



Radio Beloved

A corn of wheat

Radio Beloved: A corn of wheat.
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Chapter images by William Blake: *Christ Accepting His Role as Redeemer*; *'Behold Thy Mother'*; *Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels*; *Angels Rolling the Stone Away From the Sepulchre*.

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Introduction

Radio Beloved is 6 months old as of this writing. This collection of some of my original works reveals something of the early direction I intended, a sort of Latter-day Saint existentialism. I've since revised my philosophical position on a number of issues, but, surprisingly, as I read back through these old pieces I could find nothing I would today disagree with. This gives me the opportunity to recharge a bit with my original vision of Radio Beloved, man standing alone before the Absolute, broadcasting into the void.

Briefly, let me say that my existential conception of Latter-day Saintism struggles mainly with the nature of God. In Kierkegaard, Eckhart, and others, God is of course an absolute in the universe. For Latter-day Saints, however, he is an exalted man, and stands in a different relationship to the cosmos than for many other Christians. In some ways, that's the problem I'm trying to strike at the root of—how can one reconcile an absolute Absolute with apotheosis of God himself, a created/deified/your-pet-Mormon-theoried Absolute?

These essays, however, are more geared towards becoming what we should become, rather than getting stuck in the ontological morass of theodicy. These are the theories based on which I would like to live, as I understand God's desire for his children—to live free from death, free from fear, free to fulfill a glorious potential as children of an 'Abba'.

In any case, I have learned, through the process of composing these essays, of the basic love and understanding our Father in Heaven has for his children. The gospel, and all truth, is circumscribed into one great whole; only our misunderstanding can fragment that. Yet our petition for grace can accommodate some of our failure, and the Atonement may bring us all again one, Zion. May we become worthy of its habitation.

That ye may have life...

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (KJV)

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (NIV)

I came, that they have life, and have more plenteously. (Wycliffe)

Ego veni ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant. (Vulgate)
—John 10:10

Christ delivered this teaching to the disciples and Pharisees in the last months of his life, recorded in the Gospel of John directed to the disciples familiar with the introductory teachings of the Church already. As Jesus built his ministry to the crescendo of Gethsemane and Golgotha, he continually reaffirmed the cosmic significance of the doctrines he taught—and doctrine is too weak a word. This is the symbolic end of every lamb on every Levitical altar and the real end of the real Lamb on the Golgothan altar.

What is it to have life and to have it more abundantly?

Death is separation, whether from God, from others, or from ultimately one's own potential. Freedom from death is through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, freedom to have no elements of death in your life—but freedom is burdened by choice.

I wonder what it was like in that moment in our early childhood when we first understood death. At some point, we all experience the icy realization that I, too, will die. Yet we have been taught continually to not fear death, but accept it as part of our natural mortality, a return to a spiritual plane. Finitude,



the Heideggerian certainty of impending end, should not be a challenge to the believing Christian with more than a casual faith—*there is no impending end*, except to progress and glory, should we allow sin in. The universal gift is, of course, the Resurrection, but that only covers part of the question of death.

The first spiritual death, separation from God, is possibly the most fundamental neurosis we can have, and I believe that recognition of this death, whether overtly religious or atheistic, is what led to the modern notions of alienation and existentialism. God is separate from us by an *infinite qualitative distinction* (Kierkegaard's phrase), a complete difference of kind and degree, and the separation is an unbridgeable gap by finite means. Thus, an infinite Atonement (Alma 34:10) was necessary and sufficient to reconcile that divide—that this corruption might put on incorruption (2 Nephi 9:7).

Alienation from each other is another great divide of human existence, and our common lot. Condemned, as Kierkegaard said, to know others only in potential, we struggle through miscommunication and mistrust, largely products of our own selfishness, to construct our fragile relationships. But the Atonement, literally (Tyndale's word) *at-one-ment*, is to bring us all of one heart and one mind, Zion, to seal us together in love and charity. The division and argument common to us are elements of spiritual death, and preclude us from living life more abundantly. Christ taught a higher way, and through continual application of the Atonement we can approximate it better and better over the years of personal striving.

We all look in the mirror and see someone who is less than what we would have them be. Life more abundantly certainly precludes any sense of failure or inadequacy (beyond humility—but that's another topic). And yet we so often insist on maintaining the elements of death, physical and spiritual, in our lives. Why? What hammer drives the relentless march of our own self-destruction, whether from cigarettes, pornography, or just momentum in inactivity? In some ways, I feel that this is the most difficult part of death to approach, not because it is somehow deeper than the others, but because it is the one we face *every moment of every day*. Our own inadequacy confronts us at every turn; we can throw up walls of pride to hold it apart, but it is still there, leering at us through windows and mirrors.

In Sartrean existentialism, bad faith, or inauthenticity to one's own self, reveals an answer to this problem. Although I won't here discuss one's own self (which I take to mean that self God desires us to be and sees in us), I will examine inauthenticity. The individual insists that external circumstances (poverty, athleticism, social standing, education) dictate the terms of his or her existence, thus denying the personal freedom to change. We pretend that the possibilities of existence, good and bad, are closed to us, with one or two overriding exceptions (normally continuing in the same vein in which we already are). Alternatively, we use internal or social definitions of self (labels such as *Christian, stubborn, sloppy, or liberal*) to dictate our response, choosing to act according to the archetype of the label rather than to act authentically to one's own desires. In the case of Christian, Muslim, or Latter-day Saint, this choice may be considered virtuous; in many, many other cases, the choice is self-limiting and enclosing, perpetuating the elements of death rather than purging them.

Yet recognition of this problem is not solution: it takes more than “hard work”, concentration, or even redemption to become more than what we were. It takes the rest of the Atonement, quickening and exaltation, beyond “re”-anything.

Jesus Christ came to free us from death, to life more abundant. The truest, deepest fear of the believer, the one with a more-than-casual faith, is not death but damnation—the complete, unequivocal, eternal cessation of progress. A more complicated aspect of death and life-more-abundant is Paul’s reminder that we must pass through death to approach life, crucifying the old man of sin (Romans 6:6); but that is a discussion for another time.

God’s life, eternal life, the infinitely qualitatively distinct life, is a life free from death, a life in which all gifts are life to the degree we will let Him bestow it. He took it upon Himself in order to free us from it, and invites us continually to leave it behind—to *become*, rather than merely *be*, a son or daughter of God.

A corn of wheat

On hearing of the death of John the Baptist, possibly one of the men in the world who knew Jesus Christ best, the Savior sought the solitude of desert places. We know naught of what he was feeling, or whether he went to mourn or worship or commune. The record reads:

When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

—Matthew 14:13-14

There was not, at this time, a quiet moment of meditation for Jesus. Rather, the pressing crowds, oblivious of their intrusion on his desired tranquility, demanded instant attention. Christ did not for a moment begrudge them this, but immediately, “moved with compassion”, turned to their ministry.



Recently, I was musing on frustration in life, and stress, and their geneses via our own unrealistic expectations. We stayed with the family of my wife’s sister, her husband, and their five children. There wasn’t much time to do anything remotely personal with all the hectic running about and attention that five kids require, and at the beginning of the week I found myself staring into the abyss. I wondered how I could ever shoulder the burdens of parenthood for the long years required, when I have so many things I still want to do and be.

I came to realize, however, that although the parents may not be doing all that they may have envisioned in their past, they were not unhappy, but very, very satisfied with their good family life. It struck me that I’ve been approaching life incorrectly. Life isn’t about meeting the peculiar urges and desires of this ego right

now, but about becoming via study, prayer, meditation, and especially selfless service, begrudging no moment to another's salvation when necessary (less [of ourselves] is more [like who we need to be]). And I'm referring to much more than just parenting, although that is a wonderful example.

Self-fulfillment is a relatively modern notion, but it finds little scriptural support. Life isn't about becoming the armyman-doctor-fairyprincess-astronaut with a pony we may have dreamt of as children. It isn't about becoming the MBA or black belt or bishop we may dream of now. Some of these may happen incidentally, as we choose righteous pursuits and use them to hone our spiritual development, but the divine expectation is not that we seek to meet our own needs now but that we change and grow into the sort of being who is happy in the service of God.

A changing definition of happiness is also needed. Instead of constant pleasure-seeking, we need to become happy with the things God allots to us and happy in the service he requests. It is not a sacrifice of happiness, but a recognition that in this subjective redefinition greater peace and happiness is possible than ever we suspected before. This is no idle leap of faith, either—turning your back on years of wishing and planning can be frightening, but it need not be a resignation to despair.

The prophet Alma exclaimed:

But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish [to do more than I have been called to do]; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. ·I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.

—Alma 29:3-4

In other words, we get what we want, though we don't always suspect the terms of that fulfillment. Joseph F. Smith wrote of "educating our desires"—that "in nature we have our seed-time and harvest." He also preached, "Our desires are the strongest motives which incite us to energy and which make us productive and creative in life" (Smith, [*Gospel Doctrine*](#), pp. 297-98). This is a solemn reminder and rejoinder to continually engage in the deliberate practice of self-purification.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. ·He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

—John 12:24-25

Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.

—1 Corinthians 15:36

We are now a hard kernel of wheat, dead but with infinite potential. Face to face with the breadth of charity, charity greater than love, we pause in trepidation. Yet there need be no fear in the consecration of ourselves to God, nor in the metamorphosis from a selfish creature to a child of God. Far less of our ego than we suspect is truly who we are, and far more of our potential.

The second mile

¶ *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: ·But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. ·And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. **And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.** ·Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

—Matthew 5:38-42

The gospel of the second mile. Christ exemplifies the practical application of this most practical doctrine throughout his eternal ministry. Consider, for a moment, the Parable of the Good Samaritan:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ·And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ·And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. ·But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, ·and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ·And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

—Luke 10:30-35

It was morally incumbent on the Samaritan to bind the man's wounds and care for him, even to go so far as the inn with him. Certainly no less would be expected by any ethical system, but note the further action of the Samaritan—he pays, in advance, for the further care his charge will require. We can nod knowingly at this gesture and say, “He was certainly a charitable man,” but I think that if that alone were the target of this parable, Jesus wouldn't have watered down the precious words of his few parables with gratuity. No, this line from the Fisher of Men is intended to draw us into deeper waters of truth.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Jesus Christ is inviting us to go a mile farther than we have been compelled to go, as included in the Sermon on the Mount, the seminal moral discourse for any Christian. He's reminding us that part of life is putting more in than you receive. I know that in a salvational sense that isn't true, but in interpersonal relationships it can be, and must be, if we are to bring souls to Christ.

In the Book of Mormon, Jesus spent an entire day with the people of the New World preaching, teaching, and prophesying. Towards the late afternoon, he drew his ministering to a close:

Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again.

—3 Nephi 17:3

The Nephites sadly considered Jesus' departure, but, as the record states, "they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them (3 Nephi 17:5)." Strictly speaking, the Lord's ministry for the day among the Nephites was complete, for he had taught them the principles of the gospel. Here, however, was an opportunity to go the second mile. Jesus spent much longer in direct ministry to the Nephites, and their lame, and their children. Marvelous miracles, on the scale of those at Jerusalem, were performed for God's children in America, and the sacrament was administered for the first time in that new dispensation of grace. The second mile.

In the broadest sense, the Atonement itself embodies this principle. We know that Christ paid the price for our moral separation from God, due to the Fall:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

—Romans 3:23-25

We learn through modern revelation that the Atonement was, however, broader than this, and that Christ took upon himself even more:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels



*may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh
how to succor his people according to their infirmities.*
—Alma 7:11-12

Jesus Christ took upon himself voluntarily death. He took upon himself voluntarily sin. These were necessary elements for our redemption. However, he also chose to take upon himself our infirmities, that he might know how to succor (from L. *to run to*) us. The Holy One of Israel chose to set the ultimate example for us of going the second mile, and succoring us beyond what we may view as having strictly been required.

Now I've written a bit about what is required ethically. I suggest that what is "required", in that sense, is insufficient. It draws us into a terrestrial sphere, but not into the celestial.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? ·And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? ·Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.
—Matthew 5:46-48

This is the genius of true Christianity, the deeper requirement that is so often glossed over. In total consecration, more than the minimum, ethically required good is performed, and the maximum good is sought.

Freely ye have received, freely give.
—Matthew 10:8

The iron rod is two miles long: one mile from the lonely way of Eden to the gate of salvation, and another to the circles of exaltation.

No man dieth to himself

A few weeks ago, I wrote an essay on life and death in light of the Atonement. It ended thus:

We are now a hard kernel of wheat, dead but with infinite potential. Face to face with the breadth of charity, charity greater than love, we pause in trepidation. Yet there need be no fear in the consecration of ourselves to God, nor in the metamorphosis from a selfish creature to a child of God. Far less of our ego than we suspect is truly who we are, and far more of our potential.

Identity has been rolling around in my head for a long time now. What is identity? Who am I, or, at least, who will I be? Those are deeper questions, perhaps, than we can expect answers to in this life, but I'd still like to explore it, especially as embodied in the last phrase I wrote above. "Far less of our ego than we suspect is truly who we are, and far more of our potential."

"Far less of our ego..." What did I mean? I'm still trying to catch that elusive thought, hanging like gossamer in my mind. Certainly my selfish interests and habits will be burned away as chaff; I have to wonder how literally consciousness of myself will die, and to what resurrection. I don't believe that we will become the nameless, faceless, identityless 'brothers and sisters in Christ' of which I've heard some evangelical Christians speak, not for an instant. God didn't create human identity in his children only to destroy it mere decades later, as in that conception. Furthermore, we do know that there was self-identification before this life, as evidenced by the agency exhibited in the war in heaven. Joseph Smith preached,

*I have another subject to dwell upon..., associated with the subject of the resurrection of the dead,—namely, the soul—the mind of man—the immortal spirit. Where did it come from? All learned men and doctors of divinity say that God created it in the beginning; but it is not so: the very idea lessens man in my estimation....
The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is [co-eternal] with God himself.
—Joseph Smith (King Follett Discourse)*

This is a marvelously deep and important doctrine in Mormonism, and we've hardly scratched the surface of its implications in the nearly two centuries since its revelation. We are self-existent beings, beings of cohesive identity, beings which are self-determining as uncreated. Mere reflection cannot give us too much insight into our identity, although it can be useful. Ultimately, we can never strike too close to the quick of existence, because we are a sort of recursive observer-observing-him or her-self, condemned to perceive ourselves only as phenomena, as Kant pointed out in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

Neal A. Maxwell wrote, in what is the kernel of this post, that, "What we now defensively regard as constituting individuality is likely to be significantly refined" ([The Inexhaustible Gospel](#), 200). Furthermore, George MacDonald reminded us, "This love of our neighbour is the only door out of the dungeon of self" ([Love Thy Neighbor](#)). And so we must leave that dungeon of self, and venture forth into the wild and windy universe.

“...and far more of our potential.” Venturing forth, we now enter upon the reasons for this life, the motivation for a crucible. As children of God, destined to inherit his glory and enter into the mysteries of Godliness, it is our potential that defines our future identity. The genius of linear thought, as we are forced to have, is that every single thought determines which direction we are headed, which of the two ways we follow. There is no neutrality in divine war.

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.”
—Romans 14:7

As our own ego dies, our own potential lives. We become more effective in the inherently social world into which the Lord placed us, more effective at reflecting or transmitting the light of Christ within us, more effective at filling the same potential.

I spoke of linear thought, the chain of combinatorial logic in which we are enmeshed irrevocably. Hugh Nibley refers to this linearity extensively in his famous essay, [Zeal Without Knowledge](#):



But why this crippling limitation on our thoughts if we are God’s children? It is precisely this limitation which is the essence of our mortal existence. If every choice I make expresses a preference; if the world I build up is the world I really love and want, then with every choice I am judging myself, proclaiming all the day long to God, angels and my fellowmen where my real values lie, where my treasure is, the things to which I give supreme importance. Hence, in this life every moment provides a perfect and foolproof test of your real character, making this life a time of testing and probation. ...

Sin is waste. It is doing one thing when you should be doing other and better things for which you have the capacity.

Or, in my immediate terms, sin is the waste of our potential on our ego. It's back to the question of how we deal with our cognitive surplus.

On another note, we are reminded by C. S. Lewis that the path to Hell is paved with good intentions. How do we reconcile this? By performing every action authentically, in Sartre's term, or ethically, in Kant's, or infinitely, in Kierkegaard's. It is not a question so much of "intention", as we may easily deceive ourselves in self-justification of our meddling. It's a question of conviction—is what we are doing the deep action that we can will all others to perform, is it according to the Golden Rule, is it consistent with the deepest feelings and inspirations of our heart? That is the feather of Ma'at against which our heart will be weighed, and thus the canon we must bear in mind as we seek to become.

Refining away the chaff—I say this so cavalierly, but I know no way to say it that could give the terror of existence its full due—refining away the chaff, we have only gold left. And yet, not only gold left, but emphatically *gold*, to be poured into the divine mold. To recoin my phrase, *far less of our chaff than we suspect is who we truly are, and far more of our gold.*