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Dealing with Difficulty in Scripture: Divine Violence in the Book of Mormon

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Letter-day prophets have implored and continually encouraged members of the Church to make daily and habitual study of the scriptures a priority in their lives. One of the most important reasons for this is the fact that it is through the scriptures that one learns the most about the life and teachings of the Savior and how to follow him. “What manner of men had ye ought to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” is Jesus’s scriptural call to each of us (3 Nephi 27:27).¹ When we consider our relationship with Jesus, especially as our exemplar and in relation to his characteristics, roles, and responsibilities, it is imperative that we carefully consider the scriptural characterizations of Jesus in all their variegated glory.

Yet, reading all of the various characterizations and narratives about prophets or about Jesus Christ, either as the God of the Old Testament, the mortal Messiah of the New, or the Resurrected Lord of the Book of Mormon, can cause consternation. What do we do when we or our students, in following the encouragement of prophets, delve into the scriptures and find actions or words of prophets or even God that are surprising, worrisome, or discomforting from our modern perspectives?² We can easily run across things that were

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never touched in Primary (for obvious reasons) or Sunday School (though perhaps we shouldn't shy away from them there). This can quickly, particularly in regards to the Bible, move beyond not understanding how certain things were possible in the natural universe (e.g., the sun and moon stopping in the sky in Joshua 10:12–14 or a floating ax-head in 2 Kings 6:4–7). It can also expose us to things that, from our perspective, seem to be truly bizarre occurrences or commands (e.g., a talking donkey in Numbers 22:21–39 or laws that prescribe difficult or odd actions such as in Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 23:42, Deuteronomy 15:17, or 25:11–12). Beyond this even, there are in the scriptures more ethically or morally charged issues relating to violence and killing or gender and sex that are challenging to modern conceptions of justice and morality, not just in twenty-first century society at large but also within a Church-oriented paradigm. This does not simply apply to the Bible. Many of these same issues are also present within Restoration scripture, particularly in the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price.

There are a number of important strategies that careful readers of the scriptures need to develop that can assist in understanding these specific sections of scripture. First, it is essential to remember that the LDS Church, its prophets, or its scriptures do not espouse biblical or scriptural inerrancy.³ Likewise, it is vital for readers to understand the differences (or potential differences) between the context and culture of the original writers of scripture and that of the contemporary reader. Another important capability is being able to note differences between what the scriptures actually teach and our socially constructed views or stereotypes about them.⁴ These understandings all must be coupled with hefty amounts of charity for the writers of the scriptures, as they were writing to the best of their light and knowledge. We must also read these scriptures through the lens of modern prophetic statements. In doing so, we can recognize that we have been blessed with more light and knowledge today that may help us see more clearly: “For I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:41). Congruent with this, we must always humbly recognize (or attempt to recognize) our own blinders and biases. It can also be helpful to consult the works and thoughts of theologians and scholars (both LDS and non-LDS) to benefit from their expertise and thinking about these issues, as Elder M. Russell Ballard recently suggested.⁵ Many have wrestled with the

more problematic aspects of the Bible before in ways that can be helpful for an LDS audience.⁶

Quite a number of the challenging materials that may cause struggles can be overcome by remembering that the scriptural writers were inspired men but still mortal and imperfect, having their own worldviews, cultures, and contexts. However, challenging issues within scripture become all the more problematic when the one doing the confusing or discomforting (from our perspective) actions, is our Savior Jesus Christ. From calling a Gentile woman a “dog” (see Matthew 15:21–28 or Mark 7:24–30) to using strong and shockingly angry or violent imagery (see Luke 3:9, 12:49–53, 22:36–38, or Matthew 23:13–36) to statements seemingly intent on driving wedges between families (see Mark 3:31–35, Matthew 8:21–22, Luke 9:62, or Luke 14:26), some of the teachings and sayings of Jesus in his mortal life can be somewhat unsettling. Even more so, some of his actions recorded in the scriptures as a divine being (either before his mortal experience or after it) can also be potentially upsetting. If we are to pattern our lives on the example of the Savior, what do we do with instances such as these? Do we (or others) interpret them to allow for followers of Christ to engage in similar behaviors in the name of Jesus?

For this discussion (focusing on the topic of violence), we must always be aware of the potential real-world ramifications of how we approach examples of divine violence. On one hand, violence in scripture (divine or otherwise) can all too easily become an easy “cover for human hatred” against the “outsider” (in the words of the theologian Terence Fretheim).⁷ On the other hand, these instances are ripe for misapplication or misinterpretation based on a misunderstanding of scriptural intentions and methods, even leading to misunderstandings of the scriptural depiction of the nature of Deity.⁸ Likewise, they may prompt strong reactions because of ethical ramifications or disgust/discomfort with the violence portrayed (particularly from a modern interpretive standpoint), potentially leading to a loss of faith. These reactions can take many forms, from the removal of passages overtly (à la Marcion in the second century) or more obliquely via a simple ignoring of the issues or ramifications at hand.⁹ The latter can occur because of rather innocent, innocuous, or even laudable reasons—e.g., choosing to focus on more uplifting teachings or scriptures. In this case, for example, we generally focus on 3 Nephi 11 rather than 3 Nephi 8–9 because it speaks as more spiritually powerful, with greater hope and meaning. However, ignoring difficult passages can also occur because we

see the presentation of Jesus as not conforming to our political inclinations, axiomatic theological assertions, or ideological paradigms.

This article presents methods of dealing with a distinct subset of these potentially unsettling divine actions by focusing on only the issue of violence as performed by Deity in Restoration scripture, particularly in 3 Nephi 8–11, but also in Moses 7.¹⁰ By discussing these passages and how they present divine wrath and violence, this paper will illustrate methods of analysis and interpretation that can also be applied to other discomforting scriptural accounts involving our Deity, particularly some of those in the Old Testament. However, due to space concerns, as well as the fact that many of those other sections are somewhat different in essential character and are impacted by different methodological and analytical concerns, they will not be dealt with directly here.¹¹ Yet these interpretive methods and tools are important regarding all sections of the scriptures as a means of thinking about and obtaining further doctrinal light and knowledge pertinent for our students or us.

In 3 Nephi 8, the prophecies of Samuel regarding the death of Christ begin to be fulfilled, with a large storm or tempest that causes great physical destruction throughout the land. This includes the specific burning, drowning, and crushing of a number of cities that must have resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. Chapter 9 recounts the voice of Jesus Christ describing the physical destructions and taking personal responsibility for them as well as introducing himself and providing limited teachings about the end of the Mosaic law. Chapter 10 recounts a period of silence followed by another message given by the voice, followed by an editorial insertion by Mormon about these fulfilled prophecies. Chapter 11 of 3 Nephi is the most well known of the chapters, recounting the physical visit of Jesus Christ to the people in the land Bountiful. (For a literary breakdown, see the table.) Moses 7 recounts the ministry of Enoch, including the establishment of his city. Most notably, for this paper, Moses 7:32–69 recounts Enoch’s visions of the fate of those destroyed in the flood and the weeping reaction of God.

Three distinct methods of analysis or approaches will be highlighted herein with regard to 3 Nephi 9–11 to illustrate what doctrinal points of importance can be derived from these passages when viewed together. First, given the dearth of resources or statements from modern prophets on the issue, it will be helpful to engage with external scholarship and theological reasoning to bring additional points of view and pertinent Christian theological works on divine violence, which this paper will do by engaging with

the work of Terence Fretheim. Second, a comparative analysis with another example of divine violence within the LDS tradition, specifically Enoch’s significant interaction with God in relation to the Flood, illustrates Restoration scripture fitting within the model of biblical divine violence. The last method is a structural analysis of how Mormon, as prophet-editor, literarily constructed this pericope. Detailing how he fashioned this section of the Book of Mormon allows a clearer understanding of his message and its theological implications. All these approaches illuminate what narratives about divine violence can tell us doctrinally about the nature of Christ (or God the Father) as our exemplars and our relationship to them.

Divine Violence in Biblical and Latter-day Saint Scripture: Theological Analysis

Having a general understanding of previous and contemporary work on Christian theologies of divine violence can help situate the issues that the Book of Mormon adds to such theological discussions. Comparison with examples from elsewhere in Restoration scripture can also help. This section will begin by discussing general Christian thought and responses to scriptural examples of divine violence, including a presentation of Terence Fretheim’s notions of divine violence within his overarching relational theology. The paper will then apply such thoughts to the pericopes under discussion within LDS scripture.

Generally, within Christian thought, philosophies or theologies regarding violence are dominated by discussions of the ethical concerns surrounding the justification for human usage of violence, focusing on aspects of “just war theory.”¹² Theological thinking related to the use of violence by Deity is not as prevalent. However, there is enough of a discourse on such aspects that a general spectrum of Christian thought can be observed within which we can attempt to situate LDS scriptural discourse. There are, of course, many more thinkers and theologians than can be discussed here.¹³ The general spectrum of Christian thought on this issue spans from positions of an essential nonviolent nature of God to a recognition that God may choose in his wisdom to act violently when such is called for. To illustrate such a spectrum, on one side is the theologian J. Denny Weaver, who states, “The rule of the devil attempts to rule by violence and death, whereas the rule of God rules and ultimately conquers by nonviolence.”¹⁴ On the other side, another theologian, Miroslav Volf, concludes, “There are things only God may do. One of them is

to use violence.”¹⁵ To be sure, both positions are well thought out and based on valid intellectual interpretations of scripture, combined with axiomatic theological assumptions.

Many instances or examples from scripture (mostly within the Old Testament) contribute to this spectrum of viewpoints. Theological analysis of such examples from the Old Testament can provide assistance in both evaluating the aggregate of those occurrences of divine violence in our scriptural canon, but also helping us make doctrinal sense of what these passages teach us about Jesus Christ and how to follow him. Rather than taking the time to overview each of them, it will be easier to engage with one of the “best books” of external scholarship and theology on the subject by presenting the relational theology of Terence Fretheim (D&C 88:118).¹⁶ Fretheim, a Lutheran theologian, deals in depth with many of the characteristics of this divine violence as presented in the Old Testament.

Fretheim’s thoughts on divine violence are informed by his broader development of a relational theology, a theological endeavor that has many resonances with LDS doctrine and scripture. Differing somewhat from process theology,¹⁷ Fretheim’s theology is characterized by the concept of relationality as a basic element of the nature of God: God freely enters into relationships (LDS audiences would maybe say “covenants”) with others; these relationships bring to him very real risks, vulnerabilities, limitations, and power-sharing realities. The result of this is a God who “suffers because of, with, and for creation,” while also working in close concert with humankind in all their weakness. As he states, “in pursuing the divine purposes, God does not act alone, but works with what is available, with human beings as they are, with all their foibles and flaws, as well as their wisdom. God does not perfect people before working in and through them; God can work even through human evil toward the divine purposes (see Genesis 50:20).”¹⁸ The strictures and limitations that accompany these relationships are chosen freely by God, resulting in a voluntary giving up of omnipotence for the sake of a relationship with his creations. This last idea may seem strange at first. However, it is in many ways analogous to what Latter-day Saints express as God choosing to respect the agency of mankind, which results in his choosing not to interfere (self-limiting his power or omnipotence) if to do so would compromise such agency.¹⁹

For our purposes here, a few of Fretheim’s conclusions about divine violence in the Old Testament help make sense of the divine violence in 3 Nephi

(and Moses 7). Fretheim brings to the fore that, in the Bible, God utilizes divine violence for both enacting judgments against the wicked or salvation for the oppressed.²⁰ This certainly applies to the 3 Nephi passages in the Book of Mormon, as the wicked are targeted for judgmental destruction, while the “more righteous” are spared or delivered so that they may turn to Jesus for ultimate salvation (3 Nephi 9:13). Beyond this, however, Fretheim also stresses that this violence must always be understood in the context of violence as perpetrated by mankind. In other words, God never acts violently first. Similarly, Fretheim is also clear to point out that divine violence is never an end unto itself, it is never uncontrolled, blind, or capricious, but rather always has a purpose. Fretheim, echoing Walter Brueggemann, notes that the purposes of salvific and judgmental violence “may be reduced to one. That is, God’s use of violence, inevitable in a violent world, is intended to subvert human violence in order to bring the creation along to a point where violence is no more.”²¹ In other words, whenever God acts violently, he does so to not only stop or punish human violence, but also does so in a way that promotes, teaches, or ensures a move of humankind generally away from such violence.

With such a notion of subversion and the possibility of violence in mind, there might be instances or circumstances where defensive (not offensive) violence may be justified or even commanded by God. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that LDS scripture places a great onus of peace upon humankind (see Alma 43 and D&C 98). Thus, for Latter-day Saints, Miroslav Volf’s absolute contention that violence is something that only God can do is not entirely true in that it does not universally hold in all circumstances from our scriptural point of view. However, it is an ideal we can agree with generally as it is something that we are commanded to strive for. Resorting to violence while in mortality is in the vast majority of cases against the will of God.

The passages under consideration here (3 Nephi 9–11 and Moses 7) make the point that, irrespective of doctrines of defensive violence by mortals, there is not a full prohibition on the usage of violence by divinity when such is called for. We should also recognize that Volf’s underlying reasons for his contention stem from traditional Christian understandings of the *Ganz Andere* (wholly other) God separated ontologically from humankind. On the one hand, these passages doctrinally push Mormon interpretation away from Volf’s end of the spectrum. On the other hand, more liberal Christian theologies (including most versions of process theology that declare God as

absolutely, categorically nonviolent) become problematic, if not completely ruled out, scripturally by the passages seen here. At the very least, by their very existence, these Restoration passages suggest that, on the general spectrum of Christian theologies of divine violence, LDS doctrine should fall a little more toward the side which allows for God to be violent at times for subversive purposes. The fact that Fretheim's analysis of the Old Testament passages can be seen to apply so clearly to 3 Nephi and Moses 7 shows how closely these passages fit within the typology of divine violence established in the Old Testament.

Enoch's Experience: Comparative Analysis

Another fruitful approach to understanding Jesus's actions within 3 Nephi is a comparative analysis between the 3 Nephi account and another example of divine violence from latter-day scripture. In this regard, a comparison to Moses 7, which describes Enoch's interaction with God, particularly focusing on how and why the God of heaven weeps with regard to human beings, is enlightening. This section of the Book of Moses is a powerful theological statement of the concern and compassion that our God feels for us.²² This image is an important contributor to LDS doctrines of God as definitively passible (i.e., capable of feeling emotions or sensations, even suffering) and not a god without parts or passions. However, some of its usages in LDS discourse suffer from an unfortunate removal (in scriptural, doctrinal, and exegetical terms) of important points made regarding the actions of Deity, particularly as we think about divine violence. In these cases, while quoting from this section of Moses 7, authors fail to include all or major portions of verses 34–39, which speak of God's wrath, anger, and judgment. This omission is presumably caused by both discomfort with the theological ramifications of a full reading of the pericope as well as the shortening of the text to a manageable length.²³ I call this the "Enigmatic Ellipses in Enoch's Weeping Deity." Based on this omission, the tendency is to misfocus, particularly as it relates to the actions of God, neglecting certain important considerations for a discussion of the nature of God, while focusing on other important characterizations. In this reproduction of the entire section, the italicized verses are often removed:

The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood;

And the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them.

Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name, also.

Wherefore, I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren.

But behold, their sins shall be upon the heads of their fathers; Satan shall be their father, and misery shall be their doom; and the whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands; wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?

But behold, these which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the floods; and behold, I will shut them up; a prison have I prepared for them.

And that which I have chosen hath pled before my face. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins; inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me, and until that day they shall be in torment;

Wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep, yea, and all the workmanship of mine hands. (Moses 7:32–40)

By overlooking the specific verses that discuss the violent reprisal of a God against those who have sinned to a fullness of violence,²⁴ whether done innocently or intentionally, the reader misses the characterization of wrath as an important point for why the heavens weep. Some may question why wrath or anger from divinity is ever necessary in an attempt to justify a sole focus on God's emotional or merciful reaction. Fretheim's theological answer to such is important, pointing out that "human anger at injustice will carry less weight and seriousness if divine anger at injustice in the service of life is not given its proper place. If our God is not angry, why should we be?"²⁵ This stems from his thoughts on relational theology that reject the classical Christian notion of an impassible and passionless God. This section of Moses 7 (combined with 3 Nephi 8–11) makes it clear that the LDS scriptural tradition likewise rejects such notions. It also declares that the heavens weep, not only because the children of men are so wicked to one another, but also because such extreme wickedness requires God to come out in his wrath, for them to be destroyed, and shut up in a prison until they repent. Another important possible interpretation for the reason behind the weeping of the heavens is because of the suffering of the Chosen (see Moses 7:39–40). None of these interpretations is mutually exclusive, and, in reality, all seem to be interwoven

in distinct ways within this section, further demonstrating the difficulty of removing God's anger and violent action from his other attributes.

The characterization of God and the theological issues in this section are of the same quality and form of those presented in 3 Nephi 8–11: a Deity who is at the same time both violently destructive and everlastingly merciful and caring. They provide two linked witnesses of the usage of divine violence within LDS scripture, complete with three factors Fretheim identifies as common in biblical presentations of divine violence. First, God uses mediatory agents to perform violence (in Moses 7, the flood; in 3 Nephi most likely a volcanic eruption).²⁶ Second, God claims divine responsibility for such. And, third, God enacts divine lament and grief over its necessity.

In the end, Enoch comes to understand the place and necessity of this violence. But this only occurs after “his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned” (Moses 7:41), after he “refuse[d] to be comforted” (Moses 7:44) until God had shown unto him the coming of the Righteous One or the Lamb to finally bring rest to the earth after significant tribulations and violent judgments from God.²⁷ However, the case can be made that Mormon, as the author-editor of the Book of Mormon, did not necessarily have this understanding or wholly know what to make of the depiction of divine violence or vengeance in contrast with manifestations of divine mercy and love in 3 Nephi compared to the rest of the Book of Mormon. This claim emerges due to the presence of certain internal inconsistencies and contradictions within the Book of Mormon. For instance, Mormon categorically states, “it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished” (Mormon 4:5). Yet, in 3 Nephi 8–9 the wicked are destroyed not by the wicked, but rather by *the Righteous* (or at least by a natural agent of the Righteous One). In this manner, the doctrinal portrayal of Jesus in the Book of Mormon defies simplistic categorizations or sweeping ethical statements contained in the very same book. To a degree, then, “What manner of men had ye ought to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27) combined with “I would that ye should be perfect, even as I or your father which is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48) becomes more problematic and difficult to put into practice. This ultimately is also in curious contradistinction to other latter-day revelations on extending and preaching peace (D&C 98:16, 34; 105:38) as well as what is arguably one of the Book of Mormon's ultimate messages that violence and warfare will not save mankind, but simply lead to downward spirals of destruction, with violence begetting violence, hatred begetting hatred. From



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this perspective, it is not surprising that these sections of scripture have not inspired much prophetic or scholarly commentary or focus, relative to other sections of the Book of Mormon. The most common interpretive approach

is to see them simply as types and shadows of the destruction that is to come at the Second Coming.²⁸

Such a simplistic interpretation could keep us from truly knowing all we can about our Savior's actions at this point as well as about the Book of Mormon and what it intends to teach about him. As President Benson admonished, "we should constantly ask ourselves, 'Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?'"²⁹ What does it mean for us theologically or doctrinally to have a Risen Lord who is not only capable of such destruction, but one who actively has utilized such to the devastation and death of so many people? Such notions again make many of us uncomfortable—as they should because of their ethically and morally challenging nature. Yet we can take hope from the fact that these actions also made Jesus uncomfortable, indicated by the divine laments in 3 Nephi 10 and Moses 7. Indeed, in 3 Nephi, the inserted third manifestation in chapter 10 stands as a linchpin of importance in understanding what Mormon wants to present as well as a theological bridge to understand the two main manifestations, destructive and merciful, of Jesus to the Nephites. This understanding best comes through a detailed literary analysis of the extended narration of these manifestations.

Manifesting Himself unto the Nephites in 3 Nephi: Literary Analysis

If we are to take the Book of Mormon seriously (as Jesus commands and commends us to do to remove condemnation from off our heads; see D&C 84:55–57), we must recognize and understand these sections of 3 Nephi and how they relate to the book's purpose. Mormon as prophet-editor deliberately chose and crafted the record as related to the thesis statement that the Book of Mormon is to assist in "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations" (Book of Mormon title page). How does Mormon present Jesus as "manifesting himself" in the Book of Mormon and what relevance can that have for us in our understanding of the nature of God? The standard Mormon tendency is to focus on 3 Nephi 11 and the physical manifestation of Jesus to the Nephites. However, to solely concentrate on this manifestation to the point of ignoring the other passages that Mormon literarily connects with it is to miss a major contribution to LDS scripture and doctrine pertaining to the divine character of Jesus Christ.

Mormon constructs a narrative about Jesus's manifestation that includes three different manifestations, not just one: an intriguing combination of two distinct and symbolically opposite visitations, with another manifestation sandwiched between them (see the table). In the broader context of 3 Nephi 8:5–10:11, Mormon literarily contrasts the two major manifestations, wanting them to be noted and compared by his audience by placing them in direct juxtaposition with no historical events between them.³⁰ Yet, a close reading of this section reveals that these different manifestations occur months, if not a full year, apart. Mormon tells his audience nothing about what happened after the storm or tempest that began "in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, in the fourth day of the month" (3 Nephi 8:5) and Jesus showing himself unto the people occurring "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year" (3 Nephi 10:18).

The first manifestation of Christ to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 8–9 is characterized by extreme natural destruction and darkness for which a disembodied (not physically present) voice (which identifies itself as Jesus Christ) addresses a whole community of people and claims primary responsibility. The words of the voice strongly highlight the personal responsibility and active agency of the Voice in the destructions by repeated usage of the first person throughout 3 Nephi 9:2–18. This manifestation also highlights Christ's usage of the natural world as his agent or means of destruction. Mormon focuses our attention on this fact by recounting first the physical destruction by natural processes in 3 Nephi 8, and then having the divine Voice claim accountability and responsibility for such in 3 Nephi 9. The second manifestation, being much more familiar, depicts a physically present, resurrected Lord whose manifestation is more light (as opposed to dark), spiritual, transcendent, miraculous, individualized, and merciful (see 3 Nephi 11).³¹ Yet Mormon's literary structuring of this whole section makes clear that both of these manifestations involve the same Divine Being. This is done by the self-introductions Christ gives in both manifestations, including many of the same images and phrases (compare 3 Nephi 9:15–18 and 3 Nephi 11:10–11). Literarily, these two opposite and paradoxical manifestations are linked and made mutually comprehensive (and not contradictory) by another manifestation, the second message delivered by Christ's disembodied voice contained in 3 Nephi 10.

A number of observations suggest themselves from this literary breakdown that are important in understanding the doctrinal implications for Jesus's actions in manifesting himself to the Nephites, particularly as related

to issues of divine violence. First, it is clear that while there are three distinct manifestations of Christ, as described above, Mormon intends them to be read together. As noted, Mormon ties the two events together as he skims past the intervening months between them, instead inserting an editorial comment focusing on the notion of the fulfillment of prophecy, a motif also noted in the words of Jesus in both of the manifestations (3 Nephi 8:16; 11:10), further connecting the manifestations. This literary connection was also made explicit in the original division of the chapters in Joseph's translation. Originally, chapters 8–10 of 3 Nephi were included together in one literary unit or chapter, while 3 Nephi 11 was at the beginning of the next chapter division. These literary links show that Mormon wanted the manifestations to be connected in the minds of his readers, while also wanting to draw attention to the physical manifestation by placing it as the beginning of its own chapter.

In addition, it is also literarily and theologically important that the reasons for the destruction are made abundantly clear. The voice declares that the inhabitants of the destroyed places are guilty of explicit wickedness and abominations as well as participating in or actively consenting to the killing of the prophets (3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 9, 11). With their blood calling unto heaven for justice, the destruction occurred in reaction to the people having rebelled willfully, acting violently against the saints and prophets. At the very least, the Book of Mormon depicts this destruction, not as the act of a capricious or angry God but as justice that has been merited by the community at large.³² Yet, in the face of this, it is also of absolute importance to Mormon's project (and our interpretation) that the destruction happens via a natural agent, the storm, a fact carefully projected by the distinction and disconnect in the narrative between the physical-natural occurrences as recounted in chapter 8 and the divine claim of responsibility in chapter 9. The usage of a natural agent makes the wrath of God more impersonal, while his physical ministry of mercy is much more intimate and personal. Removed from the initial destruction and the separate claim of responsibility by a number of hours of silence, the voice again provides a specific lament or expression of grief over the physical destruction in the second manifestation (3 Nephi 10:4–7).

With such a thought in mind, the manifestation of divine violence in 3 Nephi as being a response to human violence (shedding the blood of prophets and saints) is immediately recognized. However, it needs also be seen that such violence was integral as a subversion of that human violence in that it led

to the ultimate establishment of the nonviolent Zion-type society that was to follow in 4 Nephi.³³ Such an answer may not totally mitigate ethical concerns, but it may help explain and understand God's actions. At the least, the presence of these factors accords surprisingly well with Fretheim's analysis and typology based on the presentation of divine violence in the Old Testament.

A Mormon theology or doctrine of divine violence that takes these passages seriously while also alleviating the discomfort we may feel towards them must rely on one or two potential doctrinal teachings. First, we must remember and teach more clearly the vast degree of difference between mortal humans and God. This is set up very clearly in our scriptural canon and by modern prophets. King Benjamin urged his people to "remember and always retain in remembrance the greatness of God and your own nothingness" (Mosiah 4:11). Moses, after one of his visions, noted, "Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10). President Dieter F. Uchtdorf characterized this as half of what he labeled "the paradox of man: compared to God, man is nothing; yet we are everything to God."³⁴ This certainly does not mean rejecting the ontological relationship we have with our Father in Heaven (i.e., we can progress to become like him, being of the same "species" so to speak). But it does mean that we should be more careful in the ways that we sometimes causally tend to shrink the chasm between the mortal and divine (something illustrated by, for example, our referring to Christ as our "Elder Brother" rather than the Eternal God).

Secondly, the doctrinal notion of priesthood keys may present a way of understanding that the scriptural accounts of divine violence should never be used as justification for aggressive violence by mortal disciples of Jesus Christ. President Brigham Young once taught: "It is supposed by this people that we have all the ordinances in our possession for life and salvation, and exaltation, and that we are administering in those ordinances. This is not the case. We are in possession of all the ordinances that can be administered in the flesh; but there are other ordinances and administrations that must be administered beyond this world. I know you would like to ask what they are. I will mention one. We have not, neither can we receive here, the ordinance and the keys of resurrection."³⁵

President Spencer W. Kimball built upon this to teach that not only do we not have the keys of resurrection in mortal life, but also we lack the keys and powers over giving life to plants, power to control fully the elements, the creation of spirit children, as well as those keys necessary to organize matter.³⁶

Literary Breakdown of 3 Nephi 8–11

3 Nephi 8	8:1–4—legitimacy of the record and record keeper, division among the people with doubtings and disputations 8:5–23a—physical/natural destructions upon the land 8:23b–25—lamentations of the people
3 Nephi 9	9:1—introduction of the voice 9:2–12—retelling of the destructions to this point and reasons for them 9:13–22—address to the survivors 9:13–18—invitation to return, identity of the Voice as Jesus Christ 9:19–22—instructions for survivors on future action and how to come to Christ
3 Nephi 10	10:1–2—astonishment and space of silence 10:3–7—Voice returns, Hen metaphor 10:8–9a—Lamentations of the people, time of darkness 10:9b–10—end of the darkness and destruction, lamentations replaced with joy of survivors 10:11–19—editorial comment of Mormon 10:11–17—prophecies fulfilled 10:18–19—editorial introduction to bodily visit of Christ
3 Nephi 11	11:1–2—historical introduction, setting the stage 11:3–8—another voice, three times, introduction of the Son 11:9–11—personal introduction of Christ 11:12—reaction of the crowd 11:13–17—call for multitude to witness 11:18–28a—bestowal of priesthood, instructions pertaining to baptism 11:28b–30—disavowal of contention and disputations by Christ 11:31–40—declaration of Christ’s doctrine, building upon baptism instructions 11:41—call to the ministry, spreading the word

From the previous point on the distance between humanity and God, it is not difficult to postulate that keys over the righteous usage of violence and destruction are also not given to humankind in mortality. These keys may not be bestowed upon mortals, but they may be exercised by Deity (or their power may be delegated to specific agents, natural or human) in distinct circumstances wherein the violence of humankind calls for a counter-violent subversion leading ultimately to the abolition of violence.³⁷

Conclusion: Hen Metaphor of 3 Nephi 10

In conclusion, at the very least, a close doctrinal analysis of divine violence stemming from 3 Nephi (but extending into other passages in LDS scripture) can push us in discomforting ways. However, based on the grief and lament that accompanies such divine violence, these occurrences likewise were also disturbing and discomforting to Jesus Christ and, by extension, our Heavenly Parents. Likewise, the grief and lamenting that Jesus declares over the destruction that he claims responsibility for pushes back against the adoption of traditional Christian notions of an omnipotent, inscrutable, and impassible God. Rather, these sections force us to recognize a relational quality inherent in the nature of God and Christ as passible, emotional beings, who are ultimately invested in the relationships they have built with mortals and the natural world. Yet they are at the same time committed to specific lines of righteousness and may act violently in response to extreme human violence which steps beyond the ethical or moral stipulations of their commandments. As portrayed in 3 Nephi, our Lord may do so reluctantly and with pain and tears, but he will do so.

Such a conclusion is borne out by the literary construction of these manifestations, combined with a comparative analysis with Enoch’s experience, and in conjunction with Fretheim’s Old Testament Relational Theology. In the 3 Nephi account, Mormon presents the manifestations of Jesus to the Nephites with inherent differences in qualities: the destruction is accomplished by impersonal, natural, and agential or intermediate forces, while the mercy and love of God are presented personally, intimately, and directly. This contrast between delegated justice and personalized mercy brings to the fore that God would rather give the latter. In terms of literary structure, the fact that all of the three manifestations stress his mercy bespeaks the notion that God prefers merciful interaction. But the first manifestation—the destruction—is a means of emphasizing that God is willing to enact violence if necessitated by justice and the blood of the righteous crying out to him to put a stop to further human violence. Mortals, however, cannot (or should not) utilize similar violent action (outside of very specific circumstances as directed or sanctioned by God), as it is not their prerogative nor in their authority or capability to do so righteously. As Moroni states near the end of the Book of Mormon, “Behold what the scripture saith: Man shall not smite, neither shall he judge; for judgment is mine, saith the Lord, and vengeance is mine also, and I will repay” (Mormon 8:20).³⁸

This ultimately also should cause us to view the metaphor of the hen, as presented in the second manifestation in 3 Nephi 10, in an expanded manner that structurally links the other two manifestations in chapters 9 and 11. The image of the hen is definitely a deliberate symbolic choice to present the motherly and feminine love or charity that God exhibits and the protection he desires for his children.³⁹ However, Jesus could have chosen from a nearly infinite array of animal examples or other imagery to get such a point across. By choosing a hen explicitly (and not some other potentially violent motherly image—e.g., a bear or lion), the lament may also be seen as an implicit declaration that he greatly regrets or has sincere pain because of the violence he has had to enact. The imagery highlights how he would vastly prefer to protect and deliver his children nonviolently, if they would but hearken and accept such.⁴⁰ Thus, it is not just a statement that God will protect his children, but also a statement about how he prefers to manifest that protection. “How oft have I . . . how oft would I . . . how oft will I gather you [nonviolently],” he can be seen declaring. “But if not, O house of Israel, the places of your dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to your fathers” (3 Nephi 9:7). In this case, the surrounding context suggests: “but you would not this time, and I had to destroy.”

The scriptural God presented in these chapters can be a destroyer, but he will always be a reluctant destroyer due to his emotional connection and relationality with his children. Yet, it is equally important to recognize that knowing that divinity may act through agents for justice and destruction is very different from being able to know or tell when he is or is not doing so, outside of specific prophetic revelation. In the end, we mortals, bound by our own weaknesses and blinders, must recognize that we “shall not smite, neither shall [we] judge” (Mormon 8:20). Rather, we must leave these things firmly in the hands of God, with faith to accept his timing, his mercy, and his action in our behalf. Likewise, in the absence of distinct prophetic declaration of the Lord’s hand being evidently stretched out, we must not jump to any judgmental conclusion about the causes of natural or human-caused disasters vis-à-vis the wrath of God. Rather, we are commanded to do all we can to bless the lives of all that we can, regardless of any potential causes of distress or destruction.

The divine violence exhibited by Jesus in these chapters contrasts distinctly and somewhat paradoxically with the divine mercy he shows in the chapters just following. Without a proper contextualization, the differences

and seeming contradictions can cause consternation. It has been shown that these scriptures and the events they portray are meant to be understood as challenging and somewhat discomforting, for us as well as for God. However, they also show that we need not be scared of engaging with challenging and discomforting sections of scripture. By using specific exegetical and interpretive approaches, it is shown that Mormon intended the two major manifestations of 3 Nephi to be read in concert with one another, as they are bridged by the middle manifestation of 3 Nephi 10. It is this middle manifestation that provides the key to understanding theologically and doctrinally the position and attitude of Jesus and the Father about the divine destruction they must at times wreak. Likewise, it provides valuable doctrinal instruction about the relationality and differences between God and his mortal children. As Latter-day Saints, we must constructively view and understand all of the scriptures that have been preserved for us, even those that are challenging, so that we may derive a stronger knowledge of and relationship with our Lord and Savior. As teachers in Zion, it is also of utmost importance for our students that we develop the capabilities to guide them in the use of such methods, approaches, and tools in understanding and properly applying the doctrines, principles, and narratives found in the scriptures. In this way, discomforting and unsettling sections of scripture can be turned into faith-building way-stops rather than doubt-inducing stumbling stones in our paths of discipleship. **RE**

Notes

1. All Book of Mormon quotations come from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, trans. Joseph Smith, first edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

2. Recently, President Russell M. Nelson invited and encouraged the young adults of the Church “to consecrate a portion of your time each week to studying *everything* Jesus said and did as recorded in the Old Testament, for He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Study His laws as recorded in the New Testament, for He is its Christ. Study His doctrine as recorded in the Book of Mormon, for there is no book of scripture in which His mission and His ministry are more clearly revealed. And study His words as recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, for He continues to teach His people in this dispensation.” Emphasis in original. President Russell M. Nelson, “Prophets, Leadership, and Divine Law” (worldwide devotional for young adults, 8 January 2017), <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-devotionals/2017/01/prophets-leadership-and-divine-law?lang=eng>.

3. The most succinct declaration of this point is the eighth article of faith: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” For a broader discussion of biblical inerrancy and LDS views, see Robert L. Millet, “A Latter-day Saint Perspective on Biblical Inerrancy,” in *No*

Weapon Shall Prosper: A Response to Anti-Mormon Views (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 123–40.

4. For instance, it is common to encounter the notion that the God of the Old Testament is vengeful, angry, and destructive, while the God of the New Testament is merciful, loving, and peaceful. Such a stereotyped viewpoint does not accurately represent the reality, ignoring the hundreds (if not thousands) of verses in the Old Testament extolling the Lord's long-suffering, mercy, love, and forgiveness as well as the violent and judgment-filled rhetoric and imagery associated with God and Jesus in the New Testament.

5. M. Russell Ballard, "The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century" (address to Church Educational System religious educators, 26 February 2016), <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/evening-with-a-general-authority/2016/02/the-opportunities-and-responsibilities-of-ces-teachers-in-the-21st-century?lang=eng>.

6. For instance, the following volumes are recommended for their approaches to such issues in the Bible: E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2012); Matthew Richard Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2015); Mark L. Strauss, *Jesus Behaving Badly: The Puzzling Paradoxes of the Man from Galilee* (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2015). While all three are written to a general Christian or even evangelical audience and some of their claims or interpretations are not entirely in accord with LDS Church doctrine, they have many important and valuable insights for LDS audiences.

7. Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn, eds., *What Kind of God? Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 14 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 141.

8. See John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (Spring 2003): 3–21.

9. See Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 131–33, 159.

10. The entirety of the manifestation of Jesus to the Nephites in 3 Nephi extends from 3 Nephi 9:2 to 3 Nephi 28:12, encompassing all the narratives that Mormon shares about both Jesus's manifestation by voice but also his manifestation in the flesh. For simplicity and space, this paper will only discuss the distinct manifestations found in 3 Nephi 9–11.

11. Some of the most troubling passages in this category for modern readers are those passages that are referred to by scholars as the *herem* texts, from the Hebrew term understood as "ban." These passages generally relate commands by God to completely exterminate a given population, such as found, for example, in Deuteronomy 20, Joshua 6, and 1 Samuel 15. While these passages have been subjected to much of the same analysis that is undertaken herein with regard to Restoration scripture passages, they have also been analyzed via methods that provide even more explanatory power and insight but are not fully applicable, have not been applied, or cannot be applied to texts from the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith's revelations. Such approaches include historical, source, and redaction criticism, as well as comparative analysis with other ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeological remains. From these perspectives, most scholars conclude that these passages represent exaggerated, fictionalized, or completely metaphorical narratives created well after the period of the events they purport to describe. Resources, in addition to other works already cited herein dealing with difficult topics in the Bible, discussing these passages specifically in greater depth than can be done here include Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of

Violence," 3–21; Hans Van Wees, "Genocide in the Ancient World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, ed. Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 239–58. Likewise, Fretheim's thoughts on God and violence with regard to these passages are helpful; see Terence E. Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," in *What Kind of God?*, 129–39.

12. For an introduction and overview of just war theory, see Seth Lazar, "War," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/war/>.

13. Additional resources to consider here include: Paul Alexander, "Violence and Nonviolence in Conceptualizations of Godly Love" in *Science and Theology of Godly Love*, ed. Matthew T. Lee and Amos Yong (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 77–93; "Violence," in *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 536.

14. From his article "Violence in Christian Theology," available online at <http://www.crosscurrents.org/weaver0701.htm>.

15. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 301.

16. Fretheim's works have been published in many different venues. The best one-stop for introduction to his thought and works is Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*

17. "Although Process Theology and Open Theism have many things in common, one key difference concerns how God comes into a relationship with the world. In process theology, God and the world are, to use Olson's terms, 'necessarily ontologically interdependent (pantheism).' By way of contrast, Open Theism (a far better category for Fretheim's work) assumes that God has freely chosen self-limitation and relationship. Omnipotence and unmediated action are voluntarily relinquished by God for the sake of relationship." Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 4–5, ft 6. Open Theism is one part of a broader category of Relational Theology. For a protracted theological dialogue between LDS and evangelical thought on these issues, see David L. Paulsen and Clark H. Pinnock, "Open and Relational Theology: An Evangelical in Dialogue with a Latter-day Saint," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2009): 50–110.

18. Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 34.

19. Other LDS thinkers may see this as more a metaphysical reality, with God existing subject to certain external factors that actively do limit him. See Paulsen and Pinnock, "Open and Relational Theology: An Evangelical in Dialogue with a Latter-Day Saint."

20. See Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 134.

21. Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 179. Walter Brueggemann wrote: "It is likely that the violence assigned to Yahweh is to be understood as counterviolence, which functions primarily as a critical principle in order to undermine and destabilize other violence." Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 244.

22. For a broad analysis of this image and its importance in Mormonism, see Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps: How Mormonism Makes Sense of Life*, first edition (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2012).

23. Such a reading occurs in Givens and Givens, *The God Who Weeps*, 25, and Eugene England, "The Weeping God of Mormonism," *Element* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2005), http://www.smpt.org/docs/england_element1-1.html.

24. While violence is not explicitly mentioned in the Moses account dealing with the Flood, it does appear as the sole reason for the destruction in the Genesis account. See Genesis 6:11–13.

25. Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 135, passim.

26. The natural phenomenon that best fits the evidence of the destruction as recounted in 3 Nephi would seem to be a volcanic eruption. See Bart Kowallis, “In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist’s View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 3 (1997–98): 136–90.

27. See Moses 7:45–69.

28. See, for instance, Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 34–53; Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 300–330.

29. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-Day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 19–20.

30. Instead of giving a historical overview of the period, Mormon inserts a statement of his own highlighting how the destruction which had happened was in fulfillment of prophecy (3 Nephi 10:14–17) and introducing what would happen next (3 Nephi 10:18–19).

31. This type of dualistic nature of Deity is not unfamiliar in the Book of Mormon, for example, consider Abinadi’s casting of God/Jesus as the embodiment of both mercy and justice (see Mosiah 15:8–9, 26–27), and the depiction of his nature as illustrated by hand gestures. See John Gee, “A Different Way of Seeing the Hand of the Lord,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 112–27.

32. See Skousen, *The Book of Mormon*.

33. Community, of course, is an important concept of the ancient world that is somewhat antithetical to our modern Western (particularly American) individualist tendencies. We generally focus more on the rights, experiences, and suffering of individuals, while the ancients were generally more concerned with aggregate societal ills, rebellions, and misdeeds.

34. Such a notion is echoed by certain strains of process theology that, it can be argued, posit that God may act in order to maximize the amount of goodness or positiveness for his creation in the long run, even if that action results in destruction, hurt, or discord in the short term.

35. President Dieter Uchtdorf, “You Matter to Him,” October 2011 general conference, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2011/10/you-matter-to-him?lang=eng>.

36. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 15:137

37. See Spencer W. Kimball, “Our Great Potential,” April 1977 general conference, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1977/04/our-great-potential?lang=eng>.

38. It is also interesting to consider that God’s agents in many cases exceed their mandate (because of their own agency) to fulfill God’s wrath, going beyond what God had tasked them to do. As Fretheim notes: “God’s agents of judgment/destruction commonly exceed their mandate; God’s response to the consequent disasters includes tears, lament, and regret.” Chan and Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 12. He points this out with regard to the agents identified in the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc), but also with regard to natural agents of destruction: “One might wonder, of course, if God’s natural agents also go sometimes too far, on analogy with the human agents discussed in the prophets. Is this possible? If so, perhaps God, too, is sorry about the extent of natural disasters. . . . Or . . . one wonders if God’s hands

get a bit dirty, as it were, in the course of natural disasters, even if only because this created universe with its relational ways of being and working—all the way down—is one of God’s own design and choosing,” *What Kind of God?*, 16–17. If this is accepted, then it may also be the case that the Israelite agents of God’s destruction may also have exceeded their mandates in certain cases, accounting for certain exaggerated accounts of divinely commanded violence (such as the *herem* texts).

39. Compare with Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30, and Mormon 3:15. It is not clear exactly which of these scriptures, if any, Moroni (or the translation of his writings) is alluding to, as this is not a direct quote from any of them. Likewise, the term “vengeance” is slightly archaic and may give the wrong impression here. The Hebrew term behind the usage of “vengeance” in the Deuteronomy passage can perhaps be more clearly translated as “vindication” as the context is about justice and not revenge. See Michael David Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 306.

40. For more on this topic, see Jane Allis-Pike, “‘How Oft Would I Have Gathered You as a Hen Gathereth Her Chickens’: The Power of the Hen Metaphor in 3 Nephi 10: 4–7,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 57–74. Allis-Pike notes the explicit notion of protection via the interposition of one’s own body inherent in the image, but does not connect it as a nonviolent image. Also, for the usage of this metaphor in the New Testament and broader Christian discourse, see Barbara Brown Taylor, “As a Hen Gathers Her Brood,” *Christian Century*, 25 February 1986, 201.

41. It may be debated whether or not the hen is a truly nonviolent image. While a living hen may exhibit violence, the symbolic usage of a hen (particularly in the western Christian tradition) is mostly about love, charity, and motherhood. From Tressidor, ed., *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005): “Hen”—“In Africa, a guide to the underworld, sacrificially used to call up spirits. In Europe a symbol of fussy, mothering care. A hen with chicks was a Christian image of divine providence. More rarely, the hen represents the personification of Charity,” 230. A nonviolent interpretation is certainly valid in this regard.