Also included in this issue:
Donald D. Deshler on Education and Rémi Brague on Family
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associate Director’s Notes</strong></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>James H. Charlesworth</strong></td>
<td>The Dignity of Man: <em>Imago Dei</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dignity of mankind is dependent on and intrinsic to the biblical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth that we are created in <em>Imago Dei</em>, in the image of God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daniel Robinson</strong></td>
<td>The Alphabet of Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not for science to legislate in or legislate out the discriminants we use in an attempt to understand a life, a person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rabbi David Rosen</strong></td>
<td>Religion and Peacemaking in the Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you don’t want religion to be part of the problem, the answer isn’t to eliminate religion. The answer is to ensure that religion is part of the solution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Terryl Givens</strong></td>
<td>Straining at Particles of Light: Premortal Life and the Mansions of Memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is only the doctrine’s pull on both the heart and the mind that can explain its tenacious grip on the human imagination, despite the best effort of emperors, priests, and secularists to expunge the idea of the preexistence from Western thought.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stephen H. Webb</strong></td>
<td>Mormon Ecumenical Moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity today, for all of its global success and growth, remains a divided and fragmented faith. What if Mormonism could help Christians find the unity that is so central to our common witness to Jesus Christ?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Education:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Donald D. Deshler</strong></td>
<td>Closing the Achievement Gap for Struggling Learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is probably going to sound as heresy, but quite frankly, I don’t think resource is necessarily the biggest issue. I believe resourcefulness is.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the Family:

Rémi Brague | A New Nobility: The Family*

*Not available online.

The parents of a cripple, of a drop-out, of a criminal, don’t love him or her less. This is exactly what other institutions, be they the market or the state, can’t afford to do.

The mission of the Wheatley Institution is to enhance the academic climate and scholarly reputation of BYU, and to enrich faculty and student experiences, by contributing recognized scholarship that lifts society by preserving and strengthening its core institutions. The following lectures were sponsored by the Wheatley Institution for this purpose.

For full recordings and transcriptions of these abridged lectures, please visit wheatley.byu.edu.

The opinions expressed herein are the sole responsibility of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Wheatley Institution, Brigham Young University or its sponsoring institution—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Wheatley Institution recognizes student editors Kristen Cardon, Kristen Soelberg, and editor/designer Troy Tessem for their work on this issue of the Observer.
The Wheatley Institution’s mission is to foster scholarly work and engender insightful discourse on important issues that have impact on the core institutions of our society. This issue of The Observer is devoted to the Truman G. Madsen lecture series, as well as articles on education, and the family.

In the first essay Dr. James H. Charlesworth, the first Truman G. Madsen lecturer, reminds us that we cannot understand the Bible unless we understand that at its center is a teaching about the dignity of human beings: human beings are made in the image of God—with dignity, equality, and the ability to choose between right and wrong—and that the perfection of human being is to be like God. In the second Madsen lecture, Professor Daniel Robinson argues that scientific explanation of objects and their behaviors cannot also explain human beings and their behaviors. In addition, neither kind of explanation can avoid the influences of historical and political context. In particular, the human sciences cannot avoid the importance of the aesthetic and ethical dimension in explaining human beings.

As the third Madsen lecturer, Rabbi David Rosen shows that any solution to the problems in today’s Middle East must take account of religion: we must not think that because religion is so clearly part of the problem it ought not to be part of the solution. In fact, because religion is so central to human identity in the Middle East it must be part of the solution. The fourth Madsen lecture by Professor Terryl Givens, examines the idea of pre-existence as it has been found in Western philosophy, poetry, and theology for millennia.

The last lecture in this collection, and the fifth Madsen lecture, is by Dr. Stephen Webb. As Webb sees it, many Mormon beliefs reveal a way of resurrecting some of the earliest beliefs of Christianity in a modern age. So, Professor Webb suggests, Mormon beliefs—especially that God is embodied—might make it possible for Christians of all kinds to come closer in unity.

Professor Donald Deshler discusses some of the enormous challenges that face American education, arguing that the biggest issue is not resources. He poses several questions that will help us assure that we use most responsibly whatever resources are available. Rémi Brague, a French professor of philosophy and the history of ideas, argues that the continued existence of humanity requires someone who looks at the long rather than the short run. It also requires a unit of society in which the individual is important in him or herself rather than for the good that person does for society as a whole. The family does both.

These lectures share the fact that each contains a stringent critique of contemporary society and thought, whether our thinking about education, our thinking about science, or our thinking about international affairs. Most add to that critique an examination of the place and importance of religion and religious thought in any possible response. And two take up Mormon thought in particular, though Givens does so by demonstrating that the belief in pre-existence, today unique to Latter-day Saints, has been a common idea in Western history.

These essays are scholarly yet also readable, making them accessible to a wide range of readers. Reading them has been an educational pleasure for me. I hope that you will enjoy them as much as I have.

James E. Faulconer
Associate Director, The Wheatley Institution
The Dignity of Man: *Imago Dei*

The dignity of mankind is dependent on and intrinsic to the biblical truth that we are created in *Imago Dei*, in the image of God. A lecture by Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at the Princeton Theological Seminary, James H. Charlesworth.

Our country is in a crisis. The economic barrel has a rotten bottom. Far too often in our society the human has been degraded and drained of values. Our Bibles and related literatures and especially Jesus’ message invite us to perceive the dignity of the human. Adam is the joyous pinnacle of God’s creation.

Truman G. Madsen, the former distinguished occupant of the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding at BYU, has been my friend for decades. Surely he will appreciate the importance of perceiving the dignity, even divinity, of the human. Yet we must always remember that human dignity and divinity are only conceivable because of God’s grace. Perceiving human divinity requires conceiving God’s absolute sovereignty. In my study I have often perceived Jesus taking sides with His fellow Jews who were disenfranchised and treated with disrespect. Jesus called for human dignity. Jesus’ life and message were devoted to restoring the worth of the human by helping all to realize that God loved them infinitely (cf. Matthew 10:19–31).

At the conclusion of the most important Dead Sea Scroll, Rule of the Community, we find a low estimate of the human: “What, indeed, is the son of Adam among your wondrous works? ...He is (but) a discharge, (mere) pinched-off clay whose urge is for the dust.” [1QS 11.20–22] The low evaluation of the human is also reflected in early Greek thought. For example, influenced by the Eleatics, Leucippus (5th century BCE) and Democritus (460–457 BCE) concluded that the human, as real being, is merely a chance conglomerate of atoms (*atomous*). Democritus thought the soul is also made up of atoms. The soul and the body perish. In atomism there is no room for a gracious and loving God or for revelation; and human dignity is inextricably bound with both. Far more precise and perceptive than the atomists’ cosmology is Joseph Smith’s claim that in all elements and in our refined spirits “dwell all the glory.”

The purpose of this lecture is to shift the focus from human depravity to human divinity. The guiding light will be provided by the ancient scriptures.
In this lecture, I will focus on seven issues: (1) positing the equality of all humans, (2) clarifying that the *cor malum* (the evil heart) is not to be confused with the *yetzer ha-ra* (the evil inclination), (3) exposing the historical truth that scripture indicates humans are clothed in dignity, (4) recognizing the fundamental importance of beginning with human dignity in bioethical research and medical practice, (5) displaying in a new light the biblical truth that humans are created *imago dei* (in the image of God), (6) exploring the scriptural injunction that humans are categorized as divine, and (7) concluding with a grand *inclusio* to show the oneness of all humans.

I. Equality of All Humans

We begin with a perception of the equality of all humans. According to the account of creation in Genesis, the human was Adam; that is, Adam was both male and female. The *ish*, “male,” and the *isha*, “female,” came from one being: Adam. As is well known, the story of human development continued. The process in human advancement was gradual and painful. “In the beginning all men were created equal,” said the rogue priest John Ball. Ball’s words were quoted, without notation, in Congress on July 4, 1776, by the authors of “The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America”: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” The equality of all humans is grounded in the originating acts of One Creator.

II. *The Cor Malum* (the Evil Heart) Is Not to Be Confused with the *Yetzer Ha-Ra* (the Evil Inclination).

Sometimes a thinker attributes the evil in the world to the *cor malum* (the evil heart). Other great minds choose to focus on the *yetzer ha-ra* (the evil inclination). Four Ezra seeks to explain human failures to be obedient to God by contemplating the *cor malum*; that is, each human inherits from Adam a malignant heart. Perceiving the loss of the Holy City and the Temple, this Ezra, with the smoke of a burning city seemingly entrenched in his nostrils, bewails: “O Adam, what have you done? (*O tu quid fecisti Adam?*) For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants.”
Much more prevalent in Jewish thought is the concept that God gave the human inclinations for good or evil and that each one has a choice. For instance, the Book Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, composed around 150 BCE, emphasizes free choice. God created humans with an “inclination” (יצר). This noun indicates the humans’ power to make free choices for which they are responsible. Let us agree now that the cor malum (the evil heart) reflects misperception and that it should not be categorized with the yetzer ha-ra (the evil inclination). A much more appealing explanation of human failure and sin is found in the apocalypse 2 Baruch, “Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but each of us has become our own Adam.” Truman Madsen rightly follows the insight of the Baruch-Jeremiah tradition: “The fall did not destroy individual freedom, initiative, or accountability. It did not impose sinfulness— or absolute depravity—upon Adam or upon any or all of his children.”

III. Humans Are Clothed in Dignity

Far too often our dignity is maligned. For three millennia those faithful to God have been ridiculed, abused, and martyred. Let us pause and listen to the words of the granddaughter of a slave:

Neither the slavers' whip nor the lynchers' rope nor the bayonet could kill our black belief. In our hunger we beheld the welcome table and in our nakedness the glory of a long white robe. We have been believers in the new Jerusalem.

While slaves may have felt naked, they could by faith conceptualize wearing “a long white robe.” That means they were clothed in dignity. Our Bible and the extended scriptures reveal that dignity is innate in each of us.

IV. Human Dignity and Bioethics

Should the concept of human dignity operate within the study of bioethics? In Human Cloning and Human Dignity, Ruth Macklin finds the concept of “human dignity” too subjective and unnecessary. She contends: “Dignity is a useless concept in medical ethics and can be eliminated without any loss of content.” Macklin rejects
“dignity” as a concept for treating patients, claiming that dignity causes confusion in practice and method.

I cannot agree that autonomy is a clear concept and that “dignity” should and can be reduced to “autonomy.” Persons at “the edges of life,” to borrow a phrase from Paul Ramsey, such as the unborn, newborn, comatose, and elderly with Alzheimer’s, remain vulnerable with only autonomy as a shield against abuse. Laws protect the innocent and weak; thus, laws must protect the dignity of those who are not capable of issuing a voluntary consent. Theology is fundamental in perceiving human dignity and that in theological reflection and research there are controls against abuse and misperception.

The human is not one of the animals; the human has dignity and divinity.

V. Humans Are Created Imago Dei

According to the first book in the Bible, Genesis, God created the human in the likeness of God. Recall Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind [ אדם ] in our image [ בצלמנו ], according to our likeness’” (NRSV). The author continues: “So God created humankind in his image [ אדם ], in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (NRSV, Genesis 1:27). Here we find the earliest biblical reference to the human as God’s “image.” The authors and editors of Genesis repeatedly emphasize [this].

What does it mean that the human is in “God’s image ( tslm )”? That opaque claim or revelation seems to mean that humans are like God in some uncertain way. The perceptive and learned Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch helps us comprehend the meaning of that easily misunderstood noun, tslm. He translated Genesis 1:26 as follows: “And God spake: Let Us make Adam (a representative) in a form worthy of Us as is commensurate with being in Our likeness.” Hirsch notes: “The bodily form of [the human] already proclaims him as the representative of God, as the divine on earth.” The human has “the calling of being ‘godlike.’” Humans represent God on earth, and they share with God certain qualities, such as goodness, spirituality, and divinity. When humans are morally perfect, they are like God; but that is possible only with God’s help. In Western theology, the concept of the “image of God” is known as imago dei. In Vita Adae et Evae—the Life of Adam and Eve—God declared: “Behold, Adam! I have made
you in our image and likeness [\textit{et dixit dominus deus: ecce Adam, feci te ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram}]’’ (13:3). The author of 4 Ezra revealed he knew that the human was formed by God and “called your own image (\textit{et tua imago nominatus}).” In the eighteenth century, those living in the North American colonies suffered greatly because of the insensitivities of King George III. Listen to Robert Burns’ “Ode for General Washington’s Birthday”:

\begin{quote}
\textit{See gathering thousands, while I sing,}
\textit{A broken chain, exulting, bring}
\quad \textit{And dash it in a tyrant’s face,}
\quad \textit{And dare him to his very beard,}
\quad \textit{And tell him he no more is fear’d,}
\quad \textit{No more the despot of Columbia’s race!}
\textit{A tyrant’s proudest insults brav’d,}
\textit{They shout a People freed! They hail an Empire sav’d!}
\textit{Where is man’s godlike form?}
\quad \textit{Where is that brow erect and bold,}
\quad \textit{That eye that can unmov’d behold}
\quad \textit{The wildest rage, the loudest storm}
\quad \textit{That e’er created Fury dared to raise?}
\quad \textit{Art thou of man’s Imperial line?}
\textit{Dost boast that countenance divine?}
\quad \textit{Each skulking feature answers: No!}
\textit{But come, ye sons of Liberty,}
\textit{Columbia’s offspring, brave as free,}
\quad \textit{In danger’s hour still flaming in the van,}
\quad \textit{Ye know, and dare maintain, The Royalty of Man!}
\end{quote}
It is invigorating to see Burns’ perspicacity apparent as he salutes the dignity of the human as the American patriots resist the tyrants who deny others’ “godlike form.”

VI. Humans Defined as Divine

Some biblical texts move beyond the concept of *imago dei* and suggest that the human is even divine. Note, for example, that Psalm 8 contains these thoughts: “You have made them [human beings] a little lower than God, [מִצְפָּתָה] and crowned them with glory and honour.” [NRSV, Psalm 8:5] The Hebrew text and meaning is clear; in the time of Israel this noun, *‘ĕlōhîm*, meant “God.” Professor Madsen insightfully rejects Nietzsche’s claim that humans were created a little lower than the worms and also the misinterpretation of Psalm 8, rightly stressing: “We were made and intended to become a little lower than the *‘ĕlōhîm*, or gods.” Our interpretation of Psalm 8 is supported by another comment in the Psalms. In Psalm 82 we find the following: I say, “You are gods [אלהים], the children of the Most High, all of you.” [NRSV, Psalm 82:6] Humans are not only like God; they are gods, according to this text and tradition. But there is a catch; the verse continues: “Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.” [NRSV, Psalm 82:7] Humans are gods, but they “shall die.” This is quoted by Jesus, according to the Fourth Evangelist. Recall the following passage: Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? [RSV, John 10:34–36]

It is best not to ignore or overinterpret such challenging claims and concepts; suffice it now for us to perceive that the human is special in God’s sight and in God’s scriptures; indeed, the human is divine, even a god.

VII. Human Oneness

We are all the same in the sight of God. Jew and Gentile, Mormon and Methodist, male and female, black and white—we are all one. All cultural distinctions erode in the face of the awesomeness of creation. As we reflect on our dignity and divinity, we must remember that the *imago dei* is never affected by sin or by any handicap.

Methodists believe that moving on to perfection is possible when humans have exhausted their efforts and admit they have fallen far short. We really can have victory over moral evil in this life, not by our efforts but by divine grace. That is, God supplies
what we lack to obtain perfection. It is not clear if this perfection is possible on earth or only in our postmortem existence, but it is certain that Jesus, according to Matthew, exhorted: “Be perfect . . . as your heavenly Father is perfect” (NRSV, Matthew 5:48).

Truman G. Madsen brings such reflections within the world of Mormon theology. In Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism, he writes:

For Joseph Smith, the person, whatever his acts, must be changed into a condition variously described as sanctified, perfected, glorified. The ethical life is requisite but not sufficient for the realization of holiness. The envisioned end is not only the changing of behavior. It is changing the behaver.

Such wisdom is heard from a crowd of witnesses and from many corners where God has been experienced. Paul said: “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” (RSV, 2 Corinthians 5:17). We become a \textit{kainē ktisis}, “a new creation.”

Conclusion

Perceiving the dignity and divinity of the human must not be misunderstood. It is not removing belief in God with a belief in man. The dignity and divinity of the human begins and is permanently grounded in God—a profound experience of God—and a deep belief in God’s continuous movement toward and uplifting of the human. It is a perception revealed in scripture and affirmed by Jesus Christ. All humans are worthy of being clothed in dignity; after all, all of us are created \textit{imago dei}.

The dimensions of this lecture in honor of Truman Madsen are adumbrated in Joseph Smith’s words: “If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves.” In conclusion, humans approximate truth by crafting and refining questions that have dogged them for about three million years. The best answers often appear as the most refined questions: What is the human \textit{אָדָם} that You have remembered him? And what is the son of man \textit{וּבֵן אָדָם} that You have noted him?” [Psalm 8:4] Indeed, as in all our introspective probing, our “primary gesture is toward inner echoes, toward, as it were, the nerve-endings of the spirit.”

\textit{The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on December 2, 2008.}
The Alphabet of Man

It is not for science to legislate in or legislate out the discriminants we use in an attempt to understand a life, a person. A lecture by faculty fellow of Linacre College, University of Oxford, Daniel Robinson.

The final chapter of Truman Madsen’s Eternal Man begins with the passage from Sir Thomas Browne’s Religio Medici. It reads:

There is surely a piece of the Divinity in us; something that was before the elements, and owes no homage to the Sun. Nature tells me that I am the image of God, as well as Scripture. He that understands not this much hath not his introduction or first lesson, and has yet to begin the alphabet of man.

In 1660, when Sir Thomas was already an established and celebrated figure, the Royal Society was founded. It was this society that played so central a part in the cultivation of what we now take to be the modern scientific world view. Although never elected a fellow of the Royal Society, Sir Thomas was a fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, a comparably forward-looking and scientifically oriented body.

So much for 1660. What about 1662? This, too, is an important year in the calendar of human judgment. It is the year in which Rose Cullender and Amy Deny were found guilty on thirteen counts of what the law referred to as “malevolent witchcraft.” Not only was Sir Thomas Browne present at that trial, but he actually composed a notable essay acknowledging the fact of witchcraft and dismissing skeptics as closet atheists. My point, of course, is that we surely are a less than consistent species. What, then, of “the alphabet of man”?

For this, let me turn from Sir Thomas Browne and his seventeenth century to Wolfgang Köhler in the twentieth century. In the first chapter of The Place of Value in the World of Facts, he reflects on what Max Weber had referred to as die Krise der Wissenschaft. Literally, “the Crisis of Science,” but the phrase really is better understood as the crisis within the learned professions at large. The crisis had risen to visible proportions in the First World War when the once politically neutral and

The Wheatley Observer
officially “objective” undertakings of science were now redirected to serve national and narrow political interests. Weber’s was one of the more audible voices proclaiming the objectivity of science. For all its failings as a serviceable guide to life, science was nonetheless the rational model of human understanding in its fact-gathering mission; at least, as Weber saw it.

It is at just this point that Köhler should occupy our attention. He speaks of a conversation—really a debate—he has had with an editor friend, a man of letters. Köhler takes the part of the man of science, insisting that the scientific worldview is what is needed to overcome this crisis. The editor will have none of this, insisting that what science produces is a large number of half-truths and what the editor calls “false facts.” Köhler finds such a claim to be oxymoronic, for how can a fact be false? The editor then makes his case without much difficulty, and I shall follow his lead.

Suppose we are confronted by that proverbial visitor from Mars, coming to Earth in order to determine the sorts of creatures who live here. The visitor locates a book titled *The Physiology and Chemistry of Human Life*. Returning to Mars, he offers this summary: “A human being is a body that is 50-75 percent water. The percentage of water depends on the total amount of fat. On average, each human being is comprised of enough sodium chloride to fill three salt shakers.” There would be a limitless number of facts to report, each of them counted with great accuracy, and based on systematic and scientific study. But, of course, the question that arises is whether the Martian community, now in possession of all of these facts, has even the foggiest notion of just what a human being is! Offered as an answer to the question, “What is a human being?” this body of facts constitutes a deception—a falsehood. In the editor’s terms, it’s a body of false facts.

What concerned Max Weber nearly a century ago, and what troubled Wolfgang Köhler’s friend in 1930s, is now so thoroughly ingrained in our culture as to go unnoticed. It is more or less taken for granted, by persons facing the moral and social dimensions of life in the modern world, that the surest guide to the right decisions and the right attitudes will somehow be supplied by science.

To understand an event is, among other considerations, to be able to explain it. Productive disputes within philosophy of science continue to focus on the nature of
explanation and on the manner in which a scientific explanation is supposed to differ from what would be acceptable or expected in other and non-scientific areas of inquiry.

There are good reasons to reject this model of explanation as being applicable to the human condition; applicable to important events in human history, in individual lives, in social and political contexts. The major barrier, I would submit, arises from the fact that significant psychological, social and moral engagements are highly individuated. How might we understand anyone? We might begin by locating that person within a species, and then taking stock of how that species is to be distinguished from other species. Note, however, that we may have good reason to include factors reasonably taken to be as important as species-membership: the characteristics of telling jokes, keeping pets, living under a rule of law, and loving God. These are characteristics, too, and it is not for science to legislate in or legislate out the discriminants we use in an attempt to understand a life, a person.

Presumably, though not all will agree on the relevance of every identifiable feature, there will be general agreement that some things true of almost all human beings are not found outside the human community. As we pick and choose among candidate features that we are, metaphorically speaking, using to assemble the alphabet of man, the features, taken one by one, will then call upon us to assemble them in a manner that generates a coherent, accurate, and intelligible story. Obviously, if we choose an insufficient number of features, we will have too few letters in our alphabet, and thus find it impossible to write certain words and sentences.

Reductionism in science is a summons to economize. It is an explanatory strategy with a noble heritage. Good results have been achieved this way. If all one seeks to explain is the fact of acceleration, one needs no more than the force applied to a given mass. If, instead, a larger question arises—How do we best explain the fact that the relationship is lawful at all in the first place?—then no number of repeated observations will be helpful in any way.

We must be careful in handling a razor. Occam’s razor is no exception. Wielded carefully, it can strip away much that is irrelevant and distracting, or based on little more than prejudice and superstition. But no metaphysical presupposition, no mode of measurement or explanation should be adopted, where the net effect is to lose the phenomenon of interest.
But herein lies the problem, for the maxim that would urge us to save the phenomenon is of very little help in establishing just which phenomena are to be identified and preserved. We are all well aware, for example, of saintly and heroic acts. Taking “altruism” to be nothing other than some form of sharing or self-sacrifice of advantage to others, even of disadvantageous to oneself, we now have a range of phenomena all answering to the same term, altruism. With a strategy of this sort, the following account is both illustrative and inevitable.

In experiments, each chimp[anzee] watched a person they had never seen before unsuccessfully reach for a wooden stick that was within reach of the ape. The person had struggled over the stick beforehand, suggesting it was valued. Scientists found the chimpanzee often handed the stick over, even when the apes had to climb eight feet out of their way to get the stick, and regardless of whether or not any reward was given. A similar result with 36 human infants just 18 months old yielded comparable results.

Clearly, if the phenomenon of interest is no more than handing over a stick, and if that action illustrates and even exhausts one’s developed conception of altruism, then evolutionary accounts of how such behavior favors the survival of the species will become credible, if not convincing, if not total. But handing over a stick cannot be the phenomenon of interest to one who is seeking to understand the nature of moral judgment, the sense of duty guiding conduct toward others.

I have used the metaphor of the alphabet of man several times now. We can’t be casual in choosing the letters that will form our vocabulary here, because we cannot be casual in assembling stories that might more fully disclose our defining nature and the possibilities that are immanent in that nature. Using Occam’s razor is too often to deny ourselves a vowel or two, perhaps a much-needed consonant. How do we gauge the size of the necessary alphabet? I answer, from human history and the study of lives.

One story originates with the Big Bang. We are constituted out of the stuff that makes stars and galaxies, and to that extent we seem to have the mark of the original maker in our nature. On the evolutionary account, very long seasons and favoring conditions would move life toward ever more complex modes of expression.
On that same account, ours is an evolved nature, but here the evolutionary part of the story comes to a screeching halt. It does not show us by what process we came to be the cultural, political and aesthetic creatures we are; the moral creatures who, in their better moments, create the conditions supportive of a perfectionist impulse. All animals provide some form of shelter for themselves, but this surely is not a model of the Acropolis or the Cathedral at Chartres, neither of which was intended for shelter. Patterns of aggression are found throughout the animal kingdom, but only we are prepared to die for a principle, for a belief in something higher and more significant than our individual lives. I list just a few of the many parts of the overall story, the telling of which requires a robust and flexible alphabet.

There is something within us. It is useless to search for a name for it. If we attempt to hold it steady in consciousness, it darts away. If we count on a crowd around us to acknowledge it, we run the risk of losing it. It seems to be repelled by what is merely earthly. Those of its features which we can glimpse more readily in other lives than in our own, suggest at once a moral and aesthetic dimension, something of a harmony, something of a proportion and fitness. When it is sensed or felt, no matter how fleetingly, there seems to be an expansion of the very terms of life itself. Sir Thomas Browne was content to call it a Spirit. Having thus identified it, the good Doctor concluded his essay with these lines, as I conclude mine:

Whosoever feels not the warm gale and gentle ventilation of this Spirit, though I feel his pulse, I dare not say he lives: for truly, without this, to me there is no heat under the Tropic; nor any light, though I dwelt in the body of the Sun.

The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on September 17, 2009.
Religion and Peacemaking in the Middle East

If you don’t want religion to be part of the problem, the answer isn’t to eliminate religion. The answer is to ensure that religion is part of the solution. A lecture by the president of the International Council of Christians and Jews, Rabbi David Rosen.

In so many places, religion often seems to be more the problem than the solution. In so many places of conflict, religion seems to be inextricably bound up in exacerbating hostility and not in calming it. It does not seem to create a better understanding, communication and collaboration between the parties.

It is true that most places that are addressed as religious conflicts are nothing of the sort. Sri Lanka, between Sinhalese, and between Hindus and Buddhists, was essentially a territorial conflict. Kashmir, between Muslims and Hindus, is a territorial conflict. Northern Ireland was a territorial conflict. And the Middle East, the conflict between the Israel and the Palestinians, or Israel and the Arabs, is a territorial conflict. It is not, in essence, a religious conflict. Nevertheless, it is clear that religion is used and abused in the context of that conflict. But this still then begs the question: Even if religion is not at the heart of those conflicts, why is it, all too often, more part of the problem than part of the solution?

Religion seeks to give meaning and understanding to who we are. It is accordingly bound up with all the different components of human identity—as individuals, as members of families, of communities, of nations, indeed, as part of humanity, as part and parcel of the cosmos. These components of identity tell us who we are. By definition, at the same time, they tell us who we are not. Therefore, in addition to affirming our own self-understanding they, of course, create a certain degree of separation between those who are not exactly part of those specific components.

This is not necessarily in itself a bad thing, and there are those who have erroneously jumped to the conclusion that this is an obstacle to the advancement of human well-being. The fact that I am part of a family does not mean that I need to in any way be alienated from another family. It means that the nature of my relationship is simply a different one.

However, because identity gives me an understanding of who I am not, there are contexts in which, when my identity feels threatened, I will be alienated from the other.
In that context where there is conflict, I may even seek to denigrate the other and search for my own self-affirmation and even self-justification, sometimes even at the expense of the other.

Because those components of identity have often been used destructively, there have been naïve idealists—like John Lennon, for example—who have thought that it might be a solution for humanity to eliminate these differences. In his rather lovely but actually very disingenuous song “Imagine,” he has those words: “Imagine no more countries; it isn’t hard to do. Nothing to fight or die for, and no religion too.” This is disingenuous, and modern society has demonstrated the depth of its disingenuity more than ever before. People need these components of identity in order to not only understand who they are, but for their psychological and spiritual welfare. Undermining them and eliminating them actually leaves people rootless, floundering and seeking for new forms of stimulation and stability.

Indeed, modern social scientists have pointed to the proliferation in modern societies of drug culture, of violence, and of abuse of self and others as searches for stimulation on the part of the bored or, above all, on the part of those who are deracinated, who have been dislocated from those sources that have given stability and solidity to their own self-understanding. In other words, somebody who does not have these components of identity is easy fodder for the exploitation of any kind of cult or ideology that easily manipulates people, sometimes for the most destructive ends and goals. The answer to the abuse of identity is not the elimination of identity but more constructive engagement in a more positive way.

Because religion is wrapped up with identity, when people feel alienated from their broader context, then the way they understand their own identities—and, therefore, the way their religious self-understanding comes to bear—tends to reinforce those perceptions of the wider context in which they function. If you look at the prophets of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, when the people are in exile, the prophets do not challenge them to be more expansive. There their role is a very different one. It is a nurturing role, trying to give the people a sense of hope, a sense of stability, a sense of the value of their own identity—to preserve it with a hope, with a future, with a confidence, that there will be a tomorrow in which they will be able to return to the land,
when they will be able to reestablish their own stability and security, when they will be able to live freely once again.

In situations of conflict, people want to affirm which party they are part of, and in this process they tend to assume a self-righteousness in the conflict, a sense that justice is on their side, that the claims they are making are the right ones. In order to affirm that, they tend to denigrate the other, to claim that the other’s position lacks the authenticity and the legitimacy and the justice of their own. And because religion is bound up with identity, it assumes these particular roles. This abuse of religion, I believe, is a function of both individual and collective psychology in situations of alienation.

In the Middle East, the unfortunate truth and reality is that everybody is alienated. Everybody in our part of the world feels vulnerable, and everybody thinks it’s somebody else’s fault. We just see ourselves in such totally different paradigms. Palestinians see themselves as vulnerable in the face of what they see as Israeli military might and power. But Israel is made up of people who are not only historically traumatized but contemporarily traumatized by continuous conflict. And the Arab Muslim world in particular sees itself as the victim of Western colonialism, imperialism, consumerism, and globalization—whatever you want.

This situation has become even worse in recent times, in the last decade. I was at pains to point out at beginning that this is a territorial conflict. But because it involves people with identities, and because in most parts of the world—and certainly in the Middle East—those identities are rooted in a religious heritage, religion becomes part of the weaponry of that conflict. These are the sources, the texts, the memories that are used to reinforce self-righteousness on each side, and are used as weapons to demonize the others involved in the conflict.

In the last decade or so . . . , this territorial conflict has increasingly been portrayed as a religious one. Indeed, the second intifada was known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the uprising for Jerusalem, for the holiest site in Jerusalem. And this is a very dangerous process because, as I said before, if it’s perceived as a territorial conflict then it can be resolved in a territorial compromise, but if it’s perceived and portrayed as a religious conflict between the godly and the goodly on the one side, and the godless and
the evil on the other side, then we are condemning ourselves to ongoing bloodshed, unceasing suffering and pain.

It was against this particular context of the inextricable relationship between religion and identity, and the way religion has been abused within this context and increasingly so in recent times, that in 2002, a very important initiative took place. Thanks to the engagement of the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord George Carey, and thanks to the providential connection between Canterbury and Al-Azhar, arguably the most important institute of Islamic learning, in Cairo, the head of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Sayyid Muhammad Tantawi, hosted the first-ever gathering of religious leaders of the Holy Land. We had the then-Sephardi chief rabbi leading a delegation of five rabbis, the personal appointee of Yasser Arafat at the time on behalf of the religious interests of the Palestinian authorities, as well as the head of the Shari’a Courts, together with two or three other leading Sheikhs, the Patriarchs of Jerusalem, and one Bishop who gathered together in Alexandria, bringing together, for the first time ever in history, religious representatives of the institutions of the three faiths of the Holy Land.

This gathering was both wonderful and pathetic. Pathetic in that it took 1300 years. Never in the 1300 years since the establishment of the third of these faiths have the religious leaders ever come together. But, wonderful, thank God, that we were able to do that, despite the fact that violence was raging in the streets of Israel as well as in the Palestinian territories.

This gathering issued a very important declaration, the Alexandria Declaration, which was the condemnation of violence in the name of religion as the desecration of religion, and the call on the part of all three faith communities for peace and reconciliation so that the conflict may be brought to an end. It didn’t bring the conflict to an end, but it did do something of enormous significance: it created for the first time a dynamic of interaction between the religious leaders, the leaders of the different religious communities in the Holy Land. Within the last few years, we have been able to capitalize upon that initiative and establish, for the first time ever, a permanent Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. This is the first time ever that we have formal structure of the traditional Christian communities in the Holy Land, of the Palestinian Muslim leadership, and of the institutional Jewish religious leadership.
In the past, those that have tried to bring about a resolution of the conflict in the Middle East have tended to ignore religion, sometimes aggressively so. When one sees the terrible things that are done in the name of religion in our part of the world, and in many other parts of the world, it’s not beyond one’s understanding that there should be such an inclination on the part of secular politicians. While I can be sympathetic to it, it is a total fallacy. If you seek to essentially eliminate the presence of constructive religious voices you are inviting the destructive religious voices to take center stage.

Whether it was Hamas or Islamic Jihad on the one hand, or whether it was Baruch Goldstein who murdered innocent Muslim worshippers at prayer in the Ibrahimi Mosque in the cave of Machpelah, or the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin—all of them did what they did in the name of their own religious understanding, believing that’s what God wanted them to do. There was a conspiracy of extremists who all believed that the peace process was inimical to God’s interests. If you don’t want that to happen, then you need to make sure that the voices of religion that say “this process is God’s interest” are part and parcel of the process. Put simply, if you don’t want religion to be part of the problem, the answer isn’t to eliminate religion. The answer is to ensure that religion is part of the solution.

Politicians will never succeed in terms of bringing about a lasting resolution of the conflict if they do not engage religious leadership. If you don’t want religion to be part of the problem, it has to be part of the solution. No initiative in our neck of the woods, and in many other parts of the world, will really succeed to be sustainable in any long term sense if it does not engage that religious dimension. In engaging that religious dimension, allow religion to be true to its most noble nature, it’s most noble purpose of not only nurturing the identity of individuals and communities and of their own particular affirmations, but to be a source of blessing to humanity at large, of being a source of peace in the name of the one whose name is peace, for the betterment of all humanity, of all society.

The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on January 13, 2010.
Straining at Particles of Light: Premortal Life and the Mansions of Memory

It is only the doctrine’s pull on both the heart and the mind that can explain its tenacious grip on the human imagination, despite the best effort of emperors, priests, and secularists to expunge the idea of the preexistence from Western thought. A lecture by the James A. Bostwick Professor of English at the University of Richmond, Terryl Givens.

In 1818, the poet John Keats wrote to his brother George: “There is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify, so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism. The pity is that we must wonder at it, as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish.” He opined that Jesus may have represented a heart and a system completely pure, before his words were written and revised by men interested in the pious frauds of religion. Like so many in his age, Keats was disheartened by institutionalized systems of religion that almost universally emphasized human depravity and inherent guilt, while themselves doing more to justify than to alleviate human suffering. But something would not let him give in to despair as he wrote hopefully, “Yet through all this, I see Christ’s splendor, even here, though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of. I am however young, writing at random, straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness.”

The image is a haunting but a hopeful one, “straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness.” It suggests, as it did for Keats’ entire cohort of romantic poets and for myriad others, not just the reality of a realm of eternal truth behind the shadowy idols of the present, but a realm that beckons to us, through faint traces of memory that pierce the long night of forgetfulness. I want to consider tonight some of the implications of what we could call this secret life of the soul, and what might be and has been revealed therein.

We all know the sensation of having failed to live up to who we are, the sense that there exists a different “I” than the one sometimes manifest through our actions. This perception is engrained in our very language of self-justification. “I wasn’t myself,” we might say. Or, “you are better than that,” a friend or relative might tell us after disappointing course of conduct. Who is this “I” we are referring to in such instances? Is
our most plausible candidate for this other “I” a hypothetical self we might someday be? Or is it rather what George MacDonald called, “an old soul,” a self with a long history that provides the contrast with current patterns of behavior?

Writing his *Confessions* at the end of the fourth century, St. Augustine begins with a series of questions: Where do I come from? Was I anywhere before I was in my mother’s womb? Why in spite of my success, my fame, my friends and family does this great chasm remain? Because it is not filled with God, he determines. Nothing except God can fill the cavern of my soul. But how can that be? How can I possibly have such love for a God I have never seen?

To answer this question, he turns inward and journeys ever deeper within himself because God, he concludes, must dwell in that same place where, in the moments of still solitude, we come face to face with all the great loves of our life. It is, of course, in memory that such forms dwell, and this is where we encounter God.

His argument turns out to be a great psalm of wonder and praise. In his quest of knowledge for God, he writes,

I will pass beyond this power of my nature, rising by degrees unto him who made me, and I come at last to the fields and spacious palaces of my memory, where are the treasures of innumerable images. . . . The images in my mind of mountains, billows, rivers, and stars—all those things that populate my memory—could not be there unless at a prior time I actually saw the mountains, billows, rivers, and stars, because if a thing is imprinted on the memory, it must have first been present.

Clearly, by analogy, those who seek God and the happy life must have been happy once, just like the New Testament woman who lost her coin. She would not have found it if she had not remembered it, and she would not have remembered it unless she had previously known it. Knowledge of God, Saint Augustine concludes, must then be memory of God.

Few if any religious or philosophical ideas in the history of Western thought have experienced such widespread fervor followed by such precipitous decline to the point of erasure as the belief that Augustine here expressed, that these faint intimations betoken
a life before birth, lived in God’s presence. The story of why the idea of preexistence suffered recurrent suppression is complex, and involves shifting theological winds that pushed it aside: the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, the overshadowing of free will by grace, the removal of God to realms of incomprehensibility and inaccessibility.

But the story of why the idea persisted, surfacing time and time again in spite of anathemas, purges, and orthodox resistance, is simpler: This idea has demonstrated greater intellectual power than its alternatives. In the seventeenth century, Cambridge Platonists had recourse to preexistence because, among other merits, it gave the most logically coherent account of the soul’s origin, with fewer problems than the Catholic version that God creates the soul at birth or the Lutheran version that the parents created it at conception. Preexistence was employed by philosophers like Immanuel Kant to ground a theory of free will and theologians like Julius Müller to justify human accountability.

Today seems a propitious moment to emphasize this approach because of recent developments in the God debates: the New Atheism that was referred to earlier. Terry Eagleton is no choirboy but a seasoned Marxist critic, and he has recently taken the secularists to task, not for failing to answer the right questions, but for failing to even ask them:

Science has gone a long way toward explaining our world, but it has yet to explain the kind of commitment that human beings make at the end of their tether, foundering in darkness, pain and bewilderment, who nevertheless remain faithful to the promise of a transformative love. Maybe reason is too skin-deep, and science does not go back far enough.

Marilynne Robinson refers to the lamentable triumph of scientism in the human sciences. One result, she remarks, is the odd practice of “defining humankind by exclusion of those very things that distinguish us as a species.” Curiously, those things that are most closely wrapped up with what it means to be human—the inner life that defines us, those things that defy measurement or analysis or reproducibility—cannot be taken too seriously in the intellectual pursuit of self-understanding. More specifically, there has been for some time an arrogant and yet provincial modernism, holding that,
“the experience and testimony of the individual mind should be excluded from consideration when any rational account is made of the nature of human beings.”

What Keats felt, and Augustine plumbed, was a sentiment as universal as hunger and thirst. Even Freud acknowledged that almost everybody had an innate desire to connect with something eternal and oceanic, and, in the final analysis, that is why the doctrine of the preexistence has never died out. The idea has erupted into poetry, letters, sermons, and philosophical texts over the centuries, impelled by something more fundamentally human than syllogistic argument. It is only the coming together of the rational and the affective or the emotional—only the doctrine’s pull on both the heart and the mind—that can explain its tenacious grip on the human imagination, despite the best effort of emperors, priests, and secularists to expunge the idea from Western thought.

From Mesopotamian and Greek sources alike, belief in the preexistence made its way into the very early Christian church. An early vociferous opponent of the idea was the church father Tertullian in the second century. He thought preexistence was a dangerous idea; it made us too like God, he worried, and he thought he’d found its Achilles’ heel in the soul’s failure to preserve a memory of that prior estate: “I cannot allow that the soul is capable of a failure of memory.”

In the seventeenth century, a group of churchmen known as the Cambridge Platonists would answer Tertullian. Why should it be surprising, they reasoned, if the soul cannot recall all that has passed, when in the brief span of life, we have again forgotten so much? “For who can call to mind when first he here saw the sun, or felt the gentle wind?” Other thinkers from Descartes through the nineteenth century commonly invoked preexistence to explain the innate sense of universals, of morality, and of God.

Goethe suggested a personal belief in some kind of human pre-mortality—stages of preexistence on our way to a glorious future. As to why we cannot remember any of it, he wrote to his friend Johannes Falk, “the former states or circumstances through which we . . . have passed, were too insignificant . . . for much of it to be, in the eyes of Nature, worthy to be remembered.”

With Goethe we come to the greatest modern flowering of modern poetry: the Romantic Movement. Most Mormons are familiar with Wordsworth’s great ode describing how we come to earth, “trailing clouds of glory.” Wordsworth begins his ode
with a meditation on the mystery of human melancholy. Given the beauties of the world
we inhabit, the laughter of children, and the richness of nature, how can we explain that
nagging sense of loss, that in his words, “there hath passed away a glory from the
earth”? The answer, he senses with equal power, lies in the only spiritual anthropology
that makes sense out of this human condition: “It must be that we experience at our
birth what it actually is,” he wrote, “the loss of a greater Eden we once knew.”

What we find in every case I have mentioned so far is that, although the cardinal
insight leads to wonderful poetry, sound philosophy, or even good theology, it begins as
pure intimation, prompted by introspection, meditation, or reflection upon a sleeping
child. Human intuition, not logical deduction, is the starting point.

Preexistence, like many other myriad intimations of the human soul, cannot
ultimately demand ascent on the basis of purely human feelings. Certainly memory is as
prone to its own errors as our other faculties. But the reasons why preexistence has
faded from the religious landscape have nothing to do with the roots of the idea in the
inner life of the soul. As a Cambridge classical scholar wrote not too many years ago:
“However many readers believe that their soul will survive death, rather few, I imagine,
believed that it also preexisted their birth. The religions that have shaped Western
culture are so inhospitable to the idea of preexistence that you probably reject the
thought out of hand, for no good reason.”

A case in point comes from a highly regarded biblical commentary. In the ninth
chapter of John, Jesus passes the man who was born blind. His disciples ask, “Who did
sin, this man or his parents?” And Jesus says, “Neither [one], but that the works of God
should be made manifest.”

Most commentators recognize in this episode a clear assumption on the part of
his apostles that there was a preexistent life. A well-known scriptural commentary says:
“There is something majestic in this conception of a fundamental justice woven into the
very web of life, running through all things, and working itself out in everything that
happens to us: a conception which leaves no room for whimpering or whining or self-
pity or railing against fate.” Nevertheless, our commentator concludes with unexpected
curtness: “Surely it is much too crude and easy a solution.” For those who value the
strains of the soul over the strictures of convention, however, simplicity has never been
a barrier to beauty.
The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on October 13, 2011.
**MORMON ECUMENICAL MOMENT**

*Christianity today, for all of its global success and growth, remains a divided and fragmented faith. What if Mormonism could help Christians find the unity that is so central to our common witness to Jesus Christ? A lecture by Wabash College professor of religion and philosophy, Stephen H. Webb.*

Ecumenical means ‘the attempt to restore unity to Christian churches separated by history, doctrine and practice.’ The ecumenical movement, unfortunately, has fallen on hard times. Old theological battles have not been won or lost, and little progress has been made by replacing theological dialogue with social engagement. Nonetheless, there is reason to suspect that Christianity is on the verge of potentially radical transformations.

Rather than abridging the gospel, Mormonism dares to maximize it in all of its lush complexity. So much of Christianity’s richness was discarded in the early Church’s struggle for institutional stability and theological consensus. Those hard-fought theological battles left scars. They were not so much healed as they were covered up by the questionable medicine of amnesia. Joseph Smith’s most important intellectual virtue was an ability to look into the past with an utterly fearless and therefore expansive, not contractive, imagination. Christianity today, for all of its global success and growth, remains a divided and fragmented faith. What if Mormonism could help Christians find the unity that is so central to our common witness to Jesus Christ?

The scientific mysteries and metaphysical complexities of matter indicate that the time is ripe to reconsider the old Platonic axiom that God is pure spirit. If so, then Christian theology might be ready for transformation every bit as momentous as when the Church Fathers made the crucial decision to align themselves with the best of Greek philosophy. Many Mormon scholars have identified the alignment of Christianity with Platonism—or, to use more colorful language, Augustine’s baptism of Plato—as the source of theology’s decline. Plato’s metaphysical breakthrough, when appropriated by Augustine, became Christianity’s common sense. The idea that God, the soul, and all heavenly realities are immaterial, however, pushed the divine beyond the reach of most people’s imagination and (according to the Mormon account of Church history) separated the institutional expression of the Church from its revelatory ground. The
removal of God from the realm of sense perception resulted in a crisis of religious authority. The systematic ambition of creedal formulations increasingly took the place of testimony and prophecy.

The problem with creeds, when seen in the light of what I would call a metaphysical reading of church history, is that dogmatic consensus grounded in the philosophical abstractions of an immaterial world view can never do justice to the reality and power of Jesus Christ. Whatever else it is, Mormonism is a reminder that the past is never completely over, gone, and forgotten. Roads not taken can appear out of nowhere as possibilities for future exploration.

As a Roman Catholic, I believe that the early Church was guided by divine providence towards creeds and hierarchies that were necessary for institutional survival and theological coherence. Christianity had to set itself apart from the violent world of pagan mythologies, gnostic fantasies where gods fought each other, and a cosmos governed by neither mercy nor law. Most of the alternatives to Christianity portrayed the material world as evil, a proposition that struck many people in the ancient world as common sense, given how short and painful life could be. Even the gods who were sympathetic to the human plight could hardly be bothered to take notice of human souls trapped in heavy, decaying flesh with its fleeting pleasures.

The early Church took a variety of measures to turn back the tide of these metaphysical fables with their monstrous spiritual implications. Theologians posited that God created the world out of nothing in order to show that matter was under God’s complete authority and thus not mired in evil. The doctrine of Providence began eclipsing the belief of human free will in order to assure the faithful that God is in control of the universe. Arguably, all of these positions were good, rightful, and needed in their day, and they were affirmed by devout followers of Jesus Christ for the best of reasons. Nonetheless, there might be reasons in our own time to give their alternatives another look.

The world of ideas today seems to be stuck between a rock and an empty place. That is, between the hard, reductive, yet scientifically successful explanation of all things by reference to material causation and the insistence that our minds, as well as all that we most value in life, are not the product of arbitrary and random physical forces. The mechanical view of matter treats nature as a machine that follows the laws of strict
causal determinism which leaves no room for freedom. Immaterialists respond to reductionists by insisting that our minds are not identical to our brains. Our thoughts and ideas are real, but they do not occupy physical space. Reductionists scoff at the possibility that anything could exist without being located somewhere while immaterialists bemoan the picture of our world bereft of all the qualities that make human life meaningful and unique. Mormon metaphysics opens the possibility of a third way between these two alternatives.

Plato invented the idea of immaterial substances when he argued that our knowledge of something is really our knowledge of an idea of that thing. Matter, for Plato, was simply unknowable because our knowledge of matter is limited to the form it takes. The theologians who adopted the philosophy of Plato and his students were more concerned about the Greek insistence on matter’s eternity than the problem of matter’s knowability. Following Augustine’s lead, they put a stop to matter’s eternity by positing the idea that God created the world out of nothing. This had the effect, however, of making matter even more mysterious, since there is no analogy to human experience for someone being able to create something out of nothing. After Augustine, only something immaterial could be eternal, and a great gulf opened up between the divine and everything else.

Smith began bridging the gulf between spirit and matter with his first vision, in which he saw God the Father and God the Son as two individual and fully embodied persons. He accepted the reality of what he saw while at the same time affirming the even greater reality of what all Christians will see in heaven. In other words, he inferred from his vision that the world consists of multiple levels of physical reality rather than simply two kinds of substances, one material and one immaterial. Christians have always believed that our physical bodies will be transformed in heaven, and thus, deeply hidden within Christian faith, is the acknowledgement of matter’s potential glorification. Smith provided this belief with a truly cosmic foundation by showing how the very criterion of becoming spiritual entails the perfection, not the evacuation, of material existence.

Joseph Smith did not live long enough to develop his convictions about matter into a full-fledged theological world view. That task, though, is taken up by an early convert named Orson Pratt. An unabashed atomist, Pratt defined matter as “Every
substance in space, whether visible or invisible.” He thought material substance consists of “inconceivably minute, solid, hard, impenetrable, immutable, atoms.” Pratt’s most creative application of his theory of matter is to the theology of the Holy Spirit. For Pratt, the Father and Son are embodied beings in a way that the Holy Spirit is not. The Holy Spirit is a kind of super material substance that is in a class of its own. The Holy Spirit is a kind of gravitational force that, rather than pulling physical objects closer to each other, lifts this spiritual substance of every object toward higher levels of perfection.

Since Pratt’s time, philosophers and theologians have been scrambling to reformulate the basic propositions of Western metaphysics in order to keep up with scientific advances. Process philosophers talk about matter in terms of events which are so intimately related to each other that they can be said to ‘feel’ each other. The field of emergent order studies argues for top-down causation to explain how novelty emerges from chaos. Quantum mechanics suggest that the smallest particles just might exhibit some of the traits that we ordinarily associate with human freedom. String theory has given rise to speculation about multiple universes or “worlds without number.”

Perhaps the most important legacy of Pratt’s voluminous writings is to make the case that a material God, besides being able to share our joys and sufferings, just might be even more mysterious than an immaterial God. After all, a material conception of the divine requires us to reconceive the majesty of the physical world in ways that the sciences have not yet fathomed. Only if matter is not perfectible does its attribution to God disparage and denigrate God’s glory. It certainly makes it easier to understand God’s love for us as well as God’s willingness to suffer on our behalf if we let matter into the heart of divinity.

Surprisingly enough, the Mormon view of God might not, at the end of the day, look so different from the Roman Catholic position. Mormons and Catholics share a conviction that the material world can convey the substance of the divine. For Catholics, everything about matter is concentrated into the singular moment of the Eucharist. Mormons, by contrast, have a very Protestant understanding of communion. How could Mormons have such a creative view of the ultimate destiny of matter and, at the same time, have a low, pragmatic, and somewhat informal view of the Lord’s Supper?
The answer to that question came to me when I began to realize that Mormons have their own version of transubstantiation, which is located in a different theological place than Roman Catholicism. For Catholics, transubstantiation is dramatized in a quite literal way in the Eucharist, where the bread and wine become the first fruits of the eschatological economy of Christ’s abundantly capacious body. Catholics believe that Mormons have imbibed a bit too deeply of the Protestant critique of ritual, which turns communion into an inward and subjective journey and away from matter. This reading of Mormonism is seriously flawed because it looks for transubstantiation in Mormon theology in all the wrong places. Mormons can appear to treat the Lord's Supper as a memorial affair because the saints actually locate transubstantiation in the potential for every event, no matter how mundane, to convey God's grace. As Elder Holland said in a talk entitled “Of Souls, Symbols and Sacraments”:

A sacrament could be any one of a number of gestures or acts or ordinances that unite us with God and his limitless powers. . . . [F]rom time to time—indeed, as often as is possible and appropriate—we find ways and go to places and create circumstances where we can unite symbolically with him, and in so doing gain access to his power. Those special moments of union with God are sacramental moments. . . . At such moments we not only acknowledge his divinity, but we quite literally take something of that divinity to ourselves.

Matter itself in Mormonism is bursting with transubstantiating power. Mormons focus their imagination of transubstantiation the most in the afterlife. No Christian tradition has ever had such a concrete, specific, and creative view of heaven. Every good thing we do in this life, the saints believe, we will do in the next, only with pure joy and greater results. In the next life, the saved will exercise power over matter sufficient to create and rule new worlds. The cosmos, which Mormons believe is already infinite, will multiply exponentially. Transubstantiation will become the law of the cosmos, not just a Sunday morning ritual, and the glorious body of the resurrected Lord will be at the center of it all.
If a Mormon moment can usher in a spiritual vision worthy of our modern materialistic age, then I welcome it wholeheartedly as a providential ripening of Smith’s prophetic vocation. No other branch of the Christian tree is so entangled in complex and fascinating ways with the earliest and most neglected doctrines of the church, and no other branch extends so optimistically, embraceingly upward and outward as it stretches toward a cosmic and Christ-centered horizon.

The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on November 15, 2012.
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR STRUGGLING LEARNERS

This is probably going to sound as heresy, but quite frankly, I don’t think resource is necessarily the biggest issue. I believe resourcefulness is. A lecture by Williamson Family Distinguished Professor of Special Education at the University of Kansas, Donald D. Deshler.

When it comes to education, the challenges before us are enormous. The longer I’m in it, the more I realize how daunting the challenge is, especially when we’re talking about kids who are failing.

[I’ll] remind us of some good things that have happened. Andrew Franz is a person who, years ago, really struggled with learning. He was identified as having some real problems, and he was taught some high-leverage strategies. It totally transformed his life as a learner, because his teachers taught by using methods that made a difference. He’s now a pilot in the Air Force.

With that as a backdrop, let me turn my attention to some challenges. The story goes like this. There’s a student who goes through one year of school and he picks up one year of skills. He goes through three years of school and, in normal achievement, picks up three years of skills. Unfortunately, that picture doesn’t exist for many of the students in our schools. As they go through a year of school, they don’t pick up a year of skills; three years of school, not three years of skill. Over time we see this gap starting to develop between the skills that they have and the demands of the curriculum.

Only thirty percent of secondary students are proficient readers in our schools. 89 percent of Hispanics and 86 percent of African Americans read below grade level. We have a huge challenge in our country to deal with this achievement. Do you realize that today, 3,000 youth dropped out of our schools? Behind every statistic – 540,000 dropouts, 26 percent reading below literacy and so forth –is a personal story of heartache, fear, and uncertainty. That’s where the real problem is, and oftentimes it’s so easy to lose sight of that.

Let’s take a look at the other side, the demands that we’re expected to meet in order to thrive as an economy. Anyone who hasn’t been living in a gopher hole the past eight years or so is aware of No Child Left Behind and Average Yearly Progress, or AYP.
Basically, schools are expected to meet certain benchmarks, and states individually come up with state tests and establish standards that schools need to meet as they test their students. The results of these kinds of measures have been used as the stick as opposed to the carrot, in many instances, to bring about action and changes within schools.

This is probably going to sound as heresy to some of you, but quite frankly, I don’t think resource is necessarily the biggest issue. I believe resourcefulness is, and the proper use of the resources we have. We have a responsibility and a moral obligation to advocate for the responsible expenditure of resources. The more the school hurts, the more chefs there are in the kitchen, trying to fix it. It is overwhelming for those who are teaching and leading in those kinds of schools. No one means ill, but we need to stand back and ask if we are indeed being productive as we go into these kinds of circumstances in the hopes of doing well.

Another potentially counter-productive solution is the fact that many of our solutions are basically living on the surface, and they’re avoiding the core. The core [is] the teaching, the hard, messy stuff of schools.

Now some leverage points. You just can’t throw money at the problem. If we want to be more successful in our work in improving education, [we need] to understand the difficulty and the cost of change. The second leverage point is to seek to understand dissonance between practitioners and change agents. Are the teaching practices that we’re recommending powerful? Are the teaching practices easy to implement?

There are stellar examples of inspiring work that is being done in schools. Those who are doing it on the front lines understand we need to learn from them. Those who work with them and cultivate the change process with them can teach us a great deal as well. The kids whose lives are being dramatically touched as a result of a lack of achievement deserve everything we can give to come up with those kinds of solutions.

*The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on March 17, 2009.*
A NEW NOBILITY: THE FAMILY

The parents of a cripple, of a drop-out, of a criminal, don’t love him or her less. This is exactly what other institutions, be they the market or the state, can’t afford to do. A lecture by Emeritus Professor of Medieval and Arabic Philosophy at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, Rémi Brague.

Western societies—nay, industrialized societies at large—are recognizing a crumbling down of the so-called traditional form of the family. The growing rate of divorces, premarital sex, extra-marital relationships and births, single parenthood, stepfamilies, blended families, not to mention the alleged “homosexual families”—all of these belong to this large-scale phenomenon.

This trend harks back through several centuries. Two institutions, the modern state and the market, can’t help trying to wreck the family and to recast it according to their own needs. The modern state tries to reduce men to individuals. Its early modern form, absolutely monarchy, wanted to reduce them to individuals who pay and obey, i.e. to subjects. In its late modern form, it reduces men to individuals that pay and vote, i.e. to citizens. The other most influential institution of the modern world, the market, pursues the same policy as the state. The market tries to reduce things to wares that can be bought and sold and human beings to individuals that sell and buy, to consumers for whom whatever exists has to be considered as a commodity that has a price.

In spite of all those attacks, the family has a strong hold. The biological bond is something that can’t be done away with. Precisely because it is not chosen, it subsists in spite of everything. This obvious fact has a very important moral consequence: a family is a space inside of which people are accepted for what they are and not for what they do. To be sure, parents are far more satisfied when their children are healthy, successful, and behave well. But the parents of a cripple, of a drop-out, of a criminal, don’t love him or her less. This is exactly what other institutions, be they the market or the state, can’t afford to do.

I argue that the family furnishes us with a model of relationship to time that could prove helpful, not to say salutary, in front of our present predicament. Originally, in the late middle ages, the Latin word societas meant a commercial association, i.e. company. We have been trying for centuries to call the human community “society”;
hence, to think of it on the model of a company. This model is dreadfully inadequate as soon as we ask the question how we become members of the human community. We do that by being born into it, which is not the result of our choice. Society has to take the family for granted on the one hand, if it is to replenish itself with human material. It has to undermine it, on the other hand, because it does not fit into its categories of free, negotiated choice.

Society has nothing to tell us on a very important point—nothing less than the very existence of mankind. Why is there to be human life in this earth? Must mankind have a future? This is the point on which the family could have its say and does have something very precious to teach us. Its is a peculiar and even unique relationship to temporality, to our being in time, a relationship that very well could be applied to other levels of human life and even become their cornerstone.

In former societies, the leading model of the family was the aristocratic one. A family was, first and foremost, a lineage, a vertical succession from father to son. The hero of P. G. Wodehouse’s hilarious Blandings novels, the fluffy-minded Lord Emsworth, understands himself as “Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth.” His first duty in life was to beget a potential tenth earl. Now, this care for the future is a big problem in our modern democratic societies. Problems of demography, problems of the management of natural resources and of ecology, problems of education, religion, and culture at large have, as their smallest unit of measure, ten years.

In the present-day world, the institutions that think in the very long run are not many. The family could provide other fields of human action with a useful model. Let us think, for instance, of the ecological movement. It has taught us to look at the earth as the common heritage of mankind, as something that we receive from the generations above—nay, from the whole revolutionary process of life—and that we are committed to transmit unspoiled to the next generations.

To conclude, let me point out a paradox. The family is, at the same time, reactionary and progressive. It is reactionary because it furnishes the present-day world with an equivalent of the former aristocratic time consciousness. It is progressive because it furnishes a model for the possible survival of the human race, which constitutes the rock-bottom condition of any progress. The family could be one of those not-that-numerous institutions that care for the very long run. The condition is that it
should remain faithful to this logic and not let other outlooks, the outlook of the state or of the market, encroach upon it.

_The lecture abridged here was originally delivered at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University on October 21, 2011._