

Healing and Making Peace—In the World and the Church

By Eugene England

This essay examines the ways that feelings of being unjustly treated can lead us into terribly destructive cycles of revenge, and England then uses scripture and stories from history and Shakespeare to suggest that the only way to heal such rifts is through proactively following Christ's gospel and its emphasis on offering genuine mercy.

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IN THE FALL of 1955, Charlotte and I were living in Mapusaga, a small village in American Samoa. We had been married two years and had been missionaries to the Polynesians for a year and a half. Charlotte was five months pregnant. We were teaching a woman named Taligu E'e, who had Mormon relatives and who had agreed to meet us each Wednesday afternoon. We would walk to her *fale*, her circular, open, thatch-roofed home, and teach her in broken Samoan one of the lessons from the systematic missionary teaching guide. She would listen politely and impassively, her eyes looking down at the mats we sat on, and after we finished would serve us the meal she had prepared.

One Wednesday we taught her the plan of salvation. We told her how we had all chosen to come to earth, with Christ, who had offered himself as our Savior, and how important it was to follow him if we knew him. Then I told her how, by doing temple work, we could help those who had died without knowing Christ, but who were being taught about him in the spirit world. Her head came up as I told this story. Timidly she asked about her own ancestors who lived before Christian missionaries came to Samoa, whom she had been taught must be damned because they did not know Christ and were not baptized.

I repeated what I realized right then was indeed the gospel, the Good News. I assured her that God loves everyone equally who comes to earth and had provided a way for all, including her ancestors, to come to him. She kept her eyes on my face, and they slowly filled with tears. I sensed that a deep sorrow, a long-standing wound, was being healed in her, and I kept repeating, “O le Atua, alofa tele ia i latou uma,” which I *hoped* conveyed, “God really loves them all.” Taligu was baptized the day after we left Samoa. We had been transferred, by inspiration I believe, to Hawaii for our baby to be born where there were medical facilities that turned out to be needed to save Charlotte's life. We have heard that Taligu became the matriarch of a great Church family in Samoa, and we trust that she has done the saving work for her ancestors in the Samoan Temple.

What I know is that the revealed truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ healed her and brought her peace. Truth is an essential part of healing and of peacemaking—not just any truth and not truth administered in just any fashion. Paul talked about “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Mere “truth” can build weapons of mass destruction and motivate endless quarrels, even violence, over present rights and past wrongs. Truth can be a weapon to wound and increase animosity, to foster continuing adversarial escalation. But redemptive truth, spoken in genuine love, can heal. I’ll return later to the hard question of how.

But first another story about healing and peace. When I was bishop of a BYU married student ward, one of the members asked me to talk with her friend from outside the ward who had attempted suicide and was often terribly depressed. When I met her, I quickly found that, like many young Latter-day Saints I had counseled, this woman had a strong sense of justice and self-condemnation, but a weak sense of Christ’s mercy and love. She spoke quickly and harshly about her failings and her despair. I simply read to her from the Book of Mormon those passages that teach Christ’s mercy in the Atonement and convey the spirit of that at-one-ment. After a while peace visibly came over her, and she began to weep. When she left, she had been helped and perhaps healed a little.

And that, of course, reminds me of another story. When John Taylor was president of the Quorum of Twelve, two men came to him for resolution of a bitter quarrel that had alienated them from each other. President Taylor was an exceptionally good singer, with emotional power tempered in such experiences as singing for the Prophet in the final hour at Carthage Jail. He told the two, “Brethren, before I hear your case, I would like very much to sing one of the songs of Zion for you.” When he had finished, he commented that he never heard one of the Church’s hymns without wanting to hear another and so sang one more—and then another and another. Finally the two men were moved to tears and left, fully reconciled, without any discussion of their problem.

THE HEALING POWER OF MERCY

HEALING DOES HAPPEN; peace can come. These stories give me hope and some direction. The redemptive truths of the gospel of the Prince of Peace can heal—if they are conveyed in a way consistent with their own nature and such as to move others with their potential power. The central truth seems to be God’s unconditional love, the unique power of mercy to heal our souls and bring peace to our lives—but it must touch our hearts and wills as well as our minds and understanding.

I remember well one of the first sermons I heard Elder Marion D. Hanks give, shortly after he was called as a general authority nearly forty years ago. He told of two Mormon families who had been alienated from each other for years by an offense and then revenge—not speaking to each other, nursing their wounds and inflicting new ones. Finally, the father who had been first and most sinned *against* went to the other father and asked forgiveness and the two families were reconciled. I remember clearly how stunning it was for me to understand and *feel* for the first

time, from that simple anecdote, the claim of Shakespeare's Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, that mercy blesses the giver as well as the receiver. Mercy is, in a phrase Elder Hanks may have learned, as I did, from Lowell Bennion, "the homeopathic medicine of the soul."

However, the medicine of mercy does not work automatically or easily, though I believe it works directly and consistently when we really *work* at it. Again, understanding is not enough. Portia herself is a case in point. Disguised as a legal consultant in the court where Shylock the Jew has gone to claim his pound of flesh from the merchant Antonio for a defaulted loan, she admits that Shylock's claim is legal and in the name of justice must be honored, but she pleads nevertheless for mercy:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice . . .
 . . . consider this
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation.¹

That is, of course, the basic point of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We *all* sin beyond any ability to make amends, to make anything like full restitution, if we are left only to the demands of justice. The demands of justice, which our consciences make on ourselves and on each other, as well as the unanswered demands of a just God, leave us forever divided, unhealed, unatoned. The Atonement, originally pronounced At-one-ment, is possible only because of Christ's power to reunite us to ourselves, to heal us, through his self-sacrificing mercy, and we can only be reunited with each other through similar acts of mercy for each other.

But, of course, though Portia *speaks* of mercy brilliantly when she wants it for Antonio, she is not capable of *showing* it in a difficult situation, that is, when Shylock clearly *deserves* severe punishment. By applying the letter of the law, she saves Antonio from Shylock's revenge, but then she and Antonio use the law to take revenge on Shylock, not only threatening his life and taking his fortune but, most horrible crime of all, forcing him to renounce his faith and become a Christian. I believe Shakespeare wanted us to see that they thus miss a chance to heal the enmity between Jew and Christian, to be genuine peacemakers by using Godlike mercy.

THE NEED FOR MERCY IN THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH

THERE ARE GREAT wounds in the world and the Church that are in need of healing; there is continuing violence that needs genuine peacemakers. The recent, poignantly hopeful developments in Eastern Europe were brought about, I believe, not through President Reagan's military build-ups and threats, but by God's blessings on non-violent efforts by many people. But despite those developments—

which have ended the Cold War and suggest to the optimistic the great and marvelous possibility of a quick and relatively peaceful movement toward Christ's second coming—great wounds remain, as well as a great need for healers. Wars and rumors of wars continue in the Middle East, South America, Northern Ireland, and now Yugoslavia and the former USSR. The recent so-called peace talks in Madrid (more like shouting matches) only advertise the difficulties: Both sides engaged in violence and counter-violence even as the talks began; both sides staked out non-negotiable demands, couched in the language of justice, seeking a small advantage here or there. No one seemed able to think or talk of mercy, to consider extending even *small* acts of trust, of simply giving up either land or demands for land—or recognition or even old slogans—as a way to change the patterns of violence to something new. No one seemed to remember that tactics based on seeking advantage, in demands for justice, have *never* worked, certainly not permanently. No one seemed to remember that the only two occasions when nations *tried* something like mercy—the Marshall Plan, which rebuilt the economies of our former World War II enemies; and Anwar Sadat's sacrifices, which included eventually the giving of his own life, to achieve peace with Israel—those two acts of mercy indeed brought the only lasting peace between enemies in modern times.

There are also great wounds in the Church. The Mormon intellectual community is riven in two and reduced to mutual alienation and public name-calling. Most of those in the seminary and institute system, along with many BYU religion teachers, are separated from those in the unsponsored or independent sector, including much of the BYU faculty outside of Religious Education. There is scandalous lack of respect, isolation in effectively exclusive symposia and publications, with almost no learning from each other through dialogue or even sympathetic reading of each other's writings. This division has recently gone public and escalated. The non-Mormon press has emphasized and perhaps created animosity by exaggerating the effects of controversial articles in the independent Mormon press or thoughtless or provocative expressions by independent symposia participants—and now, in response, public statements by BYU professors and even Church leaders seem to have hardened divisions and escalated antagonisms. We even have the absurd spectacle of two “alternate voices”—the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.) and Signature Books—engaged in name-calling and threatening lawsuits because, it seems to me, one is aggressively proud of its orthodoxy, the other aggressively proud of its independence—and neither are very merciful. Add to this the deepening divisions over gender issues and the wounds that many Mormon women feel—divisions between Mormon feminists and not only most Mormon men but many of their sisters. In the late sixties, when there was much turmoil within the Church and anger and even action against the Church over our discriminations against blacks, there was some evidence indicating that when attention became focused on Mormon discriminations against women we would suffer even greater turmoil within and antagonism from without. And that is happening. As Susan Faludi shows in her recent book, *Backlash, The Undeclared War Against American Women*, the gains women made in the seventies have been more than reversed in the eighties. Abetted by government indifference, male anxiety has

tended to *increase* prejudice and discrimination in a way that for many finally became visible when fourteen male senators struggled and failed to deal either justly or mercifully with Anita Hill and her allegations. Now many women are responding in despair and anger, and backlash escalates against backlash. We have great need for healing and for healers.

During the same time as the national gains for—and then the backlash against—women, Mormon women seem to have experienced a *reduction*, in the past twenty-five years, not only of their independence and effectiveness in their own organization and publications, but even in their overt and formal healing role. In Samoa, when we were isolated as a missionary couple, Charlotte assisted me as we used our shared priesthood in administering to the sick. The official Church handbook, Elder John A. Widtsoe's *Priesthood and Church Government*, quoted Joseph Smith as an authority that such a procedure was perfectly proper.² Of course, many women, like Eliza R. Snow and Patty Sessions, had healed through laying on hands and had brought peace through speaking and singing in tongues, and such gifts, including the special healing blessing administered to pregnant women, had continued up into the 1940s.³

Charlotte no longer gives blessings with me. We are obedient to what seems to be an official withdrawal of the gift that LDS women once enjoyed to be formal healers. LDS women of course continue in a healing role by giving blessings to each other in the temple and have an extremely powerful role to play as *informal* healers and peacemakers; in fact, they bear for us all the central ideals and qualities of the healing arts, both symbolically and literally, and that function *must* not be lost in any backlash against women, in or out of the Church. Let me explain what I mean by that apparently sexist claim about a special healing role for women.

GOD'S WAY OF HEALING

BASED ON YEARS of studying ancient cultures and their mythologies, contemporary primitive cultures, and classical literature, French anthropologist Rene Girard has provided the most convincing theory about how violence begins in all cultures and relationships, how it then perpetuates itself and spreads like a plague, and how cultures survive by ritualizing violence in things like duels and executions and football games and by focusing their violence on individuals or groups or even animals as scapegoats. He explains how cultures continue to harbor the plague of violence because they don't face the violence in themselves and then truly heal it by using mercy to absorb and end it.⁴

Girard provides convincing analysis of a mechanism familiar to us all. Any two beings have desires and those desires inevitably focus on the same things—a toy, a piece of land, the highest office, global prestige, or academic honor. The intensity of each rival's desires increases simply because the other desires the same thing. In the process, the two rivals become more and more like each other in their actions and emotions, literal doubles, imitative of each other in what they want and the violence they are willing to use—until there is all-out war or a scapegoat is found on which to discharge the violence and then hide it for awhile until it breaks out

again. Every childhood quarrel, if you'll think back to your siblings or cousins or playground friends, goes through this process—and so does every war in history. Imitative desire or jealousy leads to an offense, which must be answered in the name of justice, with additional blows or force for good measure, to make *certain* justice is done, then reciprocation, revenge, again with added force in the name of justice, etc. Meanwhile, the antagonists increasingly adopt the same evil means, no matter who was most “right” at first or most self-righteously accused the other of being evil. For instance, by the end of World War II, first the British and then the United States adopted high-level saturation bombing of civilian populations—which we had condemned as evil and barbaric when the Germans used it earlier. Such imitative escalation culminated in the killing of hundreds of thousands in Hamburg and Dresden, and then Hiroshima and Nagasaki in what President J. Reuben Clark called the “crowning savagery of the war.”⁵

The mechanism of imitative rivalry followed by escalating violence seems inevitable, but Girard's study has led him to a remarkable conclusion: There is one and only one successful way to stop it, and that is through the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Girard, who started as an agnostic, has come to believe that the Bible is the truest book in the world, in fact, divine. It alone reveals, rather than suppressing in rituals or scapegoats, the violence in humans and gives the solution, it shows God struggling against this universal human mechanism through his chosen people and his divine son. God fails to make much head way throughout the Old Testament, much of which is a record of human violence and human attempts to blame their violence on God. In the story of Joseph extending mercy and forgiveness to his brothers who sold him into Egypt, in the suffering servant passages (such as Isaiah 53), and in other breakthroughs of the voice of God to prophets, and culminating in the life, teachings, and death of Christ, we have gradually been given the answer, which is simple to say but not at all simple to really believe and apply.⁶

The answer is contained in the Sermon on the Mount, which teaches the ethical solution; in Christ's maledictions against the Pharisees (Matthew 23:13–39), which require the Jews to recognize the violence in themselves—that they have always killed the prophets and will kill him; and supremely and finally in Christ's death. Christ does not die as a traditional, guilty scapegoat, who *hides* the sins and violence of the community. Rather, Christ insists on being recognized as an innocent victim, a sacrifice whose perfect forgiving love shows us the cost of our violence and the only way to stop it. He lived out his teachings and sealed his testimony with the divine authority of his perfectly innocent blood.

The teachings are crystal clear: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:44–45); “Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36); “Resist not evil” (Matthew 5:39); “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

The Book of Mormon clearly reinforces those teachings with ample historical

evidence, as Hugh Nibley has pointed out, that conflict of any kind, including war, occurs *only* when *both sides* have sinned.⁷ When *either* side is willing to obey Christ's commands, to lay down their weapons or angry words and stop fighting or competing, even if they sacrifice their lives, as Christ did, they stop the violence and convert their enemies (Alma 24:17–26).

Modern prophets have reinforced this answer. President Kimball chose June 1976, during the very height of the United States's self-congratulatory celebration of its bicentennial, to remind us, in a First Presidency message in the *Ensign*, of the violence in ourselves as Americans and Mormons:

We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God.⁸

He then called us to trust the Lord and do the only thing that has ever brought peace: “to carry the Gospel to our enemies, that they will no longer be our enemies.” President Kimball, of course, did not mean simply to send missionaries to Russia or China or Iraq, but to proclaim in all we say and do the gospel, the Good News that healed the Samoan convert Charlotte and I taught—that God loves us all unconditionally and expects us to do the same. We are to *act* like Christians toward our enemies by working for and showing consistent mercy.

Christ taught, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall *obtain* mercy” (Matthew 5:7; emphasis added). In other words, we should give mercy instead of justice to enemies because that is the *only* hope to move them to give mercy back rather than returning retribution for our “justice” until we have continuing war, as we certainly still have in the Middle East.

Modern prophets have not only reminded us of the *answer* to violence, but also of the *mechanism* by which we unleash that violence if we refuse that answer. Hear the First Presidency in 1942, at the beginning of World War II:

There is an eternal law that rules war and those who engage in it. . . . The Savior laid down a universal principle [“all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”] upon which He placed no limitations as to time, place, cause, or people involved [whether righteous or wicked]. . . . [T]his is a universal law, for force always begets force.⁹

Each of us can think of many examples. Remember when the United States bombed Ghaddafi's capital city in Libya in 1986, killing perhaps forty people, many civilians. That action, we claimed, was a justified response to evidence that Libyans had killed perhaps five Americans in bombings in Europe. But of course Libyans could have claimed *they* were only responding to American violence in siding with and helping Israel in its occupations of Arab lands and continuing raids that had killed hundreds of Palestinians and others in Lebanese villages. Whatever the case, after the raid our government claimed that through force we had successfully stopped Libyan force, and most Americans seemed to agree. Now evidence has come to light that the airliner downed over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing more than 250 people,

was destroyed by a Libyan bomb, and our leaders are now talking about how we might achieve a “just” revenge. So we have gone from a general perceived injustice, our lethal tilt toward Israel, to five Americans killed, to forty Libyans killed, to 250 randomly killed, as force has not settled anything, but has begotten even greater force. And what will be our next step?

Why is it so hard for our government—and apparently most of the rest of us, who continue to support its deadly policies in the Middle East—to learn what Tom Sutherland, one of the American hostages recently freed in Beirut has learned? In an interview in December 1991 on National Public Radio, he was asked how he felt about the call by some other former hostages for revenge and about government efforts to glean from the hostages information about their captors that would help achieve that. He responded, “I disagree totally with those who want to punish hostage-takers. Revenge or retribution of any kind is wrong.” His wife, Jane, added, “We have prayed and worked for years for this resolution, an unconditional release. When people in the Middle East have been saying, ‘You’ve done this to me and I’ve done this to you,’ and this has been going on for thousands of years, it’s time to just break it and stop!” Amen.

VIOLENCE, MERCY, AND HEALING IN SHAKESPEARE

RENE GIRARD CLAIMS that, next to the Bible, the clearest revelations of the violence mechanism are in William Shakespeare and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Think of how often Shakespeare shows doubles becoming rivals and then becoming more and more alike and more violent, from the twins in the *Comedy of Errors* to Iago and Othello to Hamlet and his uncle to the Trojans and Greeks in *Troilus and Cressida*. I’ve studied Shakespeare closely, and Girard is right. I’m convinced most of the plays show that revenge, in the name of justice, is always tempting, *seems* morally justified to the avenger and the audience, and always escalates in self-righteous violence. The revengers become more and more like their targets, though each first saw that target as a thoroughly evil perpetuator of crime. In the name of righteous justice, the revenger inevitably loads the stage with corpses by the end—and the violence does not stop then, but merely continues in the next generation of reciprocal revenge.

Shakespeare also knew how hard it is for even rational Christian people to stop this cycle. He developed a dramatic device to teach and shame his audiences into understanding and a change of heart. I call it the “bandwagon effect.” He starts by showing a wrong being done by some despicable character whom we all love to hate and enjoy seeing get his comeuppance. As the victims and their friends begin to take revenge, say on the self-righteous prig Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* or the blood-thirsty Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, we cheer them on. We get on the bandwagon of justified revenge. However, a point comes when a sensitive, moral audience sees or feels that things have gone too far, that the revenge spirit has exceeded all possible justice, has perhaps inevitably done much more harm than good and so should never have even started. We want to get off the bandwagon and wish we never had gotten on. Shakespeare’s drama moves us to *feel* what it is like

to approve violence—and then to be ashamed we have approved it. That point comes in *Twelfth Night* when Malvolio is put in a dungeon and begins to go mad. It comes in *The Merchant of Venice* at least by the time Shylock is forced to become a Christian. It should come in *Hamlet* at least by the time Hamlet refuses a chance to kill the king at his prayers—because then he might go to heaven. Hamlet refuses this chance to obey the ghost not out of mercy or indecision, but in what Elizabethan audiences—and genuine Christians of today—would recognize as a blasphemous desire to destroy Claudius’s soul as well as his life. That, of course, was what the ghost said was the most horrible thing Claudius had done to *him*, killing him in his sins before he could repent. So Hamlet has become just like his uncle, just as evil, just as poisonous and dangerous and even soul-destroying.

But Hamlet is a greater and more complex soul, and he has a moment of turning back that is crucial to our understanding of the role of women in healing I mentioned earlier. Near the end of the play, he confronts Laertes, whose father Polonius he has killed and whose sister Ophelia, whom he supposedly loved, he has destroyed in his obsession with revenge. For the first time, during that confrontation in Ophelia’s grave, Hamlet sees, through Laertes, exactly what he has become—a rash, bloody revenger in the name of justice, ranting and wrestling in a grave and trailing death and hell in his wake. In the next scene, Hamlet says to Horatio, “I have a [mis]giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman . . . —the readiness is all . . . let be.”¹⁰ Exactly. He experiences what men have, to their own injury, relegated to the feminine and accordingly devalued in Western culture—that is, mercy, compassion, patience, a willingness to *be*. As he earlier debated in his famous soliloquy, “To be, or not to be,”¹¹ he has struggled to determine whether it is nobler to “suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” that is, to patiently accept God’s world, to live in mercy, to be, or on the other hand “to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them,” that is, to take revenge in the spirit of justice and likely be justly killed, *not* to be. The question whether to be or not to be is exactly the fundamental religious and moral question whether to live by “womanly” mercy or to die by “manly” revenge. Often, in *Hamlet*, men disclaim their tears as “women’s weapons” and take heart that after weeping “the woman will be out,” and then they can proceed with male honor to revenge.

In his speech about a “misgiving,” Hamlet, for a moment, lets the woman in him turn him back, but it is too late. The mechanism of violence he has unleashed by killing Polonius and threatening Claudius soon catches him up again into the revenge spirit in the bloody ending of the play.

Shakespeare knew that the only solution to the revenge mechanism did in fact lie with “the woman” in us—or literally women in Western culture, who have been left relatively free from the male cycles of violence and continuing war. So his great healers are women, not because he thought men couldn’t learn to heal, but to be true to the feminine symbolization of the healing qualities. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare shows that revenge is the *wrong* answer to evil, and in *King Lear* he shows the right answer. Cordelia heals her sinful, proud, rash father, Lear, though he cruelly casts her off, by persisting in unconditional love for him. And Shakespeare makes the only ultimate source of healing perfectly clear. At one point he has Cordelia say, “O dear

father, / It is thy business that I go about.”¹² She thus invokes, unknown to herself but clearly in the audience’s minds, the young Christ in the temple. Later a gentleman says to Lear, as he runs away, “Thou hast one daughter / Who redeems all nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought her to,” invoking not only the two evil sisters and Cordelia but also Adam and Eve and Christ and, therefore, unmistakably showing Cordelia’s parallel to Christ as healer. And Paulina, in *The Winter’s Tale*, is given a unique Christian name in a play in which all other names are Greek to invoke directly the Pauline Christian way of salvation, which she applies to a sinful, violent man—healing him to the point of a stunning resurrection on stage.

Shakespeare’s healers have much to teach us. They are not simple dreamy wimps. Like Christ, they not only love but speak *the truth* in love. Cordelia refuses to play her father’s public game of getting his daughters to flatter him for their inheritances, she is thus able to reveal to him his fundamental sin of equating love with quantity and *quid pro quo*—with *justice* in some form. Her sharp refusal unleashes storms of guilt and madness in Lear that are finally healed only by her persistent mercy. Likewise, Paulina forces Leontes to face the harm his violent jealousy has done and then to do penance for sixteen years—until he is ready, and willing, to accept mercy. But Shakespeare clearly had the enormously powerful insight that the crucial, final barrier to repentance, and thus to genuine healing and peace, is precisely the *shame* that sinners feel *because* of the barbs of truth and justice. Lear, for instance, runs away from Cordelia’s efforts to save him from her sisters’ cruelty and his own madness because “a sovereign shame so elbows him: his own unkindness . . . these things sting his mind so venomously.”¹³ Only absolute mercy, eventually only the infinite mercy of Christ, has the power to break through the bands, the shame, of that sense of justice so we can be healed.

MAKING PEACE THROUGH PAINFUL TRUTH

CLEARLY, THE ART of healing involves helping someone through a painful process of both facing the truth and taking on new constructs, new ways of thinking and being. The 1991 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize is Aung San Suu Kyi, the non-violent leader of Burma’s democratic opposition movement. Now under permanent house arrest, she once led a protest past kneeling soldiers aiming directly at her and was saved only by a last-minute cease-fire. The military junta offered to let her leave the country if she would stay out of politics, but she has refused. Remaining totally isolated, she apparently sells her belongings to pay bills. She has likened her dream, her vision of being a peacemaker, to a traditional Burmese poem:

Emerald cool we may be
As water in cupped hands
But oh that we might be
As splinters of glass
In cupped hands.¹⁴

“Splinters of glass” sounds like an image of violence rather than healing or peace, but I believe it captures one crucial element of the non-violent healing process that

leads to genuine peace. Martin Luther King was often accused of inciting violence, but his disciplined practice of non-violent direct action only brought out into the open the violence already operating within racism. He thus not only provoked our consciences toward healing racism in this country but prevented a terribly violent civil war that could easily have happened if that overt racism had continued. In Reverend King the United States was blessed with more than many of us deserved.

Similarly, the Mormon independent sector and non-Mormon press have been accused of opening wounds and inciting harsh and even violent antagonism through publishing information and opinions about people and issues that we would rather not face. Indeed, when the September 1991 *Sunstone* appeared, detailing Elder Paul Dunn's fabricated war and baseball stones, I was offended. I have known Elder Dunn for many years and respect and love him as a kind and generous man and a moderate and sane theologian, and I wondered if he couldn't be spared all this. But as I read the extremely thorough and balanced package that the editors had put together, including Elder Dunn's own interview with the press and essays by William A. Wilson and Richard Poll which placed the matter of improving on stones in larger context, I changed my mind. Thinking this through could be—and *was* for me—a painful, yet healing process. It will help me both be more careful with the truth and be more forgiving of others in their efforts to tell redemptive truths. On 26 October 1991, shortly after the *Sunstone* issue, Elder Dunn published a letter of apology in the *LDS Church News*, and I realized again how healing a simple admission and apology can be. I have seen evidence that the healing has multiplied throughout the Church as many, who before were angry, defensive, or inclined to seek justice, have responded to Elder Dunn with mercy and forgiveness and increased love.

Besides requiring sharp truth, healing requires change. Shakespeare knew well a Renaissance tradition of healing the *soul*, based on helping people imagine new possibilities for themselves. The therapists were skilled in convincing their patients to try on new constructs by telling them stories or even inventing dramas for them to literally or imaginatively participate in. For instance, Andre Du Laurens, in 1599, published a book on “Melancholike Diseases” that tells of various ruses therapists use to cure patients' delusions. One case tells of a man who was dying because he would not urinate for fear “all his towne would be drowned.”¹⁵ Rational arguments failed, but finally the physicians set a neighboring house on fire and had the town officials come in and plead with the man that the only way to save the town was for him to urinate upon the fire, which he did—and he was healed of his delusion. Other medical books of the time, which Shakespeare obviously knew, indicate this kind of therapeutic device was not only a common and accepted part of the healing tradition, but that there was a theory to explain it. William Vaughan, in *Approved Directions for Health, both Naturall and Artificiall* (first published in 1604), clarifies the theory:

Wherein consists the cure of the spiritual maladies? . . . The Physitian . . . must invent and devise some spiritual pageant to fortify and help the imaginative facultie, which is corrupted and depraved; yea, he must endeavor to deceive and imprint another conceit, whether it be wise or foolish, in the Patients braine, thereby to put out all former phantasies.¹⁶

Shakespeare's plays are full of such "spiritual pageants," plays within the plays that various healers design to help cure the souls of their patients. I am more and more convinced that Shakespeare saw his plays as such spiritual pageants, designed to imprint new conceits upon the imaginations of his audiences and thus cure their spiritual maladies. He was especially concerned about how to heal the spirit of revenge, the willingness to do harm in the name of justice, which I believe he saw as our chief human evil, the one that led to all the others, including sexism. I think he not only wanted us to see how Cordelia and Paulina heal sinful and violent men through telling them the truth and loving them unconditionally, even sacrificially; I think he wanted us, in Gloucester's words, to "*see it feelingly*"¹⁷—that is, to understand with our emotions so that we would be healed through mercy as well.

HEALING THROUGH IMAGINATIVE MERCY

HOW THEN CAN we be healers? One way is to create and repeat stones, dramas of the imagination, that enable us to imagine new possibilities for ourselves. Levi Peterson, presently our finest Mormon storyteller, does this. Rather than preaching at us, he tells us stories that dramatize the consequences of believing in a harsh God of justice as opposed to the rewards of accepting and passing on God's tender mercy—his redemptive love even for human nightsoil.

From such stories we can learn about *imaginative* mercy. A few years ago I saw the results of a *failure* to be imaginative about mercy. A bright young LDS state department official, on a visit back to BYU, was telling me, with some deserved pride, how he had been selected to be part of a two-hour session, just before the Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Iceland, to plan strategies for Reagan to use. He related how the group discussed the various bargaining gambits for Reagan to use to get some small advantage or even trick Gorbachev into a disadvantage. I finally asked my friend if anyone, during those two hours, had suggested one proposal that Reagan might make for a way our two nations might *cooperate*, say in solving some vexing Third-World problem of disease or hunger, with a view toward building trust between us through a useful cooperative endeavor. Had anyone suggested a unilateral offer that we might make to reduce tensions by reducing weapons, some act of pure mercy we might make in hopes of a similar response? With surprise and then remorse, he said no to both questions.

Rene Girard gives us a theory for what the scriptures and modern prophets say plainly: force, even "righteous," justified force, almost always begets force; mercy at least sometimes begets mercy. Shakespeare dramatizes the consequences of revenge, of any kind of adversarial undertaking, even for "justice," and shows us how to heal by telling the truth in love and by being inventive, creating new imaginative constructs, rather than being confrontive and adversarial. Here's an example of how. For some time, even long before President Hinckley's recent advice against them, I have thought public prayers to Mother in Heaven were not a good idea. They tended to be taken—and perhaps offered—as political statements rather than as means of uniting believers in worship. But what a wonderful alternative, an imaginative new construct, that Carol Lynn Pearson reports a Relief Society presi-

dent in California practices. She prays, sometimes even publicly, to Heavenly Father *about* Heavenly Mother, expressing love to her through him and asking for more knowledge about her. Certainly no one can be offended, and I believe her prayers will be answered. Such imaginative devices, developed through inspiration because they are in the merciful spirit of peace, can help heal us and bring peace in this difficult time.

There are other practical means. We can *all* try to practice, even when others do not, the fundamental counsel of the scriptures for handling differences or perceived offenses: Go to thy brother or sister alone and talk it through, in prayer, in love, with a song, with apologies, with whatever it takes. This means we do *not* write to higher authority or go to the press with public statements or resort to adversarial, escalating responses. We work it out, between each other and in a spirit of mercy, within the bonds and bounds of the Church and gospel.

THE CHURCH AS A SCHOOL FOR LOVE & MERCY

I BELIEVE THE Church is as true as the gospel—indeed is whatever it means to be the only true and living church on the earth—precisely because it provides the best place to confront each other. Because we are assigned geographically to our congregations, and because we are thoroughly a lay church, we constantly face others, and work with people whom we would not have chosen, in assigned roles that produce problems that must be solved with mercy. In this context, we *can* learn the most important human lesson, the one (and only one) which makes it possible for us to accept the Atonement: to love unconditionally as a preparation to be able to *accept* unconditional love from Christ.

Let me try to dramatize this point with a little quiz (as a teacher I can't resist; just put a yes or no by each question):

1. Have you ever endured a boring Sunday School lesson?
2. How about a politically or theologically offensive priesthood or Relief Society presentation?
3. Have you sat through a badly prepared, even embarrassing, sacrament meeting talk?
4. Have you been the victim of unrighteous dominion by a leader over you?

Now, while you are feeling perhaps a bit put upon by other Mormons, remembering all you have *endured* in our unprofessional, sometimes bumbling, lay Church, let's try a few more questions:

1. Have you ever *given* a boring Sunday School lesson?
2. How about a one-sided and offensive presentation?
3. A badly-prepared or inept talk?
4. Have you ever *exercised* unrighteous dominion in the Church?
(Probably only those who have had a chance, like myself.)

That's my point: The Church is true in large part because it provides an opportunity, for all who are willing, to *endure* all these things—and also to be *guilty* of them—and thus to learn how to be merciful, to be patient and forgiving, to accept

forgiveness and help, to love unconditionally so we can accept the unconditional love of the Atonement and be saved. Martin Luther called marriage “the school of love.” Because the Church is like marriage in its unremitting exposure of people and their weaknesses to each other in a context where covenants help us stick with the process of working through those problems, it too is the school of love, a place to learn to heal and make peace.

The Church makes us responsible for the personal, marital, physical, and spiritual welfare of people we may not already love (or may even heartily dislike), and thus we learn to love them. It stretches and challenges us, when we are disappointed and exasperated, in ways we would not otherwise choose to be—and thus gives us a chance to be made better than we might choose to be. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:22).

But finally we must be *willing*. Let me conclude by telling some stories about people in (and out of) the Church who were *willing* to be merciful. Kenneth Godfrey is a fine Mormon historian and a Seminaries and Institutes area supervisor in Northern Utah. When he was about five he would walk out each night to meet his father, who drove a school bus and had to park it a mile from their home, which was on a small farm. One night, just as Ken ran the last few yards to his father’s arms, a large high school senior came up out of hiding in the weeds near the road and started calling Ken’s father names. He had kicked the boy off the bus that evening for causing trouble, and now the boy was intent on revenge. He threatened Ken’s father, who first held him down and tried to talk quietly and quell his anger, but then let him up. Suddenly the boy, who was actually bigger than Ken’s father, hit him in the face. Ken remembers how terrified he was and then how amazed when his father simply stood and let himself be hit in the face again before the boy turned and ran away. He remembers his dad, with the blood drying on his face, taking him by the hand and walking home. He remembers hearing for a long time the gossip that spread through the town about his father’s cowardice, and he remembers feeling ashamed for him. For years, as he passed the house where the boy lived after he married, he felt that shame and a helpless rage, hoping that some day he could grow large and strong enough to avenge the beating of his father, but he never did.

When Ken was a high school senior himself, eating in a cafe with his date after a dance, the man who had hit his father twelve years earlier came into the cafe drunk. He went to Ken’s booth and sat by him and began to cry. “Your father gave me the worst beating of my life twelve years ago,” he said, “and someday, when I am sober, I am going to be man enough to tell him how sorry I am for what I did and ask him to forgive me.” However, it was Ken’s father, ten years after that, when he was called as a patriarch and felt he could not function in his office until he had completely forgiven and been forgiven, who went to the man who had hit him, asked to be forgiven, and was reconciled.

Another fine Mormon historian has also told me about a healing person in the Church. A few years ago stake presidents were instructed to call in the editors and some writers for *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* and talk with them about their activities. Stake presidents responded in a variety of ways. The historian’s stake president called him on a Sunday afternoon and asked if he could visit him. My friend, who

himself had recently finished a term in the stake presidency, wondered if he was to receive a new call. The new stake president arrived, with his counselors—and asked him if they could give him a blessing. The stake president blessed my friend that he could continue to do his important work as a historian with integrity and skill and continue to be a blessing to the Church.

In the fall of 1990, shortly after attending our stake conference, I received a letter from a BYU faculty member who lives in my stake. He reminded me of the powerful spiritual presence in our Saturday evening session and then told of a particular impression that had come to him when he saw me there. He had felt simultaneously scolded and blessed: scolded because he had let his differences in doctrinal perception keep him from feeling and expressing the kind of gospel love we ought to have for each other; blessed to feel that love for me right then, along with a desire to express it and put other things in perspective. He reported to me that he first thought, “But Gene believes and teaches doctrines which I think have serious, even dangerous implications for those with tender or unsettled spiritual roots,” and then felt a quick response to that thought: “That is not the issue here. The issue is love. All people have doctrinal misperceptions that will someday need correcting.” He told of pondering that experience again and again and finally deciding to share it with me—“acknowledging my own inadequacies, and seeking to do what is right.” I say, God give us all the courage to be such good disciples of Christ as this dear and now even dearer colleague and thus to make the Church a place of healing and peacemaking, not by ignoring differences or errors, but by loving and talking despite them—because we are willing to be merciful.

Emma Lou Thyne is an eminent Mormon poet and essayist and constant laborer for peace. She has a new book about healing and being healed that I hope all will read.¹⁸ Ten years ago, in *Exponent II*, she shared an example of willing peacemaking experienced by her friend Jan Cook:

She and her husband were for three years in Africa, in “deepest Africa, where *The Gods Must Be Crazy* was filmed.” His work had taken them and their three small children there, and any meetings attended were in their own living room with only themselves as participants. By their third Christmas, Jan was very homesick. She confessed this to a good friend, a Mennonite; Jan told her how she missed her own people, their traditions, even snow. Her friend sympathized and invited her to go with her in a month to the Christmas services being held in the only Protestant church in the area, saying that there would be a reunion there of all the Mennonite missionaries on the continent.

It took some talking for Jan to persuade her husband, but there they were being swept genially to the front of the small chapel. It felt good, being in on Christmas in a church again. The minister gave a valuable sermon on Christ; the congregation sang familiar carols with great vitality. Then, at the very end of the meeting, a choir of Mennonite missionaries from all over Africa rose from their benches

and made their way to stand just in front of Jan and her family. Without a word, they began singing. Without a leader, without music, without text, they sang, “Come, Come Ye Saints.” Every verse.

Disbelieving, totally taken by surprise, Jan and her husband drenched the fronts of their Sunday best with being carried home on Christmas. . . . When they finished, Jan’s friend said simply, “For you. Our gift.”

Jan’s Mennonite friend had sent to Salt Lake City for the music to the hymn that she knew Jan loved, had had it duplicated and distributed to every Mennonite missionary in Africa; they in turn had learned it very carefully to bring the spirit of Christ to their own reunion where foreigners to their faith would be waiting to hear.¹⁹

I believe that apostles are indeed special witnesses of Christ and his mercy. One of those who served as an apostle during my boyhood, Elder George F. Richards, bore witness about mercy in a general conference right after World War II. Many who heard him had lost sons or husbands in the war, and all had suffered in various ways and had reason to still be bitter. I remember vividly the feelings of fear and hatred that the words Jap and Nazi still evoked in me as a young teenager, conditioned by the propaganda movies and newsreels during and even after the war. Elder Richards chose this time to put aside his prepared general conference manuscript and talk instead about “Love for Mankind.” He reviewed the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, “in life and in death, a voluntary gift for us, a manifestation of love that has no comparison.” He professed love for all who could hear him, “in the Church or out of the Church, . . . good or bad, whatever their condition of life,” and reminded his hearers that in the pre-existence we lived in love together and “ought to love one another just the same here.”²⁰ Then he said, “The Lord has revealed to me, by dreams, something more than I ever understood or felt before.” He first told of a dream from forty years before, in which he stood in the presence of the Savior and felt such “love for him that I have not words to explain.” Then he told of a dream from just a few years previous, toward the end of the war, in which he and some of his associates were in a courtyard where German soldiers led by Adolf Hitler were preparing weapons to slaughter them. Then a circle was formed, with Hitler and his men on the inside facing inward. Elder Richards dreamed he stepped inside the circle, faced Hitler, and spoke to him “something like this”:

“I am your brother. You are my brother. In our heavenly home we lived together in love and peace. Why can we not so live here on the earth?”

And it seemed to me that I felt in myself, welling up in my soul, a love for that man, and I could feel that he was having the same experience, and presently he arose, and we embraced each other and kissed each other, a kiss of affection.

Then the scene changed so that our group was within the circle, and he and his group were on the outside, and when he came around to where I was standing, he stepped inside the circle and embraced me again, with a kiss of affection.

I think the Lord gave me that dream. Why should I dream of this man, one of the greatest enemies of mankind, and one of the wickedest, but that the Lord should teach me that I must love my enemies, and I must love the wicked as well as the good?

Now, who is there in this wide world that I could not love under those conditions, if I could only continue to feel as I felt then?²¹

I must confess that, for me, that is hard doctrine. I feel very much like the older brother in Christ's parable, who *resented* the "injustice" of the father's mercy for the returning prodigal. Hitler unleashed on our world the most extensive and penetrating horror we know about in human history, including a war that killed tens of millions and extermination camps in which there was degradation and suffering beyond our capacity to imagine or even think about. I have read the diaries of those who suffered and have tried to write about them, to bear witness to their anguish. To think of a "kiss of affection" for Adolf Hitler brings me close to nausea.

Yet I want to believe Elder Richards, that humble apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to believe that even Hitler is my brother, that we once lived in love and peace and that through the power of mercy we can do so again. I want to believe that the very worst is redeemable, that anyone can be healed through mercy—because then I can be too.

NOTES

1. *The Merchant of Venice*, 4 1 184-200 All Shakespeare references are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, eds. G. Blakemore Evans, et al (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
2. John A. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 357.
3. Linda King Newell, "Gifts of the Spirit: Women's Share," *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, eds. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 111-50.
4. Rene Girard's main ideas can be reviewed at length in *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).
5. J. Reuben Clark, "Demand for Proper Respect of Human Life," *Improvement Era* (November 1946): 689.
6. For a short and accessible summary of this conviction, see Girard's "The Bible Is Not a Myth," *Literature and Belief* 4 (1984) 3-12; this was a Forum Address given at BYU in the fall of 1983. For a thorough analysis of the Bible as a testament against violence, see Girard's *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987).
7. Nibley develops this insight most thoroughly in chapter 12 ("Good People and Bad People") of *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), especially 342-46. See also his "If There Must Needs Be Offense," *Ensign* 1 (July 1971) 54, and "Scriptural Perspectives on How to Survive the Calamities of the Last Days," *BYU Studies* 25 (Winter 1985) 7-27.
8. Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign* 6 (June 1976), 4.
9. The First Presidency, *One Hundred and Twelfth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1942), 95.
10. *Hamlet*, 5: 2, 215-24.
11. *Hamlet*, 3: 1, 57.

12. *King Lear*, 4: 3, 22–23.
13. *King Lear*, 4: 3, 42–46.
14. Quoted in *Newsweek*, 28 October 1991, 80.
15. Andre Du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preservation of Sight, of Melancholike Diseases, of Rheume, and of Old Age* (London: Felix Kingston, 1599), 103.
16. William Vaughan, *Approved Directions for Health, both Naturall and Spirituall*, 4th ed. (London: T S for Roger Jackson, 1612), 89.
17. *King Lear*, 4: 6, 149.
18. Emma Lou Thayne, *Things Happen: Poems of Survival* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991).
19. Jan Cook, “The Gift,” *Exponent II* (Fall 1982), 6.
20. George F Richards, *Improvement Era* (November 1946) 694.
21. Richards, 758.

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