Brother Poulton gave me permission to share the paper he wrote below. If you enjoy it, you may also appreciate the writings of several authors listed below this article in blue, such as a similar paper by Brother Gillespie.

**Understanding Spiritual Evil in the Context of Psychotherapy**
**By**
**Ronald L. Poulton**

Some time ago, my wife and I attended a dinner that was hosted by the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP) in connection with its semi-annual conference. We were seated with a psychiatrist, three clinical psychologists and a social worker. We shared several minutes of conversation getting to know one another. It was evident that they all loved their profession. They practiced it in a manner that was informed by their belief in God and energized by their testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Several expressed gratitude for AMCAP and the values espoused by the Association. As the spouse of an AMCAP member I was glad to be with so many professionals and to have the opportunity to ask them a question that had been on my mind for some time, knowing that I would not have to worry whether they were listed as preferred providers with my health insurance company.

At what I thought was an appropriate time I asked my question, “How do you deal with the problem of unclean spirits in your practices?” Quiet came to the table almost immediately. One of the psychologists looked puzzled and asked me to say more. When it became clear to them that they had not misunderstood my question, their responses came quickly. The overarching conclusion common to all the responses was that this was a subject outside the domain of their common discourse and professional worldview. It held no prominent place within their practices. I was surprised by their resolute opinions that there was no such problem.

My understanding of LDS doctrine has led me to believe that this problem is near the core of many issues addressed by counselors and therapists. I believe all counselors and therapists are familiar with the effects wrought by evil spirits, but they have failed to attribute those effects to their actual sources, which are the activities of such spirits in the lives of their clients.This failure may be caused either by an incomplete understanding of doctrine or by a failure to notice and respond in a manner that would confirm the doctrine to them. In the first section I will set out their responses to my question and put them in the context of the scriptures and the teachings of Brigham Young, a prophet who was raised near the roots of Mormonism, and grounded upon those roots, vigorously taught the saints on this subject in the isolated, but religiously open environment of nineteenth century Utah Territory. Then in the second section I will address what I believe are some of the implications of this material for LDS therapists and counselors.

**I.**
The first response was: “At the time the scriptures were written, the people mistook mental diseases and biologically based defects for possession by evil spirits.” This view reflects the predominant view of many modern religionists and mental health professionals. There have been significant advances made in psychopharmacology that have produced remarkable symptom relief for depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. These developments do seem to strengthen the contention that it was a lack of sophistication or an inadequate understanding of physiology and biochemistry that led to a mistaken diagnosis that evil spirits caused physical or mental illnesses. However, that conclusion without additional explanation is unwarranted; it makes the logical error of affirming the consequence. “The situation is similar to that of a person who takes aspirin for a headache. Generally, the medicine will relieve the pain and ‘cure’ the ailment. Still, the fact that taking aspirin eliminated the pain hardly means that the pain was caused by a lack of aspirin in the first place” (Liebert & Spiegler, 1987, p. 517).

A further problem with this response is that it fails to explain the distinction gospel writers made between the heavenly power over devils and the power to heal the sick. Although these powers are often enumerated together and appear to be exercised jointly in many instances, there is a consistent and pervasive distinction maintained between freeing the afflicted from evil spirits and healing sickness through divine power: “And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him” (Mark 1:34). And again, “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick” (Matthew 8:16).

When Nephi was allowed to see in vision the ministry of the Lord at Jerusalem he reported seeing the Lord both heal the sick and cast out devils: And he spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out (1 Nephi 11:31).

When the Lord first bestowed power upon his apostles it was a twofold power:“AND when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matthew 10:1). And this was the Lord’s charge to them: “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). They were obedient to the charge given: “And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13).

Book of Mormon prophets noted that the power over devils and the power to heal were had among them and would continue always among believers in Christ: And as many as had devils cast out from them, and were healed of their sicknesses and their infirmities, did truly manifest unto the people that they had been wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and had been healed; and they did show forth signs also and did do some miracles among the people (3 Nephi 7:22).

And these signs shall follow them that believe– in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover . . . (Mormon 9:24). These promises were reaffirmed to the latter-day saints: And whoso shall ask it in my name in faith, they shall cast out devils; they shall heal the sick; they shall cause the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk (D&C 35:9; see also D&C 84:67- 70; D&C 124:98).

Those that observed the work of the Lord demonstrate repeatedly the ability to discriminate between instances of healing physical illness and instances of restoring persons whose suffering was caused by unclean spirits. They relate that on one occasion the Lord healed a man of palsy (Luke 5:17-26); on another he gave a man his sight (John 9:1-7); on another he healed ten men of leprosy (Luke 17:11-19); and from one person he cast out a devil (Mark 1:23- 27); from another he cast out seven devils (Mark 16:9) and from another he cast out a legion of unclean spirits (Mark 5:1-15). Among the spiritually discerning, there has always been an understanding that in this life people are exposed to the influence and affliction of unclean spirits. Additionally, there is a suspicion that any explanation of the world that attempts to remove the adversary far from view is little more than a subterfuge of the adversary (2 Nephi 28:22).

The fact that gospel writers have made a distinction between healing the sick and casting out evil spirits does not, however, mean that the two troubles are unrelated. On the contrary, there does seem to be a close connection between illness of mind and body and the affliction that comes from unclean spirits. Mark records that in one instance the Lord encountered a dumb man possessed of a devil and when that devil was cast out the man spake (Matthew 9:32-33). Many of the above-cited scriptures disclose a pattern of divine healing having been preceded by casting out of unclean spirits.

Brigham Young taught that there was a direct connection between evil and illness: You never felt a pain and ache, or felt disagreeable, or uncomfortable in yourbodies and minds, but what an evil spirit was present causing it. Do you realize that the ague,the fever, the chills, the severe pain in the head, the plurisy, or any pain in the system, from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, is put there by the devil? You do not realize this, do you? I say but little about this matter, because I do not want you to realize it. When you have the rheumatism, do you realize that the devil put that upon you? No, but you say, “I got wet, caught cold, and thereby got the rheumatism.” The spirits that afflict us and plant disease in our bodies, pain in the system, and finally death, have control over us so far as the flesh is concerned. But when the spirit is unlocked from the body it is free from the power of death and Satan; and when that body comes up again, it also, with the spirit, will gain the victory over death, hell, and the grave. (JD, 4:133)1

While most modern mental health and medical professionals would deny any causal linkbetween the illnesses they treat and evil spirits, Brigham Young viewed all illness of body and mind connected directly to the activities of evil spirits. Further, the foregoing scriptures support the view that the understanding of gospel writers was ahead of modernity not behind it. The modern reliance on naturalistic explanations, biological models and psychological theory, have rendered us incapable of making valuable distinctions and connections that were obvious to those personally taught and empowered by the Lord.

The second response was: “Possession by unclean spirits is rare because God placed enmity between his children and evil spirits.” This response, to be rightly considered, ought to be examined against the broader background of LDS doctrine concerning premortal and mortal life. In the Church we are taught that all people born on this earth lived a premortal life with their heavenly parents (Jeremiah 1:5; First Presidency 1995). God, seeing the need for his children to have tabernacles to escape oppression and to grow in righteousness, proposed a plan whereby his children would enter mortality, obtain physical bodies and be proven in their faithfulness in all things (Abraham 3:24- 26; Ehat & Cook, 1980, p. 62, 68, 207). To enable his children to demonstrate their righteousness, he proposed that all of his children retain their premortal agency while on the earth (D&C 29:35-36). Knowing all things from the beginning, including the fall and the subsequent entry of sin among his children, God chose his First Born, Jesus Christ, to be the savior and redeemer of mankind (Abraham 3:27; Helaman 5:9). An additional consequence of this plan, understood by God and all his children in the premortal realm, was the fact that there would be some children who would fail in this probationary state and thereby lose the right to return to their premortal glory (D&C 29:27-28, 43-44; Moses 4:1).

In vision, Joseph Smith saw that in the premortal life Lucifer was an angel who stood in authority in the presence of God (D&C 76:25-26; D&C 129:1-3). Lucifer opposed the plan to allow man to retain his agency while on the earth (Moses 4:3). He also opposed the Father’s choice of his First Born as the redeemer and savior of the world (Abraham 3:28). Lucifer rebelled against the Only Begotten of the Father (D&C 76:25). Satan desired the kingdom and glory of God and his Christ (D&C 76:28).

In his rebellion, whereby he sought evil, he became the devil (2 Nephi 2:17; Moses 4:4). The word devil means false accuser. He became the father of lies (2 Nephi 2:18). He slanders the Father and his Only Begotten Son and all of God’s children. He is the father of contention (3 Nephi 11:29). He is the author of all sin (Helaman 6:30). He brought war to heaven and those who followed him were cast out from heaven to this earth (Revelation 12:9). And having fallen from heaven he became miserable forever (2 Nephi 2:18). In further consequence of seeking, that which was evil, Lucifer and those who followed after him were denied tabernacles made from the element of this earth (Ehat & Cook, 1980, p. 68, 207). The number of God’s spirit children that followed Lucifer in rebellion was great, described as “the third part of the stars of heaven” (Revelation 12:4). Although this phrase is assumed by some to be a literal translation of what might have been a metaphor for a large group but not an exact number or percentage, similar wording, “a third part of the host of heaven,” appears in a revelation given in English (D&C 29:36). One might consider what number this could mean if intended literally. The current world population is estimated to be approximately six billion people and the total world population has been estimated to be approximately 105 billion people.2 That would indicate that the one-third following Lucifer numbered in excess of 50 billion spirits. Without counting those who have suffered their spirits to become captive while in mortal probation, there would be almost ten evil spirits to each person living on the earth.

In opposition to the Father’s plan of happiness, Lucifer formulated a plan to destroy the work of God (D&C 10:23); to destroy the world (Moses 4:6); to make all men miserable like unto himself (2 Nephi 2:18, 27); to captivate the souls of men while in probation on the earth and keep them captive after their death until the day of judgment (Moses 4:4; 1 Nephi 14:7; Mosiah 16:3,5; Alma 40:14); and ultimately to have men brought forth in the resurrection filthy and unable to return to the kingdom of God (2 Nephi 9:16). An element of this plan of misery was to possess the earthly bodies of God’s children on the earth (Alma 40:13).

The central objective of the devil is always the heart: the heart, not as poetic metaphor, but as bodily location and spiritual faculty. He carries forth his evil from generation to generation according to his success at taking hold of the hearts of men (Helaman 6:30; 4 Nephi 1:28). If the hold is secured, then evil spirits will “dwell in the hearts of the children of men” (Mosiah 3:6). Then he will “rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them to anger against that which is good” (2 Nephi 28:20) until, they are “given up unto the hardness of their hearts” and the Spirit of the Lord ceases to strive with them (Ether 15:19). But when people are cleansed and dwell in righteousness, he has no power over their hearts (1 Nephi 22:26).

Lucifer did not understand the mind of God, for God had anticipated the premortal rebellion (Moses 4:6). In fact, the plan of the Father made use of the rebellion. Its consequences on this earth became a refining fire to the faithful, that which was in some sense necessary to activate the agency granted to men while on the earth (D&C 29:39). And through his agency man became free to choose liberty and eternal life through the gift of his Son (2 Nephi 2:27). Thus, mortality became a period of spiritual death, a time of continuous temptation, wherein all are exposed to and taste the bitter that they might know to choose the sweet. With this background we can consider the record of Moses that states that following Lucifer’s successful temptation of Eve, God placed enmity, a strong dislike or deep-rooted hatred, as a barrier between Lucifer and his followers and the woman and her seed: And I, the Lord God, said unto the serpent: Because thou hast done this thou shalt be cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life; And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; and he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Moses 4:20-21).

Some have inferred from this scripture that people, as the children of Eve, are protected from evil possession because a protective barrier of enmity surrounds them. Of course, the cogency of this conclusion rests on the assumption that this scripture is referring to all the posterity of Adam and Eve as being the “seed” of the woman referred to by God. Although Eve is the woman present when God makes this pronouncement, and the inhabitants of the earth may all claim to be her seed, this scripture is cited as the first prophecy referring to the Messiah.3

Jesus Christ is the “seed” of the woman. Jesus Christ is the singular “he” who shall bruise the head of the serpent; it is he toward whom Lucifer and the spirits that follow him suffer the pains of enmity. The scriptures do not indicate that God forbid evil spirits from possessing the bodies of the children of Eve, if those children use their agency on the earth to yield to the enticements of the adversary. On the contrary, captivity by such was forewarned repeatedly. And a license to use a power of enticement upon the children of Eve was given to Lucifer by God: “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16). It is the “will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate” (2 Nephi 2:29). When temptation is yielded to the “people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed;” (Matthew 13:15) and in consequence, the scriptures warn that evil spirits enter into the tabernacles of man (Mosiah 3:6; Alma 40:13).

What God revealed to Moses, in Moses 4:20-21, was the means of escape from Lucifer’s plan of captivity. For the children of Eve, it is by coming unto Christ and by receiving a greater portion of His Spirit, that they gain discernment, to choose liberty and freedom in Christ. Only thereby will they become the beneficiaries of the protective enmity spoken of in the scripture (Helaman 5:12; Ether 8:26; 1 Nephi 22:24-28). Until their bodies become full of light and wholly without spot, until that perfect day, the children of Eve will continue to be vulnerable to temptation and entrapment by evil. There is no free and easy insulating enmity. The eternal risk inherent in the exposure to evil is an essential part of the Father’s plan; so is his promise that he is mighty to save and to heal all who come unto his Son (3 Nephi 9:13-15, 21-22).

This truth, that only by accepting and cleaving unto Christ can one secure protection against the design of the adversary, is taught powerfully in the following incident during the Lord’s Galilean ministry: And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. . . . But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. . . . And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts (Mark 5:1-17).

This encounter with evil lends support to the claim that an evil spirit would prefer the mortal tabernacle of a swine to none at all (Ehat & Cook, 1980, p. 60). However, the actual plan of the devil was more subtle. William P. McIntire recorded the following comment by the Prophet Joseph Smith on the foregoing verses of scripture: Jesus commanded him to come out of the man and the Devil besought him that he might enter in a herd of swine near by (for the Devil knew they were a covetous people & if he could kill their hogs that would drive Jesus out of their coasts & he then would have tabernacle enough) (Ehat & Cook, 1980, p. 68).

Brigham Young urged the saints to be alert to the presence and objectives of unclean spirits when he said: I want you to understand these things; and if you should say or think that I know nothing about them, be pleased to find out and inform me. You can see the acts of these evil spirits in every place, the whole country is full of them, the whole earth is alive with them, and they are continually trying to get into the tabernacles of the human family, and are always on hand to prompt us to depart from the strict line of our duty (JD, 3: 369).

Related to the idea of general enmity protecting mankind, as raised in the second response, is the notion that at least children under the age of accountability are immune from both the influence and the affliction of evil spirits. The Lord said that little children can not sin because they can not be tempted (D&C 29:47). But he said, “…when they begin to grow up, sin conceiv-eth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good” (Moses 6:55). Since many children require the assistance of counselors and therapists for many of the same types of problems for which adults seek counseling, this fact would appear to be confirming evidence that the problems for which counseling is sought are not the result of evil spirits afflict-ing people, at least not among young children. It is settled doctrine of the Church that children cannot sin and Satan has no power to tempt them until they begin to become accountable. Whatever it turns out that temptation is– it isn’t a problem suffered by children. However, the fact that they can neither be tempted nor sin does not, on its own, uphold the conclusion that children, under the age of accountability, are never afflicted by unclean spirits. Consider the following incident that occurred shortly after the transfiguration when the Lord rejoined his disciples: And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. . . . And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. . . When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. . . . And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting (Mark 9:17-29).

It was before this incident, earlier in the ministry of the Lord, that he had given power to his apostles to heal the sick and to cast out devils. As noted above, they had experienced much success and had returned from their early missions firm in their testimony of the power conferred upon them. This was the first instance of their failure to command an unclean spirit. This incident has been cited by Dummelow (1936) as one in which the child, being described as a “lunatic” in another gospel, was actually suffering from a form of epilepsy, a physical ailment, of which he was healed by the Lord, and not a case of demonic possession. However, such explanation ignores the plain text of the scripture and thereby dismisses from consideration several profound questions. First, the Lord asked the father: “How long is it ago since this came unto him?” What was the point of this question? Would it really have made a difference whether it had been a month or a year? It is the father’s answer that may hold the key; his answer to the Lord was: “of a child.” The Gospel of Mark does not tell us the age of the boy when presented to the Lord or the age of the boy when the affliction first began. However, the Greek adverb, “paidiothen ” here translated as “of a child” is related to the noun “paidion ” which is a child, one as young as a new born infant.4 Second, in answering the disciples’ question as to why they had been unsuccessful in their exercise of priesthood authority, the Lord explained: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” It would appear that the Lord is acknowledging gradation in the power of some evil spirits. But what was “this kind” of evil spirit? The only textual indicators given about the kind of spirit come from the Lord’s description of the spirit as a dumb spirit or the answer to the Lord’s question given by the child’s father that the spirit had taken possession of the boy as a child. Interestingly, when the Lord earlier had cast out a devil from a dumb man, who then spoke, no instruction was given to the disciples regarding fasting and prayer. Finally, and perhaps relevant to the age of the child at both the onset and cleansing, it is important to note that this is the only incident recorded in scripture where the Lord, in addition to casting out the evil spirit, further enjoined this devil “and enter no more into him.”

If the person freed from evil does not pursue a righteous course faithfully, then there does not appear to be a prohibition against the evil spirit reentering a body. The Lord taught: Then came some of the scribes and said unto him, Master, it is written that, Every sin shall be forgiven; but ye say, Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven. And they asked him, saying, How can these things be? And he said unto them, When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none; but when a man speaketh
against the Holy Ghost, then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth him empty, swept and garnished; for the good spirit leaveth him unto himself. Then goeth the evil spirit, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation (JST Matthew 12:37-39). 13 The third response was: “Possession by unclean spirits is very rare, if we are sincerely trying to live the gospel.” There are several reasons why encounters with evil spirits may seem to be rare. First, most memorable instances of evil encounters seem to be singular historical events such as the devil entering the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve (Moses 4:6-11), the devil appearing before Jesus to tempt him following his forty day fast in the wilderness where he communed with the Father (JST Matthew 4:1-11; cf. Ehat & Cook, 1980, p. 12) or the adversary’s attack upon Joseph Smith as he knelt in prayer in the sacred grove (Joseph Smith History 1:15-16). Rather than disrupt the routine course of individual lives, one might believe that encounters with evil occur only in instances where the adversary attempts to thwart the larger work of God’s kingdom, as was the temptation of Joseph Smith as he walked to meet Moroni at the hill Cumorah to view the plates (Joseph Smith History 1:46) or the vicious attacks upon the first missionaries sent to begin preaching the restored gospel in England (Stuy, 1987-1992, 5: 198-99, 236). Second, we do not see many people acting as if they were possessed by an evil spirit, as did some encountered by the Lord, that is, foaming at the mouth, gnashing teeth, and dwelling in a tomb, or as Joseph Smith found Newell Knight, his visage distorted, his limbs twisted as he was elevated above the floor and tossed about a room (J. F. Smith, 1971, p. 82). If it is assumed that a person possessed of an unclean evil spirit looks and acts in a ghoulish or frightening manner, then observation would indeed support the conclusion that possession is rare. But the image of a terrifying and bizarre person is not the only one described in the scriptures. Korihor, the anti-christ, was articulate and convincing to many, yet after a brief exchange the discerning Alma stated to him, “thou art possessed with a lying spirit” (Alma 30:42). The first recorded instance of the Lord rebuking an unclean spirit and commanding it to leave a man occurred in a synagogue, a house of worship and study (Mark 1:23-27). This was not an isolated instance, Mark records that the Lord preached in synagogues throughout all Galilee and cast out devils (Mark 1:39). The presence of unclean spirits at places of worship was also noted in a session of General Conference by Brigham Young: You know that we sometimes need a prompter; if any one of you was called by the government of the United States to go to Germany, Italy, or any foreign nation, as an Ambassador, if you did not understand the language somebody would have to interpret for you. Well, these evil spirits are ready to prompt you. Do they prompt us? Yes, and I could put my hands on a dozen of them while I have been on this stand; they are here on the stand. Could we do without the devils? No, we could not get along without them. They are here, and they suggest this, that, and the other (JD, 3: 369).

Third, possession may be rare because not many people are wholly taken captive by evil spirits. This is a valuable observation. In fact, each of the responses given to my original question focused on evil spirit possession, when my question asked more broadly about the problem of unclean spirits. The problem of evil spirits confronted by therapists is not restricted to persons fully possessed and bound by unclean spirits, but includes those in the process of being ensnared, who are temporarily overcome and possessed by an evil spirit in sin and those who are otherwise influenced, distressed or afflicted by such spirits. Again, Brigham Young observed this range of affliction: You may now see people with legions of evil spirits in and around them; there are men who walk our streets that have more than a hundred devils in them and round about them, prompting them to all manner of evil, and some too that profess to be Latter Day Saints, and if you were to take the devils out of them and from about them, you would leave them dead corpses; for I believe there would be nothing left of them (JD, 3: 369).

Brigham Young warned the saints that their sojourn on the earth is a continuation of the war commenced in heaven and constant vigilance is demanded. He said: I know very well that, whether we are active or not, the invisible spirits are active. And every person who desires and strives to be a Saint is closely watched by fallen spirits that came here when Lucifer fell, and by the spirits of wicked persons who have been here in tabernacles and departed from them, but who are still under the control of the prince of the power of the air. Those spirits are never idle; they are watching every person who wishes to do right, and are continually prompting them to do wrong. This makes it necessary for us to be continually on our guard--makes this probation a continual warfare (JD, 7: 239).

The scriptures give several descriptions of the strategies used by the devil to implement his cunning plan. He executes his plan carefully (2 Nephi 28:21). He urges all to abuse their agency that he may come and take “away light and truth, through disobedience” (D&C 93:39).

He will fulfill, at least in some measure and for some period of time, his promise of easy happi-ness in sin (3 Nephi 27:11; Alma 30:60). He leads at a pace calculated to pacify and lull into carnal security by whispering, “all is well” (2 Nephi 28:21). He emboldens with false and vain and foolish doctrines (2 Nephi 28:9). He urges all to contend with one another over truth, accor-ding to their own learning (2 Nephi 28:4). He denies there is a God and claims that all power is given to man (2 Nephi 28:5). He denies the justice of God and teaches that mercy will overcome justice (2 Nephi 28:8). He “flattereth away and telleth them” that there is no devil or hell (2 Nephi 28:22). He “whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains” (2 Nephi 28:22).

Brigham Young emphasized:“Here are the two powers on the earth--the evil and the good, not to speak of the ten thousand paths they make through the earth, and the various spirits that go to-and-fro. It is the good and the evil.” (JD, 8: 326) The ten thousand paths refers to the many and varied sins and miseries brought on by such spirits in the adversary’s plan to prompt, to tempt, to ensnare and to capture the souls of men. The scriptures name some of those spirits by the assignments they perform and the suffering they bring: spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7); spirit of contention (3 Nephi 11:29); spirit of jealousy (Numbers 5:14); spirit of whoredoms (Hosea 4:12); spirit of divination (Acts 16:16); spirit of error (1 John 4:6); spirit of deep sleep (2 Nephi 27:5); spirit of persecution (Joseph Smith History 1:74); and spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:11). The Lord warned: “suffer none of these things to enter into your heart” (3 Nephi 12:29).

If LDS therapists were to take time to reflect on their experience, I believe they would be able to enumerate more of the assignments and effects of evil spirits upon mankind: anxiety, depres-sion, obsession, narcissism, addiction, thought disorders, etc. In fact, because it is the design of the devil “to make all men miserable like unto himself,” one need not look any farther than the various ways mankind may be made miserable to find the adversary and his spirits at work. The assault of the adversary is always a two-pronged attack against both truth and agency. When therapy works it is because it successfully enlarges the client’s understanding of and ability to hold to truth and assists to restore a person to a greater awareness and expression of agency.

The principal tool of the adversary is a “prompting,” a thought that passes through a person’s mind. It is within the dominion allotted the adversary that he has power to suggest things to our minds, invitations to entertain that which is contrary to the will of God. The most subtle temp-tations come in an individual way, as personal promptings to do wrong. And certainly, as is evident from his assault on our senses, the adversary understands that one picture can be worth ten thousand words when teaching how to sin. Brigham Young confirmed that our thoughts can be caused, in some sense, by our interactions with external forces.

He said: The origin of thought was planted in our organization at the beginning of our being. This is not telling you how it came there, or who put it there. Thought originated with our individual being, which is organized to be as independent as any being in eternity. . . . The origin of thought and reflection is in ourselves. We think, because we are, and are made susceptible of external influences, and to feel our relationship to external objects. Thus thoughts of revenge, and thoughts of blessing will arise in the same mind, as it is influenced by external circumstances (JD, 2: 135). It is also true that there may be nothing that a person identifies as more central to personal identity than his individual thought. Thought seems to be something proprietary and private to an individual. Yet, that which instigates our thought may be of internal or external origin. It is only those thoughts that originate within us that are proprietary. While such thoughts may be known to God and his angels (Smith, 1938, p. 325), they can only be known to the adversary if one speaks them (D&C 6:16; Faust, 1987, p. 35). But the devil has perfect understanding of the thoughts, which he has prompted, and thereby may attempt to create a false impression that he knows our thoughts.

A challenge we all face is to discern the sources from which our thoughts arise. Brigham Young understood when he spoke of the profound influence of good and evil in the lives of persons that one might conclude all thoughts and actions arose from the influences outside the person. This conclusion would be an error and thwart comprehension of the fact that the divine gift of agency was given in to enable everyone to develop an independent love for goodness. He said: We are very apt through our traditions, former associations, and notion of things and ideas, to attribute every act of man and every manifestation of mankind to an invisible source--the good or the evil. God is the author of all good; and yet, if you rightly understood yourselves, you would not directly attribute every good act you perform to our Father in heaven, nor to his Son Jesus Christ, nor to the Holy Ghost; neither would you attribute every evil act of a man or woman to the Devil or his spirits or influences; for man is organized by his Creator to act perfectly independently of all influences there are above or beneath. Those influences are always attending him, and are ready to dictate and direct--to lead him into truth or to lead him to destruction. But is he always guided by those influences in every act? He is not. It is ordained of God that we should act independently in and of ourselves, and the good is present when we need it. If we will ask for it, it is with us. If we yield to temptation, the evil is present, and nigh enough to lead every son and daughter of Adam to destruction, if they give way to it. But it is the design of the Almighty that we should act independently (JD, 9: 122).

If sinning begins with promptings to our minds and expands to our hearts, our words and finally the actions of our lives, we must be watchful in everything we do. King Benjamin warned: And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not (Mosiah 4:29-30).

The path of turning away from evil is often backtracking the path that first led to sin. Again, Brigham Young promised, “If you first gain power to check your words, you will then begin to have power to check your judgment, and at length actually gain power to check your thoughts and reflections (JD, 6:98). Brigham Young solemnly advised: “You hearken to that still small voice that whispers eternal truth, that opens the visions of eternity to you that you can discern, understand and follow, and the foul spirits that throng the air, and that fill our houses if we let them in, will not have power over you” (JD, 15:7).

The attack of the adversary and the nearness of evil is also discerned in a bodily way. On the evening of the last supper, the Lord gave profound blessings to his faithful apostles, he washed their feet, he blessed them with the desires of their hearts and he prayed for them. Yet, as the disciples retired with the Lord to the Garden of Gethsemane the scriptures describe the affliction that came over them: “And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane, which was a garden; and the disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and to complain in their hearts, wondering if this be the Messiah” (JST Mark 14:36). Then they were overcome by deep sleep. This is an apt description of afflictions from unclean spirits, that may be recognizable to anyone: the fear, the heaviness, the complaining, and the doubt that sickens the heart.

Spiritual reality permeates the whole of life– the good and the evil. The more truth compre-hended by a psychological model, the greater will be its power to bring happiness. Therapies that deny any spirituality seem barren next to those that acknowledge spiritual reality. Those that incorporate spiritual reality but limit it to vague and valueless notions of self indulgent love or higher power are not as potent at bringing lasting goodness as those which teach the truth about God, who he is, and the relationship of the human family to him. And, if “spiritual” means, as it has come to mean to so many therapists, only that which is nurturing, affirming or pleasurable, then therapist and client are consigned to live with only half a map. While not intended to provide an exhaustive outline of the subject, the scriptures and prophetic commentary set forth above present a substantial body of doctrine that can only be overlooked or under-studied with peril. Prophets have been inspired to warn, to educate and to prepare the children of God for the trials of the adversary encountered by all during mortality. Therapists, as counselors, educators and healers are in the thick of this probationary warfare.

**II.**Most of our encounters with evil spirits go unnoticed, not because they are rare, but because they are so commonplace. We are, in some ways, desensitized to the direct intrusions of the adversary in our lives. We often accept such intrusions because of our willingness to accept rival explanations for our encounters with evil and our spiritual discomforts. A child’s scream from a sound sleep is not understood as being caused by the passing of an unclean presence, but by a bad dream, an upset stomach, thirst, etc. A pathogenic belief that limits the growth or freedom of a client may be the result of a childhood trauma, a lack of proper idealization in the parental transference, but it is not considered to be a lie communicated by an unclean spirit standing next to the person.

Modern psychotherapy has been marked by a move away from concepts grounded in religion and morality toward the embrace of concepts borrowed from medicine and science (Szasz 1978). Thus, behavior that was once described as sin is now frequently viewed in terms of symptom or illness (Menninger 1973). The secularized idea of the devil is reduced to nothing more than “an ancient moral construct” and evil diluted to “simply the absence of good” (Gallagher, 1999, p. 121). And it is assumed that evil can be studied and understood merely as a matter of human interaction, without reference to spiritual reality (Baumeister 1997). The very idea of evil spirits strikes many persons overseeing accreditation at universities, state licensing authorities and insurance carriers as being primitive, unprofessional and unscientific. A speaker at an AMCAP conference said recently that he had proposed to conference organizers to speak on the subject of possession by evil spirits, but he was informed that the topic was rejected by AMCAP because it would not qualify for continuing education credit (Watts 2000).

In some respect, the efforts to gain mainstream professional credibility may have left LDS therapists well regarded, but no more effective than any other segment of the profession. Unfortunately, it appears that some are satisfied to express belief in God and Christ, but shrink in embarrassment at the doctrine they revealed of an equally real and immanent adversary. This is a mistake. Psychologists have surveyed the current state of psychotherapy and asked, “Why doesn’t therapy succeed more often?” and “Why does it so often fail to make a real difference in people’s lives?” (Gendlin, 1981, p.3). The answers to such queries may be found in the failure of psychotherapists to consider the domain of the adversary encountered in the world. While most, if not all LDS therapists, would acknowledge Satan as a real spirit being, fewer seem to comprehend that he and the spirits that followed him are also immanent. Thus, one might acknowledge the presence of evil– in groups to which one does not belong, in enterprises in which one does not participate and in the lives of others. But we have more difficulty facing the possibility that we are in the presence of evil right now, that it may be focused on us, and perhaps, that we find its offer appealing. Many are prejudiced to believe that evil spirits afflict only those caught in sin. While sin and immorality certainly subject a person to evil influence, there is no valid inference that would permit one to conclude that a person struggling against evil spirits is thereby guilty of sin. Unfortunately, this bias persists even though there have been notable instances of very good people being afflicted by unclean spirits, especially when such people are on the threshold of making great contributions to their own growth and service to others.

Consider the experience of Hugh B. Brown the night before he was called as a General Authority to the Church: That night I drove from the camp up at Rocky Mountain House down to Edmonton still spiritually disturbed and depressed. Without having dinner that night, I went into the bedroom by myself, told my wife that she should stay in the other room as I felt I would have a restless night and did not wish to disturb her. All night I wrestled with the evil spirit. I was possessed with the spirit of wishing that I could be rubbed out of existence. I had no thought of suicide, but wished the Lord would provide a way for me to cease to be. The room was full of darkness and an evil spirit prevailed, so real that I was almost consumed by it. About three o’clock in the morning my wife came in, having heard me moving about the room and asked what was the matter. Upon closing the door, she said, “Oh Hugh, what is in this room?” and I replied, “It is Satan.” We spent the balance of the night together, much of it on our knees. The next morning upon going to the office (there was no one there, it being Saturday), I knelt in prayer again and asked for deliverance from this evil spirit. I felt a peaceful spirit come over me and phoned my wife to that effect (Firmage, 1976, p.90-91).

It should be remembered that the encounters with evil are universal; they span the continuum from the testing and affliction of righteous persons at one end to those few who have knowingly and willingly chosen evil to be their constant companion at the other. While the encounters with evil spirits endured by most people are not constant, they are regular. What LDS counselors and therapists may need to add to their testimonies of a personal and loving Savior is a testimony of the truth that the adversary is a personal and present danger.

A father related this experience. As he entered his home one evening after work he found his children bickering and angry. He said there was an ugly edge to the quarreling. Instead of getting involved immediately, he went upstairs to his bedroom. There he knelt in prayer and asked for the Spirit of the Lord to attend him as a father and to grant him power in the priest-hood. He arose and in his room commanded the unclean spirits to leave his family and his home. He then felt better prepared to go downstairs to visit with his children and hopefully restore peace to the home. As he entered the room where the children were, he saw all of them sitting together on the floor laughing and playing a game. The evening passed without further incident. The children did not need their father to exercise his parenting skills; they needed his discernment and intervention to protect their home from unwanted influence. What makes this experience significant is that the circumstance is so ordinary. Occasional fighting among children occurs in every family. Certainly, the father’s predisposition to get involved directly to stop the fighting was a normal reaction. He did have a responsibility to teach his children to be kind, to cooperate and meet their own needs in acceptable ways. But he noticed there was more, an “ugly edge” to the bickering. He was discerning.

The discerning of spirits is a gift of the Holy Ghost (D& C 46:23). George A. Smith, reflecting on his association with Joseph Smith, said, “…there was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of spirits” (Ehat & Cook, 1980, p.21). On one occasion the Prophet wrote to the Church: Recent occurrences that have transpired amongst us render it an imperative duty devolving upon me to say something in relation to the spirits by which men are actuated. . . One great evil is, that men are ignorant of the nature of spirits; their power, laws, government, intelligence, etc. . . . . . . [W]ho can drag into daylight and develop the hidden mysteries of the false spirits that so frequently are made manifest among the Latter-day Saints? We answer that no man can do this without the Priesthood, and having a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed; for as “no man knows the things of God, but by the Spirit of God,” so no man knows the spirit of the devil, and his power and influence, but by possessing intelligence which is more than human, and having unfolded through the medium of the Priesthood the mysterious operations of his devices . . . . . . . A man must have the discerning of spirits before he can drag into daylight this hellish influence and unfold it unto the world in all its soul-destroying, diabolical, and horrid colors; for nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God. . . .
As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles; for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, the tongue of the eloquent, the power of the mighty (Smith, 1938, p. 202-05).

Of the gift of discernment George Q. Cannon wrote: One of the gifts of the Gospel which the Lord has promised to those who enter into covenant with Him is the gift of discerning of spirits - a gift which is not much thought of by many and probably seldom prayed for; yet it is a gift that is of exceeding value and one that should be enjoyed by every Latter-day Saint. . . No Latter-day Saint should be without this gift, because there is such a variety of spirits in the world which seek to deceive and lead astray. . . . Now, the gift of discerning of spirits not only gives men and women who have it the power to discern the spirit with which others may be possessed or influenced, but it gives them the power to discern the spirit which influences themselves. They are able to detect a false spirit and also to know when the Spirit of God reigns within them. In private life this gift is of great importance to the Latter-day Saints. Possessing and exercising this gift they will not allow any evil influence to enter into their hearts or to prompt them in their thoughts, their words or their acts. They will repel it; and if perchance such a spirit should get possession of them, as soon as they witness its effects they will expel it or, in other words, refuse to be led or prompted by it (Cannon, 1974, p.198-99).

The personal and immanent nature of the struggle with the adversary and the power which discernment brings is demonstrated in the following case. Stephen, 49, was raised in the mid-west, the eldest of four boys. His father was a wealthy and successful attorney. While growing up, the family had only a loose affiliation to the Catholic Church. Through his father, Stephen was raised with the worldly belief that success as a man was determined in part by his sexual activities with women. Although this belief contributed to the eventual divorce of his father and mother, Stephen viewed sexual activity between consenting adults as natural. As a young man Stephen followed in the steps of his father. By his mid-twenties he had been with a number of women and had a strong attraction to pornography. At the end of a romantic relationship when he was 28, Stephen began to examine his life. It was during this time that he accepted an invitation from a friend to read the Book of Mormon. Stephen gained a strong testimony of the gospel, was baptized and moved to Utah. He has remained active in the Church since his baptism. Eventually he met an LDS woman and they were married in the Salt Lake Temple. Although faithful to his wife, he continued to give in periodically to the desire to view pornography.

One day when he was 47 he had lunch with some of his friends. The conversation turned to the subject of unclean spirits. One of his friends remarked that almost as a matter of course when traveling and staying in hotels he would cast out the unclean spirits from the room. The friend stated that he could physically discern their departure and this exercise of the priesthood had enabled him to rest while away from home. The friend also said that until he had learned to use his priesthood to obtain this blessing, he rarely if ever slept well in a hotel. He had thought that his restless nights were because the bed or pillow was unfamiliar or traveling had disrupted his normal routine. Now he simply viewed hotels as places where unclean spirits congregate to tempt and to afflict people.

Stephen was very interested in what was said because he, too, did a lot of business traveling. Stephen said that when he traveled he had strong urges to view adult movies in his hotel room. He said that even though some adult movie channels required the sequential pushing of three buttons on the channel changer, somehow he always “accidentally” seemed to hit those buttons in the proper order. He admitted that while traveling he would watch programs that he would never even consider having in his home. The battles in his long fought war against pornography, while won at home consistently were lost repeatedly on the road. Stephen began following the practice of his friend while traveling. He continued to travel with his scriptures and to pray as he had always done, but he also began to view his stay in a hotel as place of potential ambush by the adversary. He began to prayerfully seek priesthood power and rebuke the spirits from his room upon his arrival. He reported that he could feel something move from around him. He said that the thoughts and the urges to watch improper programs simply ceased, without any effort on his part, other than his faith in God’s willingness to honor the priesthood and the name of his Son. He said that sometimes a single rebuke was sufficient for an entire business trip. On other occasions he was required to rebuke more often, not to control his thoughts, but to maintain what he came to understand as a clear space. He had experimented on the witness and promise of Paul: There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (I Corinthians 10:13). His battle against pornography had irreversibly changed. It was no longer a battle of one part of him against another part; it was simply a matter of his discerning and rebuking the influence of unwanted evil around him.

Had Stephen sought counseling for his weakness regarding pornography, it is unlikely that the counselor, without a developed gift of discernment, would have framed the issue faced by Stephen as it was framed by Stephen’s friend. If the therapist were a practitioner of cognitive therapy, Stephen might have been taught useful tools about thought detection and thought selection or perhaps of the irrationality or inconsistency of his attraction to pornography with his desire to have a happy home life. All this would have been helpful to arm Stephen with greater truth, which he could then use to combat the temptations before him.

Stephen’s response is insightful to those who do cognitive work. Since the troubling thoughts did not originate with him, it would have been a waste of time and resources for him to attempt to assume responsibility or to attempt to stop having the prompting, the first thought. Stephen’s agency may not have begun until after the first thought passed through his mind. After receiving the prompting, then it was his choice to entertain the thought, to enlarge upon it or to reject it. Without this understanding, a person may be motivated to defend or hold on to what are believed to be “his” thoughts, or alternatively, to become discouraged by what he believes has come from him. There can be significant empowerment when a person realizes he is not talking back to a bad part of himself, or that he is not required to look for the good intention inside the evil desire.

If the therapist practiced behavior modification therapy, Stephen would be taught to identify the triggers to his unwanted behavior and he would have developed strategies to interrupt unwanted behavior patterns. He would have been taught to reinforce instances of successfully overcoming his urge to view inappropriate materials and given skills to cope with instances of relapse. All of the interventions of therapists would require that Stephen in some sense legitimize the problem as being something about himself that he must confront and combat. Although the actions Stephen did take could be seen as incorporating elements of cognitive or behavior modification therapy, what Stephen did was something quite different. He was not overcoming or conquering anything; he was not learning and applying new insight to change his thoughts or behavior; he simply vanquished a present enemy. He could have struggled, and perhaps eventually overcome this problem, many persons have done so. What Stephen did was to recognize the true nature of the trouble he faced and the personal enemy that brought it to him. He discerned that his enemy was immanent. He won, not by fighting the good fight, but by exercising his faith and priesthood to refuse the contest. He followed the admonition and course of Brigham Young, who said: Have this people been blessed? They have. Why can they not understand, that they are organized and formed for the express purpose of becoming independent in and of themselves, that they may begin to guard against any evil principle, or the suggestions of evil? But you will readily say, “That is in all men, it is natural to them.” So Paul thought. He was surrounded with spirits of evil, and was wonderfully troubled with them, so much so, that when he would do good, evil was present with him. I would have kicked them out of doors. . . . “Now,” says Paul, “I would do good to that man, but evil is present with me.” Why did he not kick that evil out of the way of his doing good? Was he bound to be troubled with it? No, no more than you and I are (JD, 2: 133).

There may be resistance to the idea that therapists ought to seek the gift of discernment of spirits in connection with the practice of psychotherapy. LDS therapists are careful not to infringe directly upon the domain of religion and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. There is an under-standing of the spiritual nature of therapy among LDS therapists. One way it is evidenced is in the recurring concern that professional practice not becomes a form of priestcraft. Some find their concerns are quieted by the fact that therapists are paid for their time, just as any other laborer. By contrast, others note that very often what the client hopes most to purchase is, not the hour, but the unconditional love of the therapist. And exchanging love for a fee feels misguided.

By the very nature of therapy, LDS therapists often find themselves working with clients in the transference, and thus, at least for a time, they may be the reluctant recipients of the very kind of praise and power sought by those who have engaged actively in priestcraft. Further, among LDS therapists there is considerable discussion of the ethical challenges they face because of the natural connection clients make between their therapy and their spiritual life, such as requesting therapists to have prayer in sessions or to give priesthood blessings. These concerns have led many LDS therapists to demarcate the area of professional practice from the overtly religious and spiritual activities of clients to avoid even the appearance of priestcraft. The line between psychotherapy and religious ministering is often fuzzy precisely because they share the same objective, the health and well being of the person. It is further obfuscated by the fact that many of the presenting problems and underlying issues addressed by therapeutic interventions are rooted in the activities of unclean spirits. Focusing attention on the influences of unclean spirits in the context of issues arising in therapy may only further blur the line and increase the concerns of LDS therapists already sensitive to boundary issues between psychotherapy and religion, and between therapists and their clients.

However, it must be remembered that LDS therapists are sowers of the word, often teaching basic gospel truths in the vocabulary of modern psychology. Therefore, to preserve success in therapy they must be mindful of the Lord’s warning in the parable of the sower: When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart; this is he who received seed by the wayside. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word and readily with joy receiveth it, yet hath not root in himself, and endureth but for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also who received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful (JST Matthew 13:18-20).

Determining proper and effective interventions requires LDS therapists to consider on an ongoing basis, what, if any, is the role of the adversary in the current condition of a client. Sometimes effective therapy can only follow a direct response to the presence of evil spirits.

Robert, 35, is married and the father of three children. He has been married for 10 years. He was raised in the LDS Church. As a boy, a man in the neighborhood sexually molested him on more than one occasion. There were no more incidents of homosexuality throughout his teenage years although he acknowledges that from time to time he did have some thoughts about homosexuality. He was called on a mission and served two years honorably and without any thought of homosexuality. Following his return from the mission, he was again periodically troubled by the thoughts and feelings of homosexuality. Upon meeting the woman he would marry, he shared with her his experiences and the questions that had arisen in his mind about his sexual orientation. Since he had not engaged in any homosexual activities during his adult life and was an active member of the Church she did not feel his past was a barrier to their future together.

When Robert was 32 he obtained an Internet connection to his home. He began spending long hours secluded in his office at home on the Internet. He began visiting adult web pages. He viewed and copied materials from homosexually oriented pages. He began frequenting on-line chat rooms catering to homosexuals. He began corresponding with individuals about his personal circumstances. As he continued on this course, he became convinced that he was a homosexual; in fact, he began to believe that he had always been a homosexual. He was convinced that he had been living a lie during his married life because he was suppressing his desires and true nature. He shared his feelings with his wife. He said he had made plans to meet a man out of state whom he had met over the Internet. Although he was unhappy about the situation and its effects on his wife and children, he could see no alternative but to leave the home and begin a new life. It seemed that this course of action was the only one open to him if he were to live with any integrity.

Robert was employed in the area of financial services. He had control over the investment funds of several members of his family. At the same time that he was questioning his sexual identity, Robert began to misuse funds and the authority entrusted to him. After only a few months the amounts he had “borrowed” without permission far exceeded his ability to repay, even if given several years to do so. Although open about his sexual orientation, he was very closed about his financial misconduct. When he met with ecclesiastical leaders, he resented their involvement and attitude toward him and the decision he had made. He claimed they simply could not understand his situation.

On a Sunday evening his wife asked a friend to come to the home to visit with Robert and her. As they sat and visited, Robert explained his situation. He averred his life long homosexuality and his powerlessness to do anything about his situation. The friend bore his testimony to Robert, but even more important the friend viewed Robert as having a spiritual problem, one brought on by Robert’s poor choices, which were continuously supported by unclean spirits. As they sat together, the wife and friend offered many silent prayers. They sought for the Spirit of the Lord to descend upon Robert. There were periods of long discerning silence. The prayers were answered when the Spirit of the Lord did arrive in power. The silence was broken when something let go in Robert and he took hold of his chest, began to cry and plead for help. A priesthood blessing was given; it commenced with a rebuke of the unclean spirits of homosexuality and immorality. Robert was promised peace and freedom through that night from the influence of unclean spirits that he might consider his situation, but in the morning he would be required to take steps to set his life in order to maintain heavenly protection.

Following the blessing Robert sat and cried. Repeatedly, he shook his head and said, What was I thinking, I almost lost everything.” He said it was as if he had been asleep. He rested that night and early in the morning he and his wife visited their families. Robert bore witness of the change that had taken place within him. It was as if his heterosexual identity had been restored immediately to him. However, he was not clear of trouble; it would be a few weeks before he could bring himself to be honest about his misuse of funds. In some ways confronting his dishonesty with money was more difficult, perhaps, because it involved a more active use of his agency.

Several years have passed since Robert underwent his trial. He has remained faithful to his wife and family. He has been restored to full activity in the Church. He has never experienced any further uncertainty about his sexual orientation. He knows he cannot afford an unclean thought and he has an unshakeable testimony of his Savior and an adversary that nearly ruined his life.

The experience of Robert has direct bearing on the current thinking about the issue of sexual orientation. The doctrine of the Church ought to bring LDS therapists to ask in cases dealing with gender identification confusion: “In addition to the possible genetic predisposition and environmental influences contributing to gender confusion, what might be the role of unclean spirits in this problem?” In 1995, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve issued, “The Family, A Proclamation to the World,” which asserts: “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (p. 102). The attribute of premortal gender describes equally the children that rebelled against the Father as it does his more faithful children that proceeded into mortality. Would it not extend our understanding to know that confusion of sexual orientation could be brought about and sustained by the influence or possession of an unclean spirit which itself has gender, perhaps the opposite gender from the person afflicted?

A latent trigger in Robert’s life appears to have been the molestation that occurred as a child. It is as if evil inflicted upon a child, does indeed “teareth” the child and exposes him to greater affliction as he grows older. This can be seen in the victim/perpetrator cycle so common in cases of abuse. It also explains why the Lord was so vehement in his rebuke of anyone that would cause a child to stumble: “And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea” (Mark 9:42).

Although casting out evil spirits brought immediate and lasting change in the case of Robert, I am not urging that all client problems are fully resolved by casting out evil spirits. Certainly all of the tasks of psychotherapy remain to be completed after evil has been dispelled. The spiritual and emotional wounds will remain to be healed. The roots which first gave evil its hold may remain to be dealt with in counseling. The understanding, acceptance and forgiveness that come from the skillful and empathetic guidance of a therapist must be pursued. The nurturing and education that restore a soul to health, power and freedom will be needed. Of course each client, being independent, also can be the source of much self-inflicted suffering. The devil is often required to give close instruction on how to sin only once; from then on one knows the way and may need little assistance. However, therapists must be keenly aware that the opposition of the adversary is renewed whenever a captive sets a course to freedom. Walking the path of change and healing can be forever frustrated if therapists are ignorant of the enemy or allow its presence to remain near their work. A physician always cleans a wound first, and thereafter as often as necessary to allow healing to come. The practice is equally applicable in the context of psychotherapy. In addition to seeking the gift of discernment of spirits, there may be a duty upon LDS therapists to speak intelligently and openly, at least among themselves, not only about our Father in Heaven and his Son, but also about the adversary encountered on a daily basis. Brigham Young urged, “We should not only study good, and its effects upon our race, but also evil, and its consequences” (JD, 2: 94). Peck (1983) concluded that psychotherapists are confronted by evil, both human and demonic, and that, proceeding with great caution, evil itself could be studied. The objective of such study was stated by Paul: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). Such discussion must be made without fascination or undue attention on the devil, but always bounded by and centered on the majesty and preeminence of Jesus Christ. No good has ever come from dwelling on evil; it is rife with danger. Virtually everyone who has immersed himself in the problem and its practices, even if done so in the name of righteousness and purity, has been afflicted and harmed by it. Its consequences can be awful. But encounters with evil come uninvited and they must be faced with peaceful assurance: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7); “for perfect love casteth out all fear” (Moroni 8:16).

Discerning an evil presence is in some ways similar to discerning a prompting of the Spirit of God. Sometimes its presence is felt strongly, while at other times it is hardly noticeable. Its intent is not always apparent. Sometimes its purposes toward a particular sin are made very clear; while at other times it simply lingers near to drain a person’s vitality. Individual sensitivity to the presence of unclean spirits seems to vary as widely among persons as does individual sensitivity to the spiritual things of God. It requires just as much diligent effort to gain spiritual literacy to discern evil as it does to discern any other prompting of the Spirit of the Lord. As with so many things of a spiritual nature, to some degree, believing must precede confirmation. Some things have their origin in heaven, others in hell and still others with the person. Some things tend to good; others to evil and some things are neutral. It is only through discernment and inspired teaching that truth in any instance can be obtained with certainty. Understanding will be enhanced greatly by clear contrast. If one believes it is only important to understand Christ, that is, to the exclusion of understanding the “common enemy” then he will be limited in his understanding of both. For the Lord is manifest in part by what he opposes. The sharper and clearer the understanding of the evil one, the clearer and greater will be the revelation of the Lord, the wisdom of his commandments and the natural desire for righteousness in people. The one reveals the other. Failure to understand this opens the door to
suffering and captivity by ignorance.

LDS therapists ought to teach each other to recognize the footprints of the adversary in clients’ lives. One such footprint is the way evil co-opts the language of truth and virtue for wicked purposes. Remember Robert’s belief that “integrity” required him to break his covenant to his wife and children in order to pursue a sinful relationship. Truth had been gutted from the word “integrity” and replaced by a course of action rooted in a lie. Another common footprint seen in therapy is the client that leaves a session enlightened and inspired only to return the next week darkened and befuddled; stripped of all the understanding and progress that came the week before. At least for the present, such person has faced and been defeated by evil. Beyond the duty to obtain the gift of discernment and to teach one another, there is also a duty upon LDS therapists to positively combat evil in their practices. James gave this injunction and promise, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). But how are we to resist?We must be cautious not to hate evil; for it will use such hatred as yet another means to seize the soul. The Lord instructed: Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that if you behold a spirit manifested that you cannot understand, and you receive not that spirit, ye shall ask of the Father in the name of Jesus; and if he give not unto you that spirit, then you may know that it is not of God. And it shall be given unto you, power over that spirit; and you shall proclaim against that spirit with a loud voice that it is not of God-- Not with railing accusation, that ye be not overcome, neither with boasting nor rejoicing, lest you be seized therewith (D&C 50:31-33).

Next to the rightful exercise of the priesthood authority, talking of Christ and preaching of Christ is the single strongest repellant of evil. When an evil presence is discerned, faith in the name of Jesus Christ brings heavenly power to rebuke it. Brigham Young said, “A little more faith in the name of Jesus Christ, and I can say to my enemies, Be thou rebuked and stay thou there. I then can say to the power of the Devil, Be thou rebuked; and to evil spirits, Come not within these walls, and they could not enter” (JD, 7: 174).

Although LDS therapists are not likely to openly rebuke the adversary while in the presence of a client, there are some things that ought to be done. First, therapists ought to protect themselves. At times the influences, which afflict a client, may linger to afflict a therapist. Be attentive to the thoughts and feelings that come while engaging a client in therapy. Keep one’s office spiritually clean and do not allow the darkness that may attend one client to remain to bother another.

One of the clear contrasts between the Spirit of God and an evil spirit is the manner of their arrival and departure. The Holy Spirit will often arrive announced with power, pouring out pure intelligence, bringing calmness and serenity to the body and soul (Smith, 1938, p.149-50). It may linger for a time and then, the gift having been given, without disruption it slowly ebbs. Unclean spirits come in subtlety, cautiously, as one stalking prey, attentive not to alarm. Stealth is evil’s principal ploy, thus causing its victims to doubt their instincts of warning. However, upon detection and rebuke, the departure of evil is distinct; one feels released from confinement and restored to clarity.

At times, nothing can be said about evil to clients either because their belief systems do not allow it, or because it may be contraindicated by the current condition of the client (Richards & Bergin 1997). There are those who have abused their agency and become willing companions with evil spirits. While the adversary abhors the agency of man, the powers of heaven are absolute in their respect for it. Thus, if one chooses to have the companionship of evil, the powers of heaven will not compel evil to leave, but the aid of divine powers may be invoked to impose limits to protect the innocent. In such cases LDS therapists will be left to do what they can to protect and to provide for the needs of those who are unable to actively aid themselves.

Ecclesiastical leaders and worthy priesthood holders can provide much support, provided they are well grounded in true doctrine. The power of the priesthood is the power to bless. It is important to remember that the priesthood is effective not only when hands are laid upon a person, but also when exercised at great distance to rebuke evil from those in sore need (Mark 7:25-29). This ought to increase the resources of all LDS therapists.5 I am unaware of the Lord ever chastising anyone for the too frequent exercise of the priesthood power when the prayerful and honest intent of the priesthood holder was to bless. Since priesthood authority can only be used in righteousness, Hugh Nibley (1990) asked and answered, “What good is it then? Over whom does it exercise dominion? Over the spirits and over the elements . . . ” (p.11). There may be times that ecclesiastical leaders do not clearly comprehend the problem. Some may hold a bias against persons who claim evil spirits have had a direct influence on their behavior on the assumption that such claims are nothing more than manipulative attempts to gain attention or to avoid personal responsibility. While this may be the case, it is not necessarily so.

Unfortunately, there are times when church leaders refer persons to counseling without considering and confronting the spiritual condition of the person trapped in sin. When this is the case, the outcome sought in counseling will be delayed or never achieved. One of the persons at the AMCAP dinner remarked that earlier in his career he believed that he had encountered a person possessed of an evil spirit. The person was referred to his ecclesiastical leader who rebuked the spirit. However, the person’s symptoms did not abate and on that basis the therapist and the church leader concluded that the person’s problems were psychologically based. This conclusion may have been drawn too hastily. It assumes much about their faith, understanding and spiritual preparation, about the nature of the spirit rebuked, and about the person afflicted. While the priesthood brought miraculous and immediate relief to Robert and Stephen it was in part because the enemy was clearly discerned and they were prepared to be obedient. In some instances the spirit must be named to be rebuked. Thus, the Lord’s teaching query, “What is thy name?” Further, if the period that follows the rebuke of evil is not spent fortifying the heart and mind, in truth, understanding and conviction, no lasting progress will result.

At the conclusion of the AMCAP dinner, one of the psychologists remarked, that despite the group not comprehending all that I had shared, she understood that what I said was in the nature of a personal testimony to them. She was discerning. It has always been my belief that LDS therapists ought to be unparalleled, not because they are more skilled or know how to love more deeply, but because the doctrinal foundation of the Church is true, because they have the gift of the Holy Ghost and they are upheld by the priesthood.

There is growing emphasis on the importance of employing spiritual interventions in the course of psychotherapy. Effective spiritual interventions are derived from spiritual truths. This paper has attempted to highlight one of those spiritual truths, the interactions of men with evil, as revealed by scriptures and prophetic teaching. Based upon these materials one could properly claim that the discernment and rebuke of evil is the first spiritual intervention. Until it is accomplished all else is in danger of contamination and error.

The author would be interested in receiving comments on the paper. Comments may  be sent to rp@poulton-yordan.com.

Notes
1. It may strike some odd that in the middle of stating that the devil is the cause the aches and
pains to body and mind, Brigham Young interjected, “I don’t want you to realize it.” This
curiosity may be explained by an event which occurred in Kirtland, Ohio. In a meeting of the
High Council of Zion in August, 1834 a complaint was made against Lyman Wight for teaching
“that all disease in this Church is of the devil, and that medicine administered to the sick is of the devil . . . .” Joseph Smith decided, “that it was not lawful to teach the Church that all disease is
of the Devil, but if there is anyone who has this faith, let him have it to himself . . . .” As to the
claim against medicines Joseph said, “such teaching is not of God” (Smith, J., 1932-1952, p.
146).

2. In the March 1997 issue of the Ensign, Kahlile B. Mehr stated: “The estimated population of
the world in A.D. 1 was 200 million; by 1850 it had reached one billion (see The World Almanac
and Book of Facts 1995 [1994], 510). By mid-1995, the world’s population was estimated at
5.76 billion. Over time, as many as 105 billion people may have lived on the earth. (Estimates
courtesy of Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C.; see Carl Haub, ‘How Many People
Have Ever Lived on the Earth?’ Population Today, 23 [Feb. 1995]: 4–5).” (p. 73)

3. There is some difference of opinion as to the identity of the “woman.” Some writers have
believed Eve was the woman spoken of in the scripture (McConkie, Millet & Top, 1987-1992, 4:
224); McConkie, 1978, p. 472; Roberts, 1903, p. 171). Others have thought that the woman
referred to was Mary the mother of Jesus (Matthews, 1994, p.77; Talmage, 1967, p. 43). Both
women can rightfully claim Jesus Christ as her seed. However, each of the above cited writers
agree that the seed of the woman, with power to bruise (crush) the serpent’s head is Jesus Christ and not mankind in general. Lord seems to confirm this when he said: “Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of darkness, who is of this world, cometh, but hath no power over me, but he hath power over you” (JST John 14:30).

4. This recalls a later instance in the ministry of the Savior. As Jesus and his disciples were
walking they saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked, “Master, who did sin, this
man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor
his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:2-3). This report is cited by LDS commentators as evidence of the disciples understanding of a premortal
existence (Talmage, 1967, p. 413). They note that the Lord did not correct the disciple’s
assumption that the man, to be born blind as a consequence of sin, must have existed prior to his birth. And further the Lord did not correct their assumption that blindness in this life could
result, though not in this case, as a consequence of the premortal existence (See Alma 34:34).
Brigham Young stated: “The spirits of the human family are pure and holy at the time they enter tabernacles; but the Lord has so ordered that the enemy has great power over our tabernacles, whose organization pertains to the earth (JD, 8: 118). Being pure and holy at birth does not mean there cannot be consequences of premortal experience continued in this life. A similar teaching exists about post-mortal life, which is, that at some time all sins but one will be forgiven by the Lord and all inheriting a kingdom of glory will be purified to receive that kingdom, but as consequence of individual conduct in mortality the inheritances and capacities of each will vary (See 1 Nephi 10:19-21).

5. The Prophet Joseph Smith, commenting to the Relief Society on the signs that follow all that
believe, as found in Mark 16:15-18, said: “No matter who believeth, these signs, such as healing
the sick, casting out devils, etc., should follow all that believe, whether male or female” (Smith,
1938, p. 224). Those without priesthood authority according to the principle of faith may
perform the rebuke of evil. Obviously, women draw upon the gift of faith equally with men, and
therefore, by this principle of power, they too can cast out evils spirits. However, it may be wise
in the direct confrontation with powerful influences of evil to support by faith the actions of
discerning priesthood holders.

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TAMARA'S COMMENTS

The subject of Brother Poulton's paper is plainly taught of in the Bible and latter-day scripture. **Joseph Smith** spoke quite a bit on this subject**.** Here is just one of many references to our subject by him:

"Perhaps there are principles here that few men have thought of. No person can have this salvation except through a tabernacle.Now, in this world, mankind are naturally selfish, ambitious and striving to excel one above another; yet some are willing to build up others as well as themselves. So in the other world there are a variety of spirits. Some seek to excel.And this was the case with Lucifer when he fell. He sought for things which were unlawful. Hence he was sent down, and it is said he drew many away with him; and the greatness of his punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle. This is his punishment. So the devil, thinking to thwart the decree of God, by going up and down in the earth, seeking whom he may destroy—any person that he can find that will yield to him, he will bind him, and take possession of the body and reign there, glorying in it mightily, not caring that he had got merely a stolen body; and by and by some one having authority will come along and cast him out and restore the tabernacle to its rightful owner. The devil steals a tabernacle because he has not one of his own: but if he steals one, he is always liable to be turned out of doors." *(Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 297-98.)