

“No Cause, No Cause”: An Essay Toward Reconciliation

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Speech delivered to the BYU English Department in 1997 (six months before England retired from that university) but not published until after his death.

Originally published: *Sunstone* 121 (January 2002): 31–39.

WHEN I WAS quite young, I had two profound spiritual experiences, more like encounters, that became the grounding realities of my life. One convinced me of the personal reality of the Savior and that what he most fundamentally requires of us is total consecration of our means, our time, and our talents in service to others; it provided a touchstone of feeling by which I have measured all moral and religious matters since—that is, I came to judge whether something was from the Savior by its resonance with that feeling. The other experience convinced me of the divine mission of the Church and the divine appointment, by Jesus Christ, of the apostles and prophets who direct the Church. Though those convictions have matured in comprehension and have been sorely tried, they have never betrayed me nor left me.

One of the interesting results of those experiences is that I became *both* a conservative and a liberal and *both* orthodox and unorthodox. The first experience centered me in the central, orthodox, gospel principles of faith in Christ unto repentance and the necessary and infinite Atonement. It also moved me toward increasing focus on what are, in our culture, considered liberal and therefore unorthodox, even suspect, causes—despite Christ’s emphasis on them. I mean causes such as more equal consumption of world resources, justice for minority or dispossessed peoples, opposition to all wars.

The second experience gave me a firm, conservative confidence in the Church and its leaders as well as the gospel, such that I have never felt any need to avoid difficult issues or to simply accept culturally prescribed boundaries. I have felt able to explore our history without fear, to examine troubling questions of doctrine and Church practice, to face squarely the humanness of our leaders. Because I have had supreme confidence that the gospel, the Church, and our leaders were true and could pass any test. I also felt that the prophets had called us to make those tests from the Apostle Paul’s “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” to Joseph Smith’s “By proving contraries, truth is made manifest.”

Elder Marion D. Hanks, soon after he was called into the Seventy, told a group of us institute students at the University of Utah that if the gospel were not true, he

would want to be the first to know, and so he must always be willing to look at all the evidence. I loved his conservative confidence and liberal openness.

Of course, my center of gravity has shifted between these poles of liberal and conservative at different times and with different parts of my being. In my teenage years, fine teachers—and my father at home—exposed me to the great liberal concepts in our theology: that we have existed co-eternally with God and can grow to be like him and continue creating and learning and adventuring together in realms beyond our imaginations; that the same “sociality” will exist there between us; that sin and repentance are a natural process of growth initiated by Adam and Eve and made possible by the teachings, example, and atoning, unconditional love of our Savior; that evil is neither God’s creation nor his will but an unavoidable result of God *not* being omnipotent and having to set up the adventure of growth in a universe of natural law and moral agents who have genuine freedom.

These were ravishing, liberating ideas to me, but they fit easily with the basically conservative lifestyle and political views I shared with my parents. And, to their everlasting credit, my parents, as well as my teachers, responded to the liberal ideas and smart aleck challenges and behaviors I sometimes indulged in by talking with me *about* them, rather than simply dismissing the ideas or condemning me with a label. I avoided the all-too-common rebellion of adolescents against the Church that occurs as part of a rebellion against authoritarian parents and teachers—because, however conservative, they treated me liberally.

My twenties were a more conservative period. I married a saint [*Editor’s note from Charlotte: NOT!*], which tends to help anyone focus his or her life on central, conservative values. Charlotte and I went, soon after we were married, on a mission to Samoa and concentrated, for two and a half years, on teaching the fundamentals of the gospel and seeing lives change profoundly as a result. We started our family, which confirmed us, through experience, in conservative family values, and I served three years as a weather officer in the Air Force, which confirmed me in patriotism. But I felt powerful liberal currents developing as well.

Coming from rather cold, emotionally reserved, largely Anglo-Saxon families and Church culture, Charlotte and I were positively bowled over by the passionate openness and directness of much Polynesian culture. I felt what I imagine being inebriated is like at its best—emotionally freed and elated—and I had a huge culture shock coming back to Salt Lake in the middle of winter to emotional bleakness and reserve. On the other hand, I once saw a Samoan man, insane with rage, chasing his son with a huge rock over his head—and I intervened. You who know Samoans may think I was as crazy as he was and wonder how I survived, but I was young and new in Samoa—and, as it turned out, my alien appearance and high cultural standing as a missionary shocked the man into immobility and probably saved the boy’s life as well as my own.

As I reflected on those experiences, I realized more and more that culture is relative, not absolute, that Mormons can have quite different cultural ways, some better, some worse than those of others but mainly different—and that the quality of our religious life is not obviously a function of cultural values. That may seem obvious, but it was a revelation to me. Mormon culture right now seems far from

this understanding of cultural relativism, and yet I believe such understanding is a key, perhaps the most important key, to renewal of this department. But more of that later.

As I said, I was a patriotic American. In fact, our squadron of F-100 fighter-bombers was alerted a few times in 1961 for service in Vietnam. But we didn't go, and I left the Air Force and went to Stanford for graduate work. There, only three years later, I experienced a profound paradigm shift. I had believed, with a certainty that was complete and religious, that the U.S. Constitution had been inspired by God, that our government therefore was essentially Christian, devoted to goodness and truth, and directed by God in its purposes and actions. In particular, I had believed our presidents were sincere and truthful.

On 4 August 1964, our government announced that North Korean gunboats had twice attacked an American destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, and that consequently we had bombed Hanoi and were greatly increasing our buildup of American troops. At the Stanford library, I had been reading reports and analyses in periodicals from around the world—not just American sources—of what was happening in Vietnam. I had become increasingly uneasy about our policies and now became convinced (as was later admitted) that our government was lying about the “Tonkin Gulf Incident”—and suddenly my whole world shifted. For me, being convinced that a president had lied and that our government was willing to deceive us and kill people far away, in my name and using my taxes—for what seemed more and more an unworthy and unjust cause—was a life-changing experience.

I became involved in the Graduate Student Coordinating Council, Stanford's version of the Free Speech Movement that had developed at Berkeley just across the Bay. We published a newsletter, organized anti-war rallies, and worked to pass local fair-housing laws. We talked a lot about how the university itself, in its involvement in military research and tendency to support the status quo, especially through authoritarian educational methods, might be contributing directly to such evils as militarism and racism.

I began to learn how the conservatism of some Mormons could lead them to act in destructive ways because it would keep them from seeing that their ideologies were culturally constructed and relative, not doctrinal and absolute. Some of the most prominent Palo Alto landlords were Mormons and took it as a religious affront that I would campaign to get them to rent to blacks. I taught institute part-time, where we discussed some of these matters quite thoroughly in a Mormon Ethics class. The parents of one of my students, who had applied for conscientious objector status, blamed me for his supposedly going astray. They contacted Institute authorities in Provo, who directed me not to talk about the ethics of violence, if I wanted to keep my job.

Yet I was, of course, still basically conservative. I helped start *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* for the express purpose of helping young LDS students, like those I taught each day at Stanford, build and preserve their testimonies. I know they faced many academic and ethical and cultural challenges, of the kind that going to college and moving away from Mormon cultural centers inevitably brings. I served in the Stanford Ward bishopric and there also was fully engaged in building

testimonies and teaching basically conservative values.

As I served in these capacities, I saw more and more how relative are the terms liberal and conservative. I found I change from one to the other simply by walking across Stanford Avenue from the university to the Institute building. On campus, among graduate students and anti-war and civil- rights activists, I was that strange, non-smoking, short-haired, family-raising conservative; at the Institute, I was that strange liberal who renounced war and worried about fair-housing and free speech. Of course, I was the same person both places; those terms reduced me to a stereotype, often marginalized me, and sometimes caused me real harm—but they did not touch my real self.

I learned how powerful though absurd cultural shibboleths can be as totalizing, stereotyping mechanisms. One day, while we worked on anti-war posters, a graduate student friend said to me, "You've got to let your hair grow long, to show which side you're on." That very evening, a Church leader said to me, "Gene, you've got to keep your hair short and always do your home teaching, to show you're really OK despite your liberal ideas."

Well, I *was* getting some liberal ideas, but the most powerful ones came from apostles. During this time, I heard Elder Harold B. Lee announce that "the activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are a continuing revelation against the sub-standard conditions of society." I assumed he meant non-Mormon society and focused my efforts, which were informed fully by the gospel and my Church experience, on changing the racism and violence in American society. It wasn't until ten years later, when President Kimball spoke out against the sub-standard materialism and militarism of *Mormons*, that I realized Elder Lee may have meant *our* society as well.

It was also during this time that I got to know President Hugh B. Brown. Intriguingly, he and President N. Eldon Tanner, both of the First Presidency, were Democrats. I had grown up with that mistaken idea that Mormons were naturally Republicans for *bona fide* religious rather than cultural reasons. Years later, I read with great interest in President Brown's memoirs that when he had come from Canada in 1928 and was deciding which party to join, President Heber J. Grant and Elder B. H. Roberts, staunch Democrats, counseled him, "If I wanted to belong to a party that represented the common people, I should become a Democrat, but that if I wanted to be popular and have the adulation of others and be in touch with the wealth of the nation, I should become a Republican." President Brown reflects on that choice, which he realizes has put him "in the minority—almost a minority of one—among the General Authorities, since most of them are now Republicans. But . . . as time goes on I become more and more convinced that the Democrats have the right philosophy . . . Theirs is the party of progress."

What does all this mean? Only that I was learning that political and cultural differences don't matter to the Lord, and that we err mightily when we try to make them matter. President Brown was not afraid to make this clear by letting political differences among the Brethren show. Elder Ezra Taft Benson was an outspoken conservative on many issues and lent at least tacit support to the John Birch Society's attacks on the United Nations. President Brown came to BYU in May 1969 and

defended the UN and then went on to discuss “freedom of the mind” as one of the “dangerous” but essential freedoms the UN was helping to preserve:

One cannot think right without running the risk of thinking wrong, but generally more thinking is the antidote for the evils that spring from wrong thinking. . . . And we call upon you students to exercise your God-given right to think through on every proposition that is submitted to you and be unafraid to express your opinions, with proper respect for those to whom you talk and proper acknowledgment of your own shortcomings. . . . We are not so much concerned with whether your thoughts are orthodox or heterodox as we are that you shall *have* thoughts.

We have come a long and unfortunate way in nearly thirty years, it seems, from such a clear call for openness and recognition of cultural relativism to a time when many students seem afraid to think, certainly to speak, for fear of being wrong—or merely unorthodox or “inappropriate.” Now, even faculty are being chosen and tenured with what looks like more concern for their cultural orthodoxy than anything else. But I may simply be wrong about that, and my main concern today is to consider some ways to talk to each other when we think someone is wrong—whether an opponent or ourselves.

Here’s a positive example: When I was released from the Stanford Ward bishopric and Charlotte and I first began to attend the Palo Alto Ward, we were asked to speak in sacrament meeting. I bore my testimony about how the gospel impelled and guided me in various efforts to improve our society. The next Sunday, in testimony meeting, one of the ward members used a good portion of the time to rebut me point by point, implying that I must not really have a testimony if I believed such “liberal” things about social action.

I was hurt and angry, ready to respond in kind. But, with Charlotte’s pointed help, I restrained myself, thought things over for a while, and fasted and prayed for the ability to respond ethically to my opponent rather than to justify myself. When I went to his house, it was awkward and painful at first—he defensive, me still smarting—but I persevered until I could apologize sincerely for offending him and could express my feelings and faith in ways he could understand and accept. He became one of my closest friends in the ward, a regular, outspoken opponent in the Gospel Doctrine class I was asked to teach. Though he disagreed with me about many things, he was willing to improve the dialogue and learning in my class through gracious opposition, because he knew my basically conservative faithfulness.

That’s a fairly obvious process I sort of stumbled into, dragging my feet, but, of course, it’s right there in scriptures: (1) reprove, but only when moved upon by the Holy Ghost (D&C 121:43); (2) if offended, go to the offender and discuss it between him and thee alone (D&C 42:88); (3) in either case, “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and show forth afterwards “an increase of love . . . lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death (D&C 121:43–44). Simple and sensible as all that is, we have violated each of those principles recently in our [BYU English] department and are continuing to suffer the results—and will, I think, until we repent and forgive.

WHEN I LEFT Palo Alto to become Dean of Academic Affairs at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, I learned even more clearly how important those principles are. Within a week of arriving, I was called as president of the little branch in that area and in the next five years learned in new ways the values of conservative religion and Church involvement. At Stanford, much of my religious life had been involved with understanding and defending the gospel and applying it to social questions. I had been mainly idealistic, abstract, and critical—in a word, liberal. Now I was in charge of twenty families scattered over seventy-five miles, ranging from Utah-born, hard-core “inactives” with devastating marital problems to bright-eyed converts with no jobs or with a drunken father who beat them. Of the seventy or so members I got to know, at most four or five were ones I would ever have chosen for friends when I was at Stanford—and with whom I could have easily shared my most impassioned political and religious concerns and views, the ones that had so exercised me before. Fortunately with Charlotte’s good advice and prodding, I did not begin by preaching about my ideas or promoting my crusades. I tried very hard to see what the immediate problems and concerns of my flock were and to be a good pastor, one who fed and protected them.

As I did that, a remarkable thing happened. After six months, I found that my branch members, at first properly suspicious of a liberal intellectual from California, had come to feel in their bones, from direct experience, that indeed my faith and faithfulness to them was “stronger than the cords of death.” And the promise of the scriptures followed, for there flowed to me “without compulsory means” (D&C 121:36) the power from the Holy Ghost to talk about *any* of my concerns and passions and to be understood and trusted, even if not agreed with. I only wish I could have found a way to be that successful in my stewardship at BYU.

In 1975, while still at St. Olaf, I was invited to BYU to give an address. As I approached the campus at the old main entrance on 12th North, I saw the university motto boldly spelled out in bright letters: ENTER TO LEARN; GO FORTH TO SERVE. I felt a deep shock of recognition, and my heart said to me: “This is home. This is where I belong.” If BYU really took such a motto seriously, I thought, it could well be the greatest university in the world—at least in God’s eyes. When I had an opportunity to join the faculty here two years later, many of my liberal friends were amazed that I would come to a place they had stereotyped as repressive. But I believed I would be freer here to discuss openly the religious and ethical perspectives that I think are essential to understanding great literature well, and to express clearly and openly my personal convictions, which I think is crucial to good teaching.

As it turned out, I have felt much freer here, in the important ways, than I did at the University of Utah or Stanford or even St. Olaf College, but there have also been problems—mainly related to our confusion about the proper place of our conservative or liberal ideologies. In twenty years, I have gone from being totalized and attacked for being a conservative to being totalized and attacked for being a liberal—yet, I’m still the same person. It’s BYU, including our department, that has changed—from being somewhat too secular to being somewhat too sectarian, from being somewhat liberal to being quite conservative. And that wouldn’t matter at all,

except that in both cases there have been some who insisted on political correctness and who have turned relative cultural values into religious absolutes with which to attack, punish, or exclude people.

When I applied here, some on the hiring committee rejoiced that an obviously liberal founder of *Dialogue* was coming to shake up the administration and conservative student body. [William A.] Bert Wilson told them they would be surprised, but to no avail, and I was hired. Then, when it turned out I was really a conservative, who had prayer in classes and believed the Church is as true as the gospel, a provincial who offered a book on Brigham Young as part of my scholarship when I applied for promotion and who wanted the department to teach more of our own Mormon heritage and culture through Mormon literature, I was attacked and punished. Now, twenty years later, I find myself labeled a liberal, publicly attacked and privately punished, not for violating the academic freedom document prescriptions against criticizing Church leaders or opposing Church doctrine, but for violating cultural taboos that are mistakenly made into religious issues: for publicly opposing war, for exposing my own and other Mormons' racism and sexism, even for teaching nationally honored but liberal Mormon writers.

AND THAT, OF course, brings us to the difficult part of this essay, where I try to talk straight about my weaknesses and ours. But first, a seventh inning stretch: Many of Einstein's greatest insights came through what he called "thought experiments"—not real physical experiments but imagined situations, like elevators traveling at the speed of light, in which he could think through new possibilities. I need some volunteers. Suppose you two on the front row are siblings; you put this book on your head and walk by, showing off a bit; you accidentally on purpose trip her. Now stop right there, and imagine what likely follows. The tripped person hits the one who tripped, that person hits back harder to make certain there is justice, then the other hits back even harder for revenge, and so on until there is crying—or intervention by parents.

Actually, this is not an "experiment," because we've all been through it many times in some form. What it illustrates, in miniature, is how almost all wars begin and grow, how any human conflict tends always to involve imitative violence and to escalate as we pursue what we think is the most worthy goal—justice. The anthropologist-turned-literary critic Rene Girard has best explicated this human process, especially as it is revealed in the works of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. He helps us understand, for instance, that Hamlet is not simply a witty, attractive, essentially good man, tragically betrayed by his melancholic tendency to put things off, but a victim of and then participant in cycles of escalating violence that began the day he is born, when Hamlet's father kills rival old Fortinbras in a duel and takes his lands. The cycles build as, about the time we hear young Fortinbras is seeking revenge, the ghost of Hamlet's father infects him with his own spirit of rivalry and revenge, and those cycles conclude with young Fortinbras taking over the defenseless kingdom, whose royalty has been reduced to a pile of corpses by Hamlet's quest for revenge.

The inevitable results of Hamlet's revenge are clear enough, of course, from the

scriptures and the prophets. Christ tells us that "*all* those who take the sword, shall perish by the sword." The LDS First Presidency declared in 1942, after quoting that statement above: "There is an eternal law that rules war and those who engage in it. . . . The Savior laid down a universal principle upon which He placed no limitations as to time, place, cause, or people involved [whether righteous or wicked]. . . . This is a universal law, for force always begets force." Violence of any kind, a blow at a sibling, a label or accusation intended to hurt or punish or exclude or demonize, a response in anger, a refusal to give forgiveness or accept an apology, an act to exclude someone who is hard to get along with—all these are wrong because they tend to produce reaction in kind and thus make war rather than peace. We will never, I believe, solve our problems and fulfill our great mission, until we learn "a more excellent way"—and that more excellent way, of course, is charity, the pure love of Christ.

Paul tells us that "charity suffereth long, and is kind, . . . is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil" (I Cor. 13:4–5). We have been quick to see evil and seek punishment. We liberals sometimes forget that, if we have not charity, we can bestow all our goods to feed the poor and it is nothing. We conservatives sometimes forget that prophecies fail, knowledge vanishes away, but charity endures, that it is even greater than faith and hope—certainly greater than political or cultural correctness.

AND THAT TAKES me back to my main theme, which I'm sure you see by now is to deconstruct the polarity of "conservative" and "liberal." What is most heartbreaking—most genuinely tragic about what we have done to each other in the ways I have described above—is that we have done all this for something quite trivial. I mean our tendency to insist on our liberal or conservative political or cultural values as if they were religious absolutes. They are not.

"Conservative" and "liberal" are (or at least should be) merely neutral terms describing two different approaches to questions of social organization or cultural emphasis—approaches that may be simply a matter of temperament. Conservatives tend to want to maintain existing institutions or views, to oppose change, preserve safe boundaries, take few risks. At their best, I believe, they are, like Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, of steady integrity, unswayed by every wind of doctrine; in Irving Howe's words, "not inclined to easily overthrow the human institutions and values won from the blood and mire of history." The word liberal derives from the Latin "to set free" and means "pertaining to a free man." Liberals tend to value freedom from the authority of tradition and autocratic institutions, from bigotry or narrow-mindedness, even freedom from orthodoxy and conventional external restraints imposed on private conscience. They seek change. At their best, they are like those in Alma 1:30, who "did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church."

I see nothing here to indicate religious superiority either way. Indeed, as I have tried to show, both the gospel and the Church include many elements that could be characterized as liberal (such as our concepts of the nature and the destiny of human beings and continuing revelation and our lay organization) and many that could be

called conservative (such as our code of personal morality and our strong loyalty to our leaders). Joseph Smith was certainly a liberal, Brigham Young and Spencer W. Kimball very interesting mixtures, Ezra Taft Benson a conservative, and Gordon B. Hinckley gloriously indecipherable.

So why are we shaking ourselves apart over something so relative and relatively insignificant—differences between us that could actually be a source of strength if we would combine them positively and learn from each other through dialogue? Some of us have thought feminism would save the Church, and others have thought themselves called to save the Church from feminism. Both positions are wrong, and both have done harm. For one thing, both have called the others fascists, constructed them as enemies, and produced escalating violence. Some have thought the newer criticisms, with their ethical passion and inclination to social and political action, are God's own means to shake up our provincial students and our moribund, irrelevant curriculum; others have thought the new ways the devil's own tools to corrupt our curriculum and the Church. Both are wrong, I believe.

The newer criticisms' liberal inclination to social and political activism certainly seems no more dangerous than the older criticisms' conservative inclination to ignore the ethical and political implications of literature and thus to reinforce, rather than call into question, the values of the Western culture it usually focuses on. Brian doesn't like the new criticisms because he is, in some ways, a conservative; Phil likes them because he is, in some ways, a liberal. Fine, let's discuss, argue, try to understand, work out some compromises in curriculum and hiring—and live in peace by making our differences a strength.

In 1987, the two-hundredth anniversary of the writing, of the U. S. Constitution, I studied it and its creation carefully, partly because I was worried about the passionate religious divisiveness over political ideology that was already festering in the national culture wars and was appearing on the horizon at BYU. By studying William Peters's book on the making of the constitution and Daniel Bell's analysis of what he calls our "Constitutional culture"—one that is buttressed by checks and balances, including the two-party system—I gained a testimony of the genius and the divine inspiration behind our system.

James Madison, especially, understood the danger of a majority uniting behind a common interest or passion, particularly a religious one, and becoming as dictatorial as a king, inclined to ignore minority rights and even to enforce private morality and cultural conformity on matters, such as what we eat and drink and how we worship, that are not the business of government. When Daniel Bell spoke at BYU that year, he stated clearly, knowing well his audience, "Cultural conservatives should be political liberals—that is, we who want to be free to practice our particularly personal moral and religious values that do not directly harm others should help make certain we have a system in which all have that freedom. We Mormons were the victims of one of the greatest failures of our government to abide by those principles, when conservative Republicans led a national effort to destroy the Church for practicing something that was entirely unharmed to others (and thus not a matter of law) but which induced in conservative Victorian society a huge cultural cringe—I mean, of course, polygamy.

When polygamy officially ended in 1890, and the Church moved to attain statehood and become an accepted part of the nation, our Church leaders were concerned that all Mormons would become Democrats and continue the volatile religious-political factionalism of the 1880s. They tried to avoid this by dividing Mormon towns and congregations, by direct assignment, into half Republicans, half Democrats. They explained themselves in a letter to their astonished Democrat friends in Washington: “The more evenly balanced the parties become the safer it will be for us [Mormons] in the security of our liberties; and . . . our influence for good will be far greater than it possibly could be were either party overwhelmingly in the majority.” That, I believe, is divine wisdom of exactly the kind Daniel Bell sees in our Constitutional culture. It applies to politics in Utah today as much as it did a hundred years ago, though now the danger is not Democrat but Republican one-party rule, confused with religious righteousness.

This principle applies directly to our department problems, as well. In our *political* system, if the checks and balances, including at least two parties in constant dialogue and competition and compromise, are believed in and kept strong, there can be a *process* of government that is a much surer guarantee of our liberties and of finding better answers to our problems than if we had to depend only on the content of any one person’s or party’s ideas. Good Democrats or good Republicans are not those who believe their party has all truth and who lust for complete victory and one-party government control. Rather, they are those who seek what interparty dialogue makes possible: civil discourse, compromise, mutually enlightening debate, and the checks on natural aggrandizement or imposition of purely cultural values on others. In our department, if we can really believe the essay by Walter Lippman, “The Indispensable Opposition” (that we still, I hope, assign our students), we will recognize that “We must protect the right of our opponents to speak because we must hear what they have to say . . . because freedom of discussion improves our own opinions” and can develop some peaceful processes of disagreement that improve our own thinking. We might even come to realize that we learn most from those who disagree with us and be willing to stay together and rejoice in our diversity as conservatives and moderates (with one or two liberals). But first we must stop lusting to impose our liberal or conservative beliefs on others as if they were religious absolutes—and especially stop rejecting or trying to punish in religious or academic ways those who are merely different from us in cultural perspective.

AT THIS POINT, I had planned to go on with some very specific accounts of mistakes I and others have made that illustrate my general points. In fact, I wrote over ten pages of such stuff—and felt more and more depressed. I was dwelling on my hurts and my resentments over friends who have been terribly hurt, judging, lashing out about offenses in ways that I deplore and that would probably have escalated the violence in our department in the way Girard has described for us—the way of our two siblings here in the thought experiment. I have fasted and prayed to be effective rather than to justify myself, and as I worked on elaborating offenses, I did indeed sense the Spirit was fleeing. I love you all, even those who have publicly attacked and sorely hurt me, and I genuinely want to forgive and have peace. I have

been invited to put my hands in blessing on the heads of some of you, and I have felt the preciousness of your souls and the love our Heavenly Parents have for you and, I believe, for all in this department. I do not wish to violate that sacred feeling. However, I believe in the principle implied in the title of the commission empowered to try to heal the bitter divisions that still plague South Africa. It is called "Truth and Reconciliation," and I believe it's hard to have one without the other. I pray that we will have the courage to establish some regular forums for Truth and Reconciliation, where all of us, conservative or liberal, who feel they have been hurt or are offended by the actions, teachings, writings, or allegations of others, will stand before us, tell the truth as best they can, and genuinely seek reconciliations. There is not really time for much of that today, but I think it's essential, that if we don't do it, we'll have wasted all our efforts at restructuring and will tend to revert to old patterns that hurt each other and thwart our great potential.

I teach the Atonement in every class because I find it explored in all great literature and because the mercy it embodies is the only answer to the imitative violence which is our greatest human plague. I teach *King Lear* as Shakespeare's answer to the question he poses in *Hamlet* and elsewhere—how can we learn to deal with offenses, even violence, in ways other than in the escalating, self-defeating cycles of revenge? Shakespeare clearly wants us to think of Cordelia as a Christ figure (she says, "It is my father's business that I go about," and is referred to as one who "redeems all nature from the general curse that twain have brought her to"), and he has her do two seemingly opposed things that are both part of the Atonement: She confronts Lear in his sins and refuses to go along with them, and she nevertheless continues to love him unconditionally, even while standing in his mind as a continuing reproach. Thus, through mercy, eventually she gives him power to overcome his shame and pride and be reconciled to her in perhaps the greatest scene in all drama: sinner and savior, father and child, kneel to each other, she relinquishing all her very legitimate grievances, saying, "No cause, no cause," and he saying the magic words of repentance and healing, "I am old and foolish. Forgive and forget."

When, at the end, Lear clasps Cordelia's dead body and holds her head up to the audience, saying, "Look, her lips / Look there, look there," he is not lapsing into senile babbling, ending this greatest of all works of literature in triviality. No, he is breaching the fourth wall, speaking directly to us, and calling our attention to the person, the very lips, that taught him the truth and redeemed him through mercy. Shakespeare understood the Atonement the way no Christian churches of his time did, but the way the Book of Mormon does—not as a payment to the demands of justice *after* we have repented, but as a power, given from Christ through his unconditional love and acceptance of us, even in our sins, that enables us to overcome our sins and be at one with him, spiritually and, eventually, literally.

I read and teach Levi Peterson—and Orson Scott Card and Teny Tempest Williams—for a couple of reasons, reasons that I should think would impel all of you to at least read and whenever possible teach them too. First, because, as Richard Cracroft keeps reminding us, it makes much more sense for us to become experts in and promote a good literature based in our own heritage and culture, which we already know well, than to spend all our energy on the literature of other cultures,

which we are less likely to excel in. Twenty years ago, Henry Nash Smith said the same when we didn't yet have a small *fraction* of the amount or quality or national respect for our literature that we have now. His counsel is even more appropriate today.

If I taught at a predominantly Black college, I would want (in fact, as a literature teacher I would feel responsible) to know and whenever possible teach James Baldwin and Tony Morrison, or if at a predominantly Jewish college, Saul Bellow and Chaim Potok, or if at a Catholic college, Graham Greene and Flannery O'Connor. You may laugh at these comparisons, but for instance, in his use of grotesques to teach mercy towards “the least of these,” and in his focus on the difficult process of salvation through grace, Levi Peterson approaches O'Connor in subject, method, and effectiveness. He teaches the Atonement better than any Mormon writer and most American writers. And he and Card and Williams are wonderful combinations of liberal and conservative qualities, in some ways less orthodox than us and our students, in some ways (such as opposition to racism and violence, concern for earth and family, focus on the Atonement) *more* orthodox than many of us. We have much to learn from them, despite, even because of, the cultural cringes they produce—and it is one of the tragic prices we are paying for our current lust for cultural correctness at BYU that these fine Mormon authors are neglected and the study of our own heritage has become suspect because our literature and study of it is sometimes critical of conservative elements in our culture.

Someone said great religious leaders both comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable—as Spencer W Kimball and Ezra Taft Benson surely did. Good teachers also do both—and so do our best Mormon writers, whether conservative or liberal, mantic or sophic, to use Richard Cracroft's descriptive terms, and we should honor and study the full variety of them and help our students to do so, perhaps especially when we disagree with those writers. I hope at some time in the future, if my proposal to have regular faculty forums is accepted by you, to talk frankly, from my perspective, about some of the issues and allegations, offenses and misunderstandings, that have hurt our department and led to our present efforts at restructuring and renewal. But in this first effort, I will focus on a time I was clearly in error and need forgiveness for.

In July 1992, I went to bid Academic Vice President Stan Albrecht goodbye. I learned from him that one reason he had resigned was his difficulty carrying out university business because of complaints from BYU religion faculty about other faculty members' writings, made to the Strengthening Church Members Committee, which seemed to him to be an *ad hoc* middle-management committee that kept files on the writing and activities of certain Church members. I began to think about friends who had been called in to discuss their writing or had actually seen their own file, in one case containing press clippings on their activities as a Young Democrat in college, and my anxiety and pain increased. When a paper at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium a few weeks later outlined more such incidents, I became convinced that the committee was behind most of them, and in the question-and-answer period, condemned such inquisition-like activity as undermining the Church and BYU, and I invited the audience to use their influence with General Authorities

to stop what I assumed was a conservative middle-management group gone out of control. But in my heart was also a desire to punish those who had hurt people I loved. Television cameras captured and replayed the scene on the news; an AP reporter went right out, called a Church spokesman, and got confirmation of the existence of the committee and some of its activities in question, which was reported nationwide.

I went home still angry but increasingly ashamed, aware I had violated the crucial principle that offenses should be dealt with face to face if possible and always in mercy—certainly not in a blanket way without my even knowing who was on the committee. Then, I learned the committee included Elder Faust and Elder Nelson, and I realized I had unwittingly criticized two apostles, as well as others. I bitterly regretted what I had done. I apologized in person to all members of the committee, then to everybody, in a public letter, then to my ward. But I’ve realized that my action may have helped to construct our department in people’s minds as adversarial to the Church and therefore has hurt all of you. I ask you to forgive me.

AS YOU KNOW, our chair, Jay Fox, has worried for some time about the escalating tensions in our department. I suggest we need a Samoan Forgiveness Ceremony. But since I couldn’t arrange the full regalia for all that (and besides, I understand that in some versions, there are death threats for any who refuse to be reconciled), let me instead offer a Samoan repentance and reconciliation blessing:

O’u uso e ma tuafafine pele e. Out te ’aioe atu ia te outou ’ia outou salamo i o outou le tonu e euiga i le misiona a lenei iunivesite ma le Ekalesia, le tonu i le agaga o a’oa’oga a Kerioso, ma le tasi. Out tefa’amagalo atu ia te outou i o outou ’aleu uma ia te a’u, ma ole atu ia outou fa’amagoalo mai fo’i ia te a’u. Ou te ole atu i le Atua ia fa’amanuia mai ia i tatou faia ia mea, ’o le la faamalolo miala I esse’eseega ma manu’anu’a o la tatou matagaluega, mafa’afouina i tatou i lo tatou malosi efaia lelei ai la tatou galuega ma tusa ai ma lefinagalo o le Atua. I le suafa o Iesu Keriso. Amene.

Translation: Beloved Brothers and Sisters. I implore you to repent of your offenses against the mission of this university and the Church, against the spirit of the teachings of Christ, and against each other. I forgive you for all of your offenses against me and ask you to forgive me as well. I ask God to bless us, that if we do these things, he will heal our department of its divisions and wounds and renew us in our ability to do our work well and according to God’s will. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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How to cite this essay: Eugene England, ““No Cause, No Cause’’: An Essay toward Reconciliation,” *Sunstone* 121 (January 2002): 31–39.

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