negro Doctrine? A Review of Ten Years of Answers," in Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*, 202.

attitudes and prejudices in mid-nineteenth-century American society at large. In essence, Bush characterized the ban an unfortunate aberration, at variance with essential Church doctrine and beliefs.

But alas, Bush found himself and his study under attack from high Church officials. The most prominent, then Church president Harold B. Lee, lamented that "Unfortunately [Bush's] study quoted from the minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve that had gotten into the papers of [Apostle Adam S. Bennion]." Even more outspoken was apostle Bruce R. McConkie, who dismissed Bush's study as "crap," and fellow apostle Mark E. Petersen, who pushed for Bush's excommunication, albeit unsuccessfully.[4] Moreover, Church leaders led by President Lee—an ardent defender of the ban—doubled down in affirming its legitimacy throughout the latter's short tenure as Church president and beyond.

Finally, at long last in 1978, the ban was lifted under the leadership of then Church president Spencer W. Kimball. Ultimately, with no little irony, Bush's basic thesis as articulated in his original essay was incorporated into the Church's official 2013 Gospel Topics essay "Race and the Priesthood." The essay asserts that the ban resulted from human error rather than divine will, further confessing that Brigham Young, as the instigator of the ban, "reflected the prejudices of his nineteenth century environment [where] racial distinctions and prejudices were not just common but customary among white Americans."[5]

Thus, Lester Bush, who suffered condemnation from Church leaders in the immediate aftermath of his pioneering essay, at long last found vindication.

~

4. As quoted in Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 254–59, 266–67.

5. "Race and the Priesthood," *Gospel Topics Essays*, available at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng.

Black Mormons and the Priesthood: A Retrospective Perspective

Robert A. Rees

Typical of far too many youths of my generation, I grew up in a racist home, a racist community, and in racist Latter-day Saint congregations. As a young man, I harbored deep racist sentiments and attitudes toward Black people (as well as other racial minorities).[1] I thought of that childhood recently when a friend sent me a copy of a letter from the First Presidency dated November 4, 1949, written in response to a letter from a convert to the Church asking, "What is the Church's attitude (both in theory and in practice) toward Negroes in social life?" The following response was signed by both J. Reuben Clark Jr. and David O. McKay of the Church's First Presidency:

> The church's attitude today is as it always has been, namely, that intermarriage between our members and negroes is forbidden because negroes cannot have the priesthood, and the progeny of marriages between our people and negroes could not hold the priesthood. Since the church's membership is charged by the Lord with carrying on his work, which is done through his priesthood, it is the obligation of every Latter-day Saint to see to it that his progeny, so far as blood and race are concerned, is of a character that can carry on the priesthood. Anything therefore that tends to encourage marriage between negroes and whites is not sanctioned by the Church. Social intercourse with the negroes has this tendency, and for equivalent reasons, it is not sanctioned by the Church. This does not mean that the Church would deny the negro any civil rights nor that it would deny to him any progress which he himself,

1. For more on this distressing subject, see my article, Robert A. Rees, "Truth and Reconciliation: Reflections on the Fortieth Anniversary of the LDS Church's Lifting the Priesthood and Temple Restrictions for Black Mormons of African Descent," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 55–83.

> as to individuals or groups, might be able to achieve in whatever line or endeavor they are able to excel.[2]

Note the exclusionary language: "our members," "our people," and "every Latter-day Saint [apparently, excluding Black Church members]." Though starker in its expression, the following statement by apostle Joseph Fielding Smith in 1963 reflects both the tone and the substance the First Presidency's letter: "I would not want you to believe that we bear any animosity toward the Negro. 'Darkies' are wonderful people, and they have a place in our church."[3]

That was the Church in which I came of age. When I went to Brigham Young University in the early 1950s, there was not a single Black student or faculty member on campus. While little at BYU challenged orthodoxy on this subject, serving a mission in Chicago and, shortly afterward, serving in the army in Georgia, I saw firsthand the realities of Jim Crow and blatant racism, which led me to begin questioning the Church's teaching on this matter. In graduate school at the University of Wisconsin—a dramatically more progressive environment than I had experienced at BYU—I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the doctrine and the official justifications for it. Nevertheless, like many Latter-day Saints at the time, I continued to defend the Church's position. As time went by, however, I began to feel a tension between the words I was saying and the misgivings of my heart.

Although I parroted what I had been taught about Black people being less valiant in the premortal existence and the curse of Cain,

---

2. First Presidency Letter to Waldo H. Anderson, president of the Northern States Mission, Nov. 4, 1949. Permission to publish granted by Waldo Anderson's grandsons, James and Neil Anderson.

3. *Look* Magazine, Oct. 1963, as cited in Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, *Mormonism 101: Examining the Religion of the Latter-day Saints* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 233, as cited in FAIR, "Do critics of Mormonism apply a double standard when attacking the Church on race issues?," https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Mormonism_and_racial_issues/Blacks_and_the_priesthood/Double_standard#cite_note-1.

eventually I developed my own more rational, if still uncomfortable, explanation: "Given the liberating doctrines of the Restoration and the political realities of mid-nineteenth-century racial culture, had the Church given the priesthood and temple blessings to Black members, they likely would have been attracted to the Church in such great numbers that Mormonism would have become essentially a Black-dominated church and therefore lost its ability to proselytize the predominate white (if racist) nations."

It wasn't until the height of the civil rights movement when I began teaching at UCLA, including teaching Black American writers in my English classes, that I became increasingly aware that my attitudes and beliefs were disharmonious with those of the Church. It was during this time when, as editor of *Dialogue*, I opened an envelope and found Lester Bush Jr.'s "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview" with its arresting opening sentence: "There once was a time, albeit brief, when a 'Negro problem' did not exist for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."[4] Immediately, the significance of what I was reading became apparent. My feeling was similar to what Herman Melville expressed upon first reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's collection of short stories—"a shock of recognition," which I have described elsewhere as "an immediate and indelible communication of truth to my soul."[5]

Bush's article put me in a moral quandary, especially when I learned that he had sent his article and all the documentation for it to Church leadership—to Elder Boyd K. Packer, to be precise, who expressed his wish that the article not be published, although, according to Bush, he didn't actually forbid it. Other General Authorities also voiced objections. According to Bush, Mormon scholar Edward Ashment was present when Elder Bruce R. McConkie, upon studying Bush's article,

4. Lester E. Bush Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11.

5. Bob Rees, "A Perfect Brightness of Hope," *Wayfare*, July 5, 2023, https://www.wayfaremagazine.org/p/a-perfect-brightness-of-hope.

"slammed the [issue of] *Dialogue* with my essay down on his desk and pronounced it 'CRAP!'"[6]

Although I was warned by Robert K. Thomas, vice president of BYU and a friend and mentor, that there could be grave consequences for me personally if we did publish the article, after much prayer and consultation with my wife and editorial staff, as well as with Gene England and other trusted advisors, we concluded that what Bush had written was so important that morally we had no choice but to publish it. As I wrote to Lester, "It is, of course, a potentially explosive issue, and undoubtedly there will be many people displeased at our efforts, but the time is long overdue, it seems to me, for us to publish some significant work on this subject."[7] If publishing Bush's article was the right decision, publishing it with responses from three trusted Latter-day Saint scholars was an even better one. Together, Gordon Thomasson, Hugh Nibley, and Eugene England created an expanded context in which Bush's words could be more fully understood. I was especially impressed by what England, who called the teaching "The Mormon Cross," said: "We can get ready for living the higher law, first by working to root out racism in ourselves through getting to know blacks and something of black aspirations and culture. And we can help get Americans ready, black and white, by working honestly and vigorously to overcome the burden of our racist past."[8] Unfortunately, it took a long time following the publication of Bush's article for us to do either.

6. Lester Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 266–67.

7. Devery S. Anderson, "A History of Dialogue, Part Two: Struggle toward Maturity, 1971–1982," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 23.

8. Eugene England, "The Mormon Cross," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 85.

What none of us could have anticipated was that, according to members of President Spencer W. Kimball's family, Bush's article was not only read by President Kimball but underlined in red throughout. As Greg Prince informs us in his article in this special section, people close to the prophet speculate that Bush's article had a strong influence on his 1978 announcement of the change in policy. In fact, Prince quotes general authority Marion D. Hanks as confirming this: "[Lester's] article had had far more influence than the Brethren would ever acknowledge. . . . It 'started to foment the pot.'"[9]

It is sobering to contemplate where the Church would be today had Brigham Young never authorized nor insisted on his false teaching. Or where we would be if the Church had taken Bush's research to its ultimate conclusion in 1978 and altogether abandoned the historical rationale for the doctrine rather than continuing it for more than three more decades. Imagine the Church over that extended period unburdened by its heavy racial history!

There is no way to calculate the personal harm suffered by Black people over the more than a century and a half between Brigham Young's teaching and the 2013 "Race and Priesthood" essay.[10] How many more Black people would have joined the Church had they been taught today's liberating policy? How many Black Mormons would have served missions and how many converts might they have brought into the Church had they been allowed to serve during the century between Brigham Young's ban and the lifting of the ban in 1978? How many more Church members, Black and white, would there currently be in Brazil, throughout Africa, and in the United States and Europe?

9. Gregory A. Prince, "A Tribute to Lester Bush on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Article that Changed the Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 57, no. 3 (2024).

10. "Race and the Priesthood," *Gospel Topics Essays*, available at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng.

How many Black brothers and sisters would have enjoyed the blessings of temple marriage and eternally sealed families? How many ancestors of Black members would have received saving ordinances through their descendants' temple work? And how many individual Black members would have been spared the pain and humiliation of prejudicial discrimination, rejection, and violence?

It is sobering to acknowledge that over a period of 129 years (from 1849 to 1978), ten prophets and hundreds of apostles were wrong in teaching and defending a doctrine and practice regarding priesthood ordination that was counter to what the prophet Joseph Smith taught and counter to the very clear language of the Book of Mormon. It is equally sobering that it took another thirty-four years for the Church to acknowledge the wrongness of earlier justifications when it published "Race and Priesthood" in 2013.

My wife, Gloria, and I were privileged to attend the impressive "Be One" celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the 1978 lifting of the priesthood ban held in the Conference Center in June 2018. We saw and talked with Lester immediately afterward, along with our mutual friend, Greg Prince. We all lamented the fact that those responsible for planning and speaking at the celebration failed to use it to permanently dispel the mythology that had persisted and done so much damage both within and without the Church for nearly two centuries (and, unfortunately, the remnants of which remain with us). Those leaving the conference center that night, their hearts filled with the evening's celebratory spirit, were left with the impression that Brigham Young, Spencer W. Kimball, and Russell M. Nelson were all part of a revelatory process and history. Few had any idea that anonymously sitting in the Conference Center that night was a courageous, humble, and devoted Latter-day Saint scholar whose brilliant and respectful service to the kingdom may be of greater import than that of any lay member in the brief history of the Church. I say, "Praise to the man!"

DARIUS A. GRAY is the past president of the LDS Genesis Group, a support group for Latter-day Saints of African descent. He has been a frequent lecturer on genealogy, Black history, and LDS history. With Margaret Young he co-wrote a trilogy of historical novels about Black Mormon pioneers entitled *Standing on the Promises*. He has long been actively engaged in human rights and civil rights causes that promote the brotherhood and sisterhood of God's children.

GREGORY A. PRINCE {gaprince@me.com} is CEO of Soft Cell Biological Research in St. George, Utah, a company focused on the causes of chronic diseases. He has published over 150 scientific papers, as well as four books and over two dozen articles within the genre of Mormon studies. In June 2023, the Mormon History Association awarded him the Leonard J. Arrington Award for lifetime achievement.

YVONNE BUSH was born and raised in Charlottesville, Virginia. In 1967 she met and married Lester Bush while he was attending UVA School of Medicine. World adventures and life ensued, and the two covered all seven continents while they raised three remarkable children. She received a BS degree in political science from the University of Utah and an MSW from Catholic University of America.

F. ROSS PETERSON {ross.peterson@usu.edu} is an emeritus professor and a native of Montpelier, Idaho. He graduated from Utah State University and obtained a PhD from Washington State University. During his career, he has taught at the University of Texas-Arlington, Utah State University, Victoria University in New Zealand (Fulbright fellow), and Deep Springs College in California, where he also served as president. He and his wife Kay edited *Dialogue* from 1987 to 1992. He chaired the Utah Humanities Council, founded the Mountain West Center at Utah State University, and was also vice president for advancement. Peterson has published many books on Western history as well as numerous essays. Twice a bishop in the LDS Church, he is now focused on autobiography and public service.

NEWELL G. BRINGHURST {newellgb@hotmail.com} is an independent scholar and professor emeritus of history and political science at College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California. He is the author or editor of fifteen books published since 1981. His most recent is *Harold B. Lee: Life and Thought* (2021). He has served as president of both the Mormon History Association (1999–2000)

and of the John Whitmer Historical Association (2005–2006). He is also the recipient of the Leonard J. Arrington Award (2021) from the Mormon History Association.

ROBERT A. REES {bobrees2@gmail.com} recently retired as visiting professor and director of Latter-day Saint/Mormon Studies at the Graduate Theological Union. He is the co-editor of *Remembering Gene: How He Changed Our Lives* (forthcoming from Signature) and co-editor, with his wife, Gloria, and Dawn Anderson of a collection of Sunstone "Pillars of My Faith" essays (also to be published by Signature). He is also completing his study, "Reimagining the Restoration," and directing two nonprofit foundations: Bountiful Children's Foundation and FastForward for the Planet.

Rocio Vasquez Cisneros, *Hecho Por Mamá*, 2020,
36 x 18 x 12 in., fabric, embroidery, and crochet

ON FEET KEEPING

Sarah Safsten

Last night, I sat on the ballroom's hardwood floor and laced up my practice shoes. Their black canvas fabric hugged the contours of my feet as I flexed, pointed, and rolled them out before a long rehearsal. I sat for a while, observing and pondering my rather large, veiny, practical feet. They're not necessarily pretty, but these feet serve me well—they don't often get tired, and they're generally steady. My preoccupation with my feet might seem silly, but perhaps it is not so strange given the fact that I've been a ballroom dancer for so many years and have spent long hours learning to coordinate the movements of my own feet with those of my partner.

In my partnership, I dance the role of the follower (which can be frustrating, especially if my partner leads me in directions with which I disagree). Sometimes, I'd rather be the leader. Wouldn't it feel good to be The Boss? I suspect many people would choose the role of the leader, rather than follower, given the choice.

As I ponder the nuances of leading and following, I recall a few lines from a well-known hymn, written by a man who also had feet on the brain:

Lead, Kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom;
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.[1]

1. "Lead, Kindly Light," *Hymns*, no. 97.

These lines were written in 1833 by John Henry Newman while he sailed from Marseille, France, to his native England.[2] During the journey, he became dangerously ill with fever. Perhaps the physical sickness he felt seemed to him at the time symbolic of some inner spiritual fever too, since his poem reads as a kind of prayer—a plea not for physical healing but for divine help and spiritual guidance.

I wonder when Newman wrote, "one step enough for me," did he really mean it? Or was that statement an aspiration for meekness and humility he was trying to manifest in writing? I'm not sure we'll ever know the answer to this, but we can guess that Newman wrestled with pride for several years. Of this struggle, he wrote,

> *I was not ever thus, nor prayed that*
> *Thou shouldst lead me on;*
> *I loved to choose and see my path; but now*
> *Lead thou me on.*
> *I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears, pride ruled my will;*
> *Remember not past years.*[3]

Maybe Newman, like me, wanted more control over his own life. Perhaps he wanted to be the boss of his own feet rather than follow his leader's instructions. Or maybe he wanted to follow those instructions but had difficulty discerning what they were. It's possible Newman interpreted divine ambiguity as a consequence of his own pride.

No matter the various causes of these feelings, it seems that ambiguity and uncertainty are familiar elements of any follower's experience. I remember one day when I was a beginning dancer, my coach asked me to close my eyes and mirror my partner's movements based on the pressure in my hands. So, with my eyes closed, I tried to block out the afternoon light filtering in from the large studio windows, tried to tune out the many voices of other coaches and the thumping bass of the

2. John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), 35.

3. "Lead, Kindly Light."

music, tried to ignore the other dancers passing close enough behind me to brush my ponytail over my shoulder. I immediately noticed that it was harder to balance without seeing my surroundings. My feet felt wobbly and unsure on my three-inch heels. It wasn't easy to be sensitive to what my hands felt. But I did my best, and at first, I could sense what my partner wanted me to do. When I felt pressure on the inside of my right hand, I moved my right hip toward my partner. But when my partner started stepping in different directions, following became harder. Once, he suddenly reversed directions and I stepped back when I should have stepped forward. At this, my partner and coach laughed a "gotcha" laugh and said I should have followed better. I got annoyed that I had missed the lead (it felt like getting an A– or a "needs improvement" on my report card), but I tried to shrug it off and get back to practicing.

I'm not the only one who struggles to follow; Newman took a while to learn this skill too. But in 1848, thirteen years after that fateful boat ride back to England, he seemed to have some of it figured out. Of being a follower, he wrote: "Let us put ourselves into His hands, and not be startled though He leads us by a strange way, a *mirabilis via*, as the Church speaks. Let us be sure He will lead us right, that He will bring us to that which is, not indeed what we think best, nor what is best for another, but what is best for us."[4] *Mirabilis via*: Latin for "wonderful way." It's a beautiful sentiment. Don't all of us hope that God will lead us to what is best for us?

But I wonder how to put myself into God's hands in a practical sense. Newman described it as a kind of letting go of anxiety, or a choice to trust that whatever happens is evidence of God's plan for you being fulfilled. "God leads us by strange ways," he wrote. "We know He wills our happiness, but we neither know what our happiness is, nor the way.

4. John Henry Newman. "Hope in God—Creator," in *Meditations & Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*, edited by W. P. Neville (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1893), 397–98.

We are blind; left to ourselves we should take the wrong way; we must leave it to Him."[5] I doubt Newman's spiritual journey was easy, but in the end, it seemed he felt a sense of peace and contentment in following God's plan for him.

By contrast, I don't often feel comfortable in my role as a spiritual follower. I have a hard time leaving my path up to divine direction. As a follower in dance, I'm sometimes reluctant or resistant, mainly due to my own pride. I feel that I can lead myself better than the leader can. So too in my spiritual life: as a follower of God, my resistance is sometimes due to pride. Other times, I resist out of doubt or fear, especially if I don't know what I'm being led to do, and I'm afraid of stepping in the wrong spiritual direction. Sure, I know generally what to do in order to be "a good person": Love other people. Treat them as I would have them treat me (not stonewalling them, snapping at them for being stupid, or punching them on the nose). But discerning more complicated things, like how to reconcile the tension between my faith and my doubt, is more difficult.

It's easier to dance than it is to parse the nuances of faith. When I dance, I can clearly identify which foot I'm standing on, measure the tempo of the music, and decide whether a movement should be sudden or sustained. When I dance, I feel lithe, agile, quick to respond, sensitive to the pressure of my partner's hands in mine. I become more aware of my own embodied weight. My feet push against the floor harder. My skeleton seems to expand inside my body, and I feel my bones almost stretch taller and wider. I become more alert to the physical sensations around me.

And when I dance, I have a partner with whom I can play, brainstorm, and argue. Take yesterday's practice, for example. We practiced a small piece of our waltz, a series of steps—*tumble turn, swivel, telespin, swivel*—which takes less than ten seconds to dance but warrants hours of repetition due to its complexity. We pushed and pulled each other

5. Newman, "Hope in God."

over those same floorboards dozens of times as we practiced keeping each other's feet:

Can you wait for my lead here?
What lead do you want me to wait for?
Wait at least until I've shifted my weight to my left foot.
That means I'll have to hang at the edge of my balance and wait for you to catch me.
Don't worry, I'll catch you. Let's do it again.
How was that?
And so on, until we both agreed to
put a pin in this until tomorrow.

Dancing is not easy, but in some ways, it's a simpler arena in which to practice leading, following, and feet keeping. If I were to practice leading and following with God, I would ask for clearer instruction on how to move forward on my spiritual path (*What lead do You want me to wait for?*). It is not my place to tell God how to lead me, but communicating with heaven is so often abstract, confusing, and frustrating.

Some questions I'd like to ask God:

How can I dance with an immortal Being?
How can I trust You with my weight when I can't feel You?
How do I know if I'm moving in the right direction?
What if You're testing me, and I'm getting it wrong?
Is there even a lead at all, or am I straining at empty air?

I kneel beside my bed before I go to sleep each night in search of a heavenly lead. I stay there for a time, feeling my heart throb in my ears, feeling my feet start to go numb and tingly. I offer up my own muddled mess of doubts and hopes and feelings, straining to feel any communication from heaven. I remember what Dylan Thomas wrote and try to follow suit: "I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept."[6] I try to discern the spiritual leads

6. Dylan Thomas, "A Child's Christmas in Wales" (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1954).

prompting me toward my own *mirabilis via*, and I can almost sense the rhythm and hear the music playing. I can imagine the kinds of steps I might possibly take. But I can't feel a lead—an impulse or indication of when or where to start. The only thing I feel is a general sense that God wants me to be happy and to use my agency to make choices that result in happiness for me while also helping those around me. That's like the leader saying, "I want you to dance."

I recall one recent dance class where I felt particularly stumped by the intricacies of leading and following. It was early fall, and the mid-morning sunlight shone in through the large east-facing windows in the dance studio. The other dancers in the room and I were slightly sweaty and out of breath from our efforts to improve our rumba technique all morning. After watching us dance the routine, my coach turned off the music and asked us to gather around him. He then started explaining the concept of leading and following in a way I hadn't heard before. To the leaders in the room, he said, "It's not about trying to trick your partner. Instead, you should be making it as clear and easy to follow your lead as possible."

He then turned to the followers and said, "It's not about trying to read your partner's mind. It's not about trying to guess the right steps. Instead, you need to maintain your internal rhythm. Continue moving to the music, and don't anticipate the lead that is coming. Live in the moment."

Finally, he addressed us all as a group: "Leading is about listening. The leader offers a lead like a gift to their partner but can't dictate how that person receives it or interprets it. Both partners need to be sensitive to each other." As I stood there in my high-heeled shoes, shifting my weight from foot to foot, I felt relieved that I could stop the futile exercise of trying to read my partner's mind. Relieved that I could stop worrying about what step would come next.

As I write this, I realize that my conception of my role as a follower might have been lacking in imagination. I used to think that all a

follower had to do was trust the leader to dictate what they should do next. I thought obedience was the only required skill, and an easy one at that. But through time and practice, I've learned that being a follower doesn't mean waiting for my leader to tell me what to do, like a soldier waiting for orders. Quite the contrary.

Being a follower means taking responsibility for the presentation of my craft. It means revising my own artistic choices: to reach for my partner's hand as slowly as a sloth reaches for the nearest branch, or to jump faster than a tightly wound spring; to stretch all my muscles and bones as high as possible, almost becoming weightless, or to pack my bones and muscles down tight until I become heavier than the mountains. Being a follower means claiming my own identity as a dancer as something that is nuanced, complex, and unique—something that cannot be reduced to a set of instructions my partner gives to me through pressure in my hands.

But here is where I must confront the limitations of my metaphor. While thinking of God as my partner—a person with whom I can play, brainstorm, and argue—is freeing, it is also limiting. In real life, I don't get immediate feedback on how well or poorly I followed a spiritual lead, nor can I dictate which kind of lead God gives me. Real life is more improvised than it is choreographed. So, as I write this, I start to question the ability of a single metaphor to describe the nature of an infinite, inscrutable God. Metaphors are certainly helpful in conceptualizing certain elements of my spirituality, but they will always be limited. In short, God will always be bigger than my metaphors.

As dumbfounding and frustrating and mind-blowing as it is to recognize God's bigness, it is also liberating and empowering. If I accept that there are some things about God I will never understand in this life, then I can stop trying to read God's mind. I can stop worrying about what comes next and instead take ownership over my spiritual steps in this present moment. I can choose to put my feet in God's keeping.

Because, God, we both know that I'm using synecdoche here, and when I say keep Thou my feet, I'm really saying, keep Thou my soul. Keep me company. Keep me safe. Keep Thou my dancing and my essays. Keep Thou my faith and my doubts. Keep Thou my plans and hopes and dreams. I'll try not to anticipate or second guess but keep dancing to my internal rhythm.

Lead Thou me on.

SARAH SAFSTEN (she/her) {sarah.s.cheney@gmail.com} received her BA and MFA from Brigham Young University in English and creative writing. Her essays have recently been published in journals such as *Inscape*, *Exponent II*, and *Sky Island Journal*. She currently serves as a contributing editor for *Wayfare* magazine and teaches English at Utah Valley University. When she isn't reading, writing, or teaching, you might find her ballroom dancing or making Korean food with her husband.

RESURRECTION MORNING

Ryan A. Davis

Sometimes in the morning, I wake earlier than the others. I slip out of my room and sit down on that well-worn spot on the couch that over time has become mine—the one the boys grumble good-naturedly about having to relinquish because dad says so. Maybe I've claimed it as mine because it's where the world feels most right, where the small sense of order found in familiarity harbingers a happier and less harried time, sometime in the future when lions will lie down with lambs and the imperfect but earnest will grow like cedars in Lebanon.

They are quiet moments, those, and quietly shepherded along by markers of time that make our home both unique and cliché: The passing train in the early morning hours that reminds me we live at a transportation crossroads, linking us to north and south, east and west, but only occasionally, and at great cost, to our family; the cuckoo that peeps his reluctant head out every half hour to remind me not just what time it is but that for twenty years he lay silent in his gift-box-cum-cardboard-cage, unable to sing his little Swiss songs of joy. These are the sounds I hear in the early mornings, this morning, as I sit in silent contemplation in my spot on the couch and wait for the sun and my family to rise.

We knew when we moved to the Midwest that the physical distance between us and our families would be vast. One thousand six hundred and nine-tenths of a mile to my parents', one thousand three hundred eighty-six miles to my in-laws'. What we didn't know was that the emotional distance between us would stretch or shrink as a measure of the strength of our relationship with them, that it would ebb and flow with the local demands placed on us, on them. When you live far from

family, there is an inertia that sets in. We have noticed it with the phone calls that get less frequent; loved ones' accounts of trips to hither and yon but rarely to here; the boys' missed birthdays, followed by perfunctory and sincere apologies that we accept with a little more resignation each time.

Sunday dinners at mom and dad's become one more needle in a pin cushion of emotions that already has a few holes. Of course you're happy for everyone there, but you'd be lying if you said you didn't feel a little twinge when you call after church and hear the buzz of love in the background: The sound of your nieces and nephews playing with each other while your boys are downstairs in the basement half a country away, the snippets of your siblings' conversations with each other while your wife finds friendship in the pages of a book, sitting next to you alone on the couch.

It is one thing to comprehend the realities of life's demands, the rhythms and patterns of our responsibilities that tether us to the places where we live: we in the Midwest, they out West. It is another to taste the separation on the tongue of experience, no less bitter because its provenance is understood.

I imagine it was quite the undertaking for my parents to schlep the six of us kids up to Utah from Arizona every summer so that we could stay connected to our extended family. We'd take the US 89 north, crossing the border into Kanab, and then drive through Panguitch and Manti, where my maternal grandparents were married. Grandpa had always been punctual on their dates, so when he arrived late to the temple, grandma feared for a moment she might be jilted at the altar. We'd pass through Ephraim and Mt. Pleasant—these are the town names that stay with me—and when we'd get close to Fairview, mom and dad would tell us to keep our eager eyes peeled for the cabin. There was always a rush when we spotted it peeking through the trees. We knew we were on the final stretch when we left the pavement and crossed the cattle guard through the gate onto grandma and grandpa's property.

I was only a year old when grandpa built the cabin. Dad was in college at Washington State and would drive down from Pullman in the summer to help out. When grandpa died it went to an uncle who held onto it as long as he could. He and my aunt built a house on the adjacent lot, hoping to rent the cabin out Vrbo-style. But what it possessed in quaint charm and others' memories, our memories, it lacked in modern amenities and renovations, and the abortive venture soon came to naught. It finally passed unremarkably out of our lives when my uncle sold it. Some cousins and I talked briefly about purchasing it; surely someone could step up and keep it in the family, we argued. You're not in a position to do it? Yeah, me neither. And just like that, our wistful conversation faded away on the winds of nostalgia.

Not to overstate the metaphor, but emotionally the loss of the cabin felt something like a death. You wake up one day and this special place that was once so alive with an otherworldly magic is gone. You see the physical shell that remains, but the memories of everything that gave it life no longer reside there—instead, they live in your mind like so many disembodied spirits.

We don't bury buildings like we do people, though, not like we did my maternal grandmother. She outlived grandpa by twenty-six years. Mom used to joke that she kept putting off death because she didn't know what her reunion with grandpa would be like. Would he be there at all, or would he jilt her for real this time, not at the altar but in the afterlife? That would be awkward, even in heaven. Maybe she thought he would be with his first wife, the one who died in childbirth, off in some corner of the cosmos with the family he originally set out to create before life, or rather death, intervened. Maybe grandma was worried that heaven has wallflowers, too, and that she was one of them.

When she finally did die, she was only a couple of months shy of her one hundredth birthday. I had recently called to see how she was doing. By the time I hung up, I knew the end was nigh. She repeated herself again and again, unaware of things she had already said. The gregarious and witty woman I had lived with for a few years in college, the one who

was always excited when I brought a young lady home thinking maybe she was the one, was all but gone. What little cognitive faculty she still possessed was all that was keeping the conversation—and my composure—from collapsing in on itself. When we said goodbye, I hung up and lost it, sobbing at the realization that I'd never see her alive again, not in this life. Maybe tender mercies are tender because they arrive when your heart is weighed down by the knowledge that none is good but One, and He would have called sooner, more often.

As roommates go, grandma was the best. We used to sit next to each other on her matching gliders (the Cadillacs of rocking chairs) and watch reruns of *Cheers*. She would feign embarrassment at the mildly off-color jokes and wonder aloud whether letting her grandson watch that sort of show was such a good idea. I used to ask her what life was like when she was my age. Her eyes would light up as she relived her memories. I loved to hear them, too, even when the sound of her voice lulled me to sleep and I would come to minutes later only to find her still chatting away as gleefully and oblivious to my naps as when she started.

The last time I saw her alive was long after I'd moved out. With little ones now in tow, my wife and I had made our way west from our new home in Illinois. I asked grandma to tell me some stories and pulled out my phone to record them. The sound quality isn't great; I didn't have a microphone and her voice was fragile at that point. But every now and then, I pull up the app and hold my phone up to my ear just so I can hear her voice one more time. She hasn't been gone very long, only a couple of years now, but I'm still holding on to her like it's been forever.

Death is definitely a separation, but if you live your life right, it can also be one last chance to knit together the lives of those you leave behind. Grandma's funeral—like some but not, alas, like others—was an unplanned family reunion, full of tears but also of sweet remembrances. It's one of those tender ironies of life, I suppose, that God uses death to breathe one last bit of life into relations that so often grow cold when new grandparents take the place of old ones and the extended

family of your youth gives way to the one your children will grow to know.

It's now our parents who stand at the threshold of death. They are to our kids what our grandparents were to us. We don't want their funeral to be the next time the boys see them, so as a matter of course we bend our lives in the direction of the sun, every year or so in the summertime when the boys are out of school and I'm off contract at the university. We load up the minivan and head to Arizona and then Utah, or sometimes it's Utah first and then Arizona. It's a long trip, and there are moments when I wonder if it's worth it. I never seem to feel that way a few weeks later when we load up the van and say our goodbyes and set out on the drive home.

Somewhere along the interstate in the wide, unpopulated expanse between the Midwest and the West, the nostalgia of going home gives way to the cold realization that we're not going home. Home now lies behind us. If we're heading anywhere, it's to the past, to somewhere that will never be for my boys what it once was but will never again be for me, for my wife. The thought puts me in a melancholy mood, and with nothing else to do but drive, I get lost in the somber peripatetics of my mind. My wife sleeps next to me so she can take the evening shift. The boys put on a movie and their wireless headsets and get lost in their digital oblivion to the natural wonder that surrounds them. And for long stretches of the American Great Plains, I find myself effectively alone—alone to wonder about the wide world, the wider cosmos, and my place in them.

I think about the times when the call to adventure beckoned me far from everything I knew: the romanticism of ranch life in the rolling hills of southern Alberta; a mission to Guatemala as a nineteen-year old kid who seems almost a stranger to me now; my very own American-in-Paris summer in, well, Paris, but also Belgium and Switzerland, where I found a clock in a shop on the streets of Geneva that I sent home to say I know I'm far away, I know you worry, but I'm okay, I'm loving it here, and I wanted you to know.

We stop for gas and to stretch our legs. Everybody out. Make sure you go to the bathroom. No, I won't buy you a knife or a stuffed elk or any of the other random stuff you manage to find that's probably been there since last summer and will probably still be there next summer. Yes, I'll buy some more snacks. Yes, you can get a soda. You're going to mix different flavors, aren't you? You know how I know? You're smiling. . . . Okay, time to go. Where's your brother? The bathroom?! He's just now going?! We've been here for . . . Oh, for the love . . . My wife takes my hand and looks at me and smiles. I sigh. You're right, I say, what's five more minutes? It's all part of the adventure.

US 89 drops us into the valley out of the Tonto National Forest. We know we're getting close because the temperature keeps rising. At Gilbert Road we take a left and cross the Salt River bed through the last stretches of the Indian reservation. I ask the boys if they want to drive by the house I grew up in. Mom and dad moved away from Lehi after I left home at eighteen. They live up the hill now, in Mesa. The boys just want to get to grandma and grandpa's.

When we finally pull in and get out of the van, it feels like we step out of a cryopod. And not just because we're greeted by the stern Arizona sun after spending hours in an ice box on wheels. The trip only takes two days, but what for my parents begins with a text—Hey, just wanted you to know we're on the road—and ends with a knock at their door—Here so soon?—is, for us, like traveling to the moon and back. Travel has a way of condensing time and experience. Maybe that's why those who never step beyond their own world measure it in time and distance, while those who do measure it in hopes and dreams and memories.

Standing on the porch, I see the glint of gold on the door. I feel the warmth of the sun and of something else. Of being here, of being home, or home-not-home. My wife takes my hand and looks at me and smiles. I put my arm around my closest son and for a moment pause to remember the road that brought us here. That wound us through Iowa

and Colorado, gas station bathrooms and rest stop lunches, through marriage vows and deaths and cross-country moves, and autoimmunity and four cesareans, and depression and dark nights of the soul that finally yielded to vistas of a garden and a man and an awe for the love that He feels for His friends, that a father feels for His child. The love that wraps me in His shadowy embrace on those mornings when it's still dark outside and the others are sleeping, and I sit in my spot on the couch and wait—for the cuckoo to peek his head out the clock and for the sun and my family to rise.

RYAN A. DAVIS {rdavis2@ilstu.edu} holds a PhD from Emory University and is a Hispanist at Illinois State University, where he studies modern Spanish narrative and cultural history. In the field of Mormon studies, he has published on and researches missionary athletes, missionary rock/folk bands, and Spanish Mormon Westerns.

Rocio Vasquez Cisneros, *The Life of Border Children*, 2021,
8 x 5 x 5 in., fabric and embroidery

FROM DOWNSTREAM

Dixie Partridge

Whatever landscape a child is exposed to early on, that will be the sort of gauze through which he or she will see all the world afterward.
—Wallace Stegner

They must have had names. To us they were *the creek*, *the tree*, *the mountain*, and they filled the frescoed days of a time before we thought much about time.

In photographs on my wall, they don't look the same. The early memories reach and fade into each other, overlapping my sister and me with infusions of light absent in photos. Even the rain was a kind of light, giving back wavery colors of those places waiting for us.

The scent of mint growing near that creek in Wyoming would be carried into our adult lives, a trigger to memory. Years later and states away, near our back fence mint multiplies from a paper-cup sprig once brought home by our second grader. Breathing in, I can feel the long-ago uneven slope down to the stream over stones, the barn loft open fifty yards behind me, the tree reaching toward water with giant roots and tips of low branches. The ridged trunk forked near enough to pasture ground that we could climb in to wedge ourselves, feet against one side and back against the other. Higher up, we could, if we chose, occupy an instant secrecy above our mother's call, our father's reach.

The mountain, covered with brush and north-slope pines, provided a mural, canvas backdrop to our play. Our attempts to scale its craggy sides sent us back downstream, knowing its hugeness out of reach. But it felt in-place, lit with the western sun far into evening. Mornings, it slowed the dawn, its massive shadow scrolling back toward us with a mystery of time delayed, as sunlight across the valley lay open, bright and early.

In spring seasons with high runoff, the creek flooded, leaving us stranded as the tree and barn, unable to reach what we deemed necessities of childhood. We watched our parents in tall boots rescuing calves, herding livestock into the barn on higher ground. At night the uncommon sound of wild water reached our upstairs window, telling us morning would be other than we wanted. We waited in apprehension to rebuild our stone bridges and coves along the mint.

The creek later became its name, Dry Creek, dammed upstream for sprinkler systems. Alone beside it, the tree was *cottonwood* when a photographer for the high school yearbook selected it for the inside cover. The unnamed images of moving light seem more true, while the cottonwood remains unchanged in the photograph, the camera a lens without memory. I have found no other name, still, for the mountain.

~

Does memory define who we are? What about all that we forget, or imagine? Entering a canyon lodge where my father took us long ago, my voice feels off-key, the word *nickelodeon* something I strain to call back. But the Snake River behind the old lodge ran in my father's memory as my own: the horse he rode carried away in night rapids, at last delivering him downstream onto an unfamiliar shore. *All horses are good swimmers*, my father told me to remember.

After my father's tellings, I saw the action in my mind and in my dreams, as though I was there, somewhere just above him, watching it happen. I felt the power of swift currents and the large, moving muscles of the horse. And it's all part of how in his over eighty years my father valued horses as partners, farming with them long after tractors were common in the valley. My mother drove a buck rake during haying each summer, pulled by a work team of black horses.

Summers when I was young, tourists on the way to Yellowstone on US 89 would stop with their cameras as though they had happened

upon some past life preserved just for their review, leaving one of my brothers embarrassed, another amused.

~

Born on his family's farm and never leaving home, my father taught me that both beauty and bread can satisfy hungers, to watch for the brief streak of a red fox along the edge of a field. He plowed around an abandoned fox den for years, hoping they would come back.

One day recently I read a quotation about work, attributed to Saint Benedict, and immediately associated it with my farming heritage and my parents: *Laborare est orare*. To work is to pray.

Somewhat inadvertently I think, my father taught me to contemplate what kinds of losses may matter to us most. I have lost his story that somehow connects this to his father's early death, a card shark, and a debt. I seem to have lost whole pieces of childhood: what happened to that other tree for climbing in the north pasture, how a billboard for the cheese factory came to be in that spot. And I cannot recall where my father went for a full week one year (or why) when I was small, so unusual when the family took no vacations. I have only my mother's words of explanation about a hunting friend and a lake called Jenny.

I have not lost the scent and textures of mown alfalfa and blue timothy fields, now growing his absence; nor how in some years, walking over depths of crusted snow, sinking in, one can feel steam rising from the insulated, plowed soil beneath. I have not lost the minute detail of light slanting on dust particles through rafters of a collapsing barn, nor how in dreams collapsing buildings can straighten and mend. Along the years, not knowing just how it happened, I came to sense that something had turned scriptural in the sound of the word *pasture*: its killdeer and meadow lark calls, buttercup and dandelion yellows, spring greenings and the dark swaths from drought that often came later in summer. Reinforcing this scriptural sense, I find one day

in Psalm 16:6 these words: *The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me*.

~

Separated for years by distance from my siblings, I have wondered: when we are very old, will we still wake in the night and for an instant see the window above our childhood beds, hear the clink of our mother's pails on the way to the barn? Will we return again as part of our parents' household, in dreams that suddenly banish the children of our own, our adult jobs and choices? To struggle as with half-familiar current, to anticipate the creek—flooding or dry, the tree lit with fresco light, the cottonwood turning on the yearbook cover?

When I was middle-aged and visiting the farm, my father told me that when you are old you dream old dreams, that awake, you don't remember which came from living. And soon, he said, the difference doesn't really matter.

DIXIE PARTRIDGE {pearanttree@gmail.com} grew up in Wyoming and spent most of her adult life living along the Columbia River in Washington State. Her poetry has appeared in several anthologies and many journals, including *Poetry*, the *Georgia Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Ploughshares*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. Her first book, *Deer in the Haystacks*, is part of the book series Poetry of the West from Ahsahta Press. Her second, *Watermark*, won the national Eileen W. Barnes Award. She has served as poetry editor or reviewer for two journals and co-edited regional anthologies in the Northwest. The personal impact of landscape is most often at the root of her writing.

STRAIT IS THE WAY

William Morris

I wish I had stopped my mom from talking to the hardcore punk band at that rest stop in western PA.

I will stop my mom from talking to the hardcore punk band at that rest stop in western PA.

It's not a question of how but of when. Or rather, the question of when is one of how and the question of how is one of when.

The fundamental problem—and while it was a problem, it didn't become a problem until it became The Problem—is that my mother has a habit of collecting strays. That's fine. There's nothing inherently wrong with being a magnetic personality and wanting to help the broken people you attract with that personality. It's maybe not how you want to go about getting a husband, or, later in life, a series of wives. And, of course, it didn't make for the most amazing environment for children to grow up in.

To be clear: we were never in any unsafe circumstances. It's more that, well, our daily life was never stable. So many people drifting in and out of it. So many demands on our mother's love and attention and emotional and physical capacities.

As amazing as her ability to stretch her energy to meet demands was, it was also, if we're being honest, a chaotic energy, and the expenditure of it generated a bit more friction, a bit more heat than was ideal for children.

She got stuff done. She helped a lot of people out. She was an angel, a powerhouse, a superwoman.

But it all meant we lived life more often at a rolling boil than a gentle simmer. And when life is lived at a rolling boil, it doesn't take

much for things to boil over. The heat turned up a fraction. One more stray added to the pot.

You get the point.

It's ironic, really. All that instability leading to this current stasis.

Or maybe it's not ironic at all. Maybe that's just how things go when it comes to the operation of eternal intelligences in relation to mortal experience: a desire for experience melds with a craving for security that agglomerates into social, cultural, and technological situations that slow progress (and individual progression) to a crawl.

Our co-op board has a lot of (mostly) polite arguments over what our role should and could be in breaking humanity out of the current stasis.

There are those who want us to be the dog nipping at the heels or the electric charge of the prod. There are those who still think we can be the pacemaker or even the beating heart.

My job is to remind them that as self-sufficient as we try to be, we're still essentially parasitic on the leviathans and the best thing, perhaps the only thing, we can do is maintain our uneasy truce with them and remain beneath their gaze as much as possible.

My spouse thinks I shouldn't reign the board members in quite so much. Not be so "pragmatic and realpolitik and depressing" about everything.

That's when I'm tempted to bring up my covert activities for the Church, which wouldn't be possible if our co-op became a target for greater oversight, but I know that will only add emotional pain to the near-constant physical pain they experience.

They think it should be them out there taking all the risks rather than me.

But sometimes God has a different plan.

Or, perhaps, sometimes God shifts his plans when the randomness of mortality makes the initial plan unfeasible.

We were driving back to Iowa from a spontaneous road trip to visit the Sacred Grove. For once, it was just me, my mom, and my two younger siblings.

We stopped at a rest stop in Pennsylvania to fill our water bottles and eat lunch. Lunch was warm carrot sticks (someone forgot to put them in the cooler), store-bought hummus (someone had bought the chocolate dessert flavor because it looked fun), slices of turkey pepperoni (someone had been craving pepperoni), and a big bag of cherries (someone had stopped to purchase them from a roadside stand and then spent an hour chatting up the orchard owners, which is why we were having lunch at three in the afternoon).

We were spitting the cherry pits into a paper cup. Sometimes they went in. Sometimes we missed. We decided to make a contest out of it. Things got loud and competitive, and so at first none of us noticed the group of five young, clean-cut men slink out of a beat-up minivan and sit at the picnic table next to ours. And when I say clean cut, I only mean their haircuts. The rest was exactly what you'd expect from a hardcore punk band, which is what they were, although none of them looked to be a day over sixteen: black jeans, ripped up white or black T-shirts, a smattering of tattoos, a scattering of piercings, and faces that glowered as if personally affronted by the afternoon sun.

I don't know how spiritual gifts are for you.

How you know you have them. When and how you are able to use them and to what purpose.

I'm struck, though, by the language of "to some it is given to." Spiritual gifts are selective. Individual. And while I know that the scriptures say that it's the Holy Spirit that gives us the gifts, it's not presented as a thing that's the byproduct of agency on an individual level. Spiritual gifts aren't earned. Sure, you have to be worthy to use them, but, like, it's something that just happens to you. Like, it's less like a specific parent giving a gift to a specific child and more like one of those holiday

gift exchanges where you show up with a wrapped gift, and it's totally random which one you end up leaving with at the end of the evening.

I don't think you can steal spiritual gifts from others like you can gifts at a white elephant party, though.

Although I'm sure if it were possible, a certain leviathan would have figured out how to do it. Because that's the way they think: if something exists here in this mortal life, it is a resource to be exploited for their grand plan. It's one more thing to be deployed to bring about their millennialist vision. Oh sure, no man knows the time of His coming and all that, but we're going to have the technologies and systems in place so that when He shows up, all He has to do is say, good job, everybody, let's just keep going down the track you've already laid down.

My patriarchal blessing said nothing about my spiritual gifts. Only that I had them and was to use them to help build the kingdom (oddly enough, it didn't specify which kingdom; I suppose it was implied, but which level was being implied? For me, this isn't a loophole that justifies my plan because there's no need for a loophole. It's obvious what needs to be done to anyone with any sort of sense of what the gospel is truly about).

And it certainly said nothing about my gifts that fall into the "many gifts given" category.

I became aware of the gift the day after I turned fifty-seven. It was March. Which meant it was much hotter than normal in some places and much colder than normal in other places, which is to say it was the new normal.

It's been the new normal for many years now.

I was walking home after church. The air was thick and hazy, the color of Postum or Pero (or the roasted barley and chicory drink available to you and/or found in your memory) with a lot of cream in it.

I should've changed the filter on my mask that morning, but I hadn't realized it was going to be that bad. I had hitched a ride to that

week's meeting place with a group of hedgesaints led by a Seventy who was based out of La Crosse. Elder Fluger and I disagreed on a lot of things but agreed on the main things, and that's all that mattered.

But they were heading up to Duluth after the quorum meeting, and I needed to get back to my mom (who was not to be trusted with the co-op network I was in charge of maintaining but could be counted on having the energy to cause trouble on it) and my spouse (who was to be trusted with the network but couldn't be counted on to have the energy to keep mom from causing trouble).

I was soaking in sweat, walking down the median while chains of EV pods whined by, praying my mom wouldn't cause too much trouble and that somehow the particulates would nourish and strengthen my lungs instead of weakening them further, and just as I said Amen the air went from thick to syrupy, and I was back lying in the bed of a truck, Elder Fluger beside me, both of us hidden under piles of biomass (I believe it was switchgrass), discussing if we should try to reopen the North Branch branch.

I want to be precise about this, about the nature of this spiritual gift and how it manifested: I wasn't back as if it were happening for the first time. Nor was I back as if I were remembering/replaying the conversation in some vivid, virtual way. Rather, I was back then with the current me as a sort of overlay or underlay on the then me. As a sort of guiding spirit or guardian angel to myself. My past self.

And as we lay there, sweating through our thin dress shirts, breathing heavily but trying to not breathe too heavily through our oxygen masks, the quiet panic of confinement droning in our minds—or at least in my mind—current me knew that I would be able to speak for then me when Elder Fluger asked what I thought he should do about the Sister Whitmore situation and give a different answer that would possibly change what happened to her.

But as the conversation turned from North Branch to Sister Whitmore, I grew afraid, or current me grew afraid, and I let then me say what I said then.

And then I was back on the median, several yards closer to home than I had previously been, and half a foot away from stepping into the EV lane.

Joseph Smith said that time is a circle.

No, that's wrong. Joseph Smith said that the immortal part of individuals—the thing that is us and has always been us and always will be us—is one eternal round.

The implications of that statement aren't particularly clear.

For the most part, Mormons seems to believe rather strongly that time, or at least causality, flows one way. Eternal progression doesn't exist otherwise. And we are (or were/think we still are) all about progression.

As we progress, and in order to progress, we change states: from intelligences to spirit children, from spirits to mortal beings, from mortal beings to resurrected, immortal beings, from resurrected, immortal beings to perfect beings, from perfect beings to gods who increase forever.

One can end up stuck in a certain state. But ideally, you continue to progress. And in order to progress, your actions matter. And in order for your actions to matter, there must be some sort of cause and effect in place. To sin is to err is to dam progression. To repent is to grow and learn and restart progression.

Now, I know things get complicated when you start speaking at the philosophical level on how time really works, and especially how God experiences time—does he/they even exist inside of time? Or do they live outside of time? And if the latter, how are they able to affect the time in which we exist?

And some things do transcend time. The atonement of Jesus Christ, for example, is able to time travel in that its effects are retroactive back to the beginning of mortal/human history (and perhaps even stretch beyond this planet's mortal/human history out into the vast expanse of the universe).

It's complicated. Our knowledge is imperfect.

But, generally, we believe in the flow of time—that there is a present, future, and past, and that the flow is one way from the present into the future, the past trailing behind, impacting, of course, the present, but only as traces and traumas and consequences.

And that's all fine, except . . .

What if the flow isn't one way?

Kat and Ollie were arguing about something stupid. My mom grabbed the bag of cherries, said "Sort those two out" to me, walked over to the band, and offered them the cherries.

I missed the first part of the conversation because I was dealing with my two younger siblings, but I was able to convince Kat to explain the plot of *The Princess Bride* in her telling secrets voice to Ollie, which she had seen and he had not, just as I heard my mom ask, "What does straight edge mean?"

When I say I was in a weakened state after what happened to me while walking down the median, do you know what I mean? I'm not talking about something quite to the extent of Joseph Smith Jr. fainting while attempting to cross a fence the day after being visited by the angel Moroni three times in one night.

But something akin to that.

I had not been physically weakened all that much. It was more that I was shot through with spirit, my mind and body so thrilled to the experience I had just had they were vibrating in an exultant state such that neither could quite focus on the physical world, which was demanding that I keep my steps to the center of the median and keep moving forward at a steady pace.

I'm not saying it was like being drunk. I don't know how it feels to be drunk.

I am saying that I did find myself listing at times as I struggled towards the outer boundary of our co-op.

My mom was quite taken with the notion of the straight-edge lifestyle. This was by no means her first encounter with rock musicians, and in her experience, they tended to drink heavily. They weren't allowed to drink or use drugs in our house. But she'd let them sleep their drunkenness off if they showed up already blitzed.

"Better here than out in the streets or in a jail cell," she told me when I complained about having to clean up puke while she cooked piles of flapjacks and bacon to serve for breakfast the next morning.

I want to stress that my mom does have a certain gift of discernment, and none of the people she collected were ever violent. As far as I can recall, none of them posed any danger to me and my siblings.

"Why do you do this?" she asked.

"Do what?" replied the guitarist.

"Be straight edge."

The band members all shrugged and looked away from her. The drummer, who had been intently studying the ground during the whole conversation, almost seemed to shrink.

I was just going to holler to leave them alone when the lead singer—Johnny, as we were to find out—spoke up: "Thank you for asking this question, Ma'am." He fiddled with one of the safety pins on his black denim vest. "The best way I can explain it is to ask you a question: do you believe people should be free?"

"I believe freedom is important."

"So do we. And that's why we don't drink and do drugs. We want to be free. We don't want to be dependent on anybody else or any substance—or any system, for that matter. Being sober keeps us free."

"I like that," my mom said. And she had that glow of excitement and brimming love about her when she was in stray-collecting mode. "I also don't partake of any of that stuff. It's called the Word of Wisdom. It tells us if we avoid harmful substances, we'll be healthy. We'll have the energy we need."

"Righteous," said the bass player.

"Hopefully so," said my mom. "But I have another question for you boys: what do you do with your freedom?"

I'm not saying I fully understand the idea of free agency let alone am able to explain it to the satisfaction of someone with a grounding in philosophy or quantum physics. But I had a realization while I was walking down the median: let's assume I had decided to act during the episode I had just experienced. Would that have violated anyone's agency?

Does changing the past destroy agency?

Let's set aside, for a moment, concepts like foreordination, foreknowledge, and God's omniscience and focus instead on the individual daughter or son of God and their specific context in mortality.

Does current me acting in the past destroy agency?

The first thing to account for is that I'm still me in the past. I can't do anything that I would not have done. I can only say and do the things I am capable of doing. I can only act as the agent that I am.

So I can say things to other people. But discourse—attempted persuasion—does not infringe on the agency of others.

Yes, I have knowledge of the future. But what is prophecy if not the knowledge of the future? Those who hear my words can choose to believe me or not because even though I know what has happened, they do not, and they don't know that I know. It's still a theoretical future state for them.

The second thing to account for is that I can't take dramatic physical actions.

I might be able to convince my past self to do something slightly different. Spit the cherry pit with a bit more force. But if I try to get my then body to do something very different from what my then me is doing, I get thrown back to the present. This limits how I'm able to directly affect the past.

But let's say I could find a moment where I could nudge my physical self in just such a way that it'd lead to a much more actively physical change to the past.

Let's even say, for example, I were to somehow be able to harm someone in the past. Does that destroy agency? It harms mine, of course, in the sense that it puts me in thrall to the forces of evil, and I'm at risk of being bound by them if I do not repent.

Have I removed the agency of the person who I have harmed?

Not completely. I have removed certain opportunities for experience that they could have otherwise had. I have inflicted trauma on them. But I have not removed their agency. They still are able to choose what they think, say, and do in relation to the new state they find themselves in.

If it were not so, then almost everything we do in mortality and everything that happens to us would destroy agency.

Victims do not lack agency.

This is something I firmly believe. This doesn't mean that we blame victims, shame victims, or pity victims in a condescending way. We should not. We should afford them the dignity that all children of God—all creations of God—deserve. And we should seek to do what we reasonably can to limit harm.

But we are subject in mortality to the negative actions of others, whether intentional or not, and we are subject to the randomness of complex systems, both human systems and natural systems, and, as we all know all too well, we are subject to the effects (positive and negative) of the intertwining of the two.

For example, there are conditions, there are experiences, even a series of choices which concatenate together such that someone contracts cancer.

But no one uses their agency to actively choose to have cancer.

When I finally made it home, I discovered that my mother had let a group of radtrads of the premillennialist variety leech onto the co-op's network.

"Mom," I said. "We've talked about this. Please don't let outsiders use the co-op's resources."

She shrugged. "They are nice people," she said.

"I'm sure they are. But if they want to use the network, they should make a formal request to the co-op."

"They didn't have time. They need to find the site of New Pepuza."

"I'm sure they do. But if they want to use the co-op's resources, they need to join the co-op, even if it's just for a few days. We've talked about this."

My mother's eyes were cast down, but I knew it to be a sign of calculation rather than remorse.

"How did you come into contact with this group? And how were you able to sneak them into the network?"

"Everybody knows me," she said, now looking me straight in the eyes. "What am I supposed to do? Turn them away?"

I faltered in reply.

It was no use responding. Perhaps, if they had the energy for it, my spouse could find a way to secure the network in a way that would make it more difficult for my mom to subvert.

The members of Indignation Machines, for that is what the hardcore punk band my mom talked to that day in western PA were called, seemed stunned by the question.

So my mom asked them again: "No, seriously. I'm curious. What do you do with your freedom?"

Dylan, the bass player, muttered, "Whatever we want to. That's the whole point."

But before my mom could respond, Johnny spoke up. "With all due respect, Ma'am—"

"—Leslie. Call me Leslie."

"With all due respect, Leslie, we're more concerned right now with spreading the message of anarchy and freedom and straight edge than

anything else. So I guess you could say we're using our freedom to help more people become free."

"I like that," my mom said in a tone of voice I knew all too well.

Because that's the thing with my mom collecting strays: it was not willy-nilly. She had a certain discernment. Potential collectees needed to pass a certain litmus test known only to my mother (and, perhaps, the Holy Ghost).

Clearly, the members of Indignation Machines had passed that test. Or, at least, Johnny had.

In the days the followed, I sorted out the mess with the radtrads—they agreed to donate copies of all electronic texts in their possession to the co-op's library as well as provide us with a certain number of teraflops of computing power from their devices per megabit of our bandwidth they used in return for access to selected, non-proprietary, legacy GIS/GPS data in our databases. Thus, they leeched on us while we zombied them and it all worked out in the way things do these days where social parasitism has been replaced by a wary, often short-term symbiosis because free individuals and groups are so afraid of being swallowed up by the corporate behemoths that they have no choice but to cooperate with each other.

All of which made me think of Sister Whitmore.

It was the sad cliché of our times: her son grew ill and needed expensive medications. Sister Whitmore saw no choice but to indenture herself and any future selves derived from digital copies of her current self to one of the leviathans in exchange for the medications her son needed.

Elder Fluger warned her not to. I tried to find alternatives for her son. But it was one of those situations where his illness was unique enough that what we could source wouldn't be able to remedy the underlying condition.

What was she supposed to do?

She signed the contract.

Tragically, her son passed away anyway nine months later. Our legal counsel reviewed the contract, but there was nothing we could do from a legal standpoint. She'd signed it of her own free will. The leviathan (I will not say which one out of an abundance of caution and, indeed, if it's not already obvious, all names in this account have been changed to protect privacy and maintain safety) had not misrepresented the terms of the contract and had carried out those terms to the letter of the law.

Of course, they hadn't needed to misrepresent anything. They knew she had no other choice.

Sister Whitmore dropped off our prayer lists a year or so ago, relegated to the "and bless all those in bondage or other straitened and constrained circumstances" category.

We lost track of her entirely a few months ago when the leviathan relocated her to their enclave in Grand Rapids.

I found myself praying for her at random moments during the week.

One evening while assembling sandwiches for the night shift of the co-op's onsite cyberdefense team, I closed my eyes for a moment to pray and found myself in a mildewing condo where Elder Fluger was pleading with Sister Whitmore to have faith and give us more time while her son languished quietly on a futon, his limbs mummied with bandages to protect the open sores his body spawned like angry mouths to feed.

"But your freedom," Elder Fluger was saying.

Sister Whitmore held up her weary hands. "What good is my freedom without my son?" she said.

And how were we to respond to that?

Except this time instead of sitting in defeated silence, my current self spoke through my then self: "I'm sorry to put it in these stark terms, Sister Whitmore. But even with the drugs, your son may still not be with us for long in this life. I know you'd sacrifice everything for him. But this sacrifice may not be worth—"

Sister Whitmore's eyes fixed me with a warning glare.

"I'm not saying it isn't worth it to sacrifice for your son, but I'm not sure the results of your sacrifice will do him any good, and they may do you a world of harm."

"But what other hope do I have?"

"There is always hope in Christ," Elder Fluger said.

"There may be," Sister Whitmore said. "But not for me and my son. Not in this world."

Indignation Machines lasted as a going concern for another five years, albeit with several inevitable lineup changes along the way (I may have referred to them as Resentment Machines at one point; such a clever teenager I was).

They stayed with us every time they came through the Twin Cities—we moved to Robbinsdale from Cedar Rapids shortly after the Sacred Grove trip; it was because of a guy my mom was briefly engaged to, but part of me wonders if it was really so she could put herself near a regular tour stop for the band. Toward the end of their run, only Johnny would accompany my mom back to our duplex after the show was over.

For the rest of the band, the temptations of minor fame were too tempting.

Johnny was a straight edge hardliner, though.

Going out to a club or going home with someone you fancied after playing a show was fine so long as you were on time the next morning ready to head back out on the road. What was not fine was any whiff of substance use, especially alcohol. Thus all the lineup changes over those five years.

As admirable as this may seem, it should have been the clue, the keystone for what was to come.

After the band finally broke up for good, Johnny contemplated a solo career or starting a new band under a new moniker. He sought out my mom for advice. Stayed with us for a couple of weeks. I was busy

with homework and putting the younger siblings to bed and packing their school lunches, so I only heard snippets of the late evening conversations he had with my mom. Nothing in those snippets set off any alarm bells. Most of it was about gospel topics or anarchism or about what Johnny should do next with his life.

Of course, those should have been the alarm bells.

One day I returned home from school to find Johnny gone. After a couple of days, I asked my mom about him. She shrugged and said something about Johnny "needing to find his own way to God."

I didn't hear from—or of—him until a few years later when I was in a Deseret Book on a temple trip to Nauvoo, and I saw his face copied-and-pasted across scores of book covers. The memoir was called *From Hardcore Punk to Die-Hard Disciple: A Memoir*.

I bought it, of course. My mom was mentioned but not referred to by name. Most of the non–hardcore band chapters took place after his stay with us: a whirlwind conversion and baptism, finishing his undergraduate studies at BYU in just three years, and getting accepted to Harvard Business School but turning that down to join a biotech start-up.

The memoir should have been another red flag, but I didn't read the later chapters. I was only interested in the punk years.

Of course, I don't know that, barring the gift of prophecy, anyone could have extrapolated what was to come from the memoir alone.

I don't know if my mom influenced any of Indignation Machines' lyrics, but whether she did or not, it's all so obvious when listening to their songs now:

> the machines won't rise / if you're the machine

Or:

> let their legacies of rage / roll off you like you're a blank page / be the calm in the storm / be your own final boss / take your final form

Or:

> all their ideologies burn out / when you burn so bright / not with your own might / but all of us circling around each other / dancing alone but together / united but apart

I have always craved routine.

It should be obvious why that is.

Routine, security, predictability—these are all things I thought I wanted.

I think they're what most people want.

For all their talk about change and dynamic systems and disruption, it's also what the tech people wanted deep down. What is immortality, after all, but the ultimate security against the depredations of time on a mortal body?

The problem is that immortality—true immortality—is only the Lord's to grant.

Other Mormons disagree with me on that.

They feel like it was given to them to bring about immortality—and even a sort of godhoodness—through technology.

What they brought about instead was stasis. They're so much in control, they've compounded everything in one.

Johnny turned out to be very adept at business. The novelty of his straight-edge punk background and his ability to communicate in a charismatic way combined with a keen business acumen and the credibility and connections his conversion to the Church provided led him to immediate business success, which he was then able to leverage into high-profile leadership roles in both the Church and industry/culture.

He became the leading voice in the movement to accelerate R&D spending as the only way to combat the effects of climate change. His motto was: "Human ingenuity got us into this mess; it's also the only hope we have to get us out of it."

Never mind that the advancements made rarely ever trickled down to the people who were suffering most. Never mind that there was a certain honed, cutting-edge coldness to his transhumanism.

And then when things got bad—really bad—he was in a position to offer security and a clear vision to a large portion of the Church, which then bolstered the talent pool his company had to work with, and as the leviathans evolved out of the chaos of those early years, his was the most well-positioned organization to seize as much power and as many resources (and as many converts) as possible. After all, who wouldn't want to extend their mortal probation to 120, 130, 140 years as well as out into virtual spaces? So much more time to progress! So much more experience to experience! The Millennium is upon us! Christ will only come again when we have cleansed the earth and made it and its peoples ready for Him!

Mormon exceptionalism strikes again.

At first, I traveled back to western PA just to see if I could.

Then it became a bit of an obsession.

The feeling of spewing cherry stones from my mouth a protest, a prophecy.

However, current me didn't try to act through then me. For one, I wasn't sure what I should do. For another, I wasn't sure if I should do it.

I guess this comes down to if you think there is a certain inevitability to the flow of mortal existence.

If the people (almost) always ignore the prophets. If the pride cycle keeps turning like the wheel of fortune. If the rise always has the seeds of the fall in it. If Christ is always nailed to the cross. If not Joseph Smith then some other foreordained figure to lead the Restoration.

If my mom hasn't changed even now, so many years later, then why even try?

It's less a matter of fate or anything like that and more that when spirits enter mortality we tend to travel down the well-grooved paths, and it takes a lot to jolt us out of the ruts.

We all said we wanted agency back in the Council in Heaven. We all feel the desire for agency once we get here. But none of us seem to really understand it.

In fact, it seems to me like the people most concerned with ideas of freedom and agency tend to be the most controlling, whether by their actions or lack of actions, it is the same. They project some force field, some aura, some power that the rest of us get caught in. They mistake such projection as agency, where they define anything that they perceive as affronting that projection as a violation of agency; whereas, the truth is that agency can only be fully understood and practiced within a community of varied, multitudinous, ever-evolving interdependent relationships.

All of which is to say: my mom really doesn't like living in a co-op.

I once had a conversation with Elder Fluger about why he didn't stay with the main body of the Saints and flee south or join up with Johnny—excuse me: Elder Robinson.

"I suppose," he said in that raspy voice of his. "I believe in specific places and people more than abstract ideas and grandiose plans."

As I experience my gift, time travel is only possible in relation to places and people. I can't seem to travel back to when I was reading a book or hearing a talk or a lecture or sitting alone on the train staring out the window, lost in thought.

It's as if my soul needs a certain grounding, a certain awareness of the physical world around me and the people in it to find a place in time to drift back to.

I only saw Johnny once after he became Elder/CEO Robinson.

He showed up at the clinic while my mom was receiving a second round of chemo.

"Let me take her for a while. All this is doing is killing her a bit slower than the cancer is," he said. "I must warn you. It's a highly experimental treatment. But all indications are that it's very effective and quite safe. I'd use it on my own mother if she were still alive."

I wanted to say no, but I also knew it was my mom's decision.

And, of course, my mom trusted Johnny, so her choice was inevitable.

Whatever the treatment was worked very well. Most days she has more energy than I do.

What I can't figure out, though, is why she came back to live with me. I'm sure she was invited to stay with him. She could have lived a lifestyle she had always yearned for. Johnny—Elder Robinson—had succeeded where the succession of boyfriends/husbands and then girlfriends/wives, who always seemed to be one stroke of luck, one breakthrough, one more infusion of cash away from hitting it big with their schemes and dreams, never did.

One of Elder Fluger's sources passed on that Sister Whitmore is working ten-hour days with only one day off in ten.

She spends that day off hooked into a simulation that features a representation of her son.

There's no way it's a good one.

It's not like they scanned his brain before he died, and I doubt she'd earned enough computing credits and he'd been healthy enough in the nine months he survived after she signed the contract to record enough virtual interactions for even a semi-sophisticated AI re-creation.

But I guess it's good enough for her.

The sunshine warming my neck and the back of my ears. The faint sweetness of the chocolate clashing with the nuttiness of the hummus

and the vegetal sweetness of the carrots. My teeth biting down to split the flesh of the cherry without scraping against the pit. The smell of boys who've been cooped up in a van for too long. My mother's sandalwood rose perfume. The sound of birds I can't identify. The low roar from the freeway. The whine of a motorcycle leaving the rest area. Ollie's sticky hands tugging at my bare arms as he asks for more cherries. My mother's voice saying over and over again: "What do you do with your freedom?"

I don't need this life to be perfect, and I think the Heavens would say Amen to my gift if I tried to use it for that.

I don't know that I even need it to be better.

But the current state of affairs can't stand.

Our co-op is treading water, but it gets harder to keep our head above the surface with every year that passes.

Elder Fluger is in his nineties. What happens when he leaves for the next life?

Meanwhile, the leviathans have settled into a détente with each other, confident they can outwait all the holdouts, content to add to their numbers from refugees and independents who tire of the constant battle against entropy.

And now that everything has mostly stabilized, it feels like all of humanity is just waiting around for whatever major calamity or technological breakthrough arrives next.

Maybe this is just the hush before He comes again.

But what if our current stasis is prolonging that day?

And: how long can Johnny and his allies prolong it?

Indefinitely?

Forever?

Every time I attempt to pray and ask why I have been given this spiritual gift, I'm met with what I can best describe as an intentional silence.

This is the problem with a God who is intent on preserving agency (contradictions in scripture and history notwithstanding): He can be maddeningly quiet or vague at times.

I don't know. Maybe He is happy with how humanity has worked things out on its own. Maybe His Son really will only stroll in once Johnny/Elder Robinson has finished up everything he's working on.

Or maybe He has secret, underground plans in motion to renew the flow of light and intelligence into mortality.

Maybe my spiritual gift is one small part of those plans.

But if so: why don't I receive more direction on what to do with it?

I've stopped going back to that day.

I've been trying other moments to see if I receive any inspiration on what I should do to change the past.

Nothing so far.

But it's been a healing experience.

A difficult one to be sure, yet one that's leading to a glimmer of an understanding of myself, of my past, of the joys and sufferings of mortal existence, of embodiment.

Elder Fluger passed away in his sleep last week. It was a sudden but peaceful thing. A heart attack. Or maybe his body was just so worn out, he couldn't hold onto mortality anymore.

He didn't pass his keys on to anyone before he died.

I'm finally going to try.

I've been thinking about this a lot. Praying too. But, well: see the intentional silence passage above.

There has to be a reason why I can move through time.

I can't think of any reason for me to be able to do this other than to change that day.

Yes, the trajectories will largely be the same. Removing one man from the scene isn't going to fix everything.

But I think it will give Church members a better chance at other fates.

Maybe more will flee south. Maybe more will form their own enclaves or co-ops. Maybe some of them will even form co-ops like I have: with people from other belief systems.

And maybe the leviathans will devour each other sooner, and the world won't get quite so stuck in place.

I wait until my mom and spouse are asleep.

I go for a long walk.

I walk through the gardens that used to be playgrounds.

I walk by the houses that used to be full of children and pets.

I walk along the sidewalks that used to not be cracked and crumbling.

I walk along the county road that used to be full of cars and trucks.

The sudden whine of drones as I reach the boundary of our co-op is what vaults me back.

I'm there with then me's perception of Ollie's sticky hand on my left arm.

I hear the van door slide open, and the murmur of male voices complaining, joking, giving instructions.

Current me is poised to communicate to then me.

I will get Kat and Ollie fighting and will join in and that will cause my mom to break off her conversation with Indignation Machines.

Maybe if we're loud and annoying enough she'll feel embarrassed and pack everything up and leave. Or maybe the band members will get annoyed by the noise and move to the other side of the rest area.

The boys arrive at the table and plunk a couple of jars of peanut butter and a box of Saltines on the picnic table.

I go to prompt then me to show Ollie and Kat a Jolly Rancher I'd been saving in my pants pocket, and say I'll give it to whoever yells the loudest,

But then I don't.

I am constrained.

Or rather: the Spirit constrains me. Palpably, overtly, directly constrains me, muscles bound, tongue unloosened. I can only sit and watch as my mom stands and approaches Johnny and the other members of the band.

I return to current me confused, angry, chastened.

I seek answers and am met with more intentional silence.

But what is this gift for if not to use it?

And how could that man, that boy—Johnny, Elder Robinson—be part of God's plan?

Is He really looking for such a narrow existence for so many?

Is He protecting us from even greater calamities?

I don't know, and I hate not knowing.

But the instruction was clear, and I will abide by it.

I will use my gift for other things.

Like saving Sister Whitmore and her son.

If I can.

WILLIAM MORRIS {william@motleyvision.org} is the author of *The Unseating of Dr. Smoot*, *The Darkest Abyss: Strange Mormon Stories*, and *Dark Watch and other Mormon-American stories*. William also edited the anthologies *Monsters & Mormons* and *States of Deseret*. He lives in Minnesota with his wife and daughter. More about William and his work can be found at motleyvision.org.

Rocio Vasquez Cisneros, *Ausencia de Culturas*, 2020,
digital photography

Homesteaders

Theric Jepson

I'll take your thigh road,
so rugged, overgrown,

that you and I can build upon each other
here, in our bed,

seeking safety at the end
of one more untamed day.

Just split the difference
between urge and play

to lay my timber,
making us safer, more certain.

Let's hold each other tight
and light ourselves on fire, then

sing simple hymns of victory:
you over me—me over you—

us over pressing death
still standing at our window

scratching.

THERIC JEPSON {theric@thmazing.com} is the current editor of *Irreantum*. His novel *Just Julie's Fine* was released last October from BCC Press, and *Tomorrow Will Be Longer*, a collection of winter-solstice poems, was released in a small, handmade batch in December. He lives in El Cerrito, California, with Lynsey and their nonadult children. It's the longest any of them have ever lived in one place.

Nantucket Sound

Charles Shirō Inouye

1
The day is overcast.
Our boat drenched with dew.

We shove off
and glide with the current,
slowly away from Viking Rock,
where Leif Erikson
once ran aground.

An osprey nest
at the first bend.
Clams thick in the sandbars.

beads of dew vanish
in the first morning breeze—
an egret on shore

2
Our boat,
the *Mono no aware*,[1]
passes by ships moored
to the left and right.

We try not to leave a wake,
no regrets
no frustrations.
Yet I turn and say,
"I haven't gotten over
the people I've lost."

1. The "sadness of things," ものの哀れ.

I still remember
my mother's last breath.
And the one that came after.

dry desert blossoms—
an apple tree bends above
the poppy garden

a frost-covered lawn—
I sit on the couch where she
decided to die

3
We covered her body
with a white sheet,
but drew it back
to remove the rings
from her fingers.

Covering her again,
my arms remembered
a familiar motion.

Eat.
Drink.
This is my blood
and my body.

4
From the mouth of the river,
full throttle on the open sea.

Three miles out,
we reach the tire reef where,
thirty feet below,

schools of
scup and bass gather.

keep the line taut—
I bounce the lead weight on the
rocks and sand below

wait for the bite—
I lift the rod tip high to
set the hook

5
On my fingers
the saltwater feels slippery,
a diluted runoff of
blood and tears.

black-winged terns
skim above the flowing tide—
sand eels in the surf

In this cicada-shell world,
there is no catch and release.
Only the slashing knife
and bleeding out
in the live well.

Sashimi scup
and chunks of bass
fried in hot oil.

Seeking.
Finding.
Crying.
Meoggo sanda (먹고 산다).
"I eat and live."

6
Our faces burn
with the bright wind that
thinly spreads over the water.
A brilliant *ma*—
a breath of tide and sand,
a holy interval in the catching
and killing.

Pulled
into the rip off Popponesset,
sliced open against
the edge
of the moon,
our boat trembles
in the flow,
a lobster buoy
severed from its trap
floats unattached.

seagulls circle and scream—
the wave that came through last
year is here again

The ancient
current
returns
and waits
for the day
I walk
on water.

Surely, that day
will come.
But not now.

And maybe
not tomorrow.

7
I know the dead
are not dead.
And that this pause
is for my good.

Yet I feel joy
in the wind and waves,
even as I hear
the shoals
call from below.

8
The breeze picks up,
the waves tip white.
We reel in our hooks
and point north to shore.

Through the white water,
beyond the sharks
and the seals,
past the cormorants
and children on the beach,
upriver through the nervous water
of a thousand peanut bunker
swimming for their lives,
there waits
someone
to tie us tight.

9
Dear God in Heaven,
I fear you've made a world
too beautiful
for me to understand.

Were it not for
darkness and pain,
would I ever know
the smallest truth
about anything?

10
On the dock
my knife
cleans the catch.
Sharp steel
tight against the bone.

For my wife,
flounder livers
in vinegar.
For my son,
fish and chips.
For the crabs in the river,
heads, skeletons, and innards.

At my side
you ask,
"Do you have any meat?"

sea snails trailing—
rosehips fragrantly shade the
oysters along shore

Someday soon,
We will eat fish
over your fire.

But for now
please leave me here
below the line.

Lexington, Massachusetts
July 10–September 20, 2023

CHARLES SHIRŌ INOUYE {charles.inouye@tufts.edu} is a professor of Japanese literature and visual culture at Tufts University. He is the author of *zion earth zen sky* and, more recently, *Hymns of Silence*, a collection of short stories about growing up in the silence of central Utah. A proponent of hunting and gathering, he is now writing a study of animism, *Thing Therapy—How to Be Happy the Japanese Way*, in order to help restore lost truths about the Holy Spirit that resides in all things.

Vanished

D.A. Cooper

Moses 7:69

A city, full up to the brim with light,
stood on a hill. It overlooked a valley
of shadow, death, and longing. Then, one day,
the raging radiance began to spill
over the walls and through the city gates.
Its glowing matter turned to energy,
to heat, a light that pulsed into the world
submerging everything in rippling waves
of incandescence, which, in due course, sank
into the earth.
Deep in the gaping wound
where Zion dwelt linger the songs of crickets,
the gentle scrape of wasp wings on dried mud,
the echoes of the pitter-patter footsteps
of geckos. As the day begins to fade,
eddies of chaos and creation blend
the darkness and the brilliance of the night
into a chiaroscuro of belonging
and loneliness.

Sun Maker

D.A. Cooper

Let there be light, the goddess shouted
when she struck up the match
and pressed its flame onto a patch
of wiggling hydrogen. Flares spouted
into the endless void. She'd doubted
that she could make a sun from scratch—
yet how it shined! She had to latch
the orb in space, but first, the grouted
surface of the new star was still
irregular and rough, in need
of buffing, polish. Then, when done
at last, she beamed—she'd made with skill
and grit and one small solar seed
a blazing alabaster sun.

D.A. COOPER {dacooper4@gmail.com} is from Houston, Texas, where he lives with his wife and three children. His poetry has also appeared in *Irreantum*, *Ships of Hagoth*, the *ARCH-HIVE*, and *Light*. He is the 2023 recipient of the Praiseworthy Award from Latter-day Saints in Publishing, Media, and the Arts for his poem "Talking to Dante in the Spirit World." In his free time, he likes to read, write, and ponder.

Her

Sharlee Mullins Glenn

The holiest things are always veiled:

sealed sections of holy writ
sacramental emblems
holy of holies
Her

The holiest things are always veiled.

At times we sense through falling rain
the contour of a mother's arm
the echo of a lullaby, forgotten
the far-off scent of fragrant oils

and weep for want of fullness.

SHARLEE MULLINS GLENN {sharleeglenn@gmail.com} has published poetry, essays, short stories, articles, and criticism in periodicals as varied as *Women's Studies*, the *Southern Literary Journal*, *Segullah*, *BYU Studies Quarterly*, *Ladybug*, and the *New York Times*. She is also an award-winning author of children's books.

Rocio Vasquez Cisneros, *Mis Raíces*, 2022, 8 x 3 ft.,
fabric, embroidery, and pillows

Drawing Back the Curtain on Fundamentalist Mormonism

William R. Jankowiak. *Illicit Monogamy: Inside A Fundamentalist Mormon Community*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. 320 pp. Paper: $30.00. ISBN: 9780231150217.

Reviewed by Marianne T. Watson

William Jankowiak's book *Illicit Monogamy* provides an in-depth look at the intricacies of life in plural families within a specific fundamentalist Mormon community referred to as Angel Park. His work is monumental for its analysis of individuals' experiences living in polygamous households. He gives outsiders an extensive peek into the world of plural marriage living. His anthropological work also proffers an introspective mirror useful for fundamentalist Mormons—perhaps also for other polygamists around the globe.

As a born-and-raised fundamentalist Mormon (from a different community) and as a plural wife of nearly fifty years, I found the author's study and analysis thought-provoking. His insights regarding the contradictions inherent in plural life are fascinating. Janowiak uses the term "father adoration" to describe his view of how fundamentalist plural families function. I find the term interesting, but it does not resonate with my own life. However, he does show the wide array of diversity that exists among fundamentalist fathers and their various methods for organizing a family. My experience allows for a deep reverence for some patriarchal fathers in plurality—for those who act reliably in administering wisdom acquired over years of counseling and mentoring their families as well as other community members—but that respect certainly does not apply to all fundamentalist Mormon fathers.

One of the differences between Angel Park and my community is that we frown generally upon the common consumption of coffee and

alcohol; instead, our Word of Wisdom standards more closely resemble those of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints. Also, in my fundamentalist group there is no doctrine of placement marriage. Rather, mutual attraction and free choice are emphasized, especially for women. This is a difference that makes all the difference in many ways. Still, as the author concludes, "every family is different" (267) and adjusts over time, for better or for worse.

Although the author alludes to religious adherence as an important feature for the long-term endurance of fundamentalist Mormon communities, he fails to convey the importance of one vital aspect. Most plural marriage participants consider their marital vows to be covenantal with God—in fact, covenant marriage relationships involving God are considered foundational. For this, a husband and each wife covenant individually with God to fulfill their marriage vows with each other according to His laws. When a husband marries an additional wife, each co-wife ideally consents to support their union as a new dyadic unit within the plural family. The idea is that a vertical connection with God is the basis by which each person derives strength and an increased ability for love, self-discipline, and a needed willingness to sacrifice for others. The theological model for this is personal salvation of each individual soul by and through Jesus Christ—as part of but not separate from Jesus' ultimate marriage to His bride, the church. From this perspective, personal bonds forged with God through trials enable and empower a bonded marital relationship that in turn strengthens both family and community relationships. Both dyadic and communal relationships are imperative. Theologically, both are centered first in God.

Therefore, I depart from the author's conclusion that "illicit monogamy," or the inherent draw toward a fulfilling dyadic relationship, runs counter to the intended function or purpose of a plural family. Rather, I assert that the development of healthy couple relationships within a plural family is one of its primary goals. Ideally, each husband-and-wife relationship is meant to include a high level of intimacy and emotional

and spiritual connection. Like the spokes of a wheel, each unique marriage relationship is meant to become a dyadic celestial unit, worthy of transcending beyond mortality within a mutually respective and supportive plural family wheel.

As the author points out in multiple ways, choosing to live plural marriage requires love, commitment, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice. Yet, loving oneself is co-equal with loving your neighbor, as the Bible says. So, while plural marriage incorporates dyadic love, it is not "illicit monogamy." My grandfather, who married four wives, expressed it this way: "The most beautiful love stories are in principle—if they could only be told."[1] This is the kind of encouragement expressed by my extended and ancestral family members who lived plural marriage for six generations before me. Yes, plural marriage is difficult and challenging—most challenging—but worth it for many.

Jankowiak's format and style of presentation are easy to read and understand. Both the notes section at the end and the author's extensive list of references show his thorough approach. I especially value Jankowiak's purpose addressed to the residents he studied, and I recommend his book on the same basis: "My primary aim is 'to allow readers to form their own opinion about the community I found so compellingly complex.' It is the richness of the family system that I wanted outsiders to appreciate more fully" (xi).

MARIANNE T. WATSON is a historian and genealogist who has presented papers and published articles and books, most recently *American Polygamy: A History of Fundamentalist Mormon Faith* (History Press Library Editions, 2019), co-authored with Craig L. Foster.

~

1. This statement of my grandfather, Joseph Lyman Jessop, was quoted to me during my first year in college (1975–76) by my widowed grandmother, Beth Allred Jessop, who was my grandfather's third wife in plurality.

Feeling Seen

Kerry Spencer Pray and Jenn Lee Smith, eds. *I Spoke to You with Silence: Essays from Queer Mormons of Marginalized Genders*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2022. 288 pp. Paper: $24.95. ISBN: 9781647690793.

Reviewed by Brittany Romanello

A content warning: this review discusses abuse, trauma, and suicide.

I didn't open it for a few months after receiving *I Spoke to You with Silence: Essays from Queer Mormons of Marginalized Genders*. I had been delighted when asked to review it, but when the time came, anxiety overwhelmed me. I knew I would see myself in this book in an intimate, painful way, even though many of the narratives don't directly reflect my own lived experiences. It was clear that reading this anthology of essays would make me feel vulnerable, striking close to my little queer heart, but I knew it would be healing to feel seen.

Essays in part 1 focus on identity. Many reflect on the discovery of their queer selves that they "never considered possible" (26). Many share the "expectation of silence" (50) they experienced during their self-discovery and coming out process, especially when considering the other facets of discrimination these writers encountered. Jenn Lee Smith describes how navigating their queer identity felt like "too much to add to a highly sensitive body already dealing with childhood, developmental, race, ethnic immigration, and religious abuse trauma" (40). As a queer, disabled, multiracial person of color, Melissa Malcolm King writes, "I'm stuck in these intersections all the time: between the church, my gender/sexual orientation, and a society that normalizes racism" (52). Finding acceptance in one's identity is a constant theme. "It's okay to be disconnected from my ethnic heritage,"

Sarah Pace writes. "It is okay to like girls. It is okay to be brown and butch" (29–30). By acknowledging the intersections of multiple marginalized identities, these authors explore how their journeys of self-discovery both hurt and empowered them, seeking ways to be authentic in their identity and "yearning to belong" in Mormonism and broader society (31).

Kerry Spencer Pray introduces part 2 of the essays, "Relationships," acknowledging that queer Mormon love has long been "taboo" and that LGBTQIA+ community members "don't seem to have enough words to describe the complexity of our experiences" (55–56). An anonymously written essay encapsulates some of the complicated feelings many of us feel in navigating queer feelings, longings, and acts of love: "We had never . . . crossed the line, but we didn't need to touch to be bonded. That was the greatest lie of all. That this was only a sin if we touched. That this was only real if we touched. . . . It can't be gay if you never, ever touch. But I loved you" (64). These tender and raw narratives subvert the notion that LGBTQIA+ Mormons, especially women and femmes, are "distant, othered, and inherently broken" (75). These essays challenge us to recognize beauty and reciprocity that marginalized bodies and genders can offer one another, not just "sex or body parts" (80). As these writers discuss how they began, grew, changed, and ended their relationships, the reader is invited to interrogate their ideas of what gay love looks like and means in Mormonism. To self-actualize, self-accept, and move forward, queer Mormons must navigate dissonances: "The church thinks differently than God thinks" (85).

Part 3, "Essays on Shame, Suicide, and the Closet," was difficult to read because "More often that we would like to admit . . . the burden of being queer [is] too much to bear" (105). Historical trauma in an almost globally homophobic society and within Mormon teaching and culture leads many to believe that "queer people are expendable" (106). These chapters cover various topics such as erasure, conversion therapy, self-harm, abuse, and suicide. Jaclyn Foster remembers her

mother's comment on an episode of *Modern Family* when gay couple Cam and Mitchell kiss, telling them to turn off the TV so they wouldn't "normalize" what they saw. "It wasn't allowed to be normal," they write (123). Several times while reading this section, I cried when recalling those I've known who have dealt with self-harm and self-hatred and some who have died by suicide because of the shame, stigma, and the "burden" of believing our gayness makes us abnormal, a mistake, or a sin. Jasper Brennan painstakingly describes coming out to their father, the experience that led them to conclude that "the closet is a tough place, but for now, it seems the only option" (116). Despite the heavy content, these essays—painful, brutal, and beautiful—acknowledge and dignify the pain, loss, and resilience of queer Mormons, a strength I wish we didn't need.

In one of the volume's final essays, addressing the Church, Taylor Petrey notes that if we are to understand queerness within Mormonism, we must acknowledge "the deeply heteronormative environment that the church has deliberately cultivated" (142). Introspection and diverse conclusions are evident in each essay, especially in light of the ongoing "cultural pressure points" LGBTQIA+ Mormons must face for their faith, for themselves, and for survival (143). Irving Diego Santos recalls feeling "always in a costume, but never comfortable" while feeling pressured to dress in a gender-conforming way, wishing they had "come into the world as a cis man" (169). As Cristina Moraes writes, many feel they have to "live a double life" to keep their faith and live their real identities (164). Mormon theologies make them feel included and seen but also constrained, suffocated, and bound when openly expressing their queerness. For some time, many had resigned themselves to "invisibility in their identities" (178). Others describe how living and participating in Church culture could be much "easier . . . when one isn't busy pretending to be someone else" (151). I, too, wondered who I might be in the present day if being my "real self" had been both accepted and celebrated during my upbringing within Mormon

communities rather than something to be hidden away while I pretended to only like men.

The authenticity and representation of *all* the authors' truths are the greatest strengths of this anthology. Naji Haska Runs Through asks, "Am I loveable? Can I have a family? Will I find peace?" (24). The writing reflects the various questions, dualities, and contradictions of queer Mormon lives and experiences. Moreover, readers who are Mormon and call themselves LGBTQIA+ allies are asked to think about what they can do beyond sharing their shame about the Church's homophobia secretly or on social media (175). These testaments remind us of our connections, the power of community, and the long-lasting complications and damage that continue as the Church institution denies and erases us LGBTQIA+ members' recognition and autonomy to exist exactly as we are within Mormon spaces. I admire and thank all the authors for their power, vulnerability, and willingness to share their grief and joy with those who are here, as a dedication to those who are gone, and as a witness to those who are yet to be.

BRITTANY ROMANELLO {bromanel@asu.edu} earned her PhD in sociocultural anthropology at Arizona State University (ASU). Using mixed ethnographic methods, her research explores how race, ethnicity, legal status, and religion shape Mormon Latina immigrants' lives, social networks, families, parenting, and identity. Bri is currently a faculty associate at ASU and a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow of Migration, Movement, and Place-making on the Anza Trail (2023–2025). She collaborates with the National Park Service and American Conservation Experience on the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail to explore themes of human movement, identity, and place-making along the trail corridor within the Sonora, Baja California, Arizona, and California borderlands.

Knowing It's True

Jeremy Christiansen. *From the Susquehanna to the Tiber: A Memoir of Conversion from Mormonism to the Roman Catholic Church*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022. 250 pp. Paper: $17.95. ISBN: 9781621645924.

Reviewed by Cristina Rosetti

"I am finally no longer asked to believe in things for which not only is there no evidence, but which the evidence strongly condemns on fair inspection. . . . Let me be clear: I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible" (240). The letter Jeremy Christiansen wrote to his bishop included the entire Nicene Creed, a prayer he learned while reading the history of Christianity and heard numerous times (in Latin) while attending Mass at Saint Rita Catholic Church in Alexandria, Virginia. At the time of this letter, Jeremy did not "know" the Catholic Church was true. Like millions of Catholics around the world, he nevertheless assented his will to it.

In the last ten years, books, documentaries, and television that center ex-Mormonism and faith transition have become common forms of entertainment. The stories usually cover similar themes and end with formal resignation from the Church's membership records. In this way, Christiansen's book, *From the Susquehanna to the Tiber: A Memoir of Conversion from Mormonism to the Roman Catholic Church*, is squarely within the ex-Mormon memoir genre. Christiansen was born in Blanding, Utah, and raised in a faithful family. While he had a lapse in adherence to Church standards during high school, he eventually served a mission in Argentina, married in the temple, and diligently served his ward during college and the early years of his legal career.

What makes the book different, however, is Christiansen's entry into the Roman Catholic Church. The memoir is broken into three

parts. The first covers his early years in Mormonism, high school experiences, gaining a Mormon testimony through a "burning in the bosom," and two-year mission. The second part, "Dark Night of the Soul," named after St. John of the Cross's poem and the spiritual experience of many saints, covers his early moments of doubt. How could a blessing at the hands of a priesthood leader be wrong? Why were so many people leaving the Church? In this section, Christiansen outlines the specific historical issues that concerned him. These issues will be familiar to readers of Church history and ex-Mormon media: Book of Mormon translation and historicity, polygamy, and revisionism.

All of this led Christiansen down a Christian history rabbit hole, the final part of the memoir. This section includes a large swath of history from the Church Fathers. As Christiansen read Church history, he confronted a reality he had never considered: maybe the Great Apostasy never happened. Through the writings of the Church Fathers, he learned the early Church's defense of the Eucharist, Trinitarian theology, and continuity of tradition. In each of these, he realized that his ideas about Catholicism were based on a caricature. In the writings of the Church Fathers, Christiansen found a faith that "appealed, for the first time any religion had done so, to my intellect" (227). All of this solidified Christiansen's conviction. On the feast of St. Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan and leading figure in the Counter-Reformation, he was welcomed into the Roman Catholic Church.

Throughout the memoir, the nature of a Mormon testimony develops as a central theme. At the onset, Christiansen explains that "You don't just believe Mormonism. You know it is true" (21). Within Mormonism, "knowledge" of the truth is known emotively through "the simultaneous convergence of (1) an abstract truth proposition about the Mormon Church (for example, Joseph Smith was a true prophet, the Book of Mormon is the word of God) and (2) an overwhelming emotional sense of wellbeing. Occurring simultaneously these two things (concept and emotion) produce a powerful 'aha!' moment, leading to a sense that one now knows that abstract truth proposition in a distinct

and even ineffable way" (24). This way of acquiring knowledge was the foundation of Christiansen's faith. However, as he learned Mormon history and the history of Christianity, this foundation came into question. Feelings, for Christiansen, are shaky ground. A testimony, as he told his bishop, is "built almost entirely on emotion. It is subjective. It is fideism" (239).

Christiansen juxtaposes the Mormon testimony experience with his entry into Roman Catholicism. From the outset, he is clear that he did not "know" the Catholic Church was true, at least not in the same way as Mormonism. He explained, "I have not had any individual emotional experience that was God's answer to my prayers" (239). For readers from a Mormon background, this might seem strange, but it is distinctly Catholic and an experience that resonates with my own conversion to Roman Catholicism. The faith Christiansen encountered in the Church Fathers spoke to his mind, not just his heart. Reading St. Thomas Aquinas's "Five Ways" presented a way to "know" based on Aristotelian metaphysics and refutation of proposed objections. For Aquinas, "The knowledge of God is the cause of things."[1]

For readers interested in building bridges between the two faiths, the final chapter offers an attempt to correct misconceptions about the Catholic Church, a faith once disparaged as the "Church of the Devil" by Mormon leaders (36). Christiansen explains that Catholic theology on the Trinity, Eucharist, and apostolic succession were things he only knew as caricatures prior to reading the Church Fathers. This chapter offers an overview of the essential writings on these topics, including citations to guide further reading.

Jeremy Christiansen's memoir is a journey from one faith to another told with vulnerability and love. This book should be on the reading list of anyone interested in memoirs, faith transition, and interfaith dialogue. Christiansen is self-reflexive enough to recognize that

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q14, A8.

the book might be uncomfortable or tragic to Mormon readers. To this response, he simply hopes readers will know he truly believed he had a testimony (247).

CRISTINA ROSETTI is an assistant professor of humanities at Utah Tech University. Her research focuses on the history and lived experience of Mormon fundamentalists in the Intermountain West. She was received into the Roman Catholic Church on March 26, 2016, the feast of St. Eutychius of Alexandria.

Lonely No More

Todd M. Compton. *In Sacred Loneliness: The Documents*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2022. 888 pp. Hardcover: $39.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-448-7.

Reviewed by Lindsay Hansen Park

For Mormonism's nearly two-century existence, few subjects have brought it more into the public spotlight than polygamy. Most writers and scholars have focused on Joseph Smith as they told this story. Until Todd Compton came along.

Todd Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, published in 1997, focused the lens on the women involved in the practice of polygamy, centering *their* stories and experiences. The book is now considered the bible for anyone trying to understand this complicated, enigmatic practice.

It is no exaggeration to say that the book changed my life. Discovering it as a faithful Latter-day Saint woman and young mother living in a rural town was like finding a stick of lit dynamite. For the first time in my life, women's voices came alive on the page to tell their stories of

triumph and tragedy, love and heartbreak, faith and obedience in a way I had never before experienced. Their stories stirred an awakening in me; they detonated a path that led me to my current career.

This is why I come to you as a biased reviewer of Compton's addendum to his original book, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Documents*, which he compiled and edited. This work offers new pieces to an already messy puzzle, but it's not a sequel. It is a standalone cache of insight into Mormonism's founding mothers. Before Compton, these women's stories were often marginalized, silenced, or simply missing in historical narratives, but he has uncovered and amplified their voices, allowing them to emerge from the shadows.

Compton's research is painstakingly meticulous. He draws from a wide range of sources, including personal diaries, letters, publications and firsthand accounts. The depth of his investigation is consistently impressive as he pieces together the lives of more than thirty-three of Smith's plural wives.

In his first book, Compton complicated the polygamy narrative by dispelling the conception that Smith's plural wives were all passive victims within a patriarchal system. With *In Sacred Loneliness: The Documents*, he helps us see beyond his original portraits into the long arc of these women's lives: the details of how, over decades, they endured a painful system that too often resulted in loneliness and heartbreak.

Take, for example, the story of Emily Partridge. She became one of Smith's secret plural wives on March 4, 1843, after the death of her father left her economically and socially vulnerable. Compton presents her story in her own words, where we see evidence of coercion and deception; she was a teenage victim of a powerful man. After the marriage, she was forbidden to tell anyone, including her mother and stepfather. Only her sister Eliza was in on the secret, since she married Smith four days later.

The story of the Partridge sisters is harrowing and sheds light on the grim realities of secret plural marriage to Mormonism's founder.

Emily later remembers the experience as "disagreeable" and "humiliating," saying that she was too young and "inexperienced" to "count the cost before hand." Thanks to Compton's research, we have access to this example of Smith's abuses of power.

In the chapter containing documents authored by Emily Partridge, Compton pulls from letters, autobiographical sketches, and journals. He tells of her life after the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, including her subsequent union with one of Smith's successors, Brigham Young. Partridge was sealed to Young for "time," with Young standing as proxy for Smith in an eternal sealing. Shortly after this arrangement, she gave birth to a baby boy belonging to Young on October 30, 1845, in Nauvoo. She and her new spiritual husband would go on to conceive a total of seven children.

Compton points out that despite their union, the pair were not close. "I know you cannot love me neither do I ask it for who can ^love^ what is not lovely," Partridge wrote to Young on June 30, 1850. "I fear you will be disgusted with me for writing in plain." By 1853 she was writing to him asking for a divorce, but she had more children with him afterward. Her many childbirths left her weak and sick, but she received little sympathy from Young. "Different ones have told me that they heard Pr. Young say, 'Sister Emily ought to take care of herself, and he did not intend to do anything for her much longer,'" she wrote.

Her subsequent letters to Young reflect the anxiety of a woman fearing for her very survival. She was often left to beg for food or for "comforts" for her family and always feared begging too much of her husband lest she incur his wrath. In one instance, she made an appointment at his office to beg for travel money so she could see her dying mother. He accepted her into the room but "did not answer me but kept talking with others as they came in and I thought to myself it is about as I thought it would be. It will amount to nothing. I wish he would give me an answer one way or another." Such humiliations became a constant of her life.

Compton's book challenges simplistic narratives and invites readers to see these women as complex individuals, each with their own motivations and desires. The documents paint a deep and heartrending portrait of suffering using the words of the faithful women who lived in the culture of Mormon polygamy.

The book does more than tell the story of Mormon plural marriage; it also adds shape and texture to the early Mormon experience. In the chapter focusing on Patty Sessions, Compton provides many excerpts from the *Woman's Exponent* that detail the life of Sessions and her contemporaries. Rhoda Richards's documents give detailed insight into the practice and pitfalls of Thomsonian medicine. With Melissa Lott, we get a transcript of her 1892 Temple Lot affidavit.

While many of the women endured isolated romantic relationships, their lives were much fuller than their marriages. Their documents reveal a fuller contour of the lives of some of the West's prominent colonizers.

In Sacred Loneliness: The Documents is a fundamental work in the history of Mormon polygamy, an affecting reminder that this doctrine was not a trivial part of Mormonism's beginnings but a vivid, tangled tapestry woven by the stories of those who lived it. It is an invitation to consider, to empathize, and to bear witness to the sacred loneliness of these women whose voices have too often disappeared into the ethers of time.

LINDSAY HANSEN PARK {lindsay@sunstone.org} hosts the popular Year of Polygamy podcast about the history of Mormon polygamy and co-hosts the *Sunstone Mormon History Podcast*. She is also the executive director of the Sunstone Education Foundation.

~

The Sermon Lives On

William V. Smith. *The King Follett Sermon: A Biography*. By Common Consent Press, 2023. 380 pp. Paper: $12.95. ISBN: 978-1948218856.

Reviewed by Chad Nielsen

When I picked up William V. Smith's *The King Follett Sermon: A Biography*, I was expecting to find a history of the text of the famous sermon from April 1844. I found that it was indeed that but also more—a work of historical Latter-day Saint theology on the nature of God and humans, the resurrection of children, the meaning of afterlife, and the history of polygamy. In particular, it focuses on a golden age of Latter-day Saint theology, when B. H. Roberts, James E. Talmage, Joseph F. Smith, and Charles Penrose were working on systematic theologies and the role that the King Follett Sermon played in their efforts and interactions.

By virtue of its area of focus, the book shares a lot with Eric A. Eliason and Terryl L. Givens's special issue of *BYU Studies Quarterly* published in 2021 and titled *Yet to Be Revealed: Open Questions in Latter-day Saint Theology*, though it does have a different approach. Rather than essays focusing on individual topics, Smith's volume focuses on the development of the doctrine of specific leaders and thinkers working in dialogue with each other and with the text of the King Follett Sermon. Despite sharing a lot of the same discussion points—particularly with James E. Faulconer and Susannah Morrison's chapter on the King Follett Sermon in *Yet to Be Revealed*—Smith's *King Follet Sermon* differs. For example, Faulconer and Morrison write that it "may be neither the pinnacle of Joseph Smith's teachings nor peripheral to it" but instead "the most important mirror of a Latter-day Saint's theological self-understanding" (102–04). William V. Smith agrees that the sermon does not succeed as "a statement of belief for all time," but he adds an incredible amount of context to the statement. For example, he draws upon his previous work in

Textual Studies of the Doctrine and Covenants: The Plural Marriage Revelation as he highlights the role of polygamy in shaping an understanding of spirit birth that differed from the ideas presented in the King Follett Sermon. In time, Smith observes, different camps evolved in the Church relative to the King Follett Sermon, with more liberal thinkers (often career university professors) embracing the reconciling framework proposed by B. H. Roberts, while a group ensconced more in fundamentalist Protestant paradigms embraced a framework that reacts against the King Follett Sermon. Hence, "Follett in many ways is an important—if rather invisible—anchor of belief in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (263). Thus, Smith concludes, it is "a fractured *hidden* Standard Work of Latter-day Saints" (267).

Given the early twentieth century era that serves as the focal point in William V. Smith's book, it also works in dialogue with biographies of B. H. Roberts. John Sillito's *B. H. Roberts: A Life in the Public Arena* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021) intentionally avoids delving into Roberts's doctrinal thoughts but does highlight some of the same doctrinal clashes with Joseph F. Smith, such as a 1909 general conference address where Roberts openly described past prophets as fallible men, as well as Joseph F.'s frustration with Roberts's political involvement.[1] Truman G. Madsen's *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980) is more applicable, since it does discuss the history of B. H. Roberts's doctrinal thought, though Madsen does tend to shy away from conflict with Joseph F. Smith. Regardless, Madsen does discuss how "little that Roberts wrote ever escaped controversy," including his work on the *Documentary History of the Church*. He also discusses Roberts's "The Immortality of Man" article, which provided a framework for reconciling spirit birth with the idea of spirit adoption in the King Follet Sermon.[2] Both of these biographies of Roberts

1. John Sillito, *B. H. Roberts: A Life in the Public Arena* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021), 406–16.

2. Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 291, 297–98.

fail, however, to discuss the role of his efforts to publish and discuss the King Follett Sermon during the 1907–1912 era when he was being marginalized by other Church leaders, something for which William V. Smith makes a strong case.

Smith's book provides a fairly comprehensive overview of both the history of the published versions of the sermon and discussions about the text within the Church. It felt, however, that he got a bit distracted from time to time while diving into tangents. Even those tangents proved interesting, however, including a brief overview of Jonathan Grimshaw's life beyond the compilation of the standard King Follett Sermon text.

The King Follett Sermon: A Biography is an important glimpse into how the ideas presented in Joseph Smith's most famous sermon have evolved over time in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In providing this glimpse, it poses important questions about what it means to be a living organization that embraces ongoing revelation. In particular, it asks: to what extent are members of the Church beholden to Joseph Smith Jr. as the founding prophet for all of their beliefs and to what extent are later leaders allowed to modify or directly contradict Joseph Smith's teachings? William V. Smith's work doesn't answer these questions directly, but it does provide examples of key moments of doctrinal shifts and debates since Joseph Smith's death in 1844.

CHAD NIELSEN {chad.lawrence.nielsen@gmail.com} has three great intellectual passions in life: science, history/religious studies, and music. He has pursued a career in biotechnology but maintains an active interest in both of his other passions. Chad is a four-time winning contestant in the Arrington Writing Award competition held at Utah State University and has presented at the Society of Mormon Philosophy and Theology. He is a practicing Latter-day Saint who currently serves as a member of the Bells at Temple Square handbell choir and writes for the Latter-day Saint blogs *Times and Seasons* and *From the Desk*.

~

Caught in the Crosshairs

Maurine Whipple. *A Craving for Beauty: The Collected Writings of Maurine Whipple*. Edited and annotated by Veda Hale, Andrew Hall, and Lynne Larson. BCC Press, 2020. 599 pp. Paper: $22.99. ISBN: 978-1948218368.

Reviewed by Heidi Naylor

The life of Maurine Whipple, lauded Mormon author of the 1941 novel *The Giant Joshua*, is one of the saddest stories in LDS literature. She loved her people, the tough and hardscrabble settlers of St. George and the Arizona Strip, greatly; she saw and understood them deeply; she shared their strife and tumults and ultimate triumph over the desert in service of the Grand Idea: brotherhood, the binding of the family of man, the power of community in the face of daunting obstacles. Critics then and now admire *The Giant Joshua*, and there was to be a sequel, and then another.

But Maurine—I feel such affection for her that I cannot bring myself to call her by her last name—did not anticipate the defensiveness and wariness, perhaps even the paranoia, that forced her community to turn on her and her published work. According to the editors of *A Craving for Beauty*, when *The Giant Joshua* was published by Houghton Mifflin and subsequently reviewed positively by critics and honored with a fellowship, Maurine faced painful backlash from her own father, who intercepted an advance copy from the local post office and pronounced it "vulgar." Her mother's friends in the Relief Society were offended by the book, and then-apostle Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote a mixed review in the *Improvement Era*. He said the book was "unfair . . . [and] straining for the lurid."[1] Sales in Utah were hampered by such reactions.

1. Quoted in Katherine Ashton, "Whatever Happened to Maurine Whipple," *Sunstone* 14, no. 2 (Apr. 1990): 35.

Maurine's subsequent writing career included a few notable highlights, but ultimately she could not surmount the negative criticism from her own family and community. Despite the encouragement of editors and others, despite fellowships and bequests of time and funding, she was unable to complete the sequels.

What was a tragedy for her and for LDS literature has been softened by this new volume. In *A Craving for Beauty*, her biographers and posthumous editors have turned our attention back toward Maurine with perceptivity and grace. The volume is a treasure trove. It shows clearly how astonishing Maurine's literary gifts were, and it reveals how her care for her heritage and its stories was foundational to those gifts.

Craving includes early works from Maurine's University of Utah years, during which she began to articulate her love for red dust and deserts: "it explains why I know more about rattlesnakes than finger bowls," one early essay notes (32). She detailed her admiration for the strength of her grandmother, who became the model for *Joshua*'s heroine:

> She was not destined for happiness. She entertained early-day audiences in Salt Lake with her singing [and then] . . . went with her father to help settle Sanpete County . . . [finding the] bitterest poverty and loneliness, even no shoes. Her memories are of the brief pleasantnesses, of the friendly Indians who came to her father for counsel and aid, and of the Big Chief who called her Canary partly because he could not pronounce Cornelia and partly because of her sweet singing. Her church said marry this man. And she married him, even though he already had two wives, was many years older and she hardly knew him. He was a good man and she learned to love him. (37)

Maurine's talent caught the attention of writer Ford Madox Ford. He showed her 1937 novella, *Beaver Dam Wash* (included in *Craving*), to New York editor Ferris Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin, who responded with eagerness and encouragement. *Craving*'s editors note how Maurine's "family stories . . . unfolded in sharp and memorable detail . . . provid[ing] grist for Whipple's creative mill" (10). The "triumph" of

her resulting 1941 masterpiece "lay in its full portrait of all the Dixie pioneers, the saints and their Grand Idea, what men and women working together could accomplish for their God, their children, and each other" (9).

Other stories and essays in *Craving* feature Mormon folklore, including magical realism, spiritual intervention, and the vagaries and consequences of a desperate, abiding, and taut-stretched faith. In more than one story, the cost of this faith is death: "This tabernacle of clay ain't important . . . [but] you know, Phineas, I needn't of died," says a feeble, faithful wife after a long-awaited but horrific childbirth. "You love your religion more'n me" (163).

Another story recounts the advice of a Nauvoo farmer named Priddy Meeks to whom "the Lord had appeared . . . one day in the fields and counseled him to 'quit a-plowing and go to doctoring'" (170). On the Muddy River, near Las Vegas, Meeks advises, "A very good practice for you mothers is to hold out your children to make water in the fire when convenient. . . . He picked up Tildy's Book of Mormon and slipped it under [her] child's pillow, 'You can't never tell what'll scare a witch!'" (171).

Many of Maurine's stories build fascinating, semi-fictional accounts of factual events, such as the construction of Boulder Dam (later named Hoover Dam), which brought stored water to the inhospitable desert. *Craving* also presents a 1952 feature article published in *Collier's* titled "Arizona Strip—America's Tibet." This piece explains "one of the strangest wastelands on the American continent . . . divided politically by the pencils of an anti-Mormon Congress in 1896, separated physically from its own state by the vast chasm of the Colorado River . . . isolated and wild" (296). Here, where the "water is thick enough to chew," there are two commandments: "Mind Thy Own Business. Then, Mind Thine Own Water Hole" (299). Two types of folk prospered on the Strip: "perhaps a half a dozen known killers and fugitives . . . [who] . . . hold target practice every evening" (303) and Mormons, who had "already [been]

stoned, pillaged, and hounded" (301). The Strip is hard country, peopled by Abraham and Ella Bundy's descendants who founded the town of Bundyville (now Mount Trumbull) in a forbidding setting bordered by the Grand Canyon and cut off from civil services and law enforcement.

The Bundy clan today includes anti-government, militant extremist and folk hero Ammon Bundy, recent candidate for governor of Idaho.[2] Maurine detailed Ammon Bundy's great-grandaunt and mythic matriarch Chloe Bundy, who in 1952 was "still beautiful at sixty-three . . . 'Mom' to 247 healthy Bundys . . . all beautiful, healthy, and intelligent . . . raised in a country that would discourage a rabbit. . . . The Bundys came to the Strip in 1916 seeking refuge, a Zion. But the desert, a Cinderella cloaked with flowers and grass under spring rain, is a dried-up witch later on" (306).

A Strip cowboy, according to Maurine, is "so bowlegged from lifelong riding that Levi Strauss is said to cut out his pants with a circle saw" (304). She describes a meeting when the Taylor Grazing Act became law in 1934: "Judge LeRoy Cox of St. George and two government representatives met 75 Strippers at Zion National Park. Whiskered, holstered, implacable, they clanked into the lodge. Artillery forcibly checked, they listened to the heresy of 'bob-wire' . . . [of] imposters corralling, dividing, cutting out their unfenced immensities, hobbling their freedom" (308). Maurine's article gave me a better understanding of Ammon Bundy's perspective and mindset than did months of local (Idaho) and national coverage.

A particular *Craving* gem is Maurine's 1953 feature article for *Collier's* titled "Why I Have Five Wives: A Mormon Fundamentalist Tells His Story." After an Arizona state trooper raid that shocked the nation, Maurine won the trust of remaining citizens in the polygamist

2. William Danvers, "The Passionate Intensity of Ammon Bundy and the People's Rights Movement," *Just Security*, May 25, 2021, https://www.justsecurity.org/76636/the-passionate-intensity-of-ammon-bundy-and-the-peoples-rights-movement/.

community of Short Creek, Arizona. Her article presents the first-person perspective of Edson Jessop, patriarch of the community. It is riveting, articulate, startling, and sympathetic and contributed to public opinion and questions of policy; by the spring of 1955, most of the families had been reunited (312).

"Why I Have Five Wives" is especially important to this story because Maurine's treatment of plural marriage was largely responsible for the backlash against *The Giant Joshua*. Emma Ray McKay, wife of then-prophet President David O. McKay, wrote in a 1956 private letter that she was "disgusted" with Maurine.

I hesitate to share this private letter from Sister McKay. It was addressed to a family member of LDS writer Eric W. Jepson, and with his permission, I'd like to include one of its paragraphs here. Emma Ray McKay expressed a sentiment that many LDS readers of the mid-twentieth century likely held (boldface type is mine):

> The narration of the many little things that made up life in those old days is very interesting and too sacred to be printed for the public which I hope you will never think of doing. I am so disgusted with the author of *The Giant Joshua* that I can scarcely contain myself. **The outside people or rather nonmembers of our church do not understand our life during polygamous days and personal experiences of this kind should never be given to them.** The publishers must always have something disgusting to tell even if they have to add something themselves.[3]

The narration Sister McKay refers to is an eighty-five-page biography of southern Utah pioneer and midwife Mary Lee, which was printed privately by Lee's (and Jepson's) family in 1955; a copy was sent to Sister McKay as a gift. Nearly fifteen years after *The Giant Joshua*'s publication, Sister McKay felt that the sacred experiences of the Mormon pioneers,

3. Quoted by thmazing, "Too sacred for public consumption, or, Disgusting the prophet's wife," *A Motley Vision* (blog), July 9, 2009, https://motleyvision.org/2009/07/09/too-sacred-for-public-consumption-or-disgusting-the-prophets-wife/.

particularly "during polygamous days," were not to ever be shared with "outside people." Maurine saw this differently. She was ahead of her time.

Today we are closer to an understanding that truth and facts will out: that obstructing them inflicts great damage. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said in a 2007 PBS documentary that "we're emerging from a period of . . . writing within the Church [of] adoring history that doesn't deal with anything that's unfavorable, and we're coming into a period of 'warts and all' kind of history. Perhaps our writing of history is lagging behind the times."[4] Gospel Topics essays appeared on the official Church website in 2013, with the goal of explaining historical problems in forthright language, employing a "refreshing frankness . . . that has surprised many readers."[5] The remodeled and modernized (2015) LDS Church History Museum has placards that clearly state how Joseph Smith translated the gold plates while sometimes peering into a hat. At my monthly Boise chapter meeting of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, whose lesson books are collected in my state university library, we both wonder and commiserate over troubling details of pioneer and polygamous life. Times have changed. There are reasons to believe that as a people we have evolved from the view that what happened in our past is "too sacred" and "should never be" shared. Instead, we feel we should avoid promoting the exclusivity, separateness, and isolation that our early LDS history certainly necessitated.

Perhaps mid-century Mormons were right to be wary: Many of them well remembered the days of the federal crackdown on plural

4. "Elder Oaks Interview Transcript from PBS Documentary," Church Newsroom, July 20, 2007, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/elder-oaks-interview-transcript-from-pbs-documentary/.

5. Jana Riess, "For Mormons in a faith crisis, the Gospel Topics essays try to answer the hard questions," *Religion News Service*, Oct. 27, 2020, https://religionnews.com/2020/10/27/for-mormons-in-a-faith-crisis-the-gospel-topics-essays-try-to-answer-the-hard-questions/.

marriage, including deps ("federal polygamy chasers") who threatened their communities and split up their families (196). Mid-century Mormons were much closer than we are to the persecution that destroyed bodies, buildings, and benevolence, that cruelly drove beloved and cherished ancestors into the desert with government sanction. Also, mid-century Latter-day Saints may not have ever realized that the outsider response to *The Giant Joshua* was not only positive but sympathetic, interested, and tilted toward understanding. Non-LDS critics were receptive in ways that could have—that should have—given pause to insular reactions, that might have encouraged American acceptance of Mormon people, and that could have shored Maurine up.

For instance, literary critic Bernard DeVoto wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that "*Joshua* is excellent reading and it catches a previously neglected side of the Mormon story and that is the tenderness and sympathy which existed among a people dogged by persecution and hardships, forced to battle an inclement nature for every morsel of food they ate, and to struggle for every moment of genuine happiness" (quoted in *Craving* 10). Editor Avis M. DeVoto, Bernard's wife, wrote that *Joshua*'s heroine, Clory MacIntyre, was "one of the most appealing women in modern fiction"; she praised the novel's "engrossing details of living, the clothes, the food, the remedies, the deaths, the births, the preparing of bodies for burial. These people live in the round—a tough, hardy lot, rough of tongue, bursting with vitality" (quoted in *Craving* 10).

Unfortunately, Maurine Whipple—authentic in her artistry and believing that her ancestors in the red dust deserts of St. George had never been properly celebrated—was caught in the crosshairs of the polarized views of her work. She gave her time to lecturing during World War II and to smaller-scale written works for as long as she could—and nearly all of this work is collected, for our delight, in *A Craving for Beauty*. We get features and articles that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, and *Collier's* into the 1950s. And there is

the pleasure of five energetic chapters of the sequel to *Joshua*, with the evocative title *Cleave the Wood*.

But after the 1950s, Maurine lived a life tinged with sorrow and dejection. Biographer Veda Hale, one of the three editors of *A Craving for Beauty*, wrote that Maurine "endured fifty years of disappointment, loneliness, and poverty, sometimes so paralyzed by despair that she was incapable of working."[6] Her final years were brightened by the 1983 sale of film rights to *The Giant Joshua*, which provided her a living. She was eighty years old. And in 1991 she received a lifetime achievement award from the Association for Mormon Letters, which cited *Joshua* as the novel widely considered to be "the finest work of Mormon fiction."[7]

When Eric Jepson shared the 1956 letter from Emma Ray McKay on the website *A Motley Vision* in 2009, reader Kjerste Christensen shared this insight: "if we don't tell our stories, someone else with their own agenda and bias will tell them for us."[8] Maurine was perfectly positioned to tell the story of the settlement of Utah's Dixie. She was captured by it her whole life, despite the hardships and despair that dogged her steps. Her prose is nimble, generous, vivid, and sharp. Her particular faith in the Mormon project—what she termed the "Grand Idea"—remained intact throughout all her years, despite the efforts of Mormons in power to dissuade and destroy it. Buy this book, read it, and send up a prayer of thanks and support for Maurine. Ask God and his angels to help her see: *No, really, we—your people—love you. Well done, thou gifted, spirited artist! Thank you for telling our stories to those outside our faith and beliefs. Indeed, you followed the injunction of our Savior with uniquely pure intent, Maurine, by sending your keenly*

6. Veda Tebbs Hale, "In Memoriam: Maurine Whipple," *Sunstone* 16, no. 2 (Aug. 1992): 13.

7. Wikipedia, s.v. "*The Giant Joshua*," n. 21, last modified Apr. 20, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Giant_Joshua.

8. Katya, July 9, 2009, comment on thmazing, "Too sacred for public consumption."

observed edition of this fiercely powerful, transformative gospel beyond its borders, with lively language and robust, energetic craft and skill. Your work is invaluable. In fact, it is priceless to us.

HEIDI NAYLOR {heidinaylor@boisestate.edu} is the author of *Revolver*, published by BCC Press. She writes and teaches in Idaho. Find her at heidinaylor.net.

~

"Womanho": A Beehive Girl Perfects Her Womanhood

Mikayla Orton Thatcher. *Beehive Girl.* BCC Press, 2013. 311 pp. Paper: $12.95. ISBN: 978-1948218825.

Reviewed by Brittany Chapman Nash

Beehive Girl is a delightful book. Mikayla Orton Thatcher takes the reader on her journey completing the 1915 Beehive Girls program—an invigorating and intensive achievement plan for young women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was the first in a long line of recognition programs in the Young Women organization. Introduced to Beehive Girls through an article in a Church magazine, Thatcher located their manual online and was enthralled by the full-bodied approach to growth in its antiquated list of requirements. They were a stark departure from the requirements in the Personal Progress program she knew as a young Latter-day Saint, where spiritual development was emphasized. The original Beehive Girls program demanded an intentionality that Thatcher found simultaneously charming, challenging, and grounding. Thatcher learned that the Beehive watchword was "Womanho" ("wo" for work, "man" for mankind, and "ho" for

home) and their stated purpose was to "perfect our womanhood."[1] She was inspired to "be the woman these early [Young Women] leaders envisioned" and eagerly began a years-long process fulfilling the requirements, including plucking her own chicken, doing one good turn daily, and sleeping with her windows open for two months (11). The universal joy of new experience and self-improvement spills onto the pages, and Thatcher's witty, conversational style is punctuated by profound insights as she fulfills the various "cells" of achievement. As the book progresses, the giggle-worthy fun of accomplishing old-fashioned goals becomes transformative to Thatcher as she internalizes deeper truths through her participation in the program. The intelligent crafting of *Beehive Girl* produces a fascinating fusion of past and present. As Thatcher blurs generational lines, modern readers find meaning in women's traditional spiritual and temporal work and catch glimpses of the future through Thatcher's little daughter, Jane, who often toddles along behind her mother, participating in the program, too.

If a reader is looking for a scholarly history of the Beehive Girls program, this is not that book. It is first a memoir. Thatcher includes brief histories of the Young Women organization and Beehive Girls program and weaves in life sketches of eight Latter-day Saint women. In each of these areas, Thatcher takes care to be historically responsible, and I believe she achieves that aim. Although *Beehive Girl* is not a history in the formal sense, the book is written through a historical lens as Thatcher consistently compares the past to the present and reflects on changes over time. For example, Thatcher invites a friend to help her complete the Beehive goal to "identify any fifteen trees." After her experience, Thatcher concludes, "I think that the YLMIA general board, the creators of Beehive Girls, wrote this cell to be about trees. For us, though, this cell became about reconnecting with our innate curiosity and giving it some time to be giddy. It has also been about finding ways

1. *Hand Book for the Bee-Hive Girls of the Y.L.M.I.A.* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, 1915), 3–5.

to socialize that are actually satisfying. . . . While developing friendships with other girls isn't a stated goal in the Beehive Girls manual, I think it must have been a key part of the plan from the beginning" (45).

Incidentally, about two-thirds through *Beehive Girl*, I laughed out loud. In a moment of pure serendipity, I was featured as a character in the book! Thatcher describes a visit she made to the Church History Library where she hoped to find a treasure trove of records kept by young women . . . but had disappointing results. As a historian in the Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CHD), I met with Thatcher that day because we share an interest in the Beehive Girls program. We exchanged knowledge and resources (thankfully she wrote that I was helpful—phew). She lamented that there were not more records from Beehive girls themselves. Where were their scrapbooks? The photos of their adventures? What about memories from Beekeepers (those who led the "swarms" of girls)? Unhappily, beyond what was published in contemporary Church magazines or manuals, only a handful of personal records documenting Beehive girls' experiences are in the archives. The gold mine may still be buried in attics or basements, tucked away in boxes of great-grandmothers' things. Hopefully soon Beehive Girls scrapbooks and other memorabilia will be donated to repositories such as the Church History Library where their stories can be preserved and shared.

Happily, though, I do have some great news for Thatcher. In the book she notes, with some regret, that an updated history of the Young Women organization has not been written; the last one was published nearly seventy years ago. She was not alone in recognizing that gap, and the Church History Department decided to fill it! Historians in the CHD have completed a comprehensive new history of the Young Women organization, and it is projected to be published by the Church Historian's Press in 2025. The book takes a fresh look at the Young Women organization, and readers will no doubt enjoy taking a deeper dive into the history of the Beehive Girls program and how it shaped

what Young Women eventually became. Thatcher's book is timeless, but somehow knowing that it just precedes a forthcoming history makes this memoir feel even timelier and more significant.

To sum up, Mikayla Orton Thatcher joyfully captures and applies a pivotal development in the 150-year history of the Young Women organization. I wish she could be awarded the queen bee pendant and necklace alongside her 1915 sisters who also completed the program, but Thatcher teaches us that self-improvement, knowledge, and expanded experience bring their own rewards. It is meaningful that we get to tag along with her on the trip of a lifetime, with plenty of laughs, lessons, and good conversation along the way. Womanho.

BRITTANY CHAPMAN NASH {brittany.nash@churchofjesuschrist.org} is a historian at the Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah. She coedited the *Women of Faith in the Latter Days* series and authored *Let's Talk About Polygamy*. She lives in Salt Lake City with her husband and two young children.

~

Boys Want Her, Girls Want to Be Her. But What Does She Want?

Theric Jepson. *Just Julie's Fine.* By Common Consent Press, 2023. 170 pp. Paper: $9.95. ISBN: 978-1948218962.

Reviewed by Alison Maeser Brimley

Julie Them, the focal character of Theric Jepson's new novel *Just Julie's Fine*, is a Mary Sue character: "so perfect every reader hates her" while "in the fictional world all people, heroes and villains alike, adore her utterly" (1). The narrator isn't shy about proclaiming this from the

get-go. Julie is a BYU student in 2005, a Marriage & Family Development major whose most pronounced perfection is her stunning beauty, which not a single person in her vicinity can help but notice. She also possesses a strange quality of inviting people's confidences, leading to astonishingly personal conversations with people she hardly knows (not one but two characters find themselves revealing a secret inability to fit the BYU mold in some essential, shameful way, and one even imagines Julie "as God the mother" (65) for her ability to comfort and understand). She's preternaturally smart, and though she's chosen a "throwaway major," she is conversant in Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman and has a freakish knack for physics. Perhaps most surprisingly, though, she commands the attention of every heterosexual male in a fifty-foot radius, and even women seem powerless to dislike her.

"I do not know how you will stand her," the narrator warns (5).

To put it succinctly, *Just Julie's Fine* is the story of a young woman who has been pigeonholed by her sex and incredible attractiveness into a life centered on finding a suitable marriage partner and, by extension, preparing for a life of mothering and homemaking. (The implicit tie of sex appeal to mother potential is hard to ignore here.) Or rather, because of Julie's attractiveness, her task is less to find a partner and more to sort through (and fend off) dozens of would-be partners who aren't right for her, from a stranger in Coke-bottle glasses shooting his shot in the Costco parking lot to an arrogant wannabe Mormon rockstar ("For a sec, I was worried you might be a good kisser," (42) Julie quips when he plants one on her outside her apartment.) She's a BYU student in this story set nearly two round decades ago—a span of time that, to this reader, feels somehow longer than it was. Already it feels like a story like Julie's could not take place today, among twenty-year-olds raised on the internet—talk of patriarchy, the Bechdel test, and queerness are present in the novel but met with general ignorance by most of the characters.

Just Julie's Fine is a (loose) sequel to Jepson's 2019 novel *Byuck*, in which a pair of male students set out to write a rock opera about their quest to avoid marriage while at BYU. *Byuck*'s main character David Them is Julie's older brother, though David does not appear in this novel. Themes at play in the earlier novel, though, are clearly treated from a different angle in Jepson's newest offering.

In the end, Julie decides that the path she is on—evenings of multiple dates and days of child development homework—was never a choice made consciously. (A happy thing for her that she realizes this before committing to it in the form of temple marriage.) At the risk of inducing light spoilage, I'll just say that Julie chooses to dedicate her energies to a field more challenging, more prestigious, and, incidentally, more male-coded. In some sense this seems inevitable: it would be hard to write about a woman in the modern age who doesn't make such an adjustment without conjuring a vibe of tradwife propaganda. And yet the story doesn't read—at least for a long time—like a go-girl empowerment tale. Julie is not plodding her way up Freytag's pyramid to feminist enlightenment. Her story takes such a roundabout way of getting there.

For one, Julie's own perspective isn't truly accessed until the final chapter of the book. Until then, we see her only through the eyes of other characters, some as close to her as her roommates and some as distant as the bass player at a club Julie visits, giving us a progressively clearer view of Julie. Some of them envy her, some idolize her, some never learn her name. (In fact, many of them display a strange inability to remember her name, even when they do learn it.) Their encounters with her are recounted in a variety of formats—a letter home to a parent, a confessional stream-of-consciousness prayer addressed to a female God, even a podcast transcript resurfaced and annotated twenty years after the fact. Some of these characters introduce themselves and very nearly steal the show before disappearing, never to be seen again. The effect is of a polyvocal chorus, suggesting that an entire world is

contained on the campus of BYU in 2005. These characters have a range of relationships to their faith, while Julie's own beliefs are largely traditional, if unexamined (as per Tom Petty's definition of a good girl, the narrator tells us in a footnote, Julie "loves Jesus (though she rarely thinks of him)" (5).

The novel satirizes BYU dating culture and Mormon culture generally, somewhat straightforwardly at first (our first POV characters are doltish roommates Maddysyn and Ashleigha, who draft an email to the Honor Code office to report a fellow student for mentioning sex, yet live for male attention and admire Julie because "she's the one we learned looking-over-the-shoulder-to-put-the-boobs-in-profile from") (10) and approaching greater sensitivity and realism with each subsequent narrator. By the end of the novel, we have reached Julie herself, and the qualities that defined her as a Mary Sue at the beginning of the novel are now treated as real problems to be solved. What does a young woman with an oversupply of beauty, kindness, and intelligence *do* with such abundance in the limited world she finds herself in? Perhaps the great surprise is that there is no great surprise—it would not be quite true to say that some great mystery at Julie's heart has been concealed beneath a distractingly beautiful facade, only to be revealed once we enter her head. Whatever the reader discovers about her, Julie discovers almost at the same time. Her journey to self-knowledge is precipitated by an encounter with the rarest of men: one who isn't interested in her. But her most important relationships are finally revealed to be those she has with other female students: two iconoclastic roommates and a group of "lady engineers" (109) bonded by the scarcity of their species.

The world of Jepson's BYU is a joy to inhabit, and his novel is a tangent-following gambol that takes us from ward prayer (a pileup of people in an apartment living room that's called "a regular Mormon orgy" (143)) to a college robot-building competition to the Center Street of Provo's early-aughts indie rock scene. But an unsettling current lurks

beneath the surface, allowing us to see through the eyes of characters on the margins even while circling around an apparent paragon of Mormon womanhood.

ALISON MAESER BRIMLEY {alison.maeser@gmail.com} is a writer living in Utah. She received an MFA from Brigham Young University, and her fiction has appeared in *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *Western Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. She is currently at work on a Mormon historical fiction novel.

Rocio Vasquez Cisneros, *Nepantla*, 2022, mixed media installation (dirt, vinyl, traditional Mexican dress)

Rocio Vasquez Cisneros, *Tijuana*, 2022, digital photography

ROCIO VASQUEZ CISNEROS is a Mexican-American, Utah-Based artist. She works primarily in video and photography, but also works in oil paint and various other mediums. Much of her photo and video work is a means to merge religious symbols and imagery with the voices of real people who deal with issues of racism and immigration every day. Her work is narrative, and includes self portraiture, much of her work is also performance based. @rocio.cisne

LASISI RICHARD OLANGUNJU is a visual artist from Ondo State in Nigeria. He holds a Fine and Applied Arts Education degree from Obafemi Awolowo University and a masters degree in Fine and Applied Arts (Sculpture) from University of Benin, Nigeria. His artistic styles and forms reflect Yoruba traditional culture. A member of the Sculptors Association of Nigeria (ScAN), he is a lecturer at the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Oyo state, Department of Fine and Applied Arts. @olagunjuart1974

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

SPECIAL ISSUE: THE FAMILY IN LATTER-DAY SAINT CULTURE AND THOUGHT

ARTICLES

James E. Faulconer: "On a Philosophy of Marriage"

Kate Mower: "Rule of Lawyers: Latter-day Saint Entanglement in Eastern European Anti-LGBTQI+ Legislation"

Elizabeth Mawlam: "The Legacy of the 1960's "New Era" and "Singing Mothers Tour" on LDS Gender Roles and the Family in Great Britain"

Join our DIALOGUE!

Find us on Facebook at Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought
Follow us on Twitter @DialogueJournal
Follow us on Instragram at dialoguejournal
Follow us on YouTube at
https://www.youtube.com/c/DialogueJournalofMormonThought

DIALOGUE PODCASTS

Listen and subscribe at dialoguejournal.com/podcasts or on your favorite podcast app

PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

1 year (4 issues) $60 | 3 years (12 issues) $180
at dialoguejournal.com/subscribe

DIALOGUE BOOK CLUB

1 year (4 books) $120 at dialoguejournal.com/book-club

www.dialoguejournal.com

DIALOGUE
PO Box 1094
Farmington, UT 84025
electronic service requested

UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS PRESS

0012-2157