

# God and I

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It's been a jackpot year for catching reruns of old historical riffs. For instance, I was tickled to see the Papacy get it together one more time and denounce the legitimacy of secular authority. That doesn't mean I expect to see Helmut Schmidt standing barefoot in the snow at Canossa any time soon, you understand, but it was the sort of thing a Pope is *supposed* to do. After that, JP II agreed to re-hear *Church v. Galileo* at the instigation of a member of the Dominicans (which again is fitting), on account of a slight suspicion that the Catholic Church was in the wrong the last time they tried the case. And Israel, now, has gone over to the shekel standard in a move to combat inflation. I was even privileged earlier this month to once more sit in front of the television, getting smashed while watching a President I could wholeheartedly hate--though the last time I did that, the President in question was resigning to avoid impeachment.

So pick your own anachronism. Myself, I got hauled up in front of an ecclesiastical court this summer and formally excommunicated. Really. A genuine heretic, anathematized by the grace of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the Mormons. (By the way, if *you* are a Mormon and are reading this, I should warn you that I've touched all the pages in this issue of *Telos* and the paper is probably crawling with heretic-microbes. Don't let me stop you, but if you suddenly go weak in the knees and develop an irresistible craving to vote the straight Socialist Workers' Party ticket while drinking a cup of coffee and praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a swimming pool on Sunday, you'll know what's happened to you. Sorry.) I could wish, just for the sake of completeness, that they had dashed the candles to the ground and all, gone the whole route, and that if I were to die without a reconciliation they would hunt up an unsanctified crossroads to bury me under; but what actually happened--well, what happened comes in the proper course of this story. So let me mander on for a while and then I'll explain how the deed was done, along with other mysteries like the Holy Underwear of God and the Book of Ether.

You can take your pick of where this story ought to start. I'm inclined to favor 1964, when I was eight years old. That's the age when Mormon children are baptized and confirmed and thereafter held accountable for their sins. Even at that age I'd already had some difficulties in Sunday School, since I'd fallen in love with archaeology and fossils, and one day, in all innocence, argued Darwin over Genesis to my teacher. After that episode my mother took me aside and said that by all means I should believe in evolution, but that I wasn't to speak of it in church. I was confused, but I mostly kept my mouth shut. I didn't give up on the dinosaurs, though.

But my baptism was a rank failure. I was duly interviewed by my Bishop and recommended for the ritual--after all, what sins does an eight-year-old have access to, aside from the milder sloths and avarices? They have neither the temptation nor the opportunity for really *solid* wickedness--and then I went around for weeks sinning incessantly. I figured that the sins would shortly be all washed away anyway, and then after that I'd have to be good. On the appointed day I fasted and was dressed in white cotton coveralls, by way of ceremonial vestments, and then after some prayers was firmly dunked, head under, in a baptismal font. It should have worked, but it didn't. I never felt the least bit saved, or cleansed, or initiated, or much of anything besides wet all over. Besides, as soon as I got home I snatched and ate a Tootsie Roll intended for one of my brothers, and only afterward remembered that this constituted theft and was now a sin. I checked by the clock. My sinlessness had lasted for something under two hours, and it was all downhill from there.

Further breaches with the Church came when I hit puberty and became the target of much intense propaganda concerning proper young Mormon womanhood. I went through the normal miserable

precocious childhood and by that time had become a scruffy-looking adolescent girl with lank hair, crooked teeth, Clark Kent glasses, and a perpetual armload of books. I was forcibly given lessons in ballroom dancing and deportment (I can waltz, foxtrot, two-step, polka, manage cake-napkin-punch-and-fork all at once, and go without dishonor through a formal reception line, none of which things have I ever been called upon to do since), told that women have A Very Special And Wonderful Role, and warned that nobody would be responsible for the awful consequences if I wore my skirts so short as to expose my knees. This was in '68-'70, of course.

All of these gobbets of knowledge were jumbled together, but the business about my knees got the most airing. You would have thought they were radioactive, from the handling instructions I got concerning them: how to sit, how to stand, how to pick something up gracefully from the floor, all without those two knobby and scarred (in my case) lust-objects flashing upon the public view. The confusing part was that I knew damned well that nobody was watching my knees, or indeed any part of me. I had all the allure of a bell pepper. Furthermore, all the things that the ravishing and modest young ladies in the visual aids were doing were things I was bad at, and none of them seemed to involve reading science fiction or collecting rocks or blowing things up.

This was upsetting. It was bad enough to have to act like a girl (at which I was so untalented that I became convinced that I was something else unspecified, and was the victim of mistaken identity), but doubly and triply so to be told that God wanted me to do it. I became darkly suspicious of a God that had both created me and required such impossible behavior of me. After that I quietly slid down into perdition for some years. Surprisingly, no one ever noticed this, I think because I didn't do anything recognizably awful. There's no place in the mythology for an unobtrusive defection from the straight and narrow. One day you decide to skip Fast & Testimony Meeting to watch the Rolling Stones on the Ed Sullivan Show, and BAM! the next thing you know you're dancing the dirty bop at an ill-lit, smoky, unsupervised party, and your date is whispering in your ear that out in the garage the kids have some marijuana woofers going, so how about a little *real* action? After that there's nothing for it; you wind up hocking your mother's kitchen appliances to support your habit until the day when, dazed on drugs, you walk in front of an oncoming cement truck. Except that I didn't do that, so nobody noticed until I wrote the denunciatory letter last spring. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I still worried, every so often, if maybe the Mormons weren't right, if I wasn't maybe a sinner or a pervert or something. It was a kind of gentle, commonplace worry: "I wonder if I'm blowing my eternal salvation, or have I just not had enough sleep this week?" I wondered if, after my apostate youth, I'd somehow see through the error of my ways and go back to church, family, and Mesa, Arizona, as my mother did. It didn't seem likely. Still, I was idly concerned about it, enough to spend a couple of hours in 1977 in a Howard Johnson's discussing it with Joe Sheffer. Phoenix fandom was full of theologians in those days the way that the Wallingford Mob is full of Marxists and old high-school debaters. Joe was easily the best of them, a Thomist who could argue with wit and subtlety on some odd point--say, the proposition that evil is good pursued badly--and then turn around and invent half a dozen new non-contingent being jokes. (Sample: Why is John Wayne a non-contingent being? Because he can't act.) (Sound of Saint Dominick being hit over the head with a rubber chicken.) At one point, Joe became convinced that he could reduce the unified field theory to four basic equations with the help of healthy infusions of Thomism. I was skeptical (so was he, mostly), but I didn't put it past him; we halfway expected to someday hear a loud knocking from the direction of Tempe and find out later that Joe had invented antigravity. Lovely fellow. Anyway, Joe gave me the clinching argument that stopped forever my late-night visions of winding up, in the afterlife, in a court of final judgment presided over by Jehovah flanked by the Osmonds. However, in order to explain it I first have to talk about the Book of Mormon, the basic revealed text of the Mormon church. Bear with me; the Book of Ether is coming right up.

Western New York, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was known as the "Burnt-Over District," the name alluding to the fires of the spirit that swept over the area repeatedly in that time.

Like Southern California in the second half of the twentieth century, it was an incredibly fertile breeding ground for religious enthusiasms, with constant fundamentalist revival movements, proposed reforms of various ills, and a string of preachers, seers, prophets, and small-time theologians to attend to them. In 1830, a young man named Joseph Smith, who had grown up in the middle of this ruckus, announced that he had found some golden plates--that is, thinly-beaten plates of gold, engraved in an unknown language--which he had translated with the help of God and a sort of pair of magic spectacles, called by him the Urim and Thummim, which he found along with the plates. The book so translated he called "The Book of Mormon," and though the gold plates disappeared fairly soon after the translation was done (an angel came and took them away again), the book is ranked right up with the Bible in the religion that bears its name.

The BofM is largely a long chronicle of the doings of various Semitic migratory groups in the New World. It divides up into various books written by different authors over a long period of time, all of which were eventually delivered into the hands of one Mormon, who gave them a thorough and even redaction (which is why it's called the Book of Mormon, to state the obvious). Mormon gives the book to his son Moroni (when you see the gold angel on top of a Mormon temple, that's Moroni), and he buries it in what will someday become Joseph Smith's backyard.

Chronologically, the first book in the BofM is the second-to-last chapter, called the Book of Ether. Significantly, Ether is the liveliest chapter in the whole work. (There's also the Book of Omni, but never mind.) Ether tells the story of the Jaredites, a group of people involved in the Tower of Babel project, who escaped the confusion of languages in the ensuing catastrophe due to the good offices of their leader Jared and his brother the prophet. This prophet never does get his own name; he's referred to throughout as The Brother of Jared, for some obscure reason. These two prayed mightily to God, who spared them and theirs. The group then took off for America in sealed barges, a sort of early precursor of steerage; in all the pictures, the barges are just rectangular wooden boxes, proportioned like ice cream sandwiches. Like Noah's ark, the boxes are God's idea, and he gives the Jaredites directions for building and provisioning them. When they're almost ready to leave it occurs to Jared and Brother that sealing themselves and their people into the barges will mean that they have to do the whole trip in the dark. So The Brother of Jared goes out and prays to the Lord again, and God obliges him by touching some crystalline rocks with his finger (in the pictures, the rocks look like rough marbles) so that they glow in the dark.

And so the Jaredites come to America. Their story moves pretty rapidly, because the entire history--much longer in the original--was compressed by Mormon. It certainly doesn't drag; kings and prophets and conspiratorial cabals and betrayals go clipping by. In short, the Jaredites came to America, were godly, prospered, became wicked, and all wiped each other out in one final enormous pitched battle. The last survivor of all this, their wicked king who precipitated the battle, lives just long enough to see the new chosen people arrive. He gives them the sacred records that become the Book of Ether, and then expires.

These new people just now coming over the hill are Jews who, at the urging of their patriarch Lehi (another prophet), flee Jerusalem just before its destruction by the Babylonians, somewhere between B.C. 600 and 592. Lehi has four sons, Laman and Lemuel and Nephi and Sam. Laman and Lemuel are bad, while Nephi and Sam are good; the God of the Mormons goes in for a lot of symmetry and repetition. In addition, Nephi is well in the way of becoming a prophet himself. Angels come and talk to him a lot.

Lehi takes wife and sons and tents and provisions and flees into the wilderness. After several days of this he stops and makes camp: He's forgotten something. So he waits there and sends all four of his sons back into the about-to-be-destroyed city of Jerusalem to pick up the family's genealogical records. This, by the way, is a thoroughly Mormon thing to do; it's a genealogy-obsessed religion.

So Laman and Lemuel and Nephi and Sam go back to Jerusalem and, after various harrowing adventures, come staggering back with the family genealogy, fetchingly engraved on a series of

thinly-beaten metal plates. The Book of Mormon digresses from the narrative for several chapters at this point while everyone in camp has visions, in which are revealed the rise and perfidy of the Catholic Church, the superior status of America as God's Chosen Land, and the dangers of Freemasonry.

When the story picks up again, Lehi once more smites his forehead with the heel of his hand as he remembers another thing that he and all his sons have forgotten. So Laman and Lemuel and Nephi and Sam once more journey back to Jerusalem, to recruit another family that Lehi knows of that has four daughters. After this strategic necessity has been taken care of, the enlarged group builds proper boats, with decks and sails and everything, and embarks for America. They are guided in this by a magic dingus called the Liahona which God has given to Lehi, a sort of compass-*cum*-homing device that apparently runs on spiritual energy, since it will only point in the right direction as long as everyone stays right with God.

When the emigrants arrive, they find a strange America whose forests are filled with "beasts of every kind," including cows, oxen, horses, asses, and both wild and domesticated goats. After this landfall the narrative breaks off again for a couple of chapters while Nephi discusses the prophecies of Isaiah. When we get back to the scene of the action, Laman and Lemuel are rebelling violently against Lehi and Nephi and Sam. Naturally, the godliness faction takes off and flees into the wilderness, where Lehi expires after pronouncing several chapters of blessings on his various offspring. Laman and Lemuel are cursed for their wickedness and acquire dark skins, with the attached proviso that if they or their offspring ever repent sufficiently, the Lord will bless them and make them white again. Melanin is a favorite curse of the Mormon God, and two guesses as to which racial group is supposedly descended from Cain.

I won't go so tediously through the rest of the book. Let it suffice that it's a lot like a longer, duller version of the Book of Ether. The Nephites (the followers of Nephi, remember?) are godly, settled, and agricultural; they behave themselves, prosper, become wicked, and are all wiped out in one enormous battle that leaves only Lamanites roaming benightedly and aboriginally across the landscape. Along the way there are a couple of major subplots. One involves bands of people constantly splintering off from more settled groups that have become wicked, and striking out into the wilderness (I told you it was a repetitive book) to seek a more godly life. One city, in fact, achieves such godliness that it transports bodily up into heaven, presumably leaving behind a big blank spot in the forest. The other major subplot involves repeated prophecies of the coming of Christ, culminating in a series of earthquakes, tidal waves, tempests, fires, and thunderings and lightnings, followed by three days of palpably thick darkness at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Christ then appears in glory for the three days he is supposedly in his tomb in the Old World, and preaches the revealed gospel of the New Testament to the Americas. For a time then *everyone* behaves--but like my baptism, it doesn't take, and the wickedness that follows carries the whole pack and passel of Nephites down into oblivion and the necessity for burying gold plates in upstate New York. When you consider that their scripture is full of America the Land of the Blessed, warnings about evil godless conspiracies, and tales of superpowers squaring off at each other for the last battle, it's easy to understand why Mormons tend to do things like vote for Ronald Reagan.

So there's that venerable (150 years old now) book for you, reduced to a pureed caricature of itself for your easy consumption. But remember Joe Sheffer? We left him sitting in the Howard Johnson's in Tempe several pages ago, drinking coffee and waiting to deliver his clinching argument. Actually, all he said was that Lehi & Co. would have had to forget the use of the wheel somewhere on the voyage from the Middle East to America, since the invention was widely in use at the time of their departure from Jerusalem but was never used in the Americas until the European conquests. I thought about that for a moment. Joe was dead right, of course. Then I considered it for a couple of minutes more while I waited for the tremors to die down (no doubt the serpent at the foundations of the earth stirring), and then plunged into an orgy of dissection.

For instance, the book is written in very bad King James English that sounds like the language spoken in Mighty Thor comic books (I say thee, nope!). This is a little hard to swallow in a manuscript that was theoretically translated by an upstate New York farmboy in the nineteenth century; harder to swallow is the notion that God really talks like that. It reads as though someone very familiar with the Bible (in an unscholarly way) were trying to write in imitation of the King James Version's style--say, the son of a devout Protestant Fundamentalist family, where reading the Bible would have been the order of the day, where more sophisticated Biblical scholarship would have been unknown, and where the most commonly available version of the Bible would have been one in a distinct and peculiar style that included things like verse breaks.

Then there's the archaeological side of the question. In the nineteenth century the science hadn't really been invented yet; there was still the possibility that the Amerinds *were* the Ten Lost Tribes, or something equally fabulous. Of course, the truth (current version, who knows?) turned out to be just as strange, in a wildly different way, and I'd no more give up on Olmec heads, the Mound Builders of the eastern United States, and the trek across the Siberian land-bridge, than I would have given up on dinosaurs as a kid. Moreover, the Amerinds are manifestly *not* just dark-skinned Semites; there are some distinct physiological differences besides skin color, the blood type is all wrong, and the indigenous American languages, all God-knows-how-many-dozens of them, are nothing like any known Semitic language.

Another thing, a small thing that peculiarly caught my eye, is that in the Book of Mormon there are many large battles fought with swords. Now, there are two kinds of swords that could be used in these conflicts. They could have the all-metal one- or two-edged sort that comes in a hundred shapes and sizes in Old World literature, or they could be using the best New World equivalent, a sort of large club or paddle edged on both sides with inset rows of sharpened obsidian chunks--a fearsome weapon. Whichever; take your pick. Many men with swords go out to the field of combat and die there, their swords and armor decomposing somewhat more slowly than their bodies. Now, if they were using metal swords, there ought to be *some* trace of that much metal left--its rust in the ground in wetter climates, the artifacts themselves further west. (In some parts of the Southwest, corncobs and broken sandals are found in caves thousands of years after they were abandoned there, still in perfect shape.) In either case there'd be metalworking sites near sources of ore. There's nothing of the sort. So, okay, they were using the Aztec-style wooden paddle with obsidian edges. In that case there should be, around the old battle sites, innumerable shaped obsidian pieces lying where they came to rest after their wooden cores rotted out. These should occur frequently at sites extending from Old Mexico to New York. They don't, of course; there was a remarkably widespread trade in Central American obsidian across North America, but the stuff was used for things like ritual implements and jewelry.

I don't know if anyone else is as interested in all this as I am. It must sound like I'm going the long way around to discredit a book that, probably, most of you have at best only heard of, much less read or believed in. And certainly that whole world of Mormons and Mormonism and the Book of Mormon seems distant. I'm sitting here typing in my study in Seattle, trying to write about this very strange subject for the next issue of my fanzine. But if I were to get on the phone and call home to Mesa, in talking to my sister or grandfather I'd be talking to a world in which this entire silly-sounding historical romance of a book is the literal truth, the Word of God. It's a world in which America will never be conquered by foreign powers as long as it maintains righteousness, where the pioneers of the American frontier were only re-enacting the heroic journeys into the wilderness of a far more ancient time, and where the mind's eye peoples the Pyramid of the Sun and the ruins of Chichen Itza with fair-skinned Christian women and warriors, prophets and kings. I spent most of my first twenty years there, in a place where almost everyone was LDS and most of those were my relatives. As a child, I was genuinely astonished the day I found out that not everyone in the world was a Mormon. And it's all still there; that community, and others like it, scattered thickly up and down the line of the Rocky Mountain states, a little less commonly found elsewhere but still extant

almost everywhere in the world. But I'm running on--here, I'll get back to my narrative. Sorry to make you wait a few chapters while I have revelations.

It's a long jump from me sitting in a Howard Johnson's coffee shop, talking theology and anthropology with a friend, to me three years later getting off the 43-Ballard bus and walking up to the local Stake House (a stake is kind of like a diocese, but different) to stand trial and be excommunicated. I could have gone on for years ignoring the church and being ignored in return, except that this year they excommunicated Sonia Johnson. Have you heard of her? She's an organizer of the Mormons for the ERA, a strong, managerial sort of woman who had a fervent belief in her church. But when she criticized the leadership they excommunicated her, threw her out of the tightly-knit church-centered community, on the grounds that she was not supportive of the leadership and had damaged the missionary effort. Incidentally, when Spencer W. Kimball, the current President of the Church and head of the Board of Directors of its extensive corporate interests, a man whose full ecclesiastical title is "Prophet, Seer and Revelator," publicly announced that the ERA was immoral and would destroy the family, he was defended against allegations of undue influence on church members and an improper church-state involvement on the grounds that, like any other private citizen, he had a right to his own opinion.

I got angry. I'd known for years that the LDS church was openly working against the women's rights movement; when I was working as a page at the Arizona House of Representatives and the anti-ERA groups mustered in force to defeat that legislation in the Judiciary Committee, the women who showed up to protest the ERA were organized by wards (a ward is kind of like a parish, but different). Mormon women don't do protest marches on their own get-go. To hear official spokesmen deny this--which they have--and claim that Sonia Johnson was not persecuted for her pro-ERA organizing, but only for criticizing the Presidency--and then to hear it claimed that the pronouncements of a man who is accounted a prophet and whose word is taken as divine revelation by all believing members represent nothing but off-the-cuff personal opinions--struck me as rankest hypocrisy, and I was disgusted by it.

I fired off a letter to President Kimball, demanding that my name be taken from the rolls of the church, and seconding Ms. Johnson's opinions of the church leadership. I added gratuitously that President Kimball had his nerve talking about women in the church, since he'd never been one, and all his councillors are, to a man, men.

This brought on a flurry of correspondence between the church presidency and my local Bishop and myself and my mother (whom I'd imprudently informed of my actions), followed by a brief comic interlude as some brethren of the church attempted to serve me a summons to bishop's court, finally catching me at home as I sat in my bathtub. I answered the door wrapped only in a towel, thinking that the ringing was Patrick and Alan wanting me to unlock the door, and found instead three dour-looking elders of the church who handed me an envelope and left as soon as possible. And so I wound up presenting myself at the appointed time and place.

It was easier to go into church this time, since I had Jerry Kaufman with me. The last time I'd gone in was a couple of weeks earlier for preliminary negotiations with Bishop Lee after the presidency wrote him and asked him to please talk me out of my protests. I was thrown badly off balance then, since it turned out that the church building not only looked exactly like all the churches of my youth back in Mesa, but smelled just like them too, an indistinct faint sweet smell with no known source which I've never smelled anywhere else. Worse, Bishop Lee turned out to be from Safford, Arizona, a man of my grandparents' generation, which means that I'd comfortably bet a month's rent on the proposition that he's a relative of mine. I won't explain all that here, since it would involve matters like my mother's seventy-five first cousins (a story alternately subtitled "Why I Left Mesa" or "Why My Father Is Still Referred To As Barbara Crandall's Husband"); let it suffice that we immediately spent fifteen minutes in a ritual discussion of our mutual kin. I was completely disarmed.

This time, though, as I said, I had Jerry with me. He'd come on the spur of the moment; I'd been over at his house running off *Telos 2* and trying to soothe my jangling nerves by talking to him, and somehow he'd wound up telling me about his cousin's Bar Mitzvah, with the band and the hired hall and the swans made out of chopped liver and everything. I found this oddly comforting, and so persuaded him to come along. We found ourselves waiting in the building foyer for a good twenty minutes in the company of some six or eight teenage Mormon male louts. Jerry wandered around looking at all the thick carpeting and new paint (good but durable, the way Mormon churches always are; temples are furnished in Serious Luxury), in through the door of the chapel where a dozen or so members of the ladies' auxiliary were rehearsing an ensemble version of "O My Father," and over to where a large portrait of the current prophet hung on the wall (Prez Kimball, looking very much like a pink and earless Yoda), and said "It's weird! It's all so *Anglo!*"--in his nice Cleveland/New York Eastern Urban Degenerate accent. Call it perspective. It was much easier to stand waiting to be called into the court session in the company of Jerry, a representative representative of the normal Delanyesque world where everyone publishes small mimeographed magazines and writes for *The Rocket*.

Then suddenly there was Bishop Lee, smiling and white-haired and kindly, asking me to please come in now. I think he thought Jerry was my husband; he shook his hand firmly and said hello. "This is my friend Jerry Kaufman," I said. "He's come along for moral support. My husband is busy running a mimeograph." Bishop Lee just looked at me, profoundly confused. Then it struck me: I'd been away from the home continuum too long. Back there, grown married ladies *simply do not* have male friends who are not their husbands, particularly friends who show up on important occasions when their husband does not. Some seconds passed. Finally, I smiled brightly at the Bishop and said "Jerry isn't coming to the trial, he just came to wait with me." I'm not sure how this allowed the matter to be resolved, but Bishop Lee affably showed Jerry to a chair in the Ward Clerk's office, on the other side of a door from where I was being tried.

I went in. The Bishop's office was a long, somewhat narrow room, furnished with a very long, narrow, highly polished wooden table with a much smaller table set crossways at its head. The gentlemen of the court clustered tightly up there, while I had a solitary chair down at its foot, and the length of that table stretched between us. There were four of them: the Bishop, his Second Counselor (the First Counselor ought to have been there too, but he had some other urgent business), the Ward Executive Secretary, and somebody else official. I forget. They were nice older men, like Rotarians, and none of them had the slightest idea what to do on this occasion. So they all smiled and shook hands with me and said that they were pleased to meet me there, which considering the circumstances cannot have been true, but which was apparently the only thing they knew to say when meeting someone.

The next order of business was an opening prayer. Now, Mormonism has a lay ministry, which means that there is no professionally trained clergy; for instance, I think that Bishop Lee is a builder or contractor or some such thing. And though services are generally heartfelt, they are not graceful. One peculiarity this breeds is that everyone learns to pray by listening to everyone else, and certain phrases get repeated over and over, prayer after prayer, until they lose their sense. So, sure enough, when the Ward Secretary stood up to pray, he started with "We thank Thee, O Lord, for bringing us together on this occasion--" and down at the foot of the table I almost lost my composure. It was so dumb and familiar, and so completely inappropriate.

Then we proceeded to read off all the correspondence, from me to the church, the church to me, the church to Bishop Lee, the Bishop to me, and the summons to my trial in full, for all the world as though we were reading the minutes of the previous meeting. Then Bishop Lee took out a three-ring binder which turned out to contain the looseleaf manual of instructions for bishops, and read me off the terms of excommunication. As I understand them, they amount to a complete severance of myself from the church, denying me all privileges of membership. I am barred from the temple, of course; also, the church will not permit me to pay any tithing or make other offerings of any sort.

On the other hand, I can attend meetings and am encouraged to repent, though if I want to re-enter the church I'll have to be re-tried and recommended by the same ward in which I was excommunicated. And there's one other thing, the official action that really and truly made me excommunicate: When the central organization of the church received word that I was out, someone formally went to the filing cabinet where my membership file was kept. And that someone, specifically and officially using red ink, took my folder and stamped across the face of it EXCOMMUNICATED. And do you know what? If I repent and am once more received into the church and my sins are washed away again, I will triumphantly be issued *a new file folder*. I thought this was wonderful, a sort of bureaucrat's revenge and redemption.

The court asked me if I had anything to say. I did; in fact, I had a dozen copies of my typed statement in hand. I stood up and read it off. I accused the church of profound sexism, of both covert and overt opposition to the women's rights movement, and of giving moral sanction to the continuing social and economic subjugation of women. Right off, that was enough to get me excommunicated; it was no more than what Sonia Johnson had been saying--in politer language, too--when they kicked her the hell out. I went on. I said that if any institution--church, family, whatever--required the continuing systematized oppression of some group for its continued survival, then it ought to be brought down with no regrets; and I charged "the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, its elders and leaders and the Prophet himself, with the guilt and burden of this injustice they knowingly perpetuate." That was fun, so I went still further. I denied the validity of the Book of Mormon and all church doctrine, said that they were not inspired of God, said that the Prophet and the Council of Twelve are not in direct communion with God, and repudiated my baptism, confirmation, and reception of the sacraments. As a sort of grand final hurrah, I denied the authority of the court to sit in judgement on me, and said that I had only appeared before it in order to separate myself from the church as thoroughly as possible.

There was silence for a few moments after I finished. Then Bishop Lee asked if I had anything more to say.

"Haven't I said *enough*?" I asked plaintively.

"I think you have."

He fumbled around with his three-ring binder, and I passed out copies of my statement to the people there. The Ward Secretary was grateful--he'd have had to copy the thing out longhand, otherwise--and complimented me on my organization. I thanked him.

I went to wait outside while they made their decision, and sat down in the chair next to Jerry's. "Do you think they'll do it?" he asked. I told him that there wasn't much room for question. All told, I was out in the hall for maybe five minutes before the door opened again and I resumed my place at the foot of the table.

Bishop Lee looked sober. "It is the judgment of this court that you should be excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," he said.

"I'm not surprised."

"Do you have any further statements to make?"

"No."

The Bishop stared at me authoritatively down the length of the table, trying hard to look awesome, so I stared back at him and put my chin up: Mammalian Politics 101, pretty basic stuff. "I think you will find that your life will be very different now-" he began.



I interrupted him. "I expect it will."

"Your life will be very different now," he continued sternly, "for you will find that the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was conferred upon you when you were baptized, has now been taken away from you, and you will no longer have the promptings of the Spirit to guide you in your decisions."

It was a little startling, after the complete mundanity of the proceedings thus far, to find myself on the receiving end of an authoritarian and rather acrimonious casting-out. I took a deep breath and said, "I don't think the gift of the Holy Spirit is yours to either give or take away."

All he came back with was "I think you'll find that saying a thing is so does not necessarily make it so," which I thought was a disappointingly pale finish to his melodramatic beginning. That over with, he asked one of the brethren to close the meeting with a prayer. And darned if the fellow didn't stand up, address the Almighty, and say "We thank Thee, O Lord, for bringing us together on this occasion--." I nearly swallowed my tongue trying to keep from laughing. I think I may have let out a couple of choked noises, but those would have been allowable signs of remorse in a newly-excommunicated viper.

And then, since it was time to go, all the brethren smiled and vigorously shook my hand again and said "It's been a pleasure to meet you, Sister Hayden." So--why not, the evening had been strange enough already--I shook hands with them all and said thank you thank you thank you, then grabbed my coat and purse and headed out the door, picking up Jerry as I went.

When we got back to Jerry & Suzle's house, I tried to go down into the basement to tell Patrick the news, but he was collating the first copy of *Telos 2* to surprise me, and wasn't finished yet. "Go away, get out of here, don't come in," he yelled up the stairs. "I don't want you down here."

"Funny," I yelled back down, "that's what the Bishop said."

The evening turned into an impromptu party; people dropped by to hear about what happened, and there were copies of the new *Telos* to pass around, and then in the middle of it Jane Hawkins and Ole Kvern and Vonda McIntyre phoned to say did we want a Frederick & Nelson chocolate cake to celebrate with? Because there was one left over from a party for Jane earlier that evening. So we made a pretty good time of it, and the cake was great.

When Vonda arrived she gave me a congratulatory hug and asked if I felt any different. I thought about it a minute, the grinned; I *did* feel different. After seventeen years, I finally felt washed clean. It's a very nice feeling, and I recommend it.

And here, where I ought to end this, I'm obliged to tell one more story, since I promised Vonda a long time ago and you somewhat more recently that I would explain the holy underwear of the Lord. I thought that it would fit somewhere into this narrative, but really, it doesn't touch on the matter of my excommunication; it's just a very odd facet of Mormonism that I don't understand. One night we were sitting around talking about Mormonism and someone--I don't remember who--repeated a rumor that she'd heard as a child, that married Mormons wear strange long underwear (with strategically-placed holes in it) that they can never take off, in the shower or anywhere else, and that when one set of underwear wears out they just put another one on top of it and let the first set *rot off*. "Isn't that strange?" she said. "Of course, it can't be true."

"Well," I said, "not *precisely*."

You have to understand that there are different levels of initiation in the LDS church. I was baptized and confirmed in a normal church setting, and that made me a member, but there are other rituals that take place in the temple, usually just before the initiate member gets married or goes on a mission, called "receiving your endowments." I don't know what that's all about, since it isn't spoken

of and I fell from grace before I was eligible to find out. (In my early teens I *did* take part in a temple ritual-baptism for the dead-that involved my getting dunked thirty times in an afternoon, in a great circular baptismal font supported on the backs of twelve life-size bronze oxen, on behalf of the inhabitants of a seventeenth-century Bavarian village; but that's another story entirely.)

The only thing that I know for sure about the receiving of endowments is that afterward the endowed member wears special underclothes called *garments*. These are like lightweight long underwear, short-sleeved, and end just above the knee. The really peculiar thing about them is that they have little marks stitched into them at nipple and belly button. These little things are technically known as "marks," and Mean Something, but I'm not sure what. My only other real datum is that my mother and father didn't shower in their underwear any more than I shower in mine, and changed theirs just as frequently.

I have one odd memory from childhood that may or may not relate to this. My parents were married secularly for years before they married in the temple, and so when they had their second marriage all five of us children attended. I remember being dressed all in white (mandatory in temple), and being left with my siblings in a variety of waiting rooms while my parents were off doing whatever-it-is. But at one point they briefly rejoined us, and I remember that what they were wearing was very strange. They had on white coveralls, like the clothing I wore at my baptism, but with the marks stitched into them. In addition, they had on little squarish white caps, like Masons' caps, and green silk loincloth-aprons appliqued in a fig leaf pattern. One other thing: I once visited the ruins of Nauvoo, Illinois, the site of an early, intense church settlement that was abandoned because of mob violence. Some of the foundations there had Masonic symbols carved into them, and I know that Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum Smith were Freemasons. Taken together with the odd ritual clothing and caps and aprons makes me wonder, but really, I don't know. Okay, Vonda? That's all I can tell you.

If there's a moral I'd derive from this whole long ramble, it would be this: next time you think of dismissing the person next to you on the bus or at the office as a polyester-suited mundane schmuck, remember that he or she could be a Mormon. Or something even stranger, that neither you nor I have ever heard of.

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