

بِهَجَّةٍ ابْتَهَجَتْ رُوحِي بِأَمْرِ الرَّبِّ؛ وَخَوَاطِرُ قَلْبِي مُتَّجِهَةٌ دَائِمًا إِلَى مَا أَبْصَرْتُ وَسَمِعْتُ وَعَلَى الرَّغْمِ مِنْ

فَدَا حَوَاطِرُ بِنَجَارٍ وَأَنَا مَرْتَانِي فِي سِرِّ وَحْدَانٍ أَجْنَحُ إِلَى الْبَهْجَةِ بَيْنَ قَلْبِي وَسَبِّ آتَامِي لَكِنِّي عَالِمٌ بِمَنْ وَثِقْتُ

بِهَجَّةٍ

بِهَجَّةٍ

صَلَّى

صَلَّى

بِاللَّيْلِ بِالثَّمَلِ بِاللَّيْلِ كَتَسَنَّبْتُ جُرَّةً وَأَنَا مُنْصَبٌ عَلَى الصَّلَاةِ أَمَامَهُ
أَجَلٌ أُرْسَلْتُ لِي عَمَّا إِلَى فَمِنْ ضَائِقَاتِي يَا لَيْلِي يَا لَيْلِي
أَوْسَعَهَا. فَلَمَّا بَنُوهُ قَلْبِي وَتَوَضَّعْتُ لِي وَتَوَضَّعْتُ لِي
وَلَا تَعْمَلُكَ الْخَطِيئَةَ فِيمَا بَعْدَ أَيِّ قَلْبِي تَهَلُّ وَلَا تَوَسِّعُ
هَلَا قَدَيْتَ نَفْسِي؟ هَلَا أَتَقَدَّسْتِي مِنْ أَيِّ قَلْبِي تَهَلُّ وَلَا تَوَسِّعُ
لَفَنِي بِرِذَاءِ بَرَكَاتِهَا أَيْهَا الرَّبُّ سِرُّنِي فِيمَا بَعْدَ أَيِّ قَلْبِي تَهَلُّ وَلَا تَوَسِّعُ
عَلَى إِنْسَانٍ أَوْ يَتَدَخَّلُ بِمَسَلِّهِ فَنَدَّ عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ الْبَرَّ يَتَوَقَّعُ إِلَيْكَ يَا صَفْرَتِي وَالْمَلِي الْأَبْدِي آمِينَ

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CORRELATING ORTHODOXY AND STYLE: INSTITUTIONALLY “APPROVED” CHRIST-CENTERED ART IN LDS VISUAL RESOURCES AND MEETINGHOUSES, 1990–2021

Noel A. Carmack

Religious images have long been used in Latter-day Saint worship and instruction. Paintings, illustrations, and graphic works served a devotional function among the early Church members. Not only did the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo use images to memorialize the Church’s founding story, but they frequently placed images in their places of worship to remind them to maintain reverential focus on New Testament themes and the life of Jesus Christ. From the time the first settlers in Utah built permanent meetinghouses, they decorated the spaces with images that focused their thoughts on the Church’s gospel.¹

1. For an informative history of LDS art and visual culture, see Nathan Rees, *Mormon Visual Culture and the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2021). For a collection of essays written by Museum of Church History and Art curators, see Richard G. Oman and Robert O. Davis, *Images of Faith: Art of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1995). On the use and reception of visuals in Nauvoo, see Noel A. Carmack, “Of Prophets and Pale Horses: Joseph Smith, Benjamin West, and the American Millenarian Tradition,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 165–76; Noel A. Carmack, “One of the Most Interesting Seeneries that Can Be Found in Zion: Philo Dibble’s Museum and Panorama,” *Nauvoo Journal* 9, no. 2 (1997): 25–38; Jeffrey G. Cannon, “The Image as Text and Context in Early Mormon History,” in *Foundational Texts of Mormonism: Examining*

Meetinghouses were decorated with scripture-themed paintings by local artists, which were often large, framed works, murals, and relief. It was not uncommon to see framed portraits of Church leaders hanging near the rostrum. For example, the Salt Lake Fourteenth Ward chapel featured portraits of Brigham Young and local authorities over the rostrum, so that ward members could easily see their priesthood leadership (see fig. 1). Framed portraits of local leaders were hung near the choir apse in the Brigham City Third Ward chapel (fig. 2). Paintings of the life of Christ could be seen above the choir loft of the Provo Tabernacle. A painting of Joseph Smith receiving the gold plates by C. C. A. Christensen was hung in the Ephraim Tabernacle. Another version of Smith receiving the gold plates from Moroni by Lewis A. Ramsey was hung in the Salt Lake Eleventh Ward chapel. Numerous Salt Lake City ward buildings featured intricately designed stained-glass windows featuring events in the restoration of the Church and New Testament narrative scenes (fig. 3).²

Latter-day Saint leaders and members of congregations followed an early- to mid-twentieth-century trend in Protestant meetinghouse interior decoration by adorning or beautifying their ward buildings with biblical and Book of Mormon-themed artwork. Paintings of Christ and New Testament narratives were frequently hung in halls, foyers, and even chapels of ward meetinghouses. During that period, murals and framed artwork were thought to enhance worship and promote a sense

Major Early Sources, edited by Mark Ashurst-McGee, Robin Scott Jensen, and Sharalyn D. Howcroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 336–72; and Mason Kamana Allred, “Panoramic Vision: Consolidating the Early Mormon Gaze,” *Material Religion* 16, no. 5 (2020): 639–64.

2. See Allen Roberts, “Art Glass Windows in Mormon Architecture,” *Sunstone* 1 (Winter 1975): 8–13; Joyce A. Janetski, “The First Vision and Mormon Stained Glass,” *Stained Glass* 75 (Spring 1980): 47–50; Joyce Athay Janetski, “Stained Glass Windows: A Latter-day Saint Legacy,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1981, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1981/01/stained-glass-windows-a-latter-day-saint-legacy?lang=eng>; Nelle Allen, “Stained Glass Art Portrays Christ, Sacred Events,” *Church News*, Oct. 17, 1981, 12; and Bridger Talbot, “Stained Glass in Latter-day Saint Chapels,” *Pioneer Magazine* 66, no. 2 (2019): 33–49.



Figure 1. Interior of the Salt Lake City Fourteenth Ward chapel. Framed portraits of Latter-day Saint Church leaders hanging over the rostrum. Image courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society.



Figure 2. Interior of Brigham City Third Ward chapel during a funeral service. Note the framed portraits of Church leaders flanking the rostrum. Image courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University.



Figure 3. Stained-glass window, featuring *Christ in Gethsemane* after Heinrich Hofmann in the Bonneville Ward chapel in Salt Lake City. Photo courtesy of ldsarchitecture.wordpress.com.

of reverence and sacred space (figs. 4 and 5). This practice continued well into the twentieth century, when member artists were contributing their work to decorate local church buildings and temples.³

3. For examples of early to mid-twentieth-century meetinghouse interior decoration and artwork, see William Laurel Harris, "Church Building and Decoration in America," *Art and Progress* 2, no. 2 (Dec. 1910): 33–39; Charles H. Dorr, "A Study in Church Decoration," *Architectural Record* 33, no. 3 (Mar. 1913): 187–203; Kathleen Curran, "The Romanesque Revival, Mural Painting, and Protestant Patronage in America," *Art Bulletin* 81, no. 4 (Dec. 1999): 693–722; and Howard Hebel, "Churches for Change: New England Meetinghouses as Sacred/Secular Prototypes," *Faith & Form* 49, no. 2 (2016): 22–27. For a thoughtful discussion on art in postwar American churches, see Katharine Morrison McClinton, *The Changing Church: Its Architecture, Art, and Decoration* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1957), chap. 15, "Art in the Church," 127–42.



Figure 4. Mural of Christ teaching his disciples outside of Jerusalem by LeConte Stewart. Interior of the Hudson Ward chapel, Denver, Colorado. Photo courtesy of Cliff Young.



Figure 5. Framed painting of *Christ on the Mount of Olives* by Effie M. Carmack after Giovanni, hanging over the choir loft in the LDS meetinghouse in downtown St. Johns, Arizona. Photo courtesy of Jayne Pulsipher.

In 1939, Professor B. F. Larsen, head of the Department of Art at Brigham Young University, reiterated that good art was an essential part of meaningful worship. “Pictures are focal points for attention,” he wrote. “Their value in mass concentration is well understood. A group of people, gazing at a fine picture, will forget hate and envy. In proportion as they are united in understanding and appreciation they will become brothers and advocates of peace and goodwill.”⁴ According to Larsen, harmonious design can have a positive effect on our thoughts, moods, and attitudes. “Pictures in churches should be worthy in subject matter and in art quality. Their selection requires understanding and careful thinking.”⁵ A beautiful pastoral scene or arid desert landscape, as shown in many early Latter-day Saint temples, might turn the thoughts of a participant toward the biblical creation story, the placement of Adam and Eve in the earthly garden, and their eventual banishment into the wilderness. A well-rendered painting of Christ or events in his ministry would, naturally, turn our thoughts to him as well.⁶

Both members and administrators in the early decades of the Church clearly valued the motivating power of images in worship. Religious images began to be used more prominently in both sacred spaces and official publications. Their potential as a mechanism for influencing—and even stimulating—the piety of Church members was

4. B. F. Larsen, “In the Interest of Better Art in Our Churches,” *Improvement Era* 42, no. 7 (July 1939): 410–11.

5. Larsen, “Better Art in Our Churches,” 411.

6. For examples of LDS meetinghouse artwork, see Mary Kimball Johnson, “The Emerson Ward Mural,” *Improvement Era* 60, no. 3 (Mar. 1957): 150–51, 193; “The Cody Mural Tells History of the Church,” *Improvement Era* 60 (Nov. 1957): 819. For excellent historical examinations of Mormon meetinghouse artwork, see Paul L. Anderson, “Mormon Architecture and Visual Arts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, edited by Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 470–84, and Ruedigar Paul Matthes, “‘Stand Ye in Holy Places’: Place and Identity in Contemporary Mormon Meetinghouses” (master’s thesis, University of Utah, 2016), especially 51–52 and 104–06.

recognized but not yet harnessed or systematized to optimize their impact. Artistic imagery was used illustratively in religious teaching, but the notion that Christ—the central focus of the Church’s message—would be the defining figure of the Church’s visual culture and image-making was not yet realized.

Although historians and sociologists of the late twentieth century acknowledged that visual culture is an important component of the Church’s efforts to shape its image, they did not focus any real attention on characterizing the official artwork and graphic designs used to represent its print and digital presence.⁷ Scholars of Mormon image-making during that period had not yet addressed the fact that the Church’s Christ-centered visual culture fit into an overall plan to orchestrate the Church’s public image, beginning with measures to centralize the production and selection of official publications and accompanying illustrations.⁸

This study builds on an earlier analysis of mine, an article published by *BYU Studies* in 2000, that discussed images of Christ and the Church’s

7. See Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), chp. 3, “Surveying the Mormon Image Since 1960,” 98–123; reprinted from *Sunstone* 118 (Apr. 2001): 58–72; and Wilfried Decoo, “In Search of Mormon Identity: Mormon Culture, Gospel Culture, and an American Worldwide Church,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 6 (2013): 1–53.

8. See, for example, Peter Wiley, “The Lee Revolution and the Rise of Correlation,” *Sunstone* 10 (Jan. 1985): 18–22. Scholar of religious art Jane Dillenberger made some insightful observations at a 1978 BYU religious studies symposium in which she stated that the LDS Church had “a highly developed and effective educational system which brings much emphasis on the visual image,” but she did not postulate on what, if any, influence correlation had on the Church’s selection of visual images. Although Douglas J. Davies, a Welsh scholar of Latter-day Saint belief and worship, examined Church-commissioned paintings and sculptures of Christ as media “that afford clear examples of gestures that express a Mormon habitus,” he did not examine the institutional curatorship of such artwork. See Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace and Glory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 115.

correlation efforts to curate a body of “approved” Christ-centered images for use in official Church publications and materials.⁹ In the more than two decades since my study, the Church has incrementally implemented measures to extend its influence over the selection and use of Christ-centered art in printed publications, digital media, and meetinghouses. Despite numerous independent organizations offering member artists opportunities to render their Christ-centered imagery with modern approaches and in diverse ways, official artwork vetted by institutional authority continues to be used to uphold an orthodoxy of style and doctrine.

Correlating a Visual Archetype

Church leaders began to systematize missionary programs and lesson materials in 1960 through the Priesthood Correlation Program.¹⁰ Correlation, being a system of evaluation or vetting of information and accompanying graphics, was a way to ensure accuracy, orthodoxy, and cohesion of official Church products. As a result, artwork, audiovisual resources, and publications were created by a corps of graphics and media specialists working under the direction of Correlation officials. Following the death of Correlation Committee member Richard L. Evans, the First Presidency called J. Thomas Fyans to serve as managing director of the Internal Communications Department. He was instructed to “ensure that all such materials are correlated, that they are of high quality and that they conform to Church policy, doctrine and standard.”¹¹ Serving under Fyans, Daniel H. Ludlow was appointed

9. Noel A. Carmack, “Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture, 1900–1999,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2000): 18–76.

10. See Norman R. Bowen, “Announcement Made of First Application of Church Correlation Program,” *Church News* [Church Progress Edition], Dec. 29, 1962, 14, 18, and Wiley, “The Lee Revolution,” 20.

11. “Communications: Top-level Positions Filled in Organization,” *Church News*, Feb. 5, 1972, 3, 11.

director of instructional materials and was charged with overseeing “curriculum, planning, correlation, edition, and graphic designs.”¹²

Within the purview of Correlation, instructors were encouraged to use the Church-approved pictures uniformly issued in teacher training materials or meetinghouse libraries. These pictures were commercially produced images by private presses such as Wheelwright Lithography Company, Providence Lithograph Company, and Standard Publishing Company. The pictures were used to supplement lessons on Christ’s ministry and other Bible stories and were made available as what was then called the CTR Pilot Picture Set, the Guide Patrol Teaching Aids, and the Top Pilot Picture series. These didactic images featured the illustrative work of non-Mormon artists such as Harold Copping, Griffith Foxley, Karl Godwin, H. Willard Ortlip, and Elsie Anna Wood.¹³

When the Correlation effort began, Latter-day Saints had a growing number of skilled artists and illustrators to interpret the Church’s unique history and gospel themes. Church officials, however, decided to turn to professional artists outside of the faith to create correlatively directed artwork. In the 1960s, Seventh-day Adventist artist Harry Anderson and two other non-Latter-day Saint artists, Tom Lovell and Kenneth Riley, were commissioned to create illustrations depicting Church history and scriptural themes. Anderson’s paintings on the life of Christ grew to be some of the most recognizable and popular images in the Church. Several of his paintings of Christ are, perhaps, the most widely used in the Church today (fig. 6).¹⁴ Of this, Mormon studies scholar Terryl Givens commented, “any institution with the LDS church’s sense of mission, theological certainty, and impulse toward centralized administration and doctrinal standardization is

12. “Top-level Positions Filled in Organization,” 11.

13. Carmack, “Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture,” 43.

14. For more on the commissioning of these artists, see Robert T. Barrett and Susan Easton Black, “Setting a Standard in LDS Art: Four Illustrators of the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005): 24–95.



Figure 6. *Christ in Gethsemane* by Harry Anderson. Copyright by Intellectual Reserve.

bound to prefer orthodox illustration to creative expression in the art it commissions.”¹⁵

Under increased standardization, official publications were changed to meet the needs of a growing Church. In 1971, Doyle L. Green became director of magazines and was charged with overseeing the production and distribution of newly created magazines the *New Era*, *Ensign*, and *Friend*, along with the *Unified Magazines*, the international magazines published by the Church in Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German,

15. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 331.

Norwegian, Spanish, and Swedish.¹⁶ These colorful, slick magazines were created to replace the long-standing *Improvement Era* and *Instructor* magazines and featured religious masterworks, illustrations, and photographs for cover art and graphics to accompany the texts.¹⁷

In the 1980s and 1990s, Latter-day Saints placed a greater emphasis on the doctrine of atonement by avoiding melancholic images of the crucifixion and more often representing images of the Church's doctrines regarding the Creation and Christ's resurrection, ascension, and visitation to the Americas. In contrast to the Catholic and Protestant focus on the symbolism of the cross, LDS renderings of Christ tended to avoid the imagery of Calvary and instead drew the viewer into a path of spiritual rectitude modeled, as much as artistically possible, in the image of a living Christ. A recent study by three thoughtfully engaged scholars, John Hilton III, Anthony Sweat, and Josh Stratford, examined the notion that—as I asserted in my 2000 study—images of Christ that depicted his suffering in Gethsemane appeared more frequently in Church publications as a reflection of Church's emphasis of this step in the Atonement. Their study further documents this trend (that extended into the 2000s and 2010s) of favoring images of Christ's suffering in Gethsemane over those depicting his death on the cross and the motivations behind it.¹⁸

An example I shared in my *BYU Studies* article was directly commissioned by President Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley asked Salt Lake City–based artist E. Keith Eddington to do a new version of his painting *The Ascension of Christ* (1960), which had been used for Church publications and tracts (fig. 7). Hinckley had seen the original image hanging in a Detroit stake center during a visit and was so impressed

16. See Jerry Rose, "The Correlation Program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints During the Twentieth Century" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973), 74–76.

17. Carmack, "Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture," 44–45.

18. John Hilton III, Anthony Sweat, and Josh Stratford, "Latter-day Saints and Images of Christ's Crucifixion," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2021): 49–79.

with the painting that he asked Eddington to paint the large nine-foot high and six-and-a-half-foot wide version now hanging on the north wall of the Legacy Theater in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.¹⁹

Eddington's original painting included design elements that have been visibly removed in the new version. *The Ascension of Christ* included the hill of Calvary and crosses on the horizon; in the 1994 version, titled *He Is Risen*, the Calvary crosses were removed. His use of dark, drab blues and grays in the original allude to the Crucifixion, in contrast to the warm fiery colors of the newer painting, which emphasize the triumph of Christ overcoming death—a more potent event according to Latter-day Saint belief (fig. 8).

Approved Images in a Digital Age

Establishing a visual archetype—a set of expected physical attributes and depicted activities—the Church could maintain cohesion and orthodoxy in its Christ-centered imagery while shaping its worldwide presence as a distinctive Christian denomination. In much the same way that an institution “controls the exegetical activities of its members” by issuing official policies and manuals, it would regulate the access and use of officially approved Christ-centered media by its members and journalists reporting on the Church.²⁰ Through the

19. Greg Hill, “New Oil Painting of the Savior Adorns Legacy Theater Lobby,” *Church News*, Apr. 23, 1994, 3, 11, available at <https://www.thechurchnews.com/1994/4/23/23257149/new-oil-painting-of-the-savior-adorns-legacy-theater-lobby/>. See also the illustration inside the front cover of the April 1997 issue of *Ensign*.

20. For a discussion on institutional controls over official texts, see Frank Kermode, “Institutional Control of Interpretation,” *Salmagundi* 43 (Winter 1979): 72–86. On institutional authority (controls) over Latter-day Saint media, see Benjamin Burroughs and Gavin Feller, “Religious Memetics: Institutional Authority in Digital/Lived Religion,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (2015): 357–77. See also Pauline Hope Cheong, “Authority,” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed., edited by Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (New York: Routledge, 2022), 87–102.



Figure 7. *Risen Lord* by Keith Eddington from the cover of *The Instructor*, April 1960.



Figure 8. *He is Risen* (1994) by Keith Eddington as it appeared in the inside front cover of *Ensign* magazine, April 1997. The painting currently hangs in the LDS Conference Center in Salt Lake City.

Church's correlation committees, priesthood leaders set the boundaries of religious orthodoxy in its media depicting Christ. A relatively small selection of correlated images could be easily reviewed, assessed, and updated to best shape its visual identity.²¹

Shortly after the Church launched its first website in December 1996, Frank McEntire, a widely respected artist, curator, writer, and arts administrator in Utah, wrote a special op-ed on images of Christ for the *Salt Lake Tribune* in which he characterized depictions of Christ by several religions—including the Baptist, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and LDS Churches—in Salt Lake City and their importance among those faiths.²² Citing historian Colleen McDannell's relatively passing observation about Del Parson's red-robed Jesus—widely used and highly recognizable in the LDS Church—McEntire's comment on the LDS visuals of Christ stressed the impact that Parson's iconic portrait of Christ had on the piety of Church members.²³ The painting, he wrote, “appeared last week for the first time in cyberspace. Worldwide visitors to the LDS Church's Internet address (www.lds.org) are introduced to this portrayal of Jesus (and a new Church logo), moving the image from ‘in-house’ curriculum use to a public stage. This depiction of Christ has the potential to become at least as renowned as Warner Sallman's familiar ‘Head of Christ’ popularized throughout Christianity after World War II”²⁴ (fig. 9).

21. See Rosemary Avance, “The Medium Is the Institution: Reflections on an Ethnography of Mormonism and Media,” *Mormon Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (2018): 65–66.

22. Frank McEntire, “Images of Jesus: Depictions of Christ Reveal Diversity of Religious Thought,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 22, 1996, D1.

23. McEntire, “Images of Jesus.” Colleen McDannell, professor of religious studies and history at the University of Utah, wrote that Parson's painting was “adopted as the ‘official’ portrait of Christ used by the Latter-day Saint church. Warner Sallman's painting was removed from the list of acceptable ward art. While individual Mormons could still buy reproductions of Sallman's art for their homes, prints of Parson's paintings were placed in the public spaces of the church.” Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 189, 192–93.

24. McEntire, “Images of Jesus.”

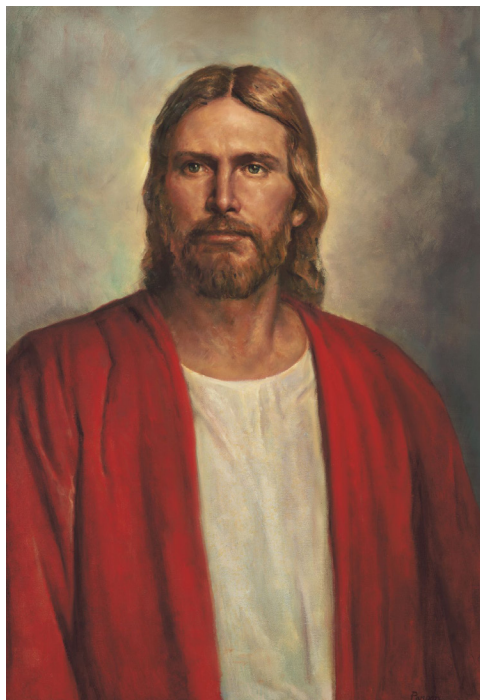


Figure 9. *Jesus the Christ* by Del Parson. Copyright by Intellectual Reserve.

McEntire's insightful op-ed seemed to precipitate a heightened awareness among Church leaders of the importance of Christ-centered artwork in conveying the Church's public image. In April 1998, the Curriculum Department, in response to an assignment by the Priesthood Executive Council (PEC), individually assessed 349 images of Christ owned by the Church or whose copyright had been secured for Church publications. The department assessment was performed by Church officials Dallin H. Oaks, Jeffrey R. Holland, Robert D. Hales, Jack H. Goaslind, Jay E. Jensen, and John M. Madsen, using a three-tiered classification of usability. This three-tiered ranking system was as follows: (1) Use where appropriate, (2) Use caution: Review application, size, and cropping, and (3) Do not use.²⁵

25. Agenda, "Images [Portraits] of the Savior," Priesthood Executive Council Meeting, Apr. 14, 1998, Visual Resources Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Notes in author's possession.

The members of the committee examined and marked each image with a number and an occasional comment in the lower margin. While they cannot serve as precise measurements of appraisal, these marks reveal the authoritative influence Church correlation has on the Latter-day Saint visual perception of Christ. Their assessments of each image are illuminating indicators of the kinds of physiognomic traits they want members to recognize and others that they want excluded from visual representations of Christ in official Church publications.²⁶

Evaluative assessments of the images seemed to be based on personal criteria but were generally regarding the overall appearance of the subject, its scriptural accuracy, and the manliness of Christ. For example, images produced by non-LDS artists such as Gustave Doré, Alexandre Bida, William Henry Margetson, and James Tissot consistently received the second and third classification, while images by LDS artists such as Robert T. Barrett, Del Parson, Greg Olsen, and Gary Kapp regularly received the number one ranking.²⁷ William Henry Margetson's painting *Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet* was given twos and threes with a comment that Christ appeared "too effeminate" (fig. 10).²⁸ James Tissot's *A Woman Anointeth the Feet of Jesus* (1899; fig. 11) also received a "to[o] effeminate" comment and an observation that the apostles were "strange looking!"²⁹ Two threes and a two were given to C. Bosseron Chambers's portrait of Christ due to an apparent objection to the "split beard and angry eyes" (fig. 12).³⁰ Carl Bloch's painting *Christ in Gethsemane* (1873) was rated with twos and threes, but one committee

26. LDS Curriculum Department, "Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior," binders 1–3, April, 1998, Visual Resources Library. Notes in author's possession.

27. LDS Curriculum Department, "Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior."

28. "Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior," binder 1, image 26.

29. "Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior," binder 1, image 25.

30. "Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior," binder 1, image 22.



Figure 10. *Mary and the Alabaster Box* by William Henry Margetson. From *The Bible Picture Book*, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, ca. 1945.



Figure 11. *The Ointment of the Magdalene (Le parfum de Madeleine)* by James Tissot. Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper, 1886–1894. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

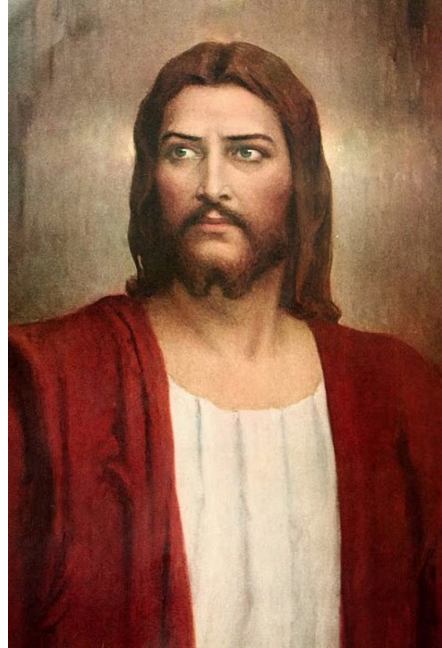


Figure 12. Portrait of Christ
by C. Bosseron Chambers.
Image courtesy of the author.

member advised cropping “and retouching of wings,” while another committee member wrote: “Angel looks female.”³¹ Gustave Doré’s *Jesus Praying in Garden* was also rated with two threes and a two, but one committee member wrote: “Was He within sight of the apostles as he prayed? Don’t like that much” (fig. 13). James Tissot’s painting *The Chief Priests Ask Jesus by What Right Does He Act in This Way* (1886–1894), received twos and threes with mixed comments. One reviewer wrote that the “Savior’s face [is] lacking,” while another wrote that the “Priests are good” (fig. 14).³²

31. “Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior,” binder 1, image 44. For example, this illustration was cropped in Jeffrey R. Holland’s, “The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2008, 32–38. The illustration in question, on page 38, is not reprinted in the digital version of this article.

32. “Summary of Usability Study on Images of the Savior,” binder 1, image 51.

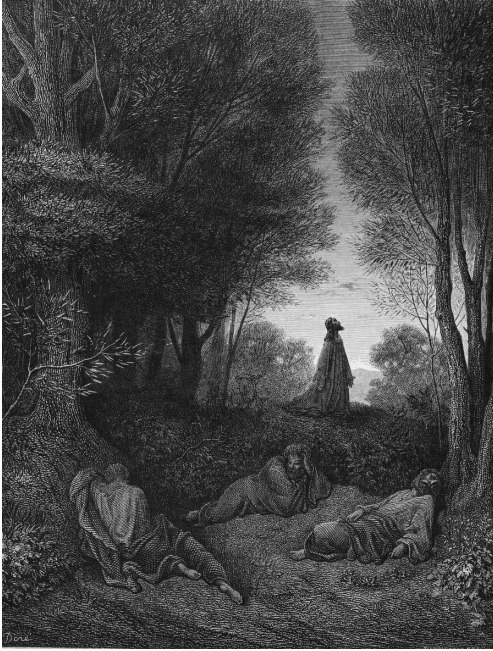


Figure 13. *Jesus Praying in the Garden* by Gustav Doré, ca. 1880. Public domain.



Figure 14. *The Chief Priests Ask Jesus by What Right Does He Act in This Way* (*Les princes des prêtres interrogent Jésus de quel droit il agit*) by James Tissot. Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper, 1886–1894. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

During the image assessment by the committee, Ronald Knighton, managing director of the Curriculum Department, informed graphics editor Allan Loyborg that the “PEC decided to have a few more visuals added. Some that may not be as strong such as the Keith Eddington one are needed.” He then asked Loyborg to check the offices of members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve to be sure that all of these artworks were included in the survey and to secure copyright for them if it hadn’t already been done. It was important that the Curriculum Department receive counsel on what should be used, how often it should be used with scriptures and in Church publications, and whether more new portraits Christ should be commissioned.³³

Much like the selection of images for official Church publications, a general concern for wholesomeness and accuracy dictated the use of images of Christ in meetinghouses. Although it was not specific in the types or quality of images that should be used, the 1999 *General Handbook of Instructions* was clear that images should be obtained from pre-approved sources. The policy on artwork read:

Artwork in Church buildings should be of high quality and depict subjects that are appropriate in a house of worship. It also should be properly framed. Church-approved pictures can be obtained through the Purchasing Division or from Church distribution centers (see the *Meetinghouse Artwork Brochure*). Pictures and other artwork may be placed in appropriate locations in the meetinghouse. However, they may not be placed in the chapel or near the baptismal font. Statues, murals, or mosaics are not authorized. This policy does not apply to works of art that have been on display for many years in the chapels of existing meetinghouses. If artwork of poor quality is offered, local leaders should tactfully decline accepting it for display in meetinghouses.³⁴

33. Ronald L. Knighton to Allan R. Loyborg, Agenda, “Images [Portraits] of the Savior,” [notes in margin], Priesthood Executive Council Meeting, Apr. 14, 1998, Visual Resources Library. Transcription in author’s possession.

34. “Artwork,” *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1: Stake Presidencies and Bishops* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 153.

This policy on the quality of selected artwork did not vary for over a decade following the issuance of the 1999 handbook, although the catalog or pool of approved images would develop over time with the advent of the internet and digital technology.³⁵

On May 24, 1999, nearly simultaneous to the release of an update to the existing *Meetinghouse Artwork* brochure and new physical facilities guidelines, the Church launched its new FamilySearch.org website—a genealogical records search portal—which overwhelmingly boosted the Church’s official digital presence in cyberspace. That same year, the LDS.org website augmented its digital imagery and text with an audio broadcast of the October general conference.³⁶ This end-of-the-century development in the Church’s methods of delivering both its gospel message and institutional policies was uncertain but inevitable. The possibilities for transmitting digital images and video, as well as text, were both promising and limitless.³⁷ The use of approved graphics and artwork to support the web text (institutional rhetoric) would legitimize the web presence with authority, or—in branding

35. “Artwork,” in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), p. 192, 21.2.1.

36. Sheila R. McCann, “Genealogy, Technology at the Crossroads,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 23, 1999, D10; Bob Mims, “LDS Web Site Logs Big Load of Hits Daily,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 27, 1999, C1; Bob Mims and Leslie Mitchell, “LDS Church Wows the Web with New Site,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 25, 1999, A1; and Lynn Arave, “Historic Moments in LDS Broadcasts,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 5, 2002, <https://www.deseret.com/2002/4/5/20780616/historic-moments-in-lds-broadcasts/>. See also Gavin Feller, “Communing with Compromise: Mormonism and the Early Internet,” *Mormon Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (2018): 67–72, and Russell C. Rasmussen, “Computers and the Internet in the Church,” in *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 274–85.

37. For a rich and engaging introduction to the Church’s adoption of the internet, see Avance, “The Medium Is the Institution,” 60–66, and Rosemary Avance, “Constructing Religion in the Digital Age: The Internet and Modern Mormon Identities” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2015).

terminology—*authenticity*. But the graphics and artwork would have to be of high quality, appropriate for the situation, perceived as uniquely institutional, and regularly improved.³⁸

The rise of the internet gave the Church exciting new avenues for presenting its gospel message and conveying a cohesive identity. However, the notion of obsolescence—or the constant need to update and improve outdated information and visuals—motivated an effort to centralize the oversight of the Church’s web presence. On March 15, 2001, the First Presidency issued a letter expressing a desire for correlative oversight of the Church’s official websites. “As you know, the Church has developed several Church Internet sites,” the letter began. “These sites contain approved, correlated material that the Church has deemed appropriate for the Internet. New and updated material will continue to appear on these sites. As the Church grows, it is very important that information presented to the world be accurate and dignified and that it represent a single, unified Church voice.”³⁹

As numerous websites for local congregations began to be created with little or no guidance and control over content, the risk of violating copyright and privacy laws became as much a concern as accuracy and cohesion. “In addition, it is imperative that the rights of third parties be protected and respected through strict compliance with applicable laws,” the letter explained. “With this in mind, a policy for the creation, operation and maintenance of local unit Web sites is being developed and will be sent to priesthood leaders. Until the policy is established, the First Presidency had requested that local church units

38. See Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), chap. 5, “Branding Religion: ‘I’m Like Totally Saved,’” 165–210.

39. Letter, Presiding Bishopric to General Authority Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents, “Discontinuation of Local Church Unit Web Sites,” Mar. 15, 2001, and “Discontinuation of Local Church Unit Web Sites,” *Policies and Announcements*, Mar. 15, 2001. Copies in author’s possession.

and organizations should not create or sponsor Web sites. They have also determined that existing sites should be discontinued.”⁴⁰

Using the 1998 Priesthood Executive Council image survey results, along with the recently implemented web policy, the Curriculum Department initiated a noticeable move toward approved Christ-centered art. The turn of the twentieth century signaled an effort to inspire the creation and use of new and uniquely Latter-day Saint depictions of Christ. A December 2002 *New Era* article entitled “Images of Christ” featured ten widely known and respected member artists who spent their careers painting the likeness of Christ on commission for the Church. The ten included: Robert Barrett, Simon Dewey, Gary Kapp, Derek Hegsted, Greg Olsen, Judith Mehr, Walter Rane, Del Parson, Gary Ernest Smith, and Minerva Teichert.⁴¹ Each artist named had an example of their work and a short testimony of their faith in Christ. These testimonies served to convey to young readers that LDS artists express their faith in Christ through their art. Walter Rane, for example, wrote that his interpretations of Christ vary in each painting he does of him (fig. 15). “I do not know what He looks like, of course, so I do not attempt to make Him look the same each time I paint Him. Every painting portrays a different event in Christ’s life and is an attempt to express a different aspect of the Savior’s personality.”⁴²

40. “Discontinuation of Local Church Unit Web Sites.” See also Lynn Arave, “Church Wants Local Web Sites Unplugged,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 28, 2001, <https://www.deseret.com/2001/3/28/19577570/church-wants-local-web-sites-unplugged/>. The Church followed up with this website discontinuation by establishing approved website templates for local units. Only units in the United States and Canada were eligible. See Sarah Jane Weaver, “Local Unit Web Sites,” *Church News*, Mar. 1, 2003, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2003-03-01/local-unit-web-sites-103751/>, and Lynn Arave, “LDS Units Can Again Post Web Sites,” *Deseret News*, Feb. 28, 2003, <https://www.deseret.com/2003/2/28/19706898/lds-units-can-again-post-web-sites/>.

41. “Images of Christ,” *New Era*, Dec. 2002, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2002/12/images-of-christ?lang=eng/>.

42. “Images of Christ.”

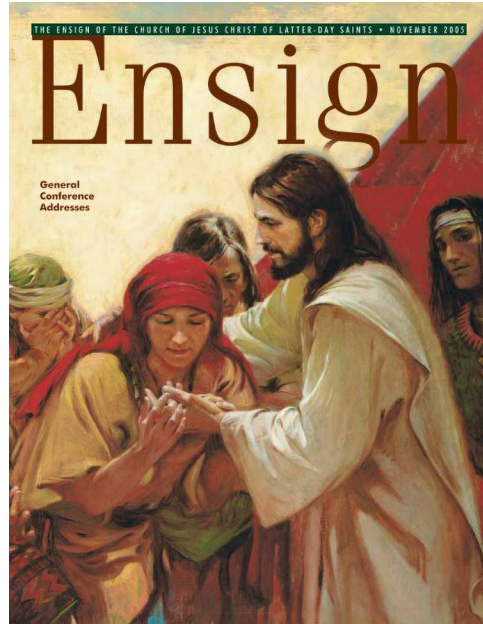


Figure 15. *One by One* by Walter Rane as it appeared on the cover of the November 2005 *Ensign* magazine.

Acknowledging his own inability to capture a true likeness, Rane still expressed his motivations for rendering his vision of the son of God: “I know my efforts are very inadequate, but it is nevertheless an honor to try and capture, in some small way, some of the greatness of our Savior, and to express, perhaps, a glimmer of His personality and express a feeling that may touch someone.”⁴³ The ten featured artists were, of course, part of the body of artists whose artwork was regularly “approved” by correlation and ubiquitously represented in Church publications, but their short testimonies were meant to serve as inspiration for other member artists to create their own artistic visuals of Christ.

Centralizing the Selection of Meetinghouse Artwork

Prior to the launch of the Church’s LDS.org website, official policies and guidelines were issued in print form and would be updated

43. “Images of Christ.”

periodically upon changes in leadership or when improvements were made to practices and standards. In April 2008, for example, the *Meetinghouse Artwork* brochure was updated with First Presidency portraits and twelve new pieces of artwork. Adjustments to available sizes and frames were also made. Priesthood leaders, project managers, and facilities managers were given instructions on keeping a binder containing the *Meetinghouse Artwork Guidelines*, *Meetinghouse Artwork* brochure, price lists for available artwork, and “floorplans showing possible locations for artwork.”⁴⁴

In June 2009, the guidelines found in the *Meetinghouse Artwork* brochure were changed to bring them into alignment with changes in the handbook and the *Facilities Management Guidelines for Meetinghouses and Other Church Property*. The new *Meetinghouse Artwork Guidelines* stated the purpose of artwork, giving a slightly expanded guideline on images of Christ and gospel subjects: “Artwork enhances the interior of meetinghouses by creating a spiritual, reverent atmosphere. The artwork should be of high quality and depict the life and image of Christ and His ministry with dignity and reverence. It should also teach gospel principles with clarity and accuracy through easily recognizable illustrations of the scriptures, and portray meaningful aspects of the Restoration of the gospel and the history and heritage of the Church.”⁴⁵ This seemingly inappreciable directive on acceptable artwork themes marked a shift toward Christ as the central identifying visual in meetinghouses.

In addition to this statement on the purpose of artwork in meetinghouses, the guidelines outlined the process of selecting

44. Michael Jensen, “Update to Meetinghouse Artwork Brochure,” *Standard Plan Information Notice: Physical Facilities Department* (SPI no. 43), Apr. 23, 2008.

45. *Meetinghouse Artwork Guidelines for Facilities Managers and Project Managers*, June 2009. See also Richard Hope, “Meetinghouse Artwork Guidelines Update,” *Standard Plan Information Notice: Architecture, Engineering, and Construction Division* (SPI no. 59), Aug. 21, 2009.

“Church-approved artwork” through the Purchasing Reference Guide (PRG) and Church Distribution Services. After selecting suitable works from the official brochure and ordering them from the Purchasing Division, the meetinghouse project manager was instructed on where to place the artwork in the building. Referring to suggested locations on an attached floorplan illustration, they could place artwork above sofas, in wall niches or recesses, and above groupings of chairs, where “depictions of the Savior are appropriate.” Offices and high council rooms could feature First Presidency portraits and, of course, depictions of Christ, but the statement on the placement of pictures in rooms where Sunday worship services or sacred ordinances were to be conducted was kept virtually the same as it had been for years. “Artwork may not be placed in the chapel or near the baptismal font,” the guidelines stated. “Statues, murals, and mosaics are not authorized.” The exception to these restrictions was still in place, in parentheses: “This does not apply to works of art that have been on display for many years in the chapels of existing meetinghouses.”⁴⁶

The Church’s Priesthood Executive Council continued to participate in the selection of images of Christ for classroom teaching, auxiliary instruction, and use in the homes of Church members. After nearly seventeen years of use by Church members, the *Gospel Art Picture Kit* was superseded in October 2009 by the introduction of a new *Gospel Art Book*, which contained illustrative images of Church themes for use in Church and in the home. When the book was issued, Michael G. Madsen of the Church Curriculum Development department wrote: “In the office of President Thomas S. Monson hangs a painting of the Savior by artist Heinrich Hofmann. The prophet says that this painting reminds him to do what the Savior would have him do. Pictures can have a powerful influence on each of us, just as this painting does on President Monson.”⁴⁷

46. *Meetinghouse Artwork Guidelines*, June 2009.

47. Michael G. Madsen, “The New Gospel Art Book,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2009, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2009/10/the-new-gospel>

The book featured 137 pictures—illustrative paintings and photographs—that could be used in the home or at church for gospel teaching and learning. The pictures were organized into six sections: (1) Old Testament, (2) New Testament, (3) Book of Mormon, (4) Church History, (5) Gospel in Action, and (6) Latter-day Prophets. Of the 137 images comprising those sections, fifty-nine images depicted Christ or events in his life. The artists whose work illustrated scenes or events in Christ’s ministry included Harry Anderson, Alexandre Bida, Carl Bloch, Grant Romney Clawson, Gustave Doré, Ted Henninger, Heinrich Hofmann, Greg Olsen, Aldo Rebecchi, John Scott, and James Tissot with new images by Joseph Brickey, Kamille Corry, Simon Dewey, David Lindsley, and Walter Rane. According to Madsen, “The new *Gospel Art Book* is an important tool that can help us help one another come unto Christ and receive the blessings of eternal life.”⁴⁸

That same year, coincidental to the release of the *Gospel Art Book*, the Church revealed its methods in collecting, reviewing, and disseminating imagery to its worldwide membership. Improvements in digital storage and broadband speed gave the Church’s graphics department greater facility in distributing print-ready artwork: “In addition to hundreds of available fine art paintings and portraits, the Church utilizes a continually updated database called Telescope as a storage receptacle for more than 300,000 images describing and illustrating events, important sites and teachings of the faith,” stated a Church Newsroom press release.⁴⁹ “Such a resource, according to Allan R. [Loyborg], director of graphic design and production for the Church’s Curriculum Department, brings a readily accessible and broad range

-art-book?lang=eng/. See also Mark Beck, “Gospel Art Book for Teaching, Learning,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 16, 2009, <https://www.deseret.com/2009/3/16/20378292/gospel-art-book-for-teaching-learning/>.

48. Madsen, “The New Gospel Art Book.”

49. “Mormon Art Portrays History, Doctrine and Beliefs of Church,” Newsroom, Mar. 27, 2009, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/mormon-art-portrays-history—doctrine-and-beliefs-of-church/>.

of illustrations forward to meet the publication requirements of the Church.” The Church’s image database description notably showed its awareness of the need for imagery applicable to a global Church. According to the news release, Loyborg’s staff organized and trained contract illustrators and photographers in many parts of the world “to bring local and cross-cultural representation to printed materials.”⁵⁰ Graphics could be modified or changed to better suit the people living the areas in which the materials are distributed. “For example,” Loyborg explained, “a recent brochure prepared for the Missionary Department contained the same text but featured illustrations based on the geographic distribution—some were printed with people from Eastern Europe, Scandinavia or South America. This design localizes the message and creates a pocket of cross-cultural communication.”⁵¹

In the spring of 2010, the existing *Meetinghouse Artwork* brochure and the Church Educational System’s art catalog were combined into a single online catalog entitled *Church Facilities Artwork Catalog*. A link to this website became available on the home page of the Church Facilities Department’s Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) website.⁵² Those who selected artwork for Church facilities (particularly meetinghouses, seminaries, and institutes) were referred to this website. The website also featured artwork appropriate for mission facilities and welfare complexes.⁵³ This resource included the familiar images of Christ by Bloch, Hofmann, Anderson, and Parson. Thus, “Church-approved artwork” for meetinghouses, including images of Christ, was to be obtained through the facilities manager using this new catalog. The facilities manager could also obtain artwork “appropriate

50. “Mormon Art Portrays History, Doctrine and Beliefs of Church.”

51. “Mormon Art Portrays History, Doctrine and Beliefs of Church.”

52. Richard Hope, “New On-Line Church Facilities Artwork Catalog,” *Standard Plan Information Notice: Architecture, Engineering and Construction Division* (SPI no. 65), Apr. 28, 2010.

53. Hope, “New On-Line Church Facilities Artwork Catalog.”

for meetinghouses” from Church Distribution Services, but it also had to be properly framed.⁵⁴

Correlative selection also led to the replevining (repossession), disposition, and sometimes replacement of historical works of art in meetinghouses. Under senior museum curator Robert O. Davis’s direction, the Church Museum of History and Art formed what was called the Art and Artifact Committee and conducted a survey of ward meetinghouse art from 2010 to 2013.⁵⁵ Historical works of art in Church meetinghouses were documented, appraised for their significance, and assessed a market value. Surveyor’s reports were submitted to the committee and filed in museum records by their type of artifact, description, location, and geographic region. These surveyors’ reports and assessments are restricted to researchers, but the data collected set the groundwork for the eventual decision to replevin some historical works of art from temples and meetinghouses for preservation.⁵⁶ Works of art that were deemed at risk or deteriorating were photographed, removed, and/or replaced with high-quality giclée reproductions or with artwork presumably deemed more pleasing and Christ-centered to viewers.⁵⁷

54. Hope, “New On-Line Church Facilities Artwork Catalog.”

55. The information in the section is based on cataloging metadata in the LDS Church History Library, under the Art and Artifact Committee Files (CR 100 653).

56. See, for example, Peggy Fletcher Stack, “The LDS Church is Removing Minerva Teichert Paintings from Its Own Chapels, Prompting a Question: Where Does the Art Belong?,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 16, 2020.

57. In one recent case, John Scott’s painting *The Last Judgment* was removed from the Washington D.C. Temple indefinitely for refurbishing. Church spokesperson Doug Anderson indicated that “proper placement will be determined at a future time.” Meanwhile, the temple’s oval-shaped rotunda entry features a similarly themed painting, Dan Wilson’s *His Return*, which depicts Jesus’s triumphal Second Coming accompanied by trumpeting angles. See David Noyce, “Missing: This Washington D. C. Temple Mural. Here’s What Happened to It,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Apr. 22, 2022.

In addition to the assessment and valuation surveys collected by the Art and Artifact Committee, guidelines based on those surveys were established for existing artwork in meetinghouses or art placed in historic properties. The AEC *Design Guidelines* (2015) give instructions for selecting and placing artwork in such meetinghouses. “Standard meetinghouse artwork is generally appropriate,” it states. However, the guidelines specify the actions that should be taken when the quality and appearance of the frames is in question. “Custom frames may be appropriate to be consistent with the style and character of the building. Existing artwork that is inappropriately scaled, framed, or faded should generally be discarded and replaced in accordance with the meetinghouse art and artifact inventory. Although the stake president may still have input, the selection and placement of artwork should be reviewed and approved by the Church History Department.”⁵⁸

Actions taken for the selection, commissioning, or preservation of temple artwork reflected the collective decision-making of at least three correlative committees. The Temple Art Committee (TAC), which is alternatively known as the Art Evaluation Committee or Church Art Committee, proposes artists and evaluates the appropriateness of their artwork for temple projects.⁵⁹ Formed in 1981 as an outgrowth of the Priesthood Executive Council’s oversight of the Church’s visual resources and the formation/planning of the Museum of Church History and Art, the committee was intended to better coordinate the display and preservation of the Church’s existing and commissioned collections of original artwork. The TAC is comprised of member art

58. *Architecture, Engineering, and Construction: Design Guidelines (United States and Canada)* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015), 9, available at https://aec.churchofjesuschrist.org/design_guidelines/AECDesignGuidelines.pdf.

59. See “What is the Temple Art Committee?,” *Thoughts on Mormon Art* (blog), June 7, 2015, <http://www.thoughtsonmormonart.com/questions/what-is-the-temple-art-committee/>.

educators, curators, dealers, and administrators who could also identify member artists whose work would be well suited for placement in temple interior spaces.⁶⁰ The TAC is instrumental in supporting the Curator and temple art curators in commissioning and placing original artwork in temples. Two other committees—the Temple Facilities Sites Committee (TFSC) and the Temple Sites Committee (TSC)—give final approval to works chosen for temple interiors. While the TFSC is mostly comprised of members of the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction Division, it considers the suitability of artwork for temples and answers to the Office of the Presiding Bishopric. The TSC is comprised of representatives of the Presiding Bishopric and the First Presidency who give final approval for proposed artworks for temple projects.⁶¹

Members of the TAC and representatives of the Special Projects Department of the Temple Design Division work closely with individual artists on the appropriateness of the finished art for display and the physical installation of their artwork in temple interior or exterior spaces. While the committee is often described by its members as inclusive and encouraging of innovative member artists, only about half of their selections are approved by PEC advisors and even less by the Office of the Presiding Bishopric, often regarded as the “bottleneck” of the art selection process. These lags and rejections in the art vetting

60. This section is based on cataloging metadata in the LDS Church History Library. Information on the temple Art Evaluation Committee (or Temple Art Committee) is available in an interview of LaVern G. Swanson with Ann Marie Atkinson and Laura A. Hurtado, Apr. 16, 2013, transcript (OH 5942); collection content metadata for the Temple Arts Committee (CR 100 812 & CR 100 898), Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah; and information provided to me by anonymous informants. See also Peggy Fletcher Stack, “LDS Artistic Mission: Enhancing the Temple Experience,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 14, 2009, available at https://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/lds/ci_13055494/.

61. “What is the Temple Art Committee?”

process can be inhibiting but are also indicative of the overarching influence correlation has on the Church's visual culture.⁶²

The placement and preservation of temple artwork does not always occur without dispute, either. A controversial decision to replace the deteriorating interior walls of the Manti Temple in 2021, including the removal of beloved mural artwork by Minerva Teichert and C. C. A. Christensen, prompted forceful pushback from concerned Church members. After Church officials announced that the walls and the murals adhered to them would be removed permanently during renovation, a groundswell of Church members living not only in Manti but throughout the state of Utah protested.⁶³ In the end, after considering the intense support for preserving the artwork, Church History Museum officials and temple art curators announced that they would consult with international art conservation experts and try to separate the canvas or portions of it from the plaster and preserve pieces of the mural for restoration, preservation, and public display elsewhere.⁶⁴

62. For an example of the committee commissioning LDS artists Michael Albrechtsen (painter) and Jacob E. Dobson (sculptor) to create art for the Indianapolis Indiana Temple, see Robert Alcorn and Mary Alcorn, eds., *Indianapolis Indiana Temple: Come and See* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Temple Book Committee, 2015), 68–69 and 76.

63. David Noyce, "Latest from Mormonland: New Battle Erupts over Minerva Teichert's Paintings, and a Shoutout to the 'Miracle' COVID Vaccine," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 19, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/08/19/latest-mormon-land-new/>. For more on Teichert's Manti temple murals, see Doris R. Dant, "Minerva Teichert's Manti Temple Murals," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1999): 6–44.

64. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, "In a Loss for Preservation, LDS Church Removes Historic Murals from Salt Lake Temple," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 12, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/03/12/lds-church-removes/>; Trent Toone, "Church will Try to Preserve Manti Temple's Minerva Teichert Murals," *Deseret News*, Mar. 24, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/3/24/22349015/church-of-jesus-christ-will-preserve-manti-temple-minerva-teichert-murals-history-renovation/>; Tad Walch, "A Threat Stalks the Manti Utah Temple's Minerva Teichert Murals," *Deseret News*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/5/20/22444757/churchbeat-newsletter-threat-to-manti-temple-minerva-teichert-murals-latter-day-saint-lds-mormon/>.

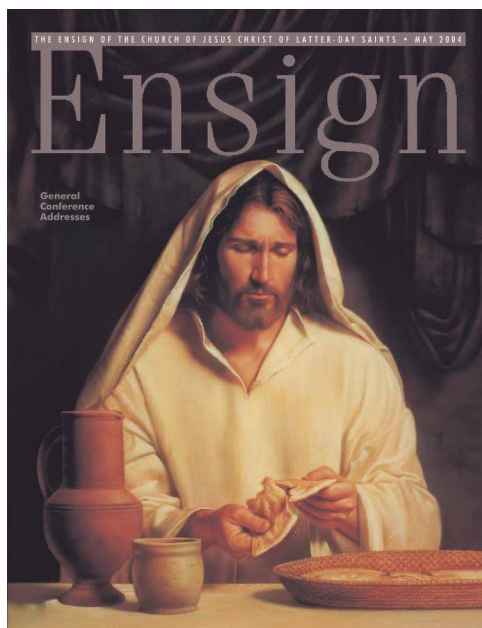


Figure 16. *The Last Supper* by Simon Dewey as it appeared on the cover of the May 2004 *Ensign* magazine.

Correlated Art, Church Doctrine, and Piety

The careful selection of artwork that accurately supports and reflects the doctrines, messages, and policies of the Church is borne out by comparing the imagery with associated religious texts. As I pointed out in my 2000 study, the depiction of Christ as a neatly trimmed, wholesome man coincides with the Church’s policy regarding the portrayal of deity in live performances in meetinghouses. The 2010 edition of the Church’s handbook expressly stated that “if the Savior is portrayed, it must be done with the utmost reverence and dignity. Only brethren of wholesome personal character should be considered for the part.”⁶⁵ In keeping with this and other official texts, correlated and approved images of Christ typically depict him as having pale skin and Germanic features with a well-groomed beard and hair, wearing a clean, wrinkle-free tunic, and bearing unsoiled hands and feet (fig. 16).

65. “Portrayal of Deity,” in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 2010, p. 109, 13.6.15.

In an August 5, 2011 article published by the Church Newsroom, Chelsee Niebergall wrote about the usefulness of art in daily worship: “Whether in homes, meetinghouses, temples, or elsewhere, good art can encourage a spirit of worship. For that reason, the Church’s Printing Division has created a way to make fine art available at a low cost for use in members’ homes and Church buildings worldwide.”⁶⁶ Niebergall assured readers that the Church was not only making these pieces of gospel-themed art available in Church magazines and on its websites but also printing them and providing them for purchase on the Church’s online store. “The goal of all these products is to help bring people to Christ,” said Dennis Smith from the Church’s Printing Division. “Art has a wonderful way of doing that. These beautiful printed scenes remind us of scripture stories or historical events or specific individuals, so all of these different depictions help teach us, inspire us, and remind us of the Savior.”⁶⁷

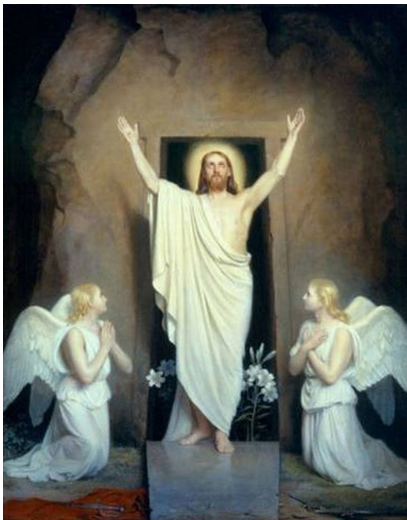
The correlative review—and sometimes careful editing—of images of Christ used in official Church publications continued to take place well into the new century. In some instances, the Church’s Graphic Design and Production Department took active measures to alter or manipulate artwork to make it acceptable for publication. For example, in cover art of the March 2013 issue of the *New Era* (the Church’s magazine for adolescents), the attending angel in Carl Bloch’s *Christ in Gethsemane* (1873) was so tightly cropped that its wings were rendered unrecognizable to the viewer—presumably in keeping with the 1998 PEC review of images (fig. 17). In another example, in the December 2011 issue of the *Ensign*, Bloch’s painting *The Resurrection of Christ* (1881) was graphically altered to conform to Church standards (fig. 18). The *Salt Lake Tribune* religion writer Peggy Fletcher Stack noted,

66. Chelsee Niebergall, “Worshiping through Art,” *Church News and Events*, Aug. 5, 2011, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/worshiping-through-arthead?lang=eng/>.

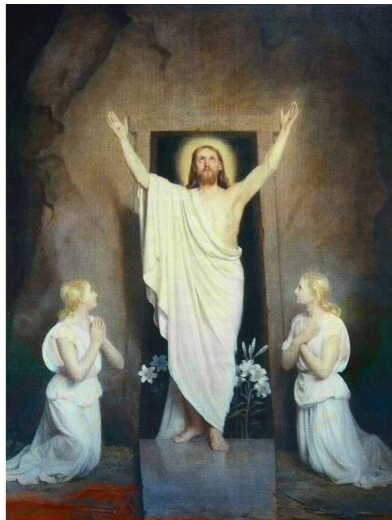
67. Niebergall, “Worshipping through Art.”



Figure 17. *Christ in Gethsemane* (1873) by Carl Bloch. Public domain.



Original painting by Carl Bloch with the two angels having wings.



Modified version that appears in the December 2011 *Ensign* pg 50.

Figure 18. Comparison of Carl Bloch's *The Resurrection* (1881) showing the modification of the angel's wings and sleeveless robes. Images courtesy of rogerdhansen.wordpress.com.

“Bloch’s female angels were given cap sleeves on their shoulders (likely reflecting the Utah-based Church’s modesty stance).”⁶⁸ The removal of the wings was indicative of the Church’s scriptural literalism or naturalistic interpretation of otherworldly beings and events. “Mormons teach that angels are resurrected humans,” Stack added, “so giving them wings flies in the face of that belief.”⁶⁹ In yet a third example, Mary’s décolleté as depicted in Carlo Maratta’s nativity *The Holy Night* (ca. 1655) was Photoshop-modified in 2016 to conform to Church modesty standards. Three winged angels flanking Mary were removed and her neckline was raised to cover her bust and shoulders before the painting was published on the Church’s website.⁷⁰ *Salt Lake Tribune* columnist Gordon Monson wrote that the image alteration sends a message to women in the Church that “there’s something shameful about their bodies.”⁷¹ Monson argued that the shame put upon women from such an overemphasis on keeping themselves covered for modesty backfires

68. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Angel with Wings on Mormon Magazine—It’s Art, Not Doctrine,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 4, 2013, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=55930850&itype=cmsid>. See also Heather, “On Immodest Angels,” *Doves & Serpents* (blog), May 16, 2012, <http://www.dovesandserpents.org/wp/2012/05/on-immodest-angels/>, and Roger D. Hansen, “Carl Heinrich Bloch’s Angels,” *Tired Road Warrior* (blog), May 21, 2012, <https://rogerdhansen.wordpress.com/2012/05/21/carl-heinrich-blochs-angels/>.

69. Stack, “Angel with Wings on Mormon Magazine.”

70. Gordon Monson, “When the LDS Church Alters Classic Art in the Name of Modesty, It Does More Harm than Good,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 30, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2022/12/30/gordon-monson-when-lds-church/>, and Alyssa Guzman, “Church Cover-Up! Mormon Leaders are Condemned for Photoshopping 1650 Painting of the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus to Cover Her Bust and Shoulders and Removed Angels,” *Daily Mail*, Dec. 21, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11588083/Mormon-Church-condemned-photoshopping-painting-Virgin-Mary-cover-bust-shoulders.html>.

71. Monson, “When the LDS Church Alters Classic Art in the Name of Modesty.”

on the Church, “not just in the harm it creates among women and women’s self-esteem, but also in sexualizing them as objects or, even worse, possessions.”⁷² The editing of these images was no small controversy to those who recognized the changes, but the use of images that align with the Church’s beliefs, moral standards, and scripturally based doctrine served to visually affirm their importance and veracity for Church members.⁷³

In the more than two decades since the appearance of my original study, interested scholars and investigators of Mormon culture focused their attention on religious art as a powerful tool for expressing religiosity. For example, in 2001, during what was then called the “Mormon Moment,” when Salt Lake City was preparing for the 2002 Winter Olympics, Kenneth L. Woodward of *Newsweek* cited my survey of the number of images of Christ used in the Church’s *Ensign* magazine.⁷⁴ In a February 2002 devotional lecture at BYU–Hawaii, psychology professor Ronald S. Jackson discussed the importance and efficacy of religious images among Latter-day Saints. Citing my 2000 study and others by Colleen McDannell and David Morgan, Jackson presented the results of his own research on the use of pictures in the homes of active Latter-day Saints.⁷⁵ Similarly, in a book-length study on Jesus in American culture, religious studies scholar Stephen Prothero addressed Christ-centered visual culture as a reflection Latter-day Saint devotion. Prothero’s book

72. Monson, “When the LDS Church Alters Classic Art in the Name of Modesty.”

73. On LDS art that renders miraculous events, otherworldly beings, and spiritual ideals, see Barry Laga, “Making the Absent Visible: The Real, Ideal and the Abstract in Mormon Art,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 47–77.

74. Kenneth L. Woodward, “The Mormon Moment,” *Newsweek*, Sept. 10, 2001, 44–49. My work was cited (uncredited) on p. 47.

75. Ronald S. Jackson, “We Would See Jesus: Visual Piety,” Feb. 14, 2002, David O. McKay Lectures, BYU–Hawaii, <https://speeches.byuh.edu/david-o-mckay-lecture/we-would-see-jesus-visual-piety/>.

American Jesus (2003) was a fascinating chronicle of the various iterations of Jesus in America's hearts, minds, and media.⁷⁶

In 2016, historian and religious studies professor John G. Turner published his masterful study on the place of Jesus Christ in Latter-day Saint culture and spirituality. The book, entitled *The Mormon Jesus: A Biography*, documents the development of the Church's Christ-centered doctrines. As a biographical work, Turner's study takes readers through a storied history of Mormon belief in Jesus Christ, from Joseph Smith's First Vision encounter with deity to his central place in the Mormon doctrine of atonement, his mortal ministry, and post-resurrection visit to the people living in the Americas. A chapter focusing on New Testament and Book of Mormon artistic depictions of Christ reiterates much of what I covered in my own study on visuals of Christ. In that chapter, Turner discusses the racial dynamics and emphases on strength of power and Christian manhood that influenced the early choices of images of Christ in Mormon visual culture. To explain the Church's unwavering favor of artwork depicting Christ as a white man, Turner reviews the Church's early statements on race, along with passages from the Book of Mormon that describe the dark skin of Native American people as a curse placed upon them for iniquity. As Turner further indicates, even though the Book of Mormon does contain some egalitarian statements on race, it describes Jesus as being pure or radiantly white (3 Nephi 9:30) and his mother Mary as "exceedingly fair and white" (1 Nephi 11:13).⁷⁷

Echoing what I characterized in my 2000 study, Turner writes that "the church today favors images of Jesus by both Mormon and non-Mormon artists that balance noble strength with tender concern and

76. Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2003), chap. 5, "Mormon Elder Brother," 161–99, especially 197.

77. John G. Turner, *The Mormon Jesus: A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 252–53.

contemplativeness. Indeed, the Mormon Savior is the Good Shepherd, the one who welcomes children, the one who reclines on a hillside in prayer. The Mormon Jesus is like the contemporary Mormon man, strong and fit, busy serving his family and community, cherishing a brief moment alone with his Heavenly Father.⁷⁸ Turner goes on to name several LDS artists whose paintings of Christ reflect these outward ideals. “One sees this image of Jesus Christ in the paintings of contemporary Mormon artists such as Greg Olsen, Simon Dewey, Liz Lemon Swindle, and Ted Henninger. Jesus is a tender shepherd, the savior who welcomes children of all races, and the risen Lord.”⁷⁹

Turner’s characterization of official LDS Christ-centered art—as well as the insightful scholarship of Prothero and others—encapsulates the outcome of the Church’s correlative decision-making. While many examples of unofficial gospel-themed art could fit those characteristics, a profusion of artistic expressions was created by faithful LDS artists who benefited from efforts to foster interpretations of Jesus and his ministry. Out of a growing desire to explore and expand broader possibilities of Christ-centered imagery, museums and arts organizations started programming creative opportunities outside of the Church’s correlated curation of artistic images. An unofficial art competition, Spiritual and Religious Art of Utah, which began in 1986 and is sponsored by the Springville Museum of Art, offers Utah artists an opportunity to express their beliefs without content or style restrictions. What’s more, beginning in 1987, the Church began sponsoring its triennial International Art Competition in which member artists from around the world participate, submitting two- and three-dimensional artwork. Although the international competition promotes a different gospel theme each time, the submitting artists aren’t required to follow a prescribed manner or approach. While the exhibited artwork still has to pass through correlative selection and approval, Church authorities

78. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 267–68.

79. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 267–68.

and museum curators consistently praise the diverse artistic interpretations of gospel themes, with many of the submissions employing unique cultural motifs, folk methods, and varied materials and styles.⁸⁰

These two competitions were inaugurated almost concurrently and gave faithful member artists new venues for interpreting spiritual or religious subjects—including images of Jesus Christ—without an expectation by a Church evaluative committee of realism or an illustrative style. Other competitions have followed and, although not official Church-sponsored events, they are often endorsed (if not financially supported) by individual Church authorities. Beginning in 2009, the Inspirational Art Association (IAA), an independent Utah-based organization, has sponsored a Christmas Season Art Showcase at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. This competition—open to all IAA members who follow its mission—is meant to foster and promote art that, according to its official website, “embodies truth, beauty, hope, faith and goodness.”⁸¹ Independent organizations such as the Zion Art Society and Certain Women were established to foster the work of LDS artists in Utah. The Zion Art Society was founded by Micah Christensen in 2016 to “create a place for LDS artists and serious collectors to collaborate and create art that advances the fine arts in the LDS Church.”⁸² A Salt Lake City–based organization, Certain Women was organized in

80. For examples of the many spiritual and gospel-themed works of art submitted for competition, see Oman and Davis, *Images of Faith*, especially 113–96; Richard G. Oman, “Lehi’s Vision of the Tree of Life: A Cross-Cultural Perspective in Contemporary Latter-day Saint Art,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1992): 5–34; and Richard G. Oman, “‘Ye Shall See the Heavens Open’: Portrayal of the Divine and the Angelic in Latter-day Saint Art,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1995): 112–41.

81. See the IAA website prospectus at inspirationalartassociation.com. President Russell M. Nelson, Thomas S. Monson, and Elders Henry B. Eyring, Richard G. Hinckley, and David Warner are a few General Authorities named among the award-winning advocates and patrons.

82. Untitled announcement under “Art Canvas,” *Deseret Morning News*, July 31, 2016. For the Zion Art Society’s website and prospectus, see www.zionartsociety.org.

2019 by Nicole Woodbury, Laura Erikson Atkinson, and Mary Brickey Cole to promote LDS women artists and offer competitive invitational exhibits to showcase their work.⁸³ The Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, based in New York City, collects, promotes, and displays literature, performing arts, and visual art from all over the world.⁸⁴

Opportunities such as these have been viewed by many Latter-day Saint artists as a welcome change or an evolution in LDS art. Religious art that was once seen as having to conform to didactic and illustrative norms can now be expressed in limitless ways. In 2013, St. George *Spectrum* features reporter Brian Passey observed, “Today’s LDS art landscape is one of stylistic diversity that has room for impressionistic painters like [Julie] Rogers or Woodland Hills artist J. Kirk Richards, whose work ‘floats somewhere between classicism, primitive expressionism and naturalism.’”⁸⁵ The encouragement and fostering of religious art without stylistic restrictions has afforded Church members limitless capacities to express their artistic visions of Jesus, while Church correlation committees have continued to unveil or issue acceptable, approved images of Christ in official print and digital media (fig. 19).

Through PEC oversight, Church leaders commissioned new art and applauded the many examples of self-expression among its members. Articles in LDS digital magazines, Utah newspapers, blogs, and BYU academic journals promoted the varied examples of religious imagery among member artists.⁸⁶ One article in the *Deseret News* highlighted the diverse art in the Sixth International Art Competition (2003) in

83. “Certain Women Art Show Shares Art from 90 Women Artists,” *Deseret News*, Oct. 3, 2019. For the Certain Women’s mission statement and activities prospectus, see www.certainwomenartshow.com.

84. The mission and vision of the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts can be found at www.centerforlatterdaysaintarts.org.

85. Brian Passey, “LDS Art Evolves,” *Spectrum* (St. George, Utah), Nov. 30, 2013, 1. See also Trent Toone, “Sacred Artwork’: The Journey of LDS Artist J. Kirk Richards,” *Deseret Morning News*, Apr. 30, 2015.

86. See, for example, Seth Saunders, “Inspired Strokes Bring Life to Christ,” *Deseret News*, Dec. 24, 2011.



Figure 19. *Jesus Blessing Jairus's Daughter (Christ Raising the Daughter of Jairus)* by Greg Olsen. Copyright by Intellectual Reserve.

which the Museum of Church History and Art received over seven hundred entries from the United States, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the British Isles. Senior curator Robert O. Davis reportedly said of J. Kirk Richards's purchase-award-winning entry, *Son of Man*: "We like these more inward expressions of the Savior," he said, referring to Richards's soft-edged but tenebrist portrait of Christ. "This one applies to the Atonement, but it's not as didactic in his illustration, not as obvious, so there's more of a mood and personality that comes through. An ambiguous expression that people can identify with."⁸⁷ A dichotomy of institutionally approved images of Christ and democratically produced, accessible renderings of Christ by Church member artists resulted (fig. 20).

87. Dave Gagon, "Faithful Art," *Deseret News*, May 13, 2003, <https://www.deseret.com/2003/5/13/19720022/faithful-art/>.

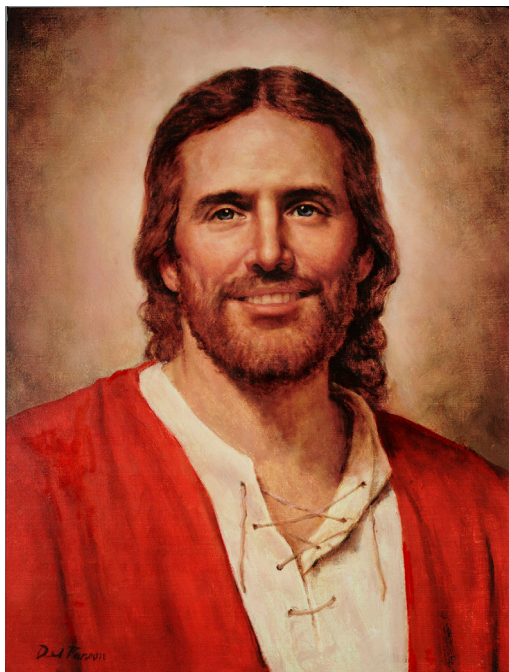


Figure 20. *Christ's Love* by Del Parson. Image courtesy of the artist.

Del Parson, the artist widely known among Mormons for his red-robed portrait of Christ, was commissioned to paint numerous works depicting the ministry of Christ or events in the Church's history. One particular painting, entitled *Christ and Children from Around the World* (*Christ with Children*), featured what appears to be two white children, a Hispanic child, and a child of African descent surrounding a seated Jesus (fig. 21). On his personal website, Parson told the story of its conception:

A member of the Primary General Presidency visited the members of the Church in Africa. Following her trip, she felt that the Church needed a depiction of Christ with children those members could relate to. The Church commissioned the painting and I used my son, a friend from his soccer team, one of his classmates, and a ward member to pose for this painting.⁸⁸

88. Del Parson website, "Jesus and the Children," <https://delparson.com/jesus-and-the-children/>.



Figure 21. *Christ and Children from around the World (Christ with Children)* by Del Parson. Copyright by Intellectual Reserve.

After the painting was unveiled, it was placed on temporary display at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building in Salt Lake City and has become a widely published visual example of the Church's belief in diversity and inclusivity.⁸⁹

Many other member artists have since added their works to the growing body of Christ-centered art that celebrates culture, gender, and race among Church members. Contemporary LDS artists have contributed meaningful representations of the diversity of Church membership that go against the long-standing predominance of white subjects and

89. See "Unity in Diversity," Newsroom, Mar. 25, 2015, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/unity-in-diversity>; Nathan Rees and Heather Belnap, "Race and Representation in Latter-day Saint Art," *Public Square Magazine*, Sept. 22, 2021, <https://publicsquaremag.org/dialogue/race-and-representation-in-latter-day-saint-art/>; and Rebecca Haymore, "Racial Representation in Latter-day Saint Art," *The Draft*, n.d., <https://thedraft.byu.edu/racial-representation-in-latter-day-saint-art/>.



Figure 22. *Anointed One* by Rose Datoc Dall. Image courtesy of the artist.

white-centric narratives in Church art. Artists such as Rose Datoc Dall, Melissa Tshikamba, Kwani Povi Winder, and Sopheap Nhem are creating Christ-centered works that are shattering racial stereotypes and expectations set by misdirected Church doctrines and boundaries set by Correlation (fig. 22).⁹⁰

90. Aleah Ingram, “Stunning Piece from Cambodian Artist Featured in 10th International LDS Art Competition,” *LDS Daily*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.ldsdaily.com/world/stunning-piece-from-cambodian-artist-featured-in-10th-international-lds-art-competition/>; Michelle Franzoni Thorley, “Diversity in LDS Art,” *Exponent II* (blog), May 15, 2020, <https://exponentii.org/blog/diversity-in-lds-art/>; and Aubrey Eyre, “This BYU Grad is Making Religious Art More Inclusive for People of Color,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 26, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/8/26/21369276/black-artist-art-byu-gold-global-faith-melissa-tshikamba-latter-day-saints/>.

Church Branding

The careful selection of religious images and, more specifically, visuals of Christ representative of the Latter-day Saint Church extended into institutional branding. It has been pointed out by designer and typographic expert Stephen Coles and others that the Church did not have an identifiable visual identity until 1974 when Randall Smith and his design team created a wordmark logo that used Baker Signet, a typeface designed a decade earlier by Arthur Baker for Visual Graphics Corporation (VGC).⁹¹ This multilayered wordmark, as Coles explains, was “well suited for the granite inscriptions that often label meeting houses and temples.”⁹² The open font gave the wordmark a classical but easy-to-read layout that was recognizable and a pleasant identifying quality that emphasized the full name of the Church (fig. 23). It was ubiquitous on meetinghouse signage, missionary name tags, letterheads, and forms until 1995, when Church administrators decided that “this design was too corporate (and maybe too chaotic), but more importantly they wanted to clarify that they are a Christian religion.”⁹³

According to various extant accounts, the 1995 wordmark was designed by Adrian Pulfer and McRay Magleby with a proprietary typeface called “Deseret” designed by renowned typographer Jonathan Hoefler.⁹⁴ This new, collaborative design was formal and symmetrically balanced, featuring the Church’s title in three lines centered (fig. 24). The name “Jesus Christ” was enlarged and centered as the emphasis of the wordmark. According to designer Brian Collier, the typeface was

91. Stephen Coles, “LDS Church Logo, 1974–1995,” <https://fontsinuse.com/uses/4894/lds-church-logo-1974-1995/>.

92. Coles, “LDS Church Logo, 1974–1995.”

93. Coles, “LDS Church Logo, 1974–1995.”

94. Coles, “LDS Church Logo, 1974–1995.” See also Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Sunstone: Designer Recalls History of LDS Church’s ‘Visual Identity,’” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 27, 2012, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=54575040&itype=CMSID>.



Figure 23. Official wordmark, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975, shown here on meetinghouse signage. Photo by Randall Smith for the *Salt Lake Tribune*.



Figure 24. Official wordmark, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995. Copyright by Intellectual Reserve.

inspired by the classical Trajan font, a letterform that is reminiscent of texts chiseled into Roman monuments.⁹⁵ This simple, straightforward wordmark logo served the Church during the rise of the internet and the growth of the digital age. The ubiquitously distributed visual helped

95. Brian Collier, "The New Church Logo: A Designer's Perspective and Analysis," *UX Collective*, <https://uxdesign.cc/the-new-church-logo-a-designers-perspective-analysis-56c435b01020/>.

recast the Church's worldwide image for a greater focus on Christ without changing the long-standing name and corporate brand.⁹⁶

However, after the passing of Church president Thomas S. Monson on January 2, 2018, the newly called president, Russell M. Nelson, pursued a new course in image-making and branding the Church's institutional presence. In the first four years of his presidency, Nelson made more than seventy changes, including reducing the length of Sunday meetings from three hours to two hours, renaming the Church websites and social media, allowing baptisms of children with LGBT parents, issuing a new handbook, and instituting policy changes for civil and temple marriages. Of the many sweeping changes, Nelson sought to discontinue the widespread use of the nicknames "Mormon" and "LDS" in favor of using the full name of the Church. During the April 2020 general conference, after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Nelson also unveiled a new wordmark, or what he called "a symbol," which was meant to replace the decades-old 1995 wordmark.⁹⁷

This symbol—essentially a logo—features a simple stipple point and line drawing of Bertel Thorvaldsen's *Christus* over the wordmark set in a rectangular box. "At the center of the symbol is a representation of Thorvaldsen's marble statue the *Christus*," said Nelson. "It portrays

96. See David Porter, "More than 100 Church Logos Represent Membership Diversity," Newsroom, May 11, 2011, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/more-than-100-church-logos-represent-membership-diversity/>.

97. Jason Swensen, "President Nelson Announces New Church Symbol During April General Conference," *Church News*, Apr. 4, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/president-nelson-announces-new-church-symbol-during-april-general-conference?lang=eng/>; Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Nelson Unveils a New Symbol for LDS Church, Calls for Another Global Fast to Seek Relief from Covid-19," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Apr. 5, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/04/05/nelson-unveils-new-symbol/>; and Brady McCombs, "Mormons Unveil New Official Logo at Crowd-less Conference," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Apr. 10, 2020, https://www.phillytrib.com/religion/mormons-unveil-new-official-logo-at-crowd-less-conference/article_eb56c1f8-32db-551b-b529-38dc9be2c3de.html/.

the resurrected, *living* Lord reaching out to embrace all who will come unto Him. Symbolically, Jesus Christ is standing under an arch. The arch reminds us of the resurrected Savior emerging from the tomb on the third day following His Crucifixion.”⁹⁸ The new symbol, he added, should feel familiar to all identifying the restored gospel with the *living* resurrected Christ. The name of the Church is placed within a rectangular shape representing the Church’s foundation, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Although it was stressed that the website name changes, the reaffirmation of the Church’s original name, and the new symbol did not constitute rebranding, the press packet and logo guidelines that accompanied the new trademark image suggested otherwise. Nelson further explained, “The symbol will now be used as a visual identifier for official literature, news, and events of the Church. It will remind all that this is the Savior’s Church and that all we do, as members of His Church, centers on Jesus Christ and His gospel.”⁹⁹

Despite some controversy raised by critics during Mitt Romney’s presidential campaign in 2012—a second “Mormon Moment,” when the *Christus* statue was deemed “an icon of white supremacy”¹⁰⁰—Nelson

98. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening the Heavens for Help,” Apr. 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/04/37nelson?lang=eng>. For the printed report, see Russell M. Nelson, “Opening the Heavens for Help,” *Ensign*, May 2020, 72–74.

99. Nelson, “Opening the Heavens for Help,” 73. See also Swensen, “President Nelson Announces New Church Symbol.”

100. Author Edward Blum was quoted in a *Daily Beast* interview with Jamie Reno on July 27, 2012 in a discussion about his and Paul Harvey’s book *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). The interview is available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/was-jesus-lily-white-author-edward-blum-discusses-race-and-the-mormon-religion/>. Issues of race and whiteness among Latter-day Saints were discussed in Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 77, 84–85. For my response to Blum and Harvey, see Noel A. Carmack, “Thorvaldsen’s White-Marbled *Christus* Reconsidered,” review of *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*, by Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 239–59.

felt that an image of the sculpture would embody or best represent a renewed focus on Christ as the head of the Church (fig. 25). An official news release written by Sydney Walker explained the purpose of the symbol, emphasizing that it is not a logo.¹⁰¹ Quoting Nelson's symbol unveiling address, Walker underscored the message conveyed by the image of Christ with open arms. "The new symbol is part of President Nelson's emphasis on the name of the Church and is not a rebranding effort, the Intellectual Property Division reaffirmed. It's about correct communication," she wrote.¹⁰² "While a logo is often used to brand products, a symbol represents or stands for something—in this case, the Savior as head of His Church. As President Nelson explained, the symbol is 'to help us remember Him and to identify the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the Lord's Church.' The symbol 'will signify the central place of Jesus Christ in His Church.'"¹⁰³ The new symbol and use of the Church's name or trademarks, however, would follow typical service marks guidelines for other corporate entities. Berne Broadbent, director of the Intellectual Property Division of the Church, reportedly explained that to avoid confusion and ensure appropriate legal protections, "we anticipate that the final guidelines for using the new symbol will be somewhat similar to the current guidelines for the use of the Church logo." He further explained that Church members generally wouldn't use the symbol, but "the Church would

101. Sydney Walker, "Three Key Aspects of the New Church Symbol, Its Purpose and Use," *Church News*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/2020/5/8/23216243/new-church-symbol-purpose-use-significance/>. See "Guidelines for Use of Church Trademarks," updated Apr. 4, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/reference/trademark-guidelines?lang=eng&country=go> (accessed May 10, 2022), and *Church Style Guide for Editors and Writers*, 6th ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2021).

102. Walker, "Three Key Aspects of the New Church Symbol."

103. Walker, "Three Key Aspects of the New Church Symbol."

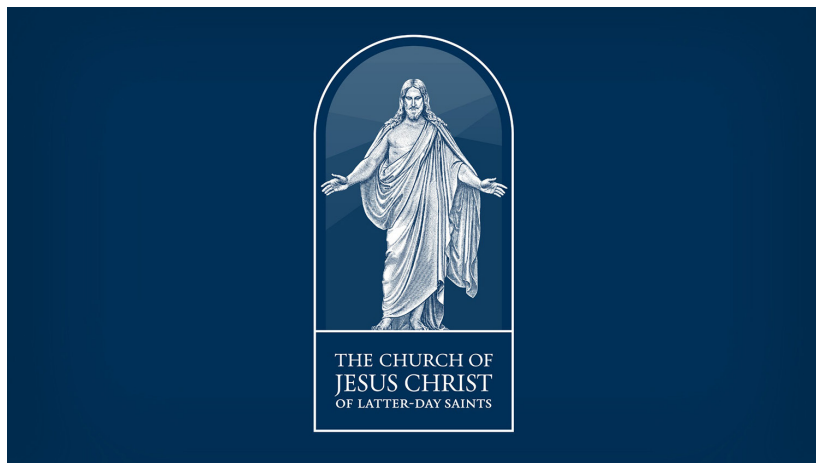


Figure 25. Official symbol (logo), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2021. Copyright by Intellectual Reserve.

use the symbol as a way of identifying official Church material.”¹⁰⁴ The *Church Style Guide for Editors and Writers* (Sixth Edition) indicates that “The Church logo should be used only on official Church products that have received Correlation approval.”¹⁰⁵ Anyone seeking questions about requirements or exception requests are directed to “contact the Visual Identity Office in the Correlation Department.”¹⁰⁶

Nelson’s continued commitment to branding the centrality of Christ extended to increased standardization of meetinghouse imagery. Another announcement affecting the Church’s visual identity came in a letter issued by the First Presidency on May 11, 2020, further establishing Nelson’s efforts to recommit Church members to placing Christ

104. Walker, “Three Key Aspects of the New Church Symbol.”

105. *Church Style Guide for Editors and Writers*, 6th ed., s.v. “Church Logotype,” 4.23, p. 12.

106. *Church Style Guide for Editors and Writers*, 6th ed., s.v. “Church Logotype,” 4.23, p. 12.

as the central focus of daily worship.¹⁰⁷ “To testify further of our central belief in Jesus Christ, we desire that our meetinghouses reflect an attitude of reverence for the Savior,” the letter stated. “Therefore, the placement of art representing Jesus Christ in meetinghouse foyers and entryways, has been authorized. Local facilities managers will contact and work with stake presidents to evaluate foyers and make necessary modifications consistent with the attached guidelines.”¹⁰⁸

The document issued by the First Presidency, “Principles and Guidelines for Meetinghouse Foyers and Entries” (2020), gives specific instructions on the selection of approved artwork for Church meetinghouses, beginning with principles that supersede all previously issued instructions for priesthood leaders and facilities managers. “Meetinghouse foyers and entries should create a feeling of reverence and dignity,” it begins.¹⁰⁹ “These spaces establish the first impression and feelings that individuals receive when entering a meetinghouse. Furnishings and artwork enhance the interiors of foyers and entries and help create a spiritual, reverent atmosphere. Artwork can also inspire faith and teach principles of the gospel. Framed artwork that focuses on the Savior should always be displayed.” The document then outlines instructions that will affect the fixtures and artwork of Church meetinghouse interiors for years, perhaps decades, to come (fig. 26). Indeed,

107. Sydney Walker, “First Presidency Encourages Reverent Art of the Savior in Meetinghouses,” *Church News*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/2020/5/11/23216251/reverent-art-church-meetinghouses-foyers-entries/>; Tad Walch, “Art Depicting Jesus Christ to Become the Standard Focus of Foyers in Latter-day Saint Meetinghouses,” *Deseret News*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/5/11/21254732/art-jesus-christ-church-mormon-lds-meetinghouses/>; and David Noyce, “Latter-day Saint Leaders Want Art of Jesus—and only Art of Jesus—in Church Foyers,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/05/11/latter-day-saints-leaders/>.

108. First Presidency letter, May 11, 2020. Copy in author’s possession.

109. Two-page document attached to First Presidency letter of May 11, 2020, “Principles and Guidelines for Meetinghouse Foyers and Entries,” May 11, 2020. Copy in author’s possession.



Figure 26. Photo showing how foyers should look after 2021 artwork policy change. Photo from *Church News*.

the many years of creating unique sacred spaces by placing pictures of local Church leaders, paintings by local member artists, photos of ward sports teams, and display cases with awards and trophies—all done autonomously by ward and stake leadership—came to an end with these instructions:

- Place existing artwork that depicts the Savior Himself or the Savior ministering to others in the meetinghouse entries and foyers. Examine existing artwork to ensure that it is appropriately framed, displayed, and in good condition.
- Move other artwork to another location within the facility or remove it altogether.
- Choose replacement art, if needed, from the Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork and follow approved sizes and quality standards.









- Assess entries and foyers as part of an annual inspection to evaluate existing furnishings, artwork, and finishes. Replace and update as needed to maintain a feeling of reverence for the Savior.
- Remove from the foyer areas distractions such as display cases, bulletin boards, tables, easels, and damaged furniture.

What had been the longtime prerogative of local leaders now fell under a Churchwide facilities policy. The selection and placement of meeting-house artwork was now fully retrenched or dictated by these guidelines and a selection of approved images. This action—another correlative measure—recalled the 1981 changes in the design of the Church’s meetinghouses themselves to a selection of simplified, versatile floorplans for economy, flexibility, and uniformity.¹¹⁰ The standardized style and appearance of both the interior decorative elements and the exterior design of the Church’s meetinghouses was now fully guided by Correlation policy.

The guidelines for placing the artwork were very similar to what had been published in the 2009 *Meetinghouse Artwork* brochure, but the document now stipulated that artwork selected for foyers and entries “should come from the Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork.” The appended list and color thumbnails show the names and titles of twenty-two approved works of art depicting Christ in scenes of his ministry by a total of nine artists: Harry Anderson, Carl Heinrich Bloch, Crystal Close, Simon Dewey, Heinrich Hofmann, Michael Malm, Del Parson, Walter Rane, and Liz Lemon Swindle (figs. 27–29).

110. “A New Generation of Meetinghouses,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 108–110; Martha Sonntag Bradley, “The Cloning of Mormon Architecture,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 20–31; and Nicole Seymour, “Standardized Meetinghouses Give a Place for More Members to Meet and Worship,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2006, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2006/03/news-of-the-church/standardized-meetinghouses-give-a-place-for-more-members-to-meet-and-worship?lang=eng>. See also Paul F. Starrs, “Meetinghouses in the Mormon Mind: Ideology, Architecture, and Turbulent Streams of an Expanding Church,” *Geographical Review* 99, no. 3 (July 2009): 323–55, and Matthes, “Place and Identity in Contemporary Mormon Meetinghouses,” 100–06.

Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork*








			
Arise and Walk Simon Dewey 39"x28" (98cm x 71cm)	Living Water Simon Dewey 34"x28" (89cm x 71cm)	Christ Healing the Sick at Bethesda Carl Heinrich Bloch 49"x39" (126cm x 101cm)	One by One Walter Rane 36"x26" (91cm x 66cm)
			
Perfect Love Del Parson 27"x36" (68cm x 91cm)	Christ Healing a Blind Man Del Parson 20"x25" (50cm x 65cm) 26"x33" (66cm x 84cm)	Christ with Mary and Martha Del Parson 22"x33" (56cm x 84cm)	Christ and the Book of Mormon Children Del Parson 25"x33" (64cm x 84cm)

* Shown are approved artwork for placement in meetinghouse foyers and main entryways. All sizes indicated are unframed. Ordering new artwork is obtained through the facilities manager who will use the Church Facilities Artwork catalog.

1

Figure 27. Page 1 of "Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork," issued by LDS Church authorities, March 2021.

Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork*








			
The Lord Jesus Christ Del Parson 24"x33" (61cm x 84cm)	He is Risen Del Parson 23"x43" (64cm x 109cm) 25"x33" (63cm x 84cm)	Jesus Christ Harry Anderson 33"x39" (84cm x 130cm) 18"x33" (46cm x 84cm)	The Second Coming Harry Anderson 28"x37" (91cm x 145cm) 26"x40" (66cm x 102cm)
			
Jesus Knocking at the Door Del Parson 30"x43" (76cm x 109cm) 24"x35" (61cm x 89cm)	Jesus Praying in Gethsemane Harry Anderson 30"x33" (76cm x 84cm) 20"x22" (51cm x 56cm)	In Remembrance of Me Walter Rane 33"x20" (84cm x 51cm)	

* Shown are approved artwork for placement in meetinghouse foyers and main entryways. All sizes indicated are unframed. Ordering new artwork is obtained through the facilities manager who will use the Church Facilities Artwork catalog.

2

Figure 28. Page 2 of "Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork," issued by LDS Church authorities, March 2021.

Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork*

			
The Sermon on the Mount Harry Anderson 51"x28" (130cm x 71cm)	These Twelve Jesus Sent Forth Walter Rane 46"x33" (117cm x 84cm) 33"x23" (84cm x 58cm)	And He Opened His Mouth and Taught Them Michael Malm 39"x33" (99cm x 84cm)	
			
Christ and the Rich Young Ruler Heinrich Hofmann 59"x40" (150cm x 102cm)	Worth of a Soul Liz Lemon Swindle 22"x33" (56cm x 84cm)	Sermon on the Mount Carl Heinrich Bloch 29"x33" (74cm x 84cm) 38"x43" (97cm x 109cm)	Woman at the Well Crystal Close 48"x36" (122cm x 91cm)

* Shown are approved artwork for placement in meetinghouse foyers and main entryways. All sizes indicated are unframed. Ordering new artwork is obtained through the facilities manager who will use the Church Facilities Artwork catalog.

3

Figure 29. Page 3 of "Approved Selection of Foyer Artwork," issued by LDS Church authorities, March 2021.

While these paintings are beautiful by most standards, they all depict the figure and visage of Christ in a traditional realistic manner and with the centuries-old and historically expected white or European physical traits. Each artist, of course, manifests individuality in approach, but their work is clearly chosen for its naturalism as a visual reinforcement of the scriptures—in support of what I previously called a literal interpretation of the New Testament and other LDS scripture bearing witness to the reality of Christ. The rendering of Christ in nearly all these approved images does not, however, emphasize his manhood or strength of power, as in some earlier Catholic, Protestant, and LDS images, but instead highlights his qualities as nurturer, teacher, and minister. Some are relatively static portraits, but most of them portray Christ interacting with disciples and ministering to the indigent, the disabled, and young children.

While some members applaud the Church's correlative selection and placement process, others view it as visually stifling. Some see it as meaningful but not progressive. "The church is clearly . . . moving away from images that are particular to Mormons. Only two of the images [in the pool of twenty-two] are scenes from the Book of Mormon," Margaret Olsen Hemming, then editor-in-chief of the Mormon feminist magazine *Exponent II*, commented in a blog post. "I love the idea of featuring works on our walls that center around Christ. But the figure of Christ that consistently appears in every single image in this group is comely, quiet, unemotional, and extraordinarily European."¹¹¹ For her part, she saw the change to a small, selective group of art as disappointing for its lack of ethnic and physical diversity, absence of emotion, and depiction of women as vapidly devotional and domestic. Hemming further observed that "in a time when art by Mormon artists is of higher quality and more available than ever before, there is simply no

111. Noyce, "Latter-day Saint Leaders Want Art of Jesus." Noyce quotes from Margaret Olsen Hemming, "Art in Meetinghouse Foyers," *Exponent II* (blog), May 11, 2020, <https://www.the-exponent.com/art-in-meetinghouse-foyers/>.

excuse for this narrowing up of the way we convey the human relationship to the divine.”¹¹² Besides being regarded as a reflection of the way the Church wishes viewers to perceive their relationship with Christ, the careful selection of images, the reduction in the size of the pool of approved images, and their in-house production are viewed as actions taken for retrenchment and centralized control over their style and use in LDS visual culture.¹¹³

Despite the Church’s denials, establishing a policy of allowing only Christ-centered artwork in Church meetinghouses and introducing a new logo wordmark can rightly be classified as an institutional rebranding effort. Thorvaldsen’s *Christus*, although it was created by a Danish Lutheran in the early nineteenth century, has become associated with LDS worship since its use as the centerpiece of the Mormon Pavilion at the 1964–65 New York World’s Fair.¹¹⁴ Also, having long been seen in temple visitors’ centers worldwide, the open-armed sculpture is now the visual identity of the Church in the same way that denominational logos each represent their churches.¹¹⁵ This change in visual identity, along with Church president Russell Nelson’s insistence that members discontinue the use of the nickname “Mormon” or “LDS,” reflects the overarching intention to reaffirm that Christ heads the Church. A recent move to discontinue the placement of Moroni statues atop the Church’s temples is another method of redirecting focus from Book of

112. Hemming, “Art in Meetinghouse Foyers.”

113. See, for example, Stack, “LDS Artistic Mission.”

114. Carmack, “Thorvaldsen’s White-Marbled *Christus* Reconsidered,” 255–59, and Matthew O. Richardson, “Bertel Thorvaldsen’s *Christus*: A Mormon Icon,” *Journal of Mormon History* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 66–100.

115. See Adam Trey Shirley, “Denominational Logos: Religious Symbols or Branding Imagery?” *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 3, no. 2 (2013): 47–59, and Adam Trey Shirley, “Branding Church: The Role of Corporate Branding Imagery in Mainline Denominations” (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 2012), especially 2–24.

Mormon-related icons to visuals of Christ. A *Salt Lake Tribune* article even noted a comment from *Times and Seasons* blogger Chad Nielsen, who wrote that the move marks “an important shift in branding and iconography” as the Church strives to put Jesus “front and center in our mentality as a culture and our image in the public square.”¹¹⁶ Nielsen acknowledged the personal significance of the change. “There is a part of me that still cherishes my Mormonism and the use of Angel Moroni as the symbolic herald of the restoration,” he wrote, “but, as a Christian, I find the trajectory of focusing more fully on Jesus the Christ as the foundation and head of the church to be satisfying.”¹¹⁷

It should be noted here that the use of Thorvaldsen’s *Christus* as the logo image is not unlike logo and rebranding changes made by mainline Protestant institutions. The figure of a living Christ, however, was deemed to be more meaningful to Church officials than a cruciform, a monogram, or a letterform symbol often used by other Christian denominations. Though it was created by a Lutheran neoclassicist and long displayed in a museum in Copenhagen, the *Christus* has been associated with Mormonism since the mid-1960s and embodies the upright and welcoming traits the Church wishes to convey to its members and the public.¹¹⁸

Since the late 1960s, the LDS Church has placed copies of Thorvaldsen’s *Christus* in its temple visitors’ centers throughout the world and frequently used the sculpture as a graphic in official publications, so it came as no surprise that the Church decided to use the open-armed figure as the identifying logo image and Christ-centered symbol. The logo

116. David Noyce, “This Week in Mormon Land: Shipments Sent to Navajos, Angel Moroni vs. the Christus, Conference Revisited,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Apr. 9, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/04/09/this-week-mormon-land/>.

117. Noyce, “This Week in Mormon Land: Shipments Sent to Navajos.”

118. See Shirley, “Denominational Logos,” and Corey Lee Fuller, “The Changing Visual Identity of Churches: From Symbols to Branding” (master’s thesis, University of Central Oklahoma, 2009), 39–61.

change stands as a capstone event in the Church's decades-long efforts to create a visual identity. It most importantly serves to show that images (and figures) of Christ are central to Church's print and digital presence. That Book of Mormon iconography and leadership imagery has been displaced or eliminated in favor of this symbol is illuminating. Of the many approved images of Christ, the figure of the *Christus* will supersede them all as the Church's visual representation of a living Christ.

Conclusions

In the twenty-three years since the publication of my original article about images of Christ in Latter-day Saint visual culture, the LDS Church has taken gradual but methodical measures to affect institutional control over the selection and use of religious images in its official publications, their display in meetinghouses, and their dissemination digitally on the internet and on social media. Facing an increasingly secular global market, the Church has implemented measures to shape and affirm a distinctive style for the institution's official media presence. Imagery made available to its members for use in print—and now in digital—media was and continues to be carefully chosen by select committees made up of art administrators and curators but overseen by priesthood authorities. The stylistic outcome for images of Christ has thus been an amalgam of individual preferences for expected physical traits of the Church's central figure. Christ's facial features, stature, and visual comportment conform to the combined expectations of the committees. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Christ-centered imagery was selected or recommended by informed individuals with artistic and curatorial expertise but collectively accepted or rejected by Church leaders with more corporate business acumen than eyes for aesthetics.

The prerogative of local leaders and Church members to select and place artwork of their choosing in ward meetinghouses was incrementally curtailed during the period between the institution of Correlation

in the early 1960s and the recent decision by Church leadership to issue the “Principles and Guidelines for Meetinghouse Foyers and Entries” (2020) and its accompanying list of twenty-two approved images of Christ. By creating a pool of approved art through the careful, correlated selection of images of Christ and other religious imagery, Church priesthood leaders maintain a desired standard of orthodoxy of doctrine and a sense of uniformity of style in the Church’s visual culture. Adherence to the artwork use guidelines will centralize the oversight of interior design elements and ensure cohesion in the appearance of all Church meetinghouse entries, foyers, and sacred spaces.

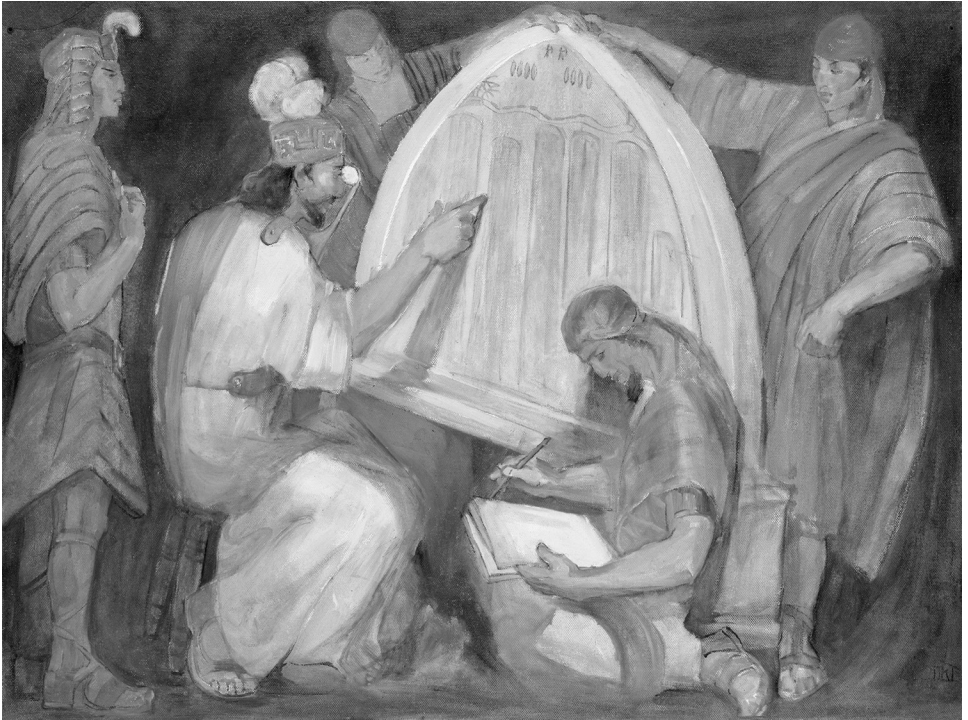
Approved artistic images and illustrations uphold a realistic style meant to depict what is taught to be real historical people and events. As a visual corroboration of scripture—a biblical or scriptural literalism—images of Christ approved for official publications, member use, and for illustrating the Church’s doctrine leave no room for fanciful interpretations or deviations from what is expected in the natural world. Painted illustrations of Book of Mormon and Bible stories, New Testament narrative events, and scenes of Christ’s ministry are rendered in a classical, naturalistic manner—with no signs of abstraction or semi-abstraction, no subjective colors, and no depictions of anthropomorphic beings or fantastical appendages and ornamentations like wings or halos. They can be described as illustrative, instructive, or educational in approach, without any effort to change or distort reality for an emotional effect.¹¹⁹

The relatively small selection of approved images for meetinghouses thus reveals a visual composite or profile of the ideal traits of Christ that the LDS Church wants its members and the public to see. It provides visual traits that make the Church distinct from what other mainline denominations include in their images of Christ. The images are distinct in characterizations of sentimentality embodied in a racially white European man, with Christ visualized as a master

119. See Rees, *Mormon Visual Culture and the American West*, 143–44. This is also discussed in Laga, “Making the Absent Visible,” 50–53.

teacher, a contemplative shepherd, a nurturing father figure who tends to children, and an empathic man who ministers to the sick and needy. Physical and outward traits common to all images in the pool of artwork show that they reflect the Church's selective Correlation process, which is partly aimed at uniformity. Distinctions between those in the pool and other Protestant and Catholic images of Christ show the traits the Church would like people to see and, conversely, those they wish to remain unseen in approved Christ-centered art. Although images of Christ used in Church publications, digital media, and meetinghouses today often bear a similar didactic realism to images chosen more than a century earlier, the mid-twentieth century desire to convey ideal Christian manhood and physical masculinity was replaced by depictions of Christ bearing traits of compassion, sensitivity, and domesticity. Correlative measures taken by Church authorities for meetinghouse art since 1990 have ensured the use of Christ-centered imagery with authenticity, a cohesion of appearance, an undeviating consistency in representational style, and an amalgam of these healthier masculine traits. Conclusively, however, the image of Christ that best conveys the true Latter-day Saint likeness may not be one that is "approved" by Church Correlation for its ostensible accuracy or realism but one bearing expressive attributes that resonate spiritually, ethnically, and culturally with both grassroots Church membership and observant nonmembers at large.

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Minerva Teichert, *Mosiah Interprets the Jaredite Stone*,
1949–1951, oil on Masonite, 36" x 48"

RACIAL INNOCENCE AND THE *CHRISTUS*-BASED LATTER-DAY SAINTS SYMBOL

M. David Huston

On April 4, 2020, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) formally adopted an institutional symbol that is now prominently displayed on the Church logo and is imprinted on Church publications, websites, videos, and other forms of communication. This symbol includes a depiction of Bertel Thorvaldsen's statue *Christus Consolator*. As philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich notes, all religious symbols both point beyond themselves and are also socially situated; symbols do not, in and of themselves, communicate outside a given cultural understanding.¹ The crucifix, for instance, carries deep theological meaning for many Christians, not because there is anything inherently communicative about two perpendicular lines but because within the cultural milieu of Christianity (1) the crucifix points to deeper theological realities tied to belief in Jesus and (2) the crucifix reinforces and engages a particular socially constructed way of understanding of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. All that is to say, a symbol is a space of social exchange that simultaneously draws us into deeper reflection and reinforces a particular cultural (socially situated) understanding. The reality that symbols are a space of social exchange is also necessarily true for the LDS *Christus*-based symbol.

1. H. D. McDonald, "The Symbolic Christology of Paul Tillich," *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988): 76.

There are a variety of ways in which the new LDS symbol could be analyzed. This essay seeks to focus narrowly on the new LDS symbol's cultural interaction with the issue of race, specifically the way in which this new symbol reinforces the idea of "Jesus-as-white" and the impacts this theology of whiteness has on LDS adherents. Following the lead of Joanna Brooks, this essay will generally frame the discussion against the backdrop of racial innocence. As will be discussed in more detail below, Brooks describes racial innocence as including the "performance of not-noticing" and "holy ignorance" when it comes to issues of race and, more specifically, institutional racism.² Racial innocence is a particularly applicable framework for an analysis of the new *Christus* logo for two reasons: (1) Put plainly, the physical image of Jesus portrayed in the *Christus*, and thus in the new symbol, is based on a white body; and (2) the LDS Church has not yet acknowledged the reality that it has formally adopted a white Jesus as its institutional symbol nor has it grappled with the implications that this decision may have on LDS adherents.

In this essay, I will examine the LDS Church's new *Christus*-based symbol and how it interacts with contemporary discussions of race. First, I will examine the *Christus* itself and touch on the contemporaneous social situation surrounding the LDS Church's embracing of the statue. Second, I will look at the stated (official) intention behind the new *Christus*-based symbol, including the ways in which LDS leadership tried to steer meaning construction, and thus how the new *Christus*-based symbol enacts a form of racial innocence. Lastly, I will briefly consider some of the theological impacts of this new symbol. I hope to demonstrate that, as in other situations where racial innocence

2. Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), quoted in Joanna Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy: American Religion and The Problem of Racial Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 86.

is present, intentional or not, the announcement of the new LDS symbol demonstrated a “willed obliviousness” to the issue of race and “especially to the thorny moral responsibility entailed in institutional racism.”³

I. The *Christus*

LDS laypersons and leaders were likely first exposed to the Thorvaldsen’s *Christus* in the latter half of the nineteenth century and made moves to acquire it in the 1950s.⁴ George Reynolds, an LDS General Authority from the late nineteenth century, wrote for LDS periodicals, believed that black skin was a curse from God, and associated whiteness with godliness.⁵ He probably spoke for many LDS believers when he praised the *Christus*’s presentation of Jesus’ physical attributes, calling it a “very dignified example” of Jesus’ likeness.⁶ Stephen L. Richards of the First Presidency likely viewed the *Christus* in person on a trip to Europe sometime during the 1950s and was so taken by it that he advocated for its placement in the Temple Square visitors’ center.⁷ The *Christus* arrived in Salt Lake City in 1959. That the image of Jesus represented by the *Christus* was so readily and heartily embraced by the LDS leadership of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should not be surprising since it portrays Jesus with stereotypically white features:

3. Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy*, 94.

4. John G. Turner, *The Mormon Jesus* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 269–70.

5. George Reynolds, “Man and His Varieties: The Negro Race,” *Juvenile Instructor* 3, no. 20 (Oct. 15, 1868): 157, available at <https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct320geor/page/157/mode/2up?view=theater/>.

6. George Reynolds, “The Personal Appearance of the Savior,” *Juvenile Instructor* (Aug. 15, 1904), 497–500, quoted in Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 269; and Noel A. Carmack, “Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture 1900–1999,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2000): 30.

7. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 270.

long, flowing hair parted in the middle; a long, straight, narrow nose; thin lips; and a strong, squared chin with a short, parted beard.

Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Peter Ahr describe Thorvaldsen's *Christus* as portraying a young Jesus with an "idealized body" that has "perfectly modeled classical features."⁸ Indeed, in his analysis of LDS depictions of Jesus between 1900 and 1999, Noel Carmack notes that the "formal order of Thorvaldsen's work exemplifies the symmetry and balance admired by mainstream Church members. This high regard for Thorvaldsen's formal classicism coincided with some Mormon authors' regard for Germanic physical attributes."⁹ John Turner further observes that Thorvaldsen's *Christus* is consonant with other LDS visual depictions of Jesus with white features.¹⁰ Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey describe the use of the *Christus* in LDS "welcome centers" around the world noting that while "Blacks were technically welcome . . . they first had to pass by the powerful white *Christus*."¹¹ And though it may be true that "in the past several years, the church has introduced racially diverse images of the savior into its videos and online exhibitions," Turner also observes that LDS depictions of Jesus in the meetinghouses, temples, and temple visitors' centers have a recognizable "sameness" with regards to Jesus' "skin color, hair color, and physique" and "reinforce the way Latter-day Saints understand their savior," i.e., a Jesus who is white.¹²

8. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Peter Ahr describe the *Christus* as portraying "a young man" with an "idealized body." Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Peter Ahr, "Bertel Thorvaldsen, Christus (Christ)," *Conversations: An Online Journal of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion* (2014), https://mavcor.yale.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdf/chu_and_ahr.pdf/.

9. Carmack, "Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture," 30.

10. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 269–73.

11. Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 254.

12. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 279, 280–81, 273. Capitalization from original.

Proximal to the time when the *Christus* was being considered for the purchase by the Church, prominent Church leadership were regularly rehashing now-discarded explanations for racial inequity—many of which privileged whiteness. Since it has been catalogued elsewhere, I will not recount the myriad teachings by prominent LDS Church leaders justifying the Church’s racial segregation that held sway between 1852 and 1978.¹³ Suffice it say, anti-Black LDS Church policy as enacted through the priesthood and temple ban was seen then as a divinely proclaimed institution that was premised on a variety of theories from the curse of Cain to a lack of fidelity the premortal life.¹⁴ Relatedly, and at the same time, whiteness was seen as symbol of purity and godliness.¹⁵

However, a less well-known incident occurred around this time: during the same era when the Church leaders were explicating these now-discarded theories of Black inferiority and close to the same

13. See, for instance, Lester E. Bush Jr. “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: A Historical Overview” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 22–68; Joanna Brooks, “The Possessive Investment in Rightness: White Supremacy and the Mormon Movement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no 3 (Fall 2018): 45–81; W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

14. Indeed, now-outdated official statements (e.g., First Presidency communications), semi-official statements (e.g., general conference addresses), and nonofficial sources (e.g., books written by prominent LDS leaders) justifying the priesthood and temple ban remain readily available. In an essay first published in 2013, the LDS Church asserts that “none of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church.” See The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics Essays*, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

15. See, for example, Spencer W. Kimball, “The Day of the Lamanites,” Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Oct. 7–9, 1960 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual), 32–37.

period of time when the Church was considering acquiring the *Christus*, at least two Church leaders quoted from the Publius Lentulus letter in general conference addresses. The Publius Lentulus letter is a forged document “written sometime between the tenth and fourteenth century, [that] falsely claimed to come from a governor of Judea during Christ’s lifetime.”¹⁶ The fabricated letter describes Jesus’ physical appearance thusly:

He is a man of medium size. . . . His hair is the color of the ripe hazel nut, straight down to his ears, but below the ears wavy and curled, with a bluish and bright reflection flowing over his shoulders. It is parted in two on the top of the head, after the pattern of the Nazarenes. His brow is smooth and very cheerful, with a face without wrinkle or spot, embellished by a ruddy complexion. His nose and mouth are faultless. His beard is abundant, and the color of his hair, not long, but divided at the chin. His aspect is simple and mature, his eyes are changeable and bright . . . He is the most beautiful among the children of men.¹⁷

Though the letter was a known fraud among the nineteenth-century Puritans, Blum and Harvey note that “by the early twentieth century, a group of white supremacists were so dedicated to making Jesus an emblem of their racial power that they consciously transformed it [the letter] from a tall tale to an established truth.”¹⁸ Thus, as Blum and Harvey go on to assert, “where the Publius Lentulus fraud was accepted, white supremacy was not far behind.”¹⁹ George F. Richards, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve, presented the Publius Lentulus letter’s description of Jesus’ physical appearance as an unquestioned

16. Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 20.

17. There are a variety of translations that are readily available in numerous print and online sources. This version is used in Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 20–21.

18. Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 21.

19. Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 69.

fact in his October 1949 general conference address.²⁰ Six and a half years later, apostle Spencer W. Kimball also quoted directly from the Publius Lentulus letter in his April 1956 general conference address.²¹ Further, alongside his sharing of this language over the conference pulpit, Kimball also reinforced the validity of the description of Jesus' physical attributes by revealing that the Publius Lentulus letter was read to the Quorum of the Twelve by President David O. McKay during a temple meeting just a few days earlier. And, in that same address, Kimball quoted from another description of Jesus that similarly presents an image of Jesus as white with rosy cheeks, light brown shoulder-length hair with loose curls, blue eyes, and a well-maintained forked beard. Though Kimball went on to suggest that any physical descriptions of Jesus are incomplete portrayals of who Jesus is, he nonetheless allows the representation of a white Jesus to stand as reflective of his visual appearance. Reflecting back on this, I think it is unlikely that Richards, Kimball, or McKay knew the Publius Lentulus letter was fraudulent when they shared it; yet it is nonetheless notable that they each gravitated toward language that presented Jesus as having stereotypically white physical attributes.

For lay LDS members at the time, knowing that the prophet, seer, and revelator for the LDS Church shared this physical description of Jesus in the temple with other prophets, seers, and revelators—coupled with the fact that the Publius Lentulus letter was shared over the pulpit at two different general conferences by two different apostles—would have given this image of Jesus an authoritative status (despite the reality

20. George F. Richards, "God so Loved the World," Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sept. 30–Oct. 2, 1949 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual), 150–53.

21. Spencer W. Kimball, "Jesus the Christ," Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apr. 6–8, 1956 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual), 118–21.

that the letter is a proven fraud). Pertinent to this analysis, the *Christus*'s representation of Jesus clearly aligned closely with descriptions of Jesus made by prominent LDS leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in public and non-public Church settings. These written descriptions and sculpted representations of Jesus likely reinforced preexisting racial bias and made them much easier to accept. Indeed, as John Turner notes, Mormons of the 1950s and 1960s saw in Thorvaldsen's *Christus* a "Jesus they recognized."²²

By any measure, the *Christus* is a magnificent piece of art. I, personally, find it to be one depiction of Jesus, among many, that moves me. The quality of the art is not in question, nor is there any intention here to impugn the artist in any way, nor should there be construed any suggestion that Thorvaldsen's statue is inherently racist. Rather, my point is that it seems to be no accident that the *Christus* has been favored by the Church and many of its members. Thorvaldsen's *Christus* reinforced both the Church's institutional proclivity for privileging images of Jesus as white and many LDS members' belief "in a fair-skinned Christ."²³ Given the social and theological climate of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the time when the *Christus* became an important piece of art for the LDS Church) and the well-documented beliefs and statements by LDS Church leaders that associated whiteness with divinely ordained power and privilege, it is neither surprising nor coincidental that prominent LDS Church leaders were attracted to written descriptions and artistic depictions of Jesus, such as the Publius Lentulus letter and the *Christus*, that reinforced this prejudice.

22. John G. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 269.

23. Carmack, "Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture," 30.

II. The New Symbol

Its Official Purpose and Meaning

In his April 2020 remarks announcing the new symbol, President Russell M. Nelson briefly described the symbol itself and then went on to explain the intended meaning behind it.²⁴ Nelson said that the symbol “includes the name of the Church contained within a cornerstone. . . . At the center of the symbol is a representation of Thorvaldsen’s marble statue the *Christus*. . . . Jesus Christ is standing under an arch.” This relatively brief description of the design was accompanied by a lengthier discussion of the LDS Church’s official intention for the symbol. Broadly speaking, Nelson suggested that the symbol was created and deployed to visually represent to LDS members and non-members the LDS Church’s institutional approach to, and relationship with, Jesus.

Nelson’s descriptions of the symbol and its meaning have two important facets. First, he implicitly acknowledges the socially constructed nature of symbolic interpretation by seeking to impose a clear institutional, authorized, official meaning upon this symbol. Perhaps not surprisingly, Nelson’s institutional meaning construction is fully self-referential and self-reinforcing. The official interpretation of the LDS Church’s *Christus*-based symbol points back to the LDS Church institution, and conversely, the LDS Church institution uses this new visual schema to symbolically claim Jesus’ imprimatur. In fact, the symbol’s meaning, according to Nelson, is almost exclusively concerned with the connection between Jesus and the LDS Church as an institution, apparently intended to suggest both that faith in the one requires faith in the other and that Jesus is institutionally aligned with the LDS Church. Nelson makes this explicit through an inversion of Ephesians 2:20 where Paul identifies “Jesus Christ Himself” as the “Chief

24. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening the Heavens for Help,” Apr. 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/04/37nelson?lang=eng>.

cornerstone” for the “household of God.” In the new LDS symbol, the LDS Church is Jesus’ cornerstone. In sum, the symbol’s imagery collapses “His gospel” (Christology) and “His Church” (LDS ecclesiology) into a single non-differentiated unit.

Second, Nelson seems to acknowledge that this particular physical portrayal of Jesus is meaningful but only offers an explanation for certain aspects of the image. To start, he notes that the symbol portrays Jesus “reaching out” and asserts that Jesus’ extended arms should be understood to reference his willingness to “embrace all who will come unto Him.” In other words, Nelson focuses on the body position of Jesus. Additionally, he notes that Jesus is “at the center of the symbol. . . . Standing under an arch” and further states that this imagery should be understood to connect “the restored gospel” (i.e., the LDS Church’s teachings, ordinances, and structures) with “the *living*, resurrected Christ” (emphasis original). Here, Nelson focuses on the space that the image of Jesus occupies relative to the other design elements. Thus, consistent with other aspects of the symbol that have already been discussed, Nelson casts the physical portrayal of Jesus in the symbol as only having meanings that reinforce the LDS Church’s institutional position. The fact that the *Christus* is based on a white body is not addressed.

As Nelson stated, the LDS institution’s symbol represents how the institution sees itself and seeks to influence how it is seen by others. This should not be surprising—this is part of the purpose of branding.²⁵ However, given the LDS Church’s complicated history surrounding race and its historical effort to establish its institutional credibility through an embrace of “whiteness,” as W. Paul Reeve extensively and skillfully explores,²⁶ it seems like a stark omission that Nelson does not

25. Stephen A. Greyser and Mats Urde, “What Does Your Corporate Brand Stand For?,” *Harvard Business Review* (Jan.–Feb. 2019), available at <https://hbr.org/2019/01/what-does-your-corporate-brand-stand-for/>.

26. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*.

acknowledge the fact that Thorvaldsen's statue depicts Jesus in a white body. In fact, Nelson's not-noticing the whiteness of the symbol's Jesus imagery leaves Jesus-as-white as an unquestioned fact.

Scholar Joanna Brooks has written about multiple ways in which LDS Church leaders sought to "preserve racial innocence" by failing to "acknowledge racism in the Mormon past and present."²⁷ Brooks suggests that throughout history, the LDS Church has been willfully blind to the racial impact of specific policies, practices, and doctrines, and instead "gestur[ed] toward a transcendence of racial issues that cost whites nothing and left segregation and white supremacy completely intact."²⁸ Building on the work of historian Robin Bernstein, Brooks suggests that this "performance of not-noticing," "active state of repelling knowledge," and "holy ignorance" when it comes to issues of race is characteristic of a pattern of actions that can rightly be called "racial innocence."²⁹

The Roll-Out

This new *Christus*-based symbol was unveiled on April 4, 2020 in the midst of a worldwide pandemic that disproportionately affected marginalized people (particularly people of color).³⁰ It was also in the immediate aftermath of the February 23, 2020 murder of Ahmaud Arbery and the March 13, 2020 murder of Breonna Taylor—which gained national prominence and that exacerbated already strained

27. Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy*, 192.

28. Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy*, 94. See, for example, Brooks's discussion of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the Osmonds, 89–106.

29. Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, quoted in Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy*, 86.

30. Sherita Hill Golden, "Coronavirus in African Americans and Other People of Color," Johns Hopkins Medicine, Apr. 20, 2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid19-racial-disparities/>.

racial tensions in the United States.³¹ Even in this context, when the new symbol was released, LDS leaders implied a universality to the symbol's imagery despite its depiction of a white body. Further, on May 11, 2020—shortly after this unveiling of the *Christus*-based symbol and recognizing that artwork can “teach principles of the gospel”—the First Presidency instructed that there would be a new emphasis on prominently displaying specifically approved depictions of Jesus in the entries and foyers of church buildings.³² Rather than creating a more diverse set of images to balance the Europeanness of the *Christus*-based symbol announced a month earlier, the twenty-two pieces of art approved for chapel use continued the “white Jesus” imagery. This May 11, 2020 announcement about approved foyer art was *also* made without any seeming recognition that the LDS Church's official Jesus imagery was exclusively white. In a blog post, Sam Brunson noted, “All of the paintings church buildings can choose from feature a white European Jesus. In fact, other than one Black boy in one painting, everybody in each of the paintings is a white *European*.”³³ These sentiments were echoed by a number of other commentators.³⁴

The context seemed to raise the stakes of these issues. Though the new symbol and approved artwork were likely decided sometime before, the heightened national attention to issues of racial injustice

31. Haley Price, William Jones, and Alina Scott, “Violence Against Black People in America: A ClioVis Timeline,” *Not Even Past* (blog), July 31, 2020, <https://notevenpast.org/violence-against-black-people-in-america-a-cliovis-timeline/>.

32. First Presidency letter, May 11, 2020, available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/multimedia/file/reverence-for-savior-in-meeting-houses.pdf/>.

33. Sam Brunson, “Whiteness and Jesus,” *By Common Consent* (blog), Sept. 16, 2020. <https://bycommonconsent.com/2020/09/16/whiteness-and-jesus/>.

34. See, for instance, MargaretOH, “Art in Meetinghouse Foyers,” *Exponent II* (blog), May 11, 2020, <https://exponentii.org/blog/art-in-meetinghouse-foyers/>; and Michael Austin, “The Graven Image in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *By Common Consent* (blog), May 11, 2020, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2020/05/11/the-graven-image-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction/>.

were pressing. Between the announcement of the symbol and the announcement of the approved foyer art, there had been another high-profile death of a person of color, this time the unarmed Mike Ramos in Austin, Texas on April 24, 2020. The announcement of LDS foyer art came just two weeks before the murder of George Floyd and the eruption of the Black Lives Matter protests.³⁵

III. Briefly: The Theological Impact of the Symbol

As a white man, I am not well situated to spend much time discussing the impact that Jesus-as-white imagery has on the BIPOC community. I will, however, briefly discuss the possible theological impacts of enshrining a white Jesus.

One of the powerful observations coming out of liberation theologies generally is the recognition that the *social situation* of Jesus (the person) is a theologically meaningful aspect of his mission. James Cone, a key figure in the development of Black liberation theology, explains that when we lose sight of Jesus' racial/ethnic background, we lose a critical aspect of who Jesus was, which in turn hampers our theological understanding of him. This revolutionary analysis, which plumbed the depths of Jesus' relationships with and within contemporaneous societal structures, resulted in seeing Jesus' life and death as God's intentional act of identifying with marginalized peoples and his work to liberate them from social and political oppression (the poor for Gustavo Gutiérrez, women for Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Black people for Cone).³⁶ Though some rightly point out that the pro-

35. Price, Jones, and Scott, "Violence Against Black People in America."

36. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation (15th Anniversary Edition)*, translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

liberation of various liberation theologies—each from the perspective of a particular (local) marginalized group, and each claiming broader (global) application—resulted in liberation theory “chaos,” these liberation theologians’ Christological perspectives successfully established that who Jesus was socially is as theologically important as who he was ontically.³⁷ What’s more, liberation theologians exposed the reality that social context has *always* impacted how Jesus is understood. Gutiérrez, Ruether, and Cone all point to the ways in which “dominant” (white, male, and affluent) readings of the Jesus story both reflect contemporary culture and serve to reinforce the status quo by allowing those in power to maintain power at the expense of marginalized groups.

Applied to the specific discussion of racial innocence and the new LDS symbol (and other Jesus-as-white imagery), and when considered against the “whiteness of Mormonism” historically,³⁸ one theological effect of the LDS Church’s perpetuation of unacknowledged white Jesus imagery that reinforces the notion of a universalized idea of race—or said differently, a nonracialized idea of the universal that is functionally expressed in white imagery—is the denial of non-white racial categories as a meaningful source for connection with the divine. James Cone observes, “the particularity of Jesus’ person as disclosed in his Jewishness is indispensable for Christological analysis. . . . It connects God’s salvation drama in Jesus with the Exodus-Sinai event. . . . Jesus’ Jewishness therefore was essential to his person. He was not a ‘universal man’ but a particular Jew. . . . His Jewishness establishes the concreteness of his existence in history, without which Christology inevitably moves in the direction of docetism.”³⁹ Cone implies that because Jesus’ racial/ethnic characteristics matter, our individual racial/ethnic characteristics must also matter. However, by attempting to transcend race through white

37. Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 238–49.

38. Darron T. Smith, “Negotiating Black Self-Hate within the LDS Church,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 38.

39. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 109. Capitalization from the original.

imagery, race (and specifically any non-white racial category) is relegated to a non-meaningful, even trivial, part of LDS members' eternal identity. Cone goes so far as to suggest that a modern-day understanding of Jesus' ancient racial/ethnic roots not only is required to make room for a full embrace of racial difference among humankind but is foundational if we are to be able to see the image of God and Jesus in marginalized populations.⁴⁰ Thus, theologically, the new LDS symbol's racial-transcendence-as-symbolized-in-whiteness seems to embody the notion that, in the eternal scheme of things, race does not matter. Or, said more concretely, that formative earthly experiences, points of connection, and meaning creation that accompany one's racial identification and participation are only eternally relevant to the extent they are nonracial. Finally, it suggests that the "image" of God does not (and indeed cannot) include racial considerations.

The real-world impacts of this theological reality are stark. For instance, in her 2019 *Dialogue* essay, Daylin Amesimeku describes how she bought her daughter a puzzle with an image of a Jesus that was "as dark-skinned as my husband." Her daughter's response was "That's not Jesus, that's Dada." Amesimeku notes, "we do not have any images of a 'conventional' Jesus in our home. Her [the daughter's] imagery of Jesus came strictly from her nursery class at church and visits to Grandma's home." Amesimeku worries that rather than seeing Jesus within familial relations, the prominence of light-skinned images of Jesus could mean that her daughter may believe that "Jesus and Heavenly Father belong to the family of the classmates in her nursery class and not her own," and thus "because the current image of deity was a foreigner to my little girl . . . she could see herself being foreign to deity as well."⁴¹ Lest this be

40. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 122–26. See this idea explored with some additional reflections in Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2013).

41. Daylin Amesimeku, "Imagery and Identity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 52, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 92–93.

dismissed as misunderstanding confined to childhood, Kirstie Stanger Weyland, in her web-only feature essay for the same issue of *Dialogue*, describes her fellow BYU classmate's incorrect assumptions that "(1) to be perfect we all need to be white and (2) Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are white."⁴² Powerfully, Weyland goes on to assert that "if God wanted me to be white, he would've made me white in the first place. My physical features are connected to my African heritage as well as my skin color which are a part of my identity."⁴³ Indeed, *Exponent II* blogger MargaretOH notes, "these [white] images serve only as mirrors for a small subset of the LDS population. They do not give LDS people of color an image of the divine that reflects their lives. They do not give women a sense of the potential of their relationship with Christ. They do not prompt white members to look out beyond their own narrow experiences."⁴⁴ And in the essay "A Balm in Gilead: Reconciling Black Bodies within a Mormon Imagination," Janan Graham-Russell notes, "We find wholeness in seeing ourselves in the eternal [via representations of the divine in "deep skin tones"] in that we recognize that our existence is not an aberration, but instead, it is intentional."⁴⁵

Further, Cone and his fellow liberation theologians helped us see that, absent accounting for things like race, gender, and social status, we run the risk of simply using theology as a tool of retrenchment. In this same vein, Brooks pointedly observes: "almost without exception, when predominantly white American Christianities have institutionalized, because institutionalization often requires the physical and social

42. Kirstie Stanger Weyland, "Racism at BYU," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (blog), Oct. 1, 2019, <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/dialogue/racism-at-byu/>.

43. Stanger Weyland, "Racism at BYU."

44. MargaretOH, "Art in Meetinghouse Foyers."

45. Janan Graham-Russell, "A Balm in Gilead: Reconciling Black Bodies within a Mormon Imagination," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 191.

capital that whiteness can offer access to, emancipatory possibilities have constricted.”⁴⁶ Thus, in adopting official Jesus imagery that is premised on a white body, the LDS Church as an institution not only fails to represent and reflect the diversity of ways in which Jesus might be seen and understood by its members, it may also unintentionally serve to perpetuate now-discarded approaches to race and LDS ecclesiastical power and access. As Sam Brunson observes, “We may not know what [Jesus] looked like, but we certainly know that He wasn’t European. . . . To the extent that we’re only willing to represent Him as a white Scandinavian, then, we’re perpetuating a myth of white supremacy, albeit without intending to do so. We’re sending the message that since we don’t know what He looks like, only white skin is good enough to represent our Savior.”⁴⁷ So, rather than embracing Cone’s recognition that “what people think about God, Jesus Christ, and the Church cannot be separated from their own social and political status in a given society”⁴⁸ by providing many, racially varied depictions of Jesus to reflect multiple social and political realities of LDS members (or, conversely, refusing to authorize any particular image), the LDS Church has enacted a form of racial innocence by privileging white imagery to gesture at transcendence.

IV. Conclusion

Historian Rebecca de Schweinitz observes that LDS Church leadership has a history of seeking to “ignore or not draw attention to racial issues in the Church and its history.”⁴⁹ Darius Gray generously frames it this

46. Brooks, *Mormonism and White Supremacy*, 25.

47. Brunson, “Whiteness and Jesus.”

48. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 41.

49. Rebecca de Schweinitz, “‘There Is No Equality’: William E. Berrett, BYU, and Healing the Wounds of Racism in the Latter-day Saint Past and Present,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 52, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 74, 80.

way: “sometimes racism is so subtle, we may not realize we’re expressing it.”⁵⁰ Maybe LDS leadership just did not realize that a symbol of white Jesus could be problematic. Maybe LDS leadership did not realize that the Church’s history of racism continues to have very modern reverberations and that this logo seemingly supports discredited views on race advocated by past LDS leaders. Maybe LDS leadership did not realize that including a white Jesus in the LDS Church’s new symbol constrains members’ future efforts to “see” Jesus in new ways. Whatever the case, the idea of racial innocence provides a framework examine the lack of official acknowledgment of ways in which the new *Christus*-based symbol privileges whiteness without acknowledgement.

To be clear, I am not asserting that the *Christus*-based symbol (nor the Church-approved foyer art) is in and of itself inherently racist. Indeed, the LDS Church has made meaningful strides in addressing its past with regards to racial issues, including specifically the 2018 “Be One” event, President Dallin H. Oaks’s recent calls to “root out racism,” and President Nelson’s notable work with the NAACP.⁵¹ The problem explored herein is the Church’s failure to acknowledge and grapple with the *Christus*-based symbol’s privileging of whiteness (and thus its implicit ties to past racially charged ideology) and how this symbol, and other similar imagery, impacts members of the global LDS Church.

50. Darius Gray, “Moving Forward Together,” *Ensign*, June 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2018/06/commemorating-the-1978-revelation/moving-forward-together?lang=eng>.

51. See for instance Oak’s October 2020 general conference address, “Love Your Enemies,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/10/17oaks?lang=eng>, or his October 27, 2020 devotional at Brigham Young University, “Racism and Other Challenges,” <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-oaks-byu-devotional-october-2020-talk>; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “First Presidency and NAACP Leaders Announce a Shared Vision to ‘Learn from and Serve One Another,’” June 14, 2021, Newsroom, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-naacp-shared-vision/>.

Some might suggest that the symbol does not attempt to depict race per se, that Jesus is beyond racial categories, or that the LDS Church is “color-blind” when it comes to Jesus’ race. They might say that the symbol seeks to portray universality when it comes to Jesus imagery. Yet, Blum and Harvey counter that any claim to a “universal Jesus” while continuing to “create visual imagery that associate[s] Jesus with whiteness” is little more than “a change verbally but not materially.”⁵² Indeed, Blum and Harvey suggest that “no group performs the rhetoric-versus-image magic better than the Latter-day Saints.”⁵³ While Nelson explained that the symbol reinforces the connection between Jesus and the LDS institution, the symbol also carries and communicates unaddressed racial dynamics. What are we as a church to do about it? Darius Gray offers us one path forward: “the first step toward healing is the realization that the problem exists, even among some of us in the Church. . . . We cannot fix that which we overlook or deny.”⁵⁴

52. Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 250.

53. Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 253.

54. Gray, “Moving Forward Together.”

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AP

'angel'

annie Poon

Annie Poon, *Angel*, 2017,
etching, aquatint, and monoprint
on copper, 7.5" x 9.5"

TINY PAPERS: PERUVIAN MORMON SUBSTANCES OF RELATEDNESS

Jason Palmer

JACOBA:¹ I have my genealogical abilities, and I wield them as I see fit.

JASON: And you saw fit to marry your son to Chalo's daughter?

JACOBA: Correct. Very correct. And it's best if those who marry are not primos, so if I could find a document to eliminate the blood, all the better.

—*Translated interview transcript. Camp Atoka, Utah. July 3, 2017.*

Within Jacoba's Latter-day Saint kin-building model, it was important that her Utah-dwelling children and grandchildren marry not only Mormons² but Peruvian Mormons. In one of her many matchmaking trips back to her homeland of Peru for that very purpose, she discovered

1. This and all other study participant names are pseudonyms unless otherwise noted.

2. Throughout this article, the term "Mormon" is used to refer to people and things connected to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints even though the top leaders of that church have largely eschewed that term within their official dogma. I continue to use "Mormon" because none of my study participants adhered to all aspects of the official dogma of their church, yet most of them still counted themselves members of it. For example, many of my study participants, both Anglo and Peruvian, continued to identify as "Mormons" even after their church's 2018 injunction against that moniker. In other words, my continuing usage of the identity category "Mormon" honors the social fact that the relatedness that my study participants felt toward each other as Mormons remained beyond the control of any of the many organizations that adhere to the Book of Mormon.

that her son Ammon had an affinity for her nephew Chalo's daughter Leslie. According to a Peruvian Mormon model of genealogy mixed with an Anglo³ Mormon one, Ammon and Leslie were primos. Therefore, according to the Peruvian incest taboo, it was best that they not marry each other. At least, they thought it was best until Jacoba found a papelito (tiny paper) that changed Chalo's ancestors and, as such, the marriageability of his descendants.

Below, I provide the digitally recorded conversations that occurred around the campfire both before and after that epigraphic excerpt. In table 1, I provide relevant data describing this study's cast of characters, some of whom sat around that campfire. Most of all, throughout this article, I provide a context for understanding how kinship is a social construct. Kinship is materially built, not biologically inherent. To accentuate kinship's materiality, I use jarringly tangible words, such as "substances." During my study, Mormon substances interacted with Peruvian substances to coagulate into a Peruvian Mormon kinship that dissolved the membrane separating relations often taken for granted as biologically determined. Ultimately, Peruvian Mormon kinship blurred the boundary that distinguished cousins from siblings and even ancestors from descendants.

I use the terms "kinship" or "relatedness" to mean the sharing of both literal and metaphorical substances in ways that make the sharers into "relatives." I call the various means through which kin substances are shared "kin systems." In this article, I will demonstrate that the Anglo Mormon kin system—meaning the kin system of Euro-American, white members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—used unidirectional pathways for substance sharing that were visualized as vertical and hierarchical. Indeed, they were depicted as "family trees." Therefore, I consider the Anglo Mormon kin system that I observed during my study to have been largely "arboreal." In contrast,

3. "Anglo" was the polite term that my Peruvian Mormon study participants used to refer to North American white people. A less polite term was "gringo."

Table 1. Table of relevant study participant relationships. Participants are listed in order of their arrival to Utah.

	Relationship to Utah	Relationship to Jacoba (in US kinship terminology)	Religious background
Jason	Birthplace in 1979	Spouse of Jacoba's half-sister Nilda's daughter Elvira	Mormon
Jacoba	Immigrated in 1982	Self	Catholic-to-Mormon
Arcadio	Immigrated in 1982	Jacoba's spouse	Catholic-to-Mormon
Ammon	Birthplace in 1982	Jacoba's son	Mormon
Nilda	Immigrated in 1994	Jacoba's half-sister	Catholic-to-Mormon
Elvira	Immigrated in 2000	Jacoba's half-sister Nilda's daughter	Catholic-to-Mormon
Mido	Immigrated in 2001	Jacoba's half-sister Nilda's half-brother	Catholic
Carol	Immigrated in 2001	Spouse of Jacoba's half-sister Nilda's half-brother	Catholic
Marina	Immigrated in 2014	Had children with the man who had children with Jacoba's mother	Catholic
Chalo	Immigrated in 2016	Raised as a brother to Jacoba's nieces and nephews	Catholic-to-Mormon
Leslie	Immigrated in 2017	Jacoba's non-blood nephew Chalo's daughter and Jacoba's son Ammon's spouse	Catholic-to-Mormon
Riana	Immigrated in 2017	Jacoba's son Ammon's daughter	Mormon

the Peruvian Mormon kin system was more “rhizomatic,” meaning that it contained fewer predetermined pathways and that the sharing of kin substances occurred in multiple directions, upending generational boundaries in ways that mixed ancestor-to-descendant hierarchies.

During my ethnographic research with Anglo and Peruvian Mormons in Peru and Utah from 2014 to 2021, nobody exemplified the complexity of those *substantial* interactions more than Jacoba. Through

her kin-building, Jacoba combined her Peruvianness and her Mormonism in unique ways, revealing the substances that she used as kin-building materials to be, among others: blood, food, drink, and tiny papers.

Linguistic Resistance to Blood and Tiny Papers

Jacoba Arriátegui was one of the principal participants in my study on Peruvian Mormonism. She was also my tía. She was also the activities coordinator for our Spanish-speaking congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter, the Church) in Salsands,⁴ Utah, a congregation that I joined as part of my full-time year of anthropological field work in 2017. Among many other positionalities, Jacoba was a Peruvian immigrant,⁵ a Lamanite,⁶ a Latina in Utah,⁷ a leader in her barrio hispano,⁸ a naturalized US citizen,⁹ a *mujerista* theologian,¹⁰ a returned missionary (having served an official, full-time LDS mission

4. A pseudonym for a lakeside city in northern Utah.

5. Erica Vogel, *Migrant Conversions: Transforming Connections Between Peru and South Korea* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

6. Arcia Tecun, “Pedro and Pita Built Peter Priesthood’s Mansion and Now They Work the Grounds: Whose *Masc* Does ‘the Lamanite’ Wear?” *Mormon Studies Review* 9 (2022): 1–14.

7. Brittany Romanello, “Multiculturalism as Resistance: Latina Migrants Navigate US Mormon Spaces,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 53, no. 1 (2020): 5–31.

8. Ignacio M. García, “A Barrio Perspective on Building Zion in the Twenty-First Century,” in *A Book of Mormons: Latter-Day Saints on a Modern-Day Zion*, edited by Emily W. Jensen and Tracy McKay-Lamb (Ashland, Ore.: White Cloud Press, 2015), 69–75.

9. Ulla D. Berg, *Mobile Selves: Race, Migration, and Belonging in Peru and the U.S.* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

10. Sujeý Vega, “*Mujerista* Theology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 598–607.

as an elderly woman together with her spouse), a matriarch,¹¹ a wedding decoration business owner, an LDS temple-recommend holder, and a Saint. However, I am reserving most of those facets of her personhood for future publications. Here, with the permission of my friends and family whose everyday realities formed the composite ethnographic character whom I have chosen to name “Jacoba,” I delve instead into another aspect of the crossroads between her Latter-day Sainthood and her Peruvianness. In this article, I focus exclusively on Jacoba’s identity as a kin-builder.

This article is about “kinship” and other terms that pertain to making humans into relatives. Words like “primos” and “tía” represent a few more of those kin terms. I leave them in Spanish for a reason. They are untranslatable. Though they roughly translate linguistically into “cousins” and “aunt” respectively, they translate relationally within Peruvian Mormonism into complex concepts that encapsulate more emotions and information than that which “cousins” and “aunt” evoked in the Anglo Mormon society that raised me inside a racially and religiously exclusive suburb of Utah in the 1980s and 1990s.¹² I grew up in a society wherein it was difficult “to convince an American that blood as a fluid has nothing in it which causes ties to be deep and strong.”¹³ In other words, I grew up around people who never paused to consider that DNA—blood—might not be the only kin substance in the universe and that gonads, gametes, and adoption agencies might not be the only kin pathways. With the advent of genome sequencing and the use

11. Jason Palmer, “*La Familia* versus *The Family*: Matriarchal Patriarchies in Peruvian Mormonism,” *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 1, no. 1 (2022): 123–51.

12. Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

13. David M. Schneider, “What Is Kinship All About?,” in *Kinship Studies in the Morgan Centennial Year*, edited by Priscilla Reining (Washington, DC: Anthropological Society of Washington, 1972), 48.

of DNA as forensic evidence, the already difficult work of convincing Anglos that there were substances other than DNA that made kinship “real” rather than “fictive” only became harder, especially among US Mormons, who, by that time, treated biogenetic and documentable kinship “as a vehicle of salvation.”¹⁴ Therefore, even though I was a fluent Spanish speaker by the year 2000, having served a two-year mission in Bolivia, it did not occur to me that the meaning of “primos” and “tía” could have at its root anything other than a linearly sequential series of shared wombs and shared DNA. Alternatives to the kin models of my youth were not visible to me until Jacoba began to incorporate me into a Peruvian Mormon kin system that was not nearly as biogenetic and arboreal as the Anglo Mormon one that had structured my emotional attachments to those to whom I felt related. Once Jacoba became my tía in a sense just as real as the sense that my mother’s “sister by blood” was my “aunt,” I saw the word “tía” as untranslatable.

In 2001, in a sacred “sealing” ceremony within the holy walls of the Church’s Salt Lake City temple, my Peruvian Mormon fiancé Elvira¹⁵ and I formed the nucleus of a Church-sponsored, heaven-approved, eternal, couple-centric kin entity called “a forever family”¹⁶ that united my Anglo Mormon rearing with Elvira’s Peruvian Mormon rearing. Thus situated, I have inhabited a decades-long vantage from which to both shape and observe the convoluted melding of two disparate systems of relatedness: the Anglo Mormon and the Peruvian Mormon. In marrying Elvira, I married into a conglomeration of mostly Mormon, mostly Peruvian relatives that called itself, always in Spanish, La

14. Rosalynde Welch, “Theology of the Family,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 497.

15. Not a pseudonym.

16. Jane McBride, “Finally a Forever Family,” *Liahona* 47, no. 7 (June 2018): 69, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2018/07/children/finally-a-forever-family?lang=eng>.

Familia. Jacoba was the matriarch of La Familia's Costa clan, a staunchly Mormon faction of La Familia. Jacoba's husband Arcadio Costa's business near Salsands, Utah formed the principal node on La Familia's network of family-based migration from Peru to Utah ever since the early 1980s.

Family-based migration is a phenomenon whereby a few members of a family move into a new country and expend the energy necessary to establish themselves socially, economically, spiritually, and linguistically. Upon breaking many of the barriers necessary for such establishments, they are then able to facilitate the arrival of more members of the same family to the exact same area. These incoming family members do not have to expend nearly as much energy as their predecessors to function in the new place. One way to stifle family-based migration, from a xenophobic nation-state's perspective, is to limit the definition of "family members." After the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the United States was no longer able to deliberately exclude migrants simply for not hailing from historically white countries. However, Congress wrote into the act itself a way to ensure the same racist result as the scientifically racist National Origins Formula that the act ostensibly abolished.¹⁷ Instead of excluding migrants for not having white ancestors, the act, which remains in effect to this day, excludes migrants for not having white kin systems. It does so by only allowing certain, sufficiently assimilated migrants—as individuals, not collectives—to "petition" only certain family members for US immigrant visas. The act designates the only family members eligible for such petitioning as "direct family members." The "direct" aspect of that designation was originally thought to "naturally" denote only four kin categories: spouses, parents, siblings, and children. Even more "naturally," the "family members" aspect of the designation means

17. Madeline Y. Hsu and Ellen D. Wu, "Smoke and Mirrors: Conditional Inclusion, Model Minorities, and the Pre-1965 Dismantling of Asian Exclusion," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 34, no. 4 (2015): 43–65.

that the only substances that can truly relate a potential immigrant to the individual petitioner are DNA (blood) or legal documents (tiny papers). Conveniently for its white supremacist signatories, the 1965 immigration act's designation of "family members" does not allow for food, drink, or the many other substances that, when shared in place and over time, create true relatedness within some of the world's least white places, such as those found in Peru.

In sum, the act's "conditional inclusion"¹⁸ only allows entry to migrants who can squeeze their transnational, abundance-model kin systems into a stifling, scarcity-model kin system that stresses "nuclear 'family stability' grounded in strict gender roles."¹⁹ Only those migrants willing to appear to relinquish what family means for them in their home countries get to be counted as model minorities with "strong family values"²⁰ in the United States.

During my study, La Familia did not willingly capitulate to US kin systems, and they wielded Spanish kin terms as if to mark their resistance to the 1965 act's racist kin limitations. I observed that even the monolingual English-speaking, Utah-born, LDS, Peruvian American teenage members of La Familia switched to Spanish for kin terms that they considered untranslatable, such as "primos," "tía," and "La Familia." When I became a doctoral student of anthropology in 2014, that untranslatability intrigued me. I began to ask about it. One of my Peruvian American nieces (sobrinas) responded in English with an utterance similar to the following.

I say, "mis primas" because it's not like they are my "cousins." That just sounds gross. Like, eww, "COUSINS!" Seriously? That's like a white thing to say. No offence, Tío Jason, but yeah. Cousin is not primo. Not at all. Are you kidding me? Primo is familia. It's strong. It's complicated. It's deep. Not like some weakling "cousin."

18. Hsu and Wu, "Smoke and Mirrors," 47.

19. Hsu and Wu, "Smoke and Mirrors," 46.

20. Hsu and Wu, "Smoke and Mirrors," 47.

What also intrigued me was that La Familia was predominantly Mormon and that Mormonism had an outsized focus on family in comparison to other Christianities.²¹ I began to wonder how it would feel to be unable to translate from one's dominant society the very concept—family—foundational both to one's personhood and to one's religion.²² I formulated a research question. How did Peruvian Mormons square familia with family without losing either their Mormonness or their Peruvianness?

In this article, I argue that as Jacoba built La Familia within a context of Anglo Mormonism's forever family, she ran into barriers stemming from the clash of two different kin systems, the Mormon and the Peruvian. I further argue that as she dug paths to circumvent those barriers, she revealed that the material and spiritual substances of her relatedness held the power to sustain a kin system without barriers. In my understanding, that kin system formed the core of Peruvian Mormonism.

Often, in order for Jacoba to consider other humans to be kin, she first had to manipulate her Peruvian Mormon substances of relatedness—blood, food, drink, and tiny papers—to (1) build humans into Peruvians, (2) build humans into Mormons, (3) build humans into potential residents of Utah, (4) build humans into a collective, rhizomatic system of place-based mutual indebtedness called “pacha” (explained below), (5) build humans into individual slots on her FamilySearch.org family tree, and (6) ritually graft humans onto that tree inside Mormon temples in ways recognized both on earth and in

21. Fenella Cannell, “Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity,” in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, edited by Fenella Cannell (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–50.

22. H. J. François Dengah II, Elizabeth Bingham Thomas, Erica Hawvermale, and Essa Temple, “‘Find That Balance’: The Impact of Cultural Consonance and Dissonance on Mental Health among Utah and Mormon Women,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2019): 439–58.

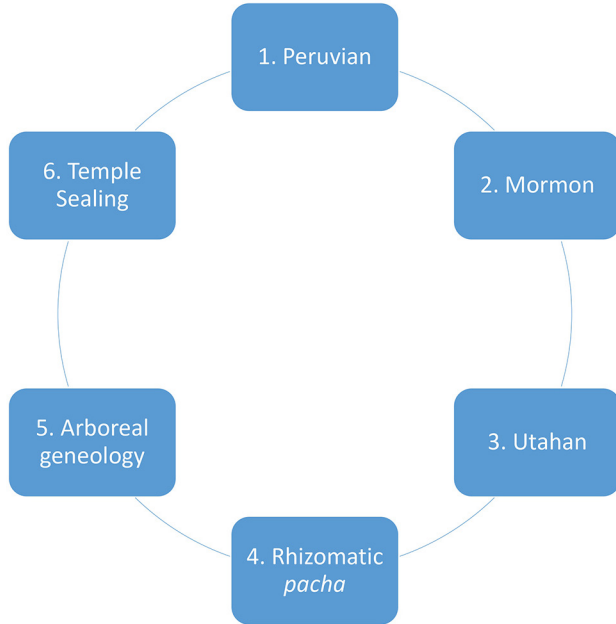


Figure 1.
Jacoba's phases
of kin building

heaven in an act called “sealing” (also explained below). Jacoba did not conceptualize those building plans as discrete “phases” as I have done above (see figure 1), and she certainly did not proceed through them in numerical order during her kin-building. However, she only fully admitted humans into La Familia when they met the essence of all six of those aspects of kin construction.

Cancelling Blood with Food, Drink, and Tiny Papers

As kin-building required intense work, Jacoba preferred it when some of her six phases were already complete. Therefore, in seeking a new daughter-in-law, she was overjoyed when, during a Halloween party that she sponsored in Lima among the cadre of La Familia that still lived in Peru, her son Ammon appeared to be falling in love with someone who fulfilled all but Phase Three, Phase Five, and Phase Six. Leslie was already Peruvian (Phase One) and already Mormon (Phase

Two). Furthermore, she already called Jacoba “tía,” meaning that she had danced enough Valicha (a folkloric dance from Cusco that Jacoba believed stemmed from her Book of Mormon ancestors, the Lamanites), drunk enough of Peru’s national soft drink, Inca Kola, and eaten at enough of Jacoba’s polladas (chicken-frying fundraisers) in close enough proximity to La Familia to become kin to La Familia in a place-based, convivial way (Phase Four). Only three challenges remained. Phase Three involved bringing Leslie to Utah with a tiny paper called a fiancé visa, which I will address later. Phase Six involved temple sealing, which I will also discuss later. Phase Five, which I will discuss now, involved adapting a rhizomatic kin model into an arboreal one in order to change the specificity of Leslie’s relationship to Jacoba. Leslie needed to transition from being Jacoba’s son’s prima to being Jacoba’s son’s wife. In so doing, Leslie would take her hierarchical place below Jacoba upon an arboreal diagram of “direct-line ancestry” that Jacoba refurbished in order to get the abundance model of La Familia closer to counting as “a forever family” within the scarcity model of Anglo Mormonism.

Before delving into the substances of relatedness that Jacoba manipulated—and eliminated—in order to perform such a feat, I must first attempt to translate the untranslatable so as to elucidate the focus group transcript below and its talk of “blood” and “documents.” In La Familia, there were two generational groups that had little to do with what Anglo Mormons might have called “blood descent” and more to do with relationally dancing upon, eating from, and spilling non-alcoholic drink onto the same local spot of earth from whence the rhythms, foods, and drinks sprang. Those generational groups were called “Los Primos” and “Los Tíos.” If you were a member of either of those groups—meaning that you shared a sufficiently complex mix of blood, food, drink, and tiny papers over a sufficient amount of time with La Familia—you would use “tío” or “tía” to refer to most members one or more generations older than you. You would use “primo” or “prima” to refer to most members in your same generational group. You would use “sobrino” or “sobrina” to refer to most members one or more

generations younger than you. Considering the breadth of different relations that came attached to each of those generational labels within La Familia, “tía” only happened to translate to “aunt” occasionally. “Tía” just as easily meant “my spouse’s cousin’s sister-in-law’s godfather’s grandmother” as it did “my father’s sister.”

There was an additional kin term translation important to the transcript below that was even more incommensurable within La Familia’s assimilation to Mormonism than tía was to aunt. That kin term was *hermanos* (siblings). If you were a member of La Familia, you would use “hermanos” to refer to everyone in your same generational group with whom you grew up under one roof. Therefore, La Familia did not distinguish between half-siblings, stepsiblings, “full siblings,” and siblings by blood. It did not even distinguish between siblings, cousins, nieces, goddaughters, and uncles so long as all were the same approximate age and grew up in the same household, however loosely conglomerated. “Hermanos” included everyone raised together on the same food and drink in the same place. Peruvian parents, tíos, godparents, and grandparents carefully constructed the bodies of hermanos over time with the substance of locally grown, homemade food until those bodies consisted of the same amino acids as the earth’s bounty and as each other. That formulation made all into one related body in ways just as literal as the ways through which shared DNA naturalized kin within the idiom of blood.²³

Yet, being a Mormon parent in addition to being a Peruvian parent, Jacoba considered herself as having at her disposal more building materials of siblingship than simply Peruvian cachangas (frybread) and *api* (a sweet corn drink). As our conversation with Chalo around the campfire at Church-owned Camp Atoka, Utah in 2017 resumes below, Jacoba demonstrated the genealogical prowess that she mentioned in the epigraph.

23. Catherine Allen, “Ushnus and Interiority,” in *Inca Sacred Space: Landscape, Site and Symbol in the Andes*, edited by Frank Meddens, Katie Willis, Colin McEwan, and Nicholas Branch (London: Archetype Publications, 2014), 71–77.

She reshuffled the substances involved in “growing up together” along with those of blood and tiny papers so that her sobrino Chalo’s daughter Leslie could become her daughter-in-law. In so doing, she revealed a fundamental difference between La Familia and forever family.

CHALO: So, I asked my tía Jacoba, “What does blood have to do with it?” I asked, “What do you mean that I’m not your blood nephew?”—

JACOBA: —And I admit that I was a little too blunt—I’m sorry, Sobrinito [Chalo]—but I felt it was better to just rip the Band-Aid off all at once. And the whole purpose was so that Leslie could marry Ammon—

CHALO: —and we both wanted that pairing to happen, so I wasn’t offended or anything, just shocked. Like, “Why had I not known this before?”

JASON: So, even though some of your hermanos were from different fathers and mothers, you never even suspected your whole life growing up with them that you didn’t share any blood at all with any of them?

CHALO: Never. Never suspected. And why would I? It’s not like I go around looking at my birth certificate every day. So, when my tía Jacoba showed me my birth certificate for the first time just last year, I was shocked. My father wasn’t on there! It was some other guy. I mean, I knew that my mother was a different mother from the ones who had birthed all of my other hermanos, but I thought that my father was Jacoba’s brother, and, it turns out, he wasn’t. He was just some random dude.— By the way, Tía, how did you procure my certificate?

JACOBA: I have my methods [laughing]. I have my genealogical abilities, and I wield them as I see fit.

JASON: And you saw fit to marry your son to Chalo’s daughter?

JACOBA: Correct. Very correct. And it’s best if those who marry are not primos, so if I could find a document to eliminate the blood, all the better.

...

JASON: So, Primo [Chalo], how did you feel to know that the hermanos with whom you had grown up weren’t really your hermanos?

CHALO: Well, that right there is an Anglo-Saxon way of thinking, Primo Jason, like we were just talking about. That question shows your

gringo-ness coming out because of course they were still REALLY my hermanos. Some papelito isn't going to change who my hermanos REALLY are. I mean, we had already grown up together. I was already an adult. The only thing that changed was that Leslie could now marry Ammon. So, it was mixed feelings: happiness for those two lovebirds and a little bit of an identity crisis for me. I'm not going to say that seeing my birth certificate for the first time as an adult had zero effect on me—

JACOBA: —Papelito manda, as they say.

CHALO: In my case, yes. I have lived papelito manda. [laughing] I am the very spawn of papelito manda!

JACOBA: No! [laughing] Riana [Ammon and Leslie's daughter] is the spawn of papelito manda!— La Familia is a curious thing. Am I right, Sobrino Jason?

Papelito manda is a Peruvian adage that means “at the tiny paper's command.” It expresses the simultaneous holiness and silliness of colonial statecraft's obsession with diminutive documents, papelitos, such as birth certificates and visas. For early Spaniards in Tawantinsuyo—the name that the Incas gave to their empire in human language, or Runa-simi—tiny papers with royal seals on them were literally the substances of the king of Spain's bodily presence.²⁴ In a similar substance shift for early Peruvian Catholics, wheat hosts—as opposed to cornmeal hosts—in human mouths were literally the flesh of Jesus.²⁵ More recently, for the twenty-first-century Peruvian Mormon Jacoba, finding Chalo's birth certificate literally rewired La Familia. Dates and names written on a certified papelito became potent enough to eliminate the blood of the incest taboo. That elimination allowed former primos to form a conjugal nuclear bond on Jacoba's granddaughter Riana's FamilySearch.

24. Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

25. Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

org family tree, essentially fulfilling Phase Five of Jacoba's construction of Leslie into La Familia.

Essentialist Blood versus Constructivist Drink

Essentialism is a cultural preference to consider reality as externally imposed, preexisting, static, and discoverable. Constructivism is a cultural preference to consider reality as constantly created and renewed by human and nonhuman volition and interaction. Chalo and Jacoba's campfire discussion—which involved many other members of La Familia who chose to participate in what I staged as a digitally recorded focus group regarding the differences between what I termed “gringo family” and “Peruvian familia”—laid bare a difference at the heart of kinship between Peruvianness and Mormonism. Basically, Peruvian non-Mormon families in my study were more constructivist while Mormon non-Peruvian families were more essentialist. Therefore, it stood to reason that people who were both Peruvian and Mormon, such as most members of La Familia, would tend to pick and choose between essentialism and constructivism as they, in Jacoba's words, “saw fit.” Within pure essentialism, kinship is a discoverable mechanism of unidirectional inheritance connected to people's biological essence as reproductive mammals. Within pure constructivism, kinship is a chosen reciprocity requiring the cyclical, multidirectional flow of nonheritable substances. Though official Mormon kin systems were lived in both essentialist and constructivist ways,²⁶ Mormonism expressed essentialism through its dogma that the essence of family could only take two possible forms. For the official Church during my study, “real” kinship was either legal or genetic. Those two forms could

26. Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, “Woman and Religious Organization: A ‘Microbiological’ Approach to Influence,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 305–20.

be diagrammed with horizontal equal signs signifying sexual intercourse and vertical lines stemming from that intercourse signifying its offspring (figure 3). The vertical lines also symbolized the kin idiom of “blood” similar to the late-Medieval European arboreal charts of vertical descent wherein named, individual ancestors fell above, meaning chronologically before, “descendants” who multiplied exponentially, increasing their individuality across distinct, numbered generations as they moved away (down) from their ancestors toward the future.²⁷

The essence of LDS forever family during my study only came into being through the meeting of signatures on legal marriage/adoption certificates or through the meeting of gametes in uteruses. Both such meetings could be documented onto papelitos. Within such an essentialist kin system, legal documents and genetic tests involved knowledge that was understood to be discoverable and, whenever it was newly discovered, as existing prior to and regardless of the relationships that the documents and tests supposedly proved. Therefore, Chalo hearkened to essentialism when he expressed that his relationship to his tía changed based on new knowledge. Written knowledge of “some random dude” whom Chalo had never met much less constructed as “father” through commensality (eating together) was strong enough to eliminate blood between him and his tía. However, Chalo simultaneously hearkened to constructivism when he scorned my “gringo” way of thinking. Chalo felt that the new knowledge expressed in a tiny paper could not make the relationships that he had painstakingly built over decades with his hermanos any less real. His siblingship suddenly lacked the essence of Mormonism’s forever family—DNA and state documents—but it

27. Guillaume Aubert, “Kinship, Blood, and the Emergence of the Racial Nation in the French Atlantic World, 1600–1789,” in *Blood and Kinship: Matter for Metaphor from Ancient Rome to the Present*, edited by Christopher H. Johnson, Bernhard Jussen, David Warren Sabean, and Simon Teuscher (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 175–95.

sustained itself through the work of kin construction that he and La Familia had established utilizing food and drink in place and over time.

Individualist Papers versus Collectivist Food

The stage was now set for Leslie's official addition to Jacoba's grandchild's family tree. Therefore, Phase Five of Jacoba's construction of Leslie into a relative within La Familia was complete. Only two phases remained. Those two phases—Phase Three: Utah Immigration and Phase Six: Temple Sealing—were complexly intertwined within Jacoba's imaginative kin-building endeavors. Though an understanding of those complexities required Jacoba's explanations, some parallels within the intertwinement were strikingly self-evident. For example, I could easily see the procedural similarities between LDS temple sealing and US immigrant petitioning. Both resulted in permission to enter places made holy through the elimination of certain elements considered profane.²⁸ Both required interviews wherein interviewers tried to discern the inner worthiness of their interviewees.²⁹ Both measured worthiness "in terms of assimilation"³⁰ to US whiteness. Both sometimes resulted in *papelitos*, be they temple recommends³¹ or immigrant visas. Most of all, both were based on the same root kinship system that only considered a handful of "direct family members"—relatives with certain biologically or legally documentable kin connections—to be sealable and petitionable.

28. Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

29. Susan Bibler Coutin, "Suspension of Deportation Hearings and Measures of 'Americanness,'" *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (2003): 58–94.

30. Tecun, "Pedro and Pita," 13.

31. A temple recommend is a wallet-sized card that certifies its holder's worthiness to enter the temple. Temple entry is not allowed without a temple recommend.

However, there were internal similarities between the LDS and the USCIS (United States Customs and Immigration Services) that were less obvious. Jacoba often tried to explain to me the complexity of how LDS temple entry and US border crossing were both part of the same kin construction process. As I understood it, if Jacoba had not met a missionary from Utah in New Jersey in the 1970s, her young nuclear family would have never migrated to Utah. Had she never migrated to Utah, she would have never included temple sealing as a requirement for family-building. Had she never granted importance to temple sealing, she would not have worried so much about finding temple-worthy³² mates for her children. Had she not worried about temple worthiness, she would not have helped Leslie and her father Chalo convert to Mormonism. Had they not converted to Mormonism, Leslie would not have been worthy of Ammon. Had Leslie not been worthy of Ammon, Jacoba would not have staged a pre-wedding reception for them in Peru—complete with the vital Peruvian kin substances of dance, food, and drink—in order to procure papelitos, photographs, and affidavits from attendees to present to USCIS officials at the embassy in Lima as proof of her future daughter-in-law’s US-worthiness for a fiancé visa. Jacoba would not have known that she needed to worry that the USCIS might contest Leslie’s US-worthiness had Jacoba not extralegally rearranged La Familia countless times prior so that the relationships of its would-be immigrants could become legible as “direct family” in the exclusionary kin system that structured the USCIS. Finally, she would not have become adept at making La Familia seem legible as family within the USCIS kin system had she not continually made similar adaptations within a kin system that was coterminous to that of the USCIS: the kin system of the US LDS.

Therefore, navigating the USCIS legalese in order to gather La Familia into one terrestrial place—an action vital to La Familia’s place-based commensality and earthy cycles of rhizomatic relatedness—was

32. Temple worthiness involves an interviewee’s ability to successfully answer a dozen pat questions regarding faithfulness to Mormonism’s core notions.

inextricable for Jacoba from her navigation of the LDS temple rites carried out in that place. That place was Utah, and its temples promised to eternally solidify each individual relative's placement onto her family tree. Though convoluted to an outsider, for Jacoba, the inextricability of LDS kin notions from USCIS kin notions made perfect sense. For me, an anthropologist, that inextricability seemed to radiate from another kin system dichotomy in addition to "constructivism versus essentialism" that Jacoba's Peruvian Mormon kin-building melded into one: "individualism versus collectivism."

The best vantage from which to witness individualism and collectivism melt into one indistinguishable relatedness through the substance of tiny papers was inside the Mormon temple. During part of my anthropological fieldwork in 2017, I became a "temple worker" inside the Ogden, Utah temple. I participated with both Anglo and Peruvian Mormons as they conducted religious rituals wherein the kinship bonds that they felt to be scientifically verifiable through papelititos were "sealed," thus making their mortal families into what they called "forever families." They called this process "temple work," and it also involved homogenizing and "nuclearizing" the world's diverse kin models, past and present. The "nuclear family" is a kinship form that generates itself as a novel, individual unit when a husband legally marries a wife. In other kin models, such as the "conglomerative family" popular in Peru, two existing households combine when members of those families marry. Conversely, in the nuclear family, a brand-new household is formed, and the conjugal couple becomes its center, its nucleus. The nuclear family household ideally consists solely of the couple and its biological or legally adopted minor children who, when they come of age, form their own, new, distally dwelling nuclear families, leaving the original couple with an "empty nest." Though the nuclear family was the globe's least valued kin model during my study,³³

33. Natalia Sarkisian and Naomi Gerstel, *Nuclear Family Values, Extended Family Lives: The Power of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

it was the only kin model that the famously global LDS Church valued enough to include in its templar sealing rituals. Indeed, only two types of relationships could be eternalized in LDS temples in the late 2010s: husband-wife and couple-child. Temple work, therefore, was akin to US immigrant exclusion work. It was the work of rescuing ancestors from their diverse, non-nuclear conglomerations of relatedness and enclosing them into limited dyads.

In November 2017, I participated with Jacoba in marriage sealings for an unknown third party's dead relatives. In the sealing ceremonies, which lasted about two minutes for each marriage, I was proxy for the dead grooms and Jacoba was proxy for the dead brides. In an interview that night at her daughter's home, Jacoba interpreted the sealings that we had performed to mean that celestial bureaucrats living on a temporally distant but spatially proximal planet made of "spirit matter" were writing the new conjugal kin relationships down on papelitos bound into the book of heaven. Indeed, using white pens and white clipboards, I had often observed temple registrars keeping carbon copies of that book of heaven inside white, three-ringed binders housed in the temple's white filing cabinets. According to one registrar whom I interviewed in August 2017, the substance of the papelitos inside those earthly binders adhered to corresponding little papers in heaven. The resulting glue bound husbands to wives, children to parents, and eventually descendants to their individualized "direct-line ancestors" so that those relationships could remain valid even after the biological or legal deaths of the individuals who embodied them on this planet.

During the templar ritualizing of these bureaucratic kin validations that I observed, living Mormons often played the ritual role of themselves. However, the role of their ancestors was played by tiny papers, about two inches long, that were coded blue for male and pink for female. Each blue and pink papelito included a dead individual's—as opposed to a live collective's—name, death date, birth date, and birthplace. Those papelitos exemplified one of the few non-white

color schemes in the temple's meticulously whitened interior design,³⁴ logics,³⁵ and habitus.³⁶ The color contrast highlighted the temple's pervasive whiteness, symbolically linking its kinship bonding to US immigration law's project of racial whitening.³⁷

During my study, Anglo Mormonism's templar project—just like US immigration law's demographic project—held biogenetic kinship unquestioned as a “fact”³⁸ that was simultaneously scientific, religious, and racial.³⁹ As anthropologist Marilyn Strathern recognized in England, which loaned early Mormonism many of its kin notions, “genetic relations have come to stand for the naturalness of biological kinship.”⁴⁰ That naturalness, expressed in the unquestioned embodiment of individualized “blood” ancestors inside the templar substance of color-coded papelitos, represented the ways in which European cultural hegemony—whiteness—placed biogenetic data “outside of culture”⁴¹ for

34. Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2012).

35. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Tukufu Zuberi, “Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods,” in *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, edited by Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 3–27.

36. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

37. Elizabeth F. S. Roberts, “Assisted Existence: An Ethnography of Being in Ecuador,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 3 (2013): 562–80.

38. Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

39. Janan Graham-Russell, “A Balm in Gilead: Reconciling Black Bodies within a Mormon Imagination,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 185–92.

40. Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 53.

41. Kimberly Theidon, *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 32.

the Anglo-dominated LDS Church as if that data transparently reflected “a universal biology without cultural mediation.”⁴² Therefore, thinking temple work to be without a situated historical and cultural context, Anglo Mormon Church leaders have applied biogenetic kinship to the entire world through their global temple-building project.⁴³ Through temple rituals and their white-pigmented architectural reinforcements, the Church cloaked its culturally situated, constantly evolving kin system inside a white shroud that made what was essentially the white nuclear family of 1950s suburban Utah seem globally applicable, eternally unchanging, and seductively mysterious.⁴⁴

However, Jacoba, along with many of my Peruvian Mormon study participants, considered the individuality of ancestral genetics expressed on templar blue and pink papelitos to be no more factual than the myriad other substances through which their overlapping societies gauged relatedness. Many felt, along with the Zumbagua of Ecuador,⁴⁵ that children were more legitimately related to the collectives with whom they shared homemade food on a daily basis than they were to the two individuals who gave them half of their chromosomes at the single moment of conception.

Scholars of Indigenous Mormonisms Arcia Tecun and S. Ata Siu’ulua⁴⁶ wrote about clashes between individuality and collectiv-

42. Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*, 32

43. Jason Palmer and David C. Knowlton, “Mormons in Peru: Building Temples with Sacred Cornerstones and Holy Drywall,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Mormonism*, edited by R. Gordon Shepherd, A. Gary Shepherd, and Ryan T. Cragun (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 397–419.

44. Fenella Cannell, “The Blood of Abraham: Mormon Redemptive Physicality and American Idioms of Kinship,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (May 2013): 77–94.

45. Mary Weismantel, “Making Kin: Kinship Theory and Zumbagua Adoptions,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4 (1995): 685–704.

46. Arcia Tecun and S. Ata Siu’ulua, “Mormon Masculinity, Family, and Kava in the Pacific,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, edited by Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 449–63.

ity within another of the world's Mormonisms, that of Tonga. When Anglo Mormon missionaries first arrived on the island of Tonga, the language of Tonga had no word to express the idea of an individualistic, distantly dwelling, husband-centric, heteropatriarchal, ostensibly monogamous couple and its coresident minor offspring. Anglo Mormons had to loan them the word for such a thing. The word was "family." Runasimi-speaking philosopher Conibo Mallku Bwillcawaman (who has published under the name *Ciro Marín Benítez*)⁴⁷ also wrote about incompatibility with individualism in the case of people living in twenty-first-century Tawantinsuyo. The US settler state's linear blood descent—upon which the official Church's genealogical strictures were patterned for the temple sealing of dead ancestors and upon which the USCIS definition of "direct family" for the purposes of Peruvian immigrant visa petitions was likewise patterned—made no sense in Tawantinsuyo's collectivist, nonlinear, ungendered, rhizomatic (as opposed to arboreal) system of relatedness called *pacha*.

In Bwillcawaman's conception of Runasimi philosophy, *pacha* meant both "earth" and "communalism." Therefore, it encapsulated the incommensurability that my Peruvian American teenage study participants sensed between family and familia. *Pacha* was Jacoba's Phase Four of kin-building. It involved constructing human and nonhuman individuals into one collective cycle wherein antecedents and descendants lost their arboreal verticality and became one place-based whole.

Making Hermanos with Blood, Food, Drink, and Papelitos

Yet, as a testament to Jacoba's "genealogical abilities"—perfected through her Mormonism—the expansive *pacha* relatedness that was *La Familia* could also be expressed as an arboreal diagram. It took Jacoba and me hours of conversation and artistry to force the collectivist

47. *Ciro Marín Benítez, Filosofía Tawantinsuyana: Una Perspectiva Epistémica* (Lima: Juan Gutemberg Editores Impresores, 2015).

complexity of pacha familia into the papelito of individuality depicted below (figure 2). That diagram will become useful in moving the discussion of Jacoba’s kin-building toward relationships beyond that of her daughter-in-law Leslie. The Utah version of Leslie and Ammon’s pre-wedding celebration became a venue for Jacoba to wield all of her kin substances—blood, food, drink and papelitos—to enforce Phase Two: Mormon Conversion and Phase Six: Temple Sealing, onto both a living new member of La Familia—Carol—and onto a deceased founding member of La Familia—Mamá Marina.

As depicted below, La Familia was a group of mostly Peruvians and mostly Mormons. Jacoba led a faction of La Familia whom her suburban, Anglo Mormon, nuclear-family-home-dwelling neighbors knew as The Costa Family. During my study, more members of La Familia immigrated each year from Peru toward the rhizomatic rootstock of

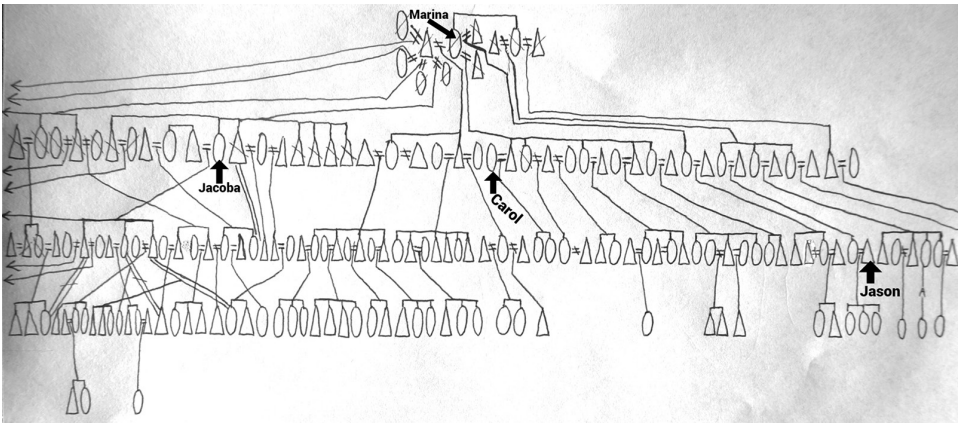


Figure 2. An arboreal expression of a small portion of *La Familia*

= Conjugal relationship	▭ Siblingship
/ Offspring of connected relationship	// First cousin once removed marriages and other intergenerational coupling
≠ No longer together	∅ Deceased
△ Male	
○ Female	

its Utah node in the upwardly mobile, pseudonymous city of Salsands, where over 150 members of La Familia dwelled.

That rootstock was not discovered through papelitos. It was not a biologically “natural” occurrence that people just happened to be “born into” or that I was able to join by simply “marrying into.” Even after being sealed to one of its daughters in the Salt Lake City temple—the holiest of Peruvian Mormon places on this planet—it took me sixteen years to become part of the substance of La Familia. I had to be built into it. While that did require papelitos like marriage certificates and genetic substances like chromosomes, it mainly required other substances: Peruvian food and Peruvian nonalcoholic drink—Inca Kola—shared in proximity through Peruvian Mormon partying. I did not experience that proximity, that commensality, that pacha with the Costa faction of La Familia until 2014 when I started to anthropologically study with La Familia and when Jacoba started to connect me to its rhizome.

That Jacoba would construct La Familia as a rhizome rather than a tree might seem contradictory given that La Familia was largely Mormon and that Mormons were famous for their obsession with an arboreal model of kin descent wherein ancestors gave of the substance of relatedness, DNA, to their descendants and wherein such sharing of substance never happened in reverse as it would in a rhizomatic model. Contradictory as it may be, though Jacoba was Mormon and had lived in a middle-class, Mormon, Utah city for decades, she still retained parts of a cyclical ancestral idiom from Tawantinsuyo that complicated the individuated family. When she talked to me in November 2017 of her ancestors, she tore the hegemonic arboreal analogy of Western European genealogy apart at the middle. She said, “I always tell human beings: ‘Look. Plant. Your kids are your branches, and your grandkids are your roots. And they remain there, planted.’”

As a Mormon, she had seen countless “family tree” depictions wherein grandchildren fell below children. Those trees sprouted

individual ancestors as branches and individual descendants as roots. Yet, Jacoba placed descendants (kids and grandkids) as both the branches *and* the roots: the future and the past. Hers, therefore, was a rhizomatic web of pacha familia, not a family tree. Children could give parts of themselves to parents, making parents descendants as much as antecedents. Jacoba's rhizomatic model made humans into "dividuals"—beings that could be divided among one great whole—rather than *individuals*.⁴⁸ Furthermore, since her cyclical cosmivision had only somewhat to do with genetics and vertical blood descent, nonblood kin, such as myself, who gave and took of the substance of relatedness and coresidence could become dividuals within Jacoba's genealogy provided we pass through all six of her kin-building phases, including Phase One: Becoming Sufficiently Peruvian.

To provide a microcosm of the substances that Jacoba used to construct rhizomatic relatedness among La Familia and the constant work required to maintain its layers of mutual indebtedness, I provide below an ethnographic vignette from one of the many Peruvian Mormon parties that built me into a Peruvian of sorts and that lubricated the cycles⁴⁹ that held La Familia together. The relationships within La Familia were never taken for granted as they would have been had they been purely essentialist. Since they were based on perishable substances like food and drink, not simply on archivable substances like genealogy and papelitos, they required constant work to keep from expiring. The festivities in question took place in the up-and-coming, exclusive suburban city of Salsands, Utah. However, before offering a glimpse into the party, I must first provide more background on the party's protagonist.

Jacoba immigrated from Lima, Callao to New Jersey in the 1970s with her husband Arcadio Costa, moved to Utah because of a business

48. Douglas J. Davies, "Dividual Identity in Grief Theories, Palliative and Bereavement Care," *Palliative Care and Social Practice* 14 (2020): 1–12.

49. Jason Palmer, "Be Careful, Ye Catholic: The Entanglement of Mormonism and Money in Peru," *Religions* 12, no. 4 (2021): 246–68.

proposal by an Anglo Mormon missionary, became a Mormon, and—infused with a material substance that Mormons call the “spirit of Elijah”—started doing her genealogy. This involved making her first creative attempts at mixing kin media and substances. According to the aforementioned interview that she granted me in November 2017, one of those substances included volitional spirit matter. Jacoba’s ancestors’ spirit bodies periodically appeared to her. These apparitions wrote dates using ballpoint pens—with the substance of ink—on the previously blank backs of photographic depictions of their former selves printed on papelitos. Jacoba combined this ghostly data with information from cemeteries and Catholic parishes in Peru until she understood herself to be the indirect byproduct of one of three sexual relationships between a woman whom all members of La Familia called Mamá Marina and three men, one of whom, Jacoba’s father, had at least thirty-six children among four women, another of whom was Jacoba’s mother.

This complex mix of unwed polyandry and polygyny produced multiple layers of siblingship that Jacoba would devote most of her life to sifting out and “dividualizing” into hermanos within a European diagram of genealogy (Phase Five). As she investigated these hermanos, she did not segregate them into the European kin groups of “half-sibling,” “stepsibling,” or even “cousin.” Even though she had only grown up with a few of them and did not know about the existence of most of them, all were equally “hermanos” in her understanding of relatedness, and she sought them through return trips to Peru. Since they were already Peruvian—Phase One—she constructed her hermanos as Mormon—Phase Two—through fusing Inca folklore with Lamanite dancing.⁵⁰ Lamanite dancing was a complex assemblage involving a unique form of Mormon Indigeneity—Lamanite identity—derived from the fact that many Latin American Mormons considered the setting of the Book

50. Christopher C. Smith, “Playing Lamanite: Ecstatic Performance of American Indian Roles in Early Mormon Ohio,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (2015): 131–66.

of Mormon to have been ancient Abya Yala,⁵¹ thus making their own ancestors into the heroes of Mormonism's origin myths.⁵² Jacoba often solidified the nascent Mormonism within her hermanos by sending, both officially and unofficially, herself, her children, and her Utah-born grandchildren on LDS missions to specific parts of Peru in order to baptize them. Incidentally, Jacoba's daughter Lori was the one who, at Jacoba's behest, sought out and helped my future mother-in-law Nilda convert to Mormonism in 1984. During all aspects of her kin-building, Jacoba carefully wove her hermanos into La Familia through Peruvian cuisine and pacha commensality (Phase Four). Furthermore, she brought many of her newly deemed hermanos to Utah (Phase Three) so that the proximity requirements of pacha could be met, thus cementing her hermanos almost completely into La Familia. "Almost" refers to the lack of the ultimate step—Phase Six: Temple Sealing—but, as that resulted in a family feud microcosmic of the substances of La Familia's simultaneously Mormon and Peruvian systems of relatedness, I will save it for the end.

For now, returning to Phase Three in Jacoba's methodical creation of La Familia, in order for Jacoba to bring her siblings to the United States in the first place, she usually had to temporarily rearrange Peruvian pacha into US kinship so as to appease the USCIS requirements of "direct family" on her hermanos' immigration papelitos. This was necessary because many of her "hermanos" did not compute as "siblings" under US colonial statecraft. Members of La Familia who were biogenetically "cousins" to each other, and thus not petitionable for US immigrant visas, became—through staged marriages and the papelitos that these produced—"husbands," "wives," and "stepmothers" to each

51. Abya Yala was the placename that descendants of the Incas gave to both North and South America, which, to this day, Peru's nationalized K-12 social studies curriculum counts as a single continent.

52. Arlene M. Sánchez-Walsh, "Jesus en las Americas: Exploring Latter-day Saint Latinx Politics and Culture," *Journal of Mormon History* 48, no. 2 (2022): 28–41.

other. All of those kin categories were petitionable under the narrow confines of what got to count as “family” in the United States. Importantly, those confines were not nearly as narrow as the Anglo Mormon confines of “family” that dictated which relationships could be immortally sealed in the temple. It bears repeating that, during my study, only two types of relationships could be officially sealed into forever family: husband-wife and couple-child.

Everyone Is Sealed Except You

Eventually, much of La Familia’s construction got out of Jacoba’s control and went on without her knowledge. Thus, one of her sobrinos whom she helped immigrate helped one of her unknown, nonblood hermanos immigrate to Utah. Biogenetically, that hermano was Jacoba’s half-sister’s half-brother. His name was Mido, and he immigrated together with his wife Carol in 2001. Jacoba met Mido and Carol for the first time during my fieldwork at Mamá Marina’s Utah funeral in 2016. At the July 2017 party that I will now finally depict, Jacoba tried to build Carol into La Familia in ways that revealed Jacoba’s uniquely Peruvian Mormon understanding of the substances that created pacha familia for her.

The occasion was Ammon and Leslie’s wedding shower/housewarming party. Ammon and his newly immigrated Peruvian fiancée, Leslie, were moving out of Jacoba’s daughter’s large, crowded home where the party took place and into their own Salsands apartment down the street, right next door to me and my nuclear family. Therefore, they needed household supplies. At first, the decibel level was high, with every group in full conversation mode eating at their respective collapsible tables, which La Familia had borrowed from our local LDS chapel. Jacoba was over on Leslie and Ammon’s table with many of Los Tíos. I could see that she was dominating the conversation there.

Another table held the native English-speaking generational group known as Los Primos, which included eighteen eligible single ladies, some in near-spinster status on Mormon timelines, meaning that they

were almost age thirty-one. Los Primos mostly included Jacoba's biological grandkids, but it also included the Corimayta siblings who had been adopted as Jacoba's grandkids because their real grandparents died in Peru without ever meeting them. Since the death of Mamá Marina one year prior, Los Primos also included Mido and Carol's daughters Luzi and Zelma, who were still navigating their recent inclusion into the Costa faction of La Familia. The tables of Los Primos included many people whom I did not know at the time. Some of them were Ammon's kids from his multiple previous relationships. Then there was the "primitos," or little cousins' table. That consisted of Ammon and Leslie's daughter Riana, my three daughters, and Ammon's youngest son from a previous relationship. They all ate cachangas for two seconds and then jumped on the neighbors' trampolines for two hours. In that neighborhood, the entire backyard row of at least seven houses did not have any fencing, so the upper-middle-class neighbors shared each other's well-grassed yards.

After the housewarming gift-opening proceedings, Ammon and Leslie each gave a little speech. I noticed on a few occasions that Leslie would correct people when they said "your husband." She would say, "No, my FUTURE husband." Jacoba was also careful to make that correction. The confusion surrounding the tense in which to conjugate the verb, "to marry" probably existed because everyone at the party knew that Ammon and Leslie had long ago consummated their conjugal relationship (even before they found out that they were not biological primos), the offspring of which, Riana, jumped on a distant trampoline as they gave their speeches. However, the confusion also stemmed from Ammon and Leslie's large "false" wedding in Peru, which Jacoba herself organized. Many of the housewarming party guests apparently did not know that Ammon and Leslie's "Peruvian wedding" was not legally officiated. In the United States, it would have been considered more a reception than a wedding, and it was all part of Jacoba's scheme to generate enough affidavits and photographs to prove to US embassy officials in Lima that Ammon and Leslie's conjugal relationship was

founded on love, which the USCIS kin system considered legitimate, rather than on the desire for a visa, which the USCIS kin system considered illegitimate. Jacoba's maneuvering ultimately helped Ammon procure a fiancée visa for Leslie. However, during the party in Utah, Ammon and Leslie still held no tangible marriage certificate valid in the United States or Peru, much less a temple marriage certificate valid in the celestial kingdom. Therefore, a linguistic confusion lingered among the guests, reflecting the mix of kin systems under which Ammon and Leslie were simultaneously married and not yet married.

Following their speeches came the requisite Costa Family dance-off. It was similar to the one that I had endured three years prior in order to prove my Peruvianness. On this occasion, however, rather than judging the contest as she had done during my choreographic ordeal, seventy-five-year-old Jacoba, a Peruvian Mormon, sat on the couch having a fervent conversation with fifty-five-year-old Carol, a Peruvian Catholic. Jacoba held Carol's hand the entire time. I tried to listen in on their conversation between huaynos, cumbias, sayas, and merengues, but all I heard were a few key words from Jacoba. She seemed to be laying it on pretty thick, saying things like, "You are not sealed to your ancestors" and "What comfort it brings me to know that I am."

Making out the words "sealing," "intertwining," "bonding," "interlacing," and "joining," I was sure that a significant kinship conversation was afoot. However, when Los Primos got ahold of the sound system, the reggaeton became too loud for me to hear anything else. Fortunately, later, when almost everyone was gone including Carol, all the collapsible tables were down, and Jacoba and I sat alone at the oak table. I asked Jacoba what she had talked about with Carol. She had no qualms telling me. As I suspected, in her conversation with Carol, she had jumped right into the topic of familial sealings. I asked her permission to turn on my digital recorder.

JACOBA: First thing I told her was, "Carol, you aren't sealed, so you really aren't yet a member of La Familia. How would you like to be resurrected,

as we are all going to be, and have Jesus meet you and say, “Go over to this kingdom of strangers that I’ve prepared for you and be an angel with other strange angels for eternity without ever seeing your family again”? Well, that is what is going to happen if you don’t get sealed.

Apparently, Jacoba never once mentioned to Carol what sealing meant, where it took place, what had to happen first, or how sealing historically came about in the LDS Church. Instead, she held all of that in her head as a given of the Mormon cosmos and talked as if Carol were already fully a part of that cosmos but that, for some unfathomable reason, she just did not want to be together with La Familia—her in-laws—for eternity. I told Jacoba, who had only recently met Carol and who—according to Anglo Mormon arboreal genealogy—was not related to Carol’s husband Mido at all: “I know from talking to Carol over the years that she has never heard of any of this before. She genuinely doesn’t know about eternal sealing and forever family.”

Jacoba responded, reprimanding me: “How is that possible? Carol has been in Utah for fifteen years. With all the returned missionaries that we have in La Familia, including you, Sobrino, why did nobody tell her?”

I hoped that was a rhetorical question, but it was not. She expected an answer from me.

JASON: Well, maybe nobody told her because until recently she’s worked three jobs all day and so even the faction of La Familia that knew about her hardly ever saw her. Also, maybe nobody told her because they know that she is extremely Catholic. She actually goes to mass almost weekly.

JACOBA: I know that she’s Catholic, and I told her, “I was once like you. I was Catholic too. My kids all went to Catholic schools, but that was before I knew the reality of things. I mean, think about how bad the Catholic Church has been! Think of what the Inquisition did in Peru. And who did they persecute? Those who wouldn’t worship the cross. And who were they? The Incas, our ancestors. And we who are Lamanites know that the Incas were Christians. They had the truth already, and the Catholics took it away from them and killed them for not worshipping the cross. But why would you worship a cross if your

son was killed on a cross? Would you worship that instrument of death, wear it around your neck?”

I had difficulty believing that she had said all of that as Carol sat right next to her with a tattoo of that very cross emblazoned onto her bare shoulder. Nevertheless, Jacoba continued her tirade.

JACOBA: Then I said, “It is a disgusting instrument of death, and you want to have it ON you!?”

Carol just kind of laughed it off and didn’t know what to say. What she didn’t realize was that none of the people at the party today would have come to this country anyway if it weren’t for me. They wouldn’t be members of the [LDS] Church and we wouldn’t be sealed if it weren’t for me. I was chosen for this work. “You wouldn’t be here in this country if it weren’t for me,” I told Carol.

“I wouldn’t have found out my other brothers like your husband Mido if I hadn’t joined the Church and realized the importance of joining all the family unit into one. That is why I searched out my long-lost sisters, which led to Nilda coming here, which led to you—Carol—coming here, and now it is up to you to be the last link in this chain. You must be sealed to us or else La Familia isn’t complete. You have to carry on my mission, because mine is ending, but yours is just beginning. That is why you are in this state of Utah. It’s not a coincidence that you are here. Things happen for a reason. The only church with the power to seal brought you here, and now, if you care about your ancestors at all, you will be sealed to them. How can you be so ungrateful as to not be sealed in the temple of the very religion that in a roundabout way brought you to me, brought you under my circle, which is sealed? Everyone is sealed into this circle except you. La Familia can’t be saved without you.”

Familia Feud

I reminded Jacoba that getting sealed in the temple was supposed to be the final, not the initial, phase toward familial salvation, at least not in the unilinear progression model of Anglo Mormonism in which I was raised and which made the templar rules for all members of the Church

the world over regardless of which substances granted them relatedness. The first step for Carol in Anglo Mormonism—the hegemonic form of Mormonism—would have had to have been baptism (Phase Two), making baptismal water into yet another substance of relatedness for La Familia. However, Jacoba talked as if Carol’s presence upon the ground of Utah (Phase Three) qualified her to be sealed to La Familia without even being baptized a Latter-day Saint in the first place.

I also reminded Jacoba that it was not true that Carol was the last unsealed link on La Familia’s circular chain, the circularity of which was another difference in symbolic substance—this time metallic—between Peruvian Mormon circular relatedness and Anglo Mormonism’s great linear chain of being. Carol may not have been Mormon-temple-married (sealed), but Mamá Marina, the foundational matriarch of La Familia, was never married at all. This left La Familia’s relatedness—inasmuch as it depended upon *templar papelitos* in three-ringed binders that needed to be cosmically sealed to celestial tomes—vulnerable to schism. Jacoba witnessed that schism widen soon after Mamá Marina’s death and, during Ammon and Leslie’s party, Carol became its scapegoat. Jacoba projected Mamá Marina’s foundational lack of sealability solely upon Carol. In reality, however, Carol was not the salvatory embodiment of La Familia’s relatedness. She was not the last unsealed link. She was not the severed rhizomatic rootstock.

That role fell squarely upon the recently deceased Mamá Marina whose dying wish, at the age of ninety-four, was to not become posthumously Mormon through a *templar* “baptism for the dead.” Only Mamá Marina, La Familia’s symbolic matriarch who crowns the genealogical diagram (figure 3), could heal the familial schism. Only Mamá Marina could somehow suture heaven and earth despite her lack of three vital Mormon substances of relatedness: baptismal water, DNA shared with Jacoba, and *templar papelitos*.

La Familia’s schism did not begin with Mamá Marina’s apparent unsealability, but it was exacerbated by it and by Anglo Mormonism’s

kin strictures. In the Anglo Mormonism of the late 2010s, families had to wait for one year after the death of a non-Mormon ancestor in order to do the following “temple work” for her by proxy through the aforementioned pink papelitos:

1. Baptize her into the Church.
2. Temple-marry her to her spouse.
3. Seal her children (living or dead) to the resulting nuclear couple.

Since Mamá Marina never had a spouse, La Familia was left with the same question that plagued other Lamanite-identifying familias as early as the 1920s, when Mexican Mormon Margarito Bautista first began interpreting Anglo Mormon temple esoterica for use within Indigenous Mormon systems of matrilineal relatedness: “How was a woman who had never been married but who had been the mother to many children to be permanently linked into a nuclear family unit in the eternities?”⁵³ Male ancestors could be forced into eternal polygyny, that is, they could be sealed to more than one wife. However, female ancestors, like Mamá Marina, could not be sealed to more than one husband (at least not according to the many Anglo Mormon temple presidents whom I queried at the behest of La Familia).

Since the one-year anniversary of Mamá Marina’s death arrived soon after Ammon and Leslie’s housewarming party, Jacoba’s feelings regarding La Familia’s sealability were not the only ones that exploded. During this schismatic time of heightened sentiments, which became particularly volatile from 2017 to 2021, one faction of La Familia worried about the righteousness of posthumously sealing (temple-marrying) Mamá Marina to any of the three deceased men with whom she had “lived in sin” (had children out of wedlock). At La Familia’s Christmas party in December 2017, the unofficial spokesperson of that faction

53. Elisa Eastwood Pulido, *The Spiritual Evolution of Margarito Bautista: Mexican Mormon Evangelizer, Polygamist Dissident, and Utopian Founder, 1878–1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 88.

asked, “Wouldn’t sealing her to any one of our abuelos mujeriegos (womanizing grandfathers) condone polygamous promiscuity, making a mockery of the Lord’s temple?” Anticipating a resolution to that question, another faction asked an adjacent question, thus fracturing La Familia further: “To which of the three men should Mamá Marina be sealed?” Carol and Mido’s faction, being Catholic, did not want her sealed in a Mormon temple at all, a sentiment that they did not dare share openly. Members of most of La Familia’s Mormon factions, on the other hand, openly advocated for Mamá Marina’s posthumous temple marriage, but only to their own paternal ancestor. However, they all wondered as to the exclusivity and irrevocability of such an act: “Will sealing Mamá Marina to just one man leave the biological descendants of the other two men cut off from La Familia for eternity? Why not seal her to all three men?” During my study, eternal polygyny was officially acceptable in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, famous as it was for its obsession with patriarchy and marriage, so why could La Familia not get special permission from an Anglo Mormon temple president to perform just a bit of eternal polyandry?

Biospiritual Husbandry

These were vital questions for Jacoba given that she was constructing La Familia with the substances of both patriarchal, settler Mormonism (blood and tiny papers), and generational, pacha matriarchy (food and drink). If Jacoba could not figure out how to posthumously seal Mamá Marina to a husband, then Mamá Marina’s children would not be able to seal themselves to her or to each other. Would those children—including Carol’s husband Mido, my mother-in-law Nilda, and my spouse’s “biological” aunts and uncles, not to mention our many tíos and tías including Jacoba herself to whom Marina was not related through the substance of DNA—remain an unlinked relatedness of expansive pacha familia simply because of Anglo Mormonism’s narrow, linear definition of “forever family” dependent entirely upon papelitos?

Not if Jacoba had anything to say about it. Unbeknownst to Nilda and Mido, Jacoba went on to have Mamá Marina posthumously baptized Mormon in the Ogden temple in January 2019. Jacoba then sealed Mamá Marina to all three womanizing fathers of her children in three different temples (Ogden, Lima, and Bountiful) so that no Anglo Mormon temple registrar—and presumably no celestial bureaucrat—would catch the mistake until it was too late. She even sealed Mamá Marina to one extra husband for good measure. He was one with whom Mamá Marina could not have “lived in sin” because she did not know him in life. Also, since he was a bachelor from Jacoba’s own biological, maternal line of arboreal ancestry, his coupling with Mamá Marina biospiritually linked Jacoba’s line into La Familia, legitimating Jacoba as La Familia’s new, regnant matriarch. All of this relational intertwining set the stage for a new existential controversy. Among her four new husbands, which one will Mamá Marina choose as her resident husband with whom she will situate Lamanite pacha through the cachanga-eating, Inca Kola–drinking, and Valicha-dancing festivities of the celestial kingdom?

Broader Impacts

That question encapsulates the substances of Jacoba’s multimedia creation of relatedness. Her creation was neither Peruvian nor Mormon in a framework wherein “Peruvian” stood for collective constructivism and “Mormon” for individualistic essentialism. Yet, her creation was fully “Peruvian Mormon”; it manipulated time and flipped ancestry in a way that blurred the boundaries between constructivism and essentialism, between individualism and collectivism. Jacoba created a temporality that allowed descendants to share the substances of relatedness with ancestors. Therefore, her Peruvian Mormon temporality—the same temporality that allowed her ancestors in Abya Yala the anachronism necessary to become the main characters of a US colonial text, the Book of Mormon—skirted any remaining barriers within her unlikely

translation of familia into family. Jacoba's kin-building shot holes into the supposed universality of Anglo Mormonism's forever family. She made the forever family porous. In so doing, she revealed the nuclear family to be incoherent outside of Anglo Mormonism. She exposed the nuclear family as an empty, even nonsensical ideal toward which it was futile to strive.

The fact that Jacoba's kin-building ran into resistance from her church's leaders exposed the true purpose of Anglo Mormon temple work. Its purpose was to force "familias" and other rhizomatic, collectivist, and conglomeration kin models into the limited, heteropatriarchal, dichotomous, nuclear family model. The leaders of the Church came to consider the essence of true kinship as that which could only be found within the relatedness linkages between a husband and a wife and between a couple and its offspring. Temple work, therefore, represented the circumscribing of expansive kinship systems across world geography and world history into an atrophied kin system limited to a specifically conjugal and parental relatedness that was important mainly among Anglo Mormons raised in 1950s Utah. Temple work was meant to impose holy order upon the unwieldy, sacred, rhizomatic models of familia wherein ancestors were collectives that provided the substance of the future just as much as the essence of the past. Anglo Mormon temple work—saturated in white decor—sought couples and sealed them to children who were in turn sealed to their spouses in a model wherein everyone became trapped within a single, straight line leading back to a white Adam and a white Eve under the banner of a church named after a white Jesus whom anthropologist Arcia Tecun described as a "White perisex cisgender heterosexual wealthy"⁵⁴ Jesus.

54. Tecun, "Pedro and Pita," 10.

Therefore, within the theoretical field that Jacoba's kin-building exposed—though certainly not within the voiced opinions of Jacoba herself—Anglo Mormonism's kinship individuality and kinship essentialism were racist. Connecting genealogically to the narrow, Adamic line of white ancestry was the only way for Saints of color in my study to legitimate their relatedness. *Essentially*, to become Saints, they had to become white.⁵⁵ All ancestral substances that could not be forced into white lineages had to be “silenced or erased.”⁵⁶ This meant that Anglo Mormonism's kinship strictures, like most aspects of Anglo Mormonism, were not innocent.⁵⁷ Rather, they were colonizing.⁵⁸ Jacoba's work in melding La Familia with forever family was not done on an even playing field. La Familia of Peruvian Mormonism found itself in a profoundly disadvantaged position in comparison to Anglo Mormonism's forever family. The mere fact that Jacoba had to struggle so creatively to skirt Anglo Mormon kinship barriers revealed them to be precisely that: deliberately placed barriers, not merely benign differences. Her kin-building exposed the lie behind Anglo Mormon temple work. It was never meant to seal the whole human family into one universally inclusive siblingship as it claimed. Instead, it was meant to atomize the world's relatives into tidily connected, easily diagrammable, nuclear dyads wherein all humans, past and future, could become listed, taxonomized, controlled, divided, and, therefore, exploited. In this, the

55. James C. Jones, “Racism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 52, no. 3 (2019): 203–08.

56. Moana Uluave-Hafoka, “To Be Young, Mormon, and Tongan,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 99–104.

57. Gina Colvin, “There's No Such Thing as a Gospel Culture,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 57–70.

58. Moroni Benally, “Decolonizing the Blossoming: Indigenous People's Faith in a Colonizing Church,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 4 (2017): 71–78.

settler Church treated its subjects no differently than the settler states treated theirs.⁵⁹

Perhaps La Familia sensed a racist tendency within Anglo-connected Mormonism, though they rarely voiced it during my study. Perhaps sensing that racist tendency was why La Familia was relentless in replacing aspects of the Anglo connection to Mormonism with a Peruvian connection. Perhaps that was why Jacoba only brought into La Familia those who had shown themselves on the dance floor and dinner table to be sufficiently Peruvian while also placing themselves in Utah long enough to be sufficiently Mormon. For Jacoba, Mormonism had to be Peruvian for it to be correct because, according to her interpretation of the Book of Mormon, Peruvianness was Mormon to begin with. Jacoba went back in time and placed a simultaneously rhizomatic and arboreal form of Indigenous—yet colonial—Mormon kinship into Peru’s primordium. Thanks to Jacoba and other Lamanite Mormons like her,⁶⁰ an essentialist, individualist model of kinship has been

59. In a future article, I will magnify this point, specifically as it manifests in the Church’s self-reliance initiative. Colonial governments criminalize Indigenous hunting by calling it “poaching,” thus destroying traditional economies and forcing people off homeland, often in the name of something benevolent like “conservation.” The people then have no economic recourse but to become the labor for capitalists who are then free to exploit that land. In like manner, the Church’s official programs make dependency upon non-nuclear forms of family seem like a sin. People who want to become sinless Saints have no recourse but to lose dependency on “extended family” and depend instead upon the Church and its ostensibly secular counterpart, the market. Therefore, instead of growing their rhizomatic networks of relatedness that are inextricable from their economies (of the sort that cannot be cleanly tithed), they are cut off from those abundance-model economies and must begin *Starting and Growing My Business for Self-Reliance*, as the title of one of the Church’s manuals demands.

60. Stanley J. Thayne, “‘We’re Going to Take Our Land Back Over’: Indigenous Positionality, the Ethnography of Reading, and *The Book of Mormon*,” in *Americanist Approaches to The Book of Mormon*, edited by Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 321–40.

made to coexist alongside constructivist, collectivist pacha among Abya Yala's first human inhabitants. Therefore, Jacoba's unlikely admixture of multiple, disparate kin systems—when combined with that of other Indigenous Mormons⁶¹ and Indigenous former Mormons⁶²—might have the power to confound the tyrannical aspects of Anglo Mormon temple work. It might even have the power to symbolically deactivate that work as a weapon of colonization.

If Jacoba's manipulation of kin systems can bring Anglo kinship into focus as a cultural construct rather than as a biological fact, perhaps Anglo colonization's co-optation of kinship can be pinpointed as one of the ignition keys for the official Church's apparatus designed to marginalize non-nuclear families. Once pinpointed, perhaps it can be used to shut down that apparatus so that the non-nuclear, conglomerative familia—the kinship form that is currently predominant across the globe and that, ironically, was originally predominant in the Anglo Mormon Church—is restored as Mormonism's core rather than its periphery. More importantly, coated in pacha familia's substances of blood, food, drink, tiny papers, and other instantiations of Peruvian Mormon creativity, perhaps a future world wherein all kinds of collectivities get to count as forever families can be diagrammed onto papelitos and, from there, made real.

61. Farina King, "Indigenizing Mormonisms," *Mormon Studies Review* 6 (Jan. 2019): 1–16.

62. Monika Brown Crowfoot, "The Lamanite Dilemma: Mormonism and Indigeneity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 54, no. 2 (2021): 57–64.

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Stephanie K. Northrup, *Alma Comforts Amulek
in His Afflictions*, 2012, acrylic on headboard,
16" x 20"

JUSTICE, SOLIDARITY, AND THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH

Ryan D. Ward

During Moroni's 1823 visit to Joseph Smith, he repeats the prophecy written in the fourth chapter of Malachi, although with a slight change in wording.¹ Later Joseph interpreted Malachi's prophecy as referring to a "welding link" constituted by baptism for the dead performed by proper priesthood authority.² This interpretation was canonized and has forever linked this prophecy and "the spirit of Elijah" with genealogy and temple work for the dead.

I suggest that an examination of the prophetic ministry of Elijah in its historical context points the way toward a more expansive interpretation of "the spirit of Elijah." This interpretation requires us not only to perform temple ordinances as a means to save humanity in the next life but also to focus on the dire need for confronting and reversing injustice in this life, affecting the salvation of those who face inequality and oppression, and in fine, saving creation from exploitation and ruin.³

1. Joseph Smith History 1:38–39. See also Doctrine and Covenants 2; Malachi 4:5–6.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 128; see also 138:47–48.

3. For an extended treatment of this view of salvation and the role of the Restoration, see Ryan D. Ward, *And There Was No Poor Among Them: Liberation, Salvation, and the Meaning of the Restoration* (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2023).

Covenant Justice Abandoned

Elijah's prophetic ministry took place during the reign of King Ahab, the seventh king of Israel following the dividing of the kingdom after Solomon's death.⁴ Elijah comes to prophetic prominence due to Israel's descent into idolatry. Although there had been a constant current of idolatry throughout Israel's history, Ahab's sins are portrayed as particularly grievous.⁵

Although the narrative as told in 1 Kings discusses and condemns at length Israel's idolatry, what is less apparent to those unfamiliar with the structure of Israel's kingdoms is the degree to which they established and perpetuated massive economic inequality and exploitation. Beginning with Solomon, the covenant code of economics that was included in the Mosaic law began to be dismantled.⁶ This led to an expropriation of ancestral lands and inheritances by the king and his retainers.⁷ Combined with the taxes, tributes, and forced servitude that was levied by Solomon for the building of the temple, his palace, and his fortress cities,⁸ this restructuring of the economics of the kingdom ruined the poor people living there and led directly to their exploitation.⁹ Though the biblical record is sparse regarding exploitation following Solomon, the reign and dynasty of Omri (Ahab's father) introduced greater burdens and exploitation of the poor due to his relocation of his capital city from Tirzah and building of a new capital city at Samaria,

4. 1 Kings 16.

5. 1 Kings 16:33.

6. See Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Frethem, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2005); Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

7. Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 248.

8. 1 Kings 5:13; 2 Chronicles 2:17–18; 1 Kings 7; 1 Kings 9:19.

9. See the story of the vineyard of Naboth in 1 Kings 21.

which required forced labor and taxation on a large scale.¹⁰ Ahab was bequeathed a stable kingdom by his father, and his reign was largely about consolidating, building, and expanding the kingdom.¹¹ Elijah is therefore called as a prophet during a period of entrenched systemic injustice.

God of Life and Idols of Death

Elijah's first prophetic act is to shut the heavens, producing a famine in Israel. After three years he comes to Ahab, instructing him to invite all of Israel to Mount Carmel, where he sets up a showdown between Israel's god and Baal. Given the ongoing famine, the stakes are very high. Baal, who was also called the Lord of Rain and Dew and Lord of the Earth, was known as the ultimate arbiter of fertility. Baal's power seemed evident in the wealth and might of Israel's competitors and Ahab's own kingdom. And yet, the long history of Israel had been punctuated by miraculous deliverance by Yahweh. Which god should they trust and serve? The question must have seemed a matter of life and death.

10. Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 244; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 996–99; Elelwani B. Farisani, "A Sociological Reading of the Confrontation between Ahab and Elijah in 1 Kings 21:1–29," *Old Testament Essays* 18, no. 1 (2005): 47–60; Kitty Schneider, "The Omrids: Too Much Theology, Too Little Context?" *Old Testament Essays* 17, no. 2 (2004): 267–81.

11. Archaeological evidence from Samaria indicates that Ahab and his court lived lives of excess and opulence, which under times of famine would have come at the expense of the poor. This no doubt contributed to Elijah's ire, in addition to Ahab's syncretism in allowing and establishing Baal worship in Israel, a political expediency which opened up more favorable diplomatic and trade relations with Phoenicia and contributed greatly to stability given the mix of Canaanites and Hebrews in his kingdom. See Ron E. Tappy, "Israelite Samaria: Head of Ephraim and Jerusalem's Elder Sister" in *Archaeology in the "Land of Tells and Ruins": A History of Excavations in the Holy Land Inspired by the Photographs and Accounts of Leo Boer*, edited by Bart Wagemakers (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 73–86; Schneider, "The Omrids."

Elijah, sensing Israel's equivocation, asks them "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."¹² Elijah provides a sacrifice for the 450 priests of Baal, but gives them no fire to burn the offering. The priests call on Baal all day, even mutilating themselves in desperation, but no fire comes to consume their sacrifice. Elijah dresses his offering and then, in an act of utter defiance, commands that twelve barrels of water be poured on his sacrifice. He prays to God, and fire from heaven consumes the offering, the wood, and the altar, leaving not a drop of water behind. The people fall on their faces, declaring Yahweh as God.

If we consider what the conflict over worship of Israel's god and Baal meant within the context of the social and economic systems embraced by Israel's kings, we can discern additional meaning behind this theatrical display. Although the narrative speaks of idolatry as a largely spiritual act of abandoning Yahweh and embracing idols, the conflict introduced by idolatry can also be thought of as a conflict over how society is to be ordered, with Israel's god representing a more egalitarian social and political arrangement that adhered to the covenant codes, and idolatry representing other, more oppressive social and political systems. As stated by the theologian and Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, "theological commitment and social ideology . . . are deeply intertwined so that theological Baalism is the legitimating force for a social theory of exploitation against which Yahwism stands."¹³ Thus, whereas the covenant community set up by Israel's god was envisioned as one of justice and equity, where members of society who were poor, vulnerable, and widowed were explicitly taken care of, the turning from Yahweh to idols symbolized an abandonment of the covenant codes that underpinned this community and was often accompanied by social and economic policies that exploited poor and marginalized

12. 1 Kings 18:21.

13. Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary, vol. 8 (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 202.

people.¹⁴ The symbolic choice presented to Israel is therefore between Israel's god—the god of life—and Baal, a representation of all systems of idolatry that privilege the wealthy and powerful over against the poor and vulnerable.

The showdown between Baal and Yahweh set up by Elijah can therefore be viewed as a contest in the minds of Israel as to which god deserved their allegiance. Put another, more relevant way: which god could feed them and provide subsistence for their families? We can see the difficulty faced by the people in making the decision of which god to worship. By demonstrating Yahweh's power in spectacular fashion, Elijah puts to rest any question of which god is deserving of worship and allegiance; "Baal is shown to have no power at all in the realm that is supposed to be his."¹⁵ Furthermore, Yahweh's opening of the heavens and sending rain in response to Elijah's petition affirms that Israel's god is a god of life, a god who champions human systems of justice and equity that encourage and support flourishing for all and utterly and completely repudiates systems of inequality and oppression and the idols of death these systems spawn, perpetuate, and glorify.

Solidarity with the Suffering

The history of Israel is one of waiting for unfulfilled covenant promises. The prophets prophesied future fulfillment of these promises, but it was unclear even to them what form that fulfillment would take. What is clear is that Israel will not give up on the promises that were made to them as a people. The Old Testament is in large part the story of Israel making sense of their history at a time when it seems improbable, if not impossible, that the promises will be fulfilled.

14. 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4; Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 3–22; Farisani, "A Sociological Reading."

15. Alan J. Hauser and Russell Gregory, *From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis* (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1990), 11.

For many in our world today, the situation is similar. Billions of people in the world today live in poverty. Millions starve to death or succumb to preventable illnesses or disease, many millions more are exploited and oppressed by economic and political systems that enrich the wealthy and immiserate the poor. The world itself is used, exploited, and poisoned, inching ever closer to catastrophic consequences. For many people, the promises of life, justice, and equity covenanted by God with Abraham to Israel, and extended through Jesus to all of creation, seem hollow and remain unfulfilled. As Latter-day Saints, what is our mandate to alleviate suffering? How can we minister to those who struggle to find hope in a society structured on injustice?

The story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath provides an explicit example of standing in solidarity with those who suffer in an unjust world. Of all the people in Israel, widows were some of the most vulnerable given women's lack of inheritance or other rights in the patriarchal society. This is why God had explicitly provided for them in the covenant code revealed to Moses. The widow of Zarephath, then, can serve as a metaphor for those who have been forgotten or purposely exploited by Israel's kings. She has her counterparts in our own day in the billions of people who live in poverty, experience food insecurity, or face labor exploitation due to the pursuit of never-ending economic expansion and profit.

Elijah encounters the widow outside the city gates gathering sticks to make one last meal for her and her son before they starve to death. Her faith in obeying the word of Elijah results in a miracle. She is able to use her meager ingredients to sustain herself and her son for many days. After some time, her son falls ill and dies.¹⁶ The woman is devastated. She asks Elijah for some answer or solace, blaming some imagined sin on her part for what has befallen her: "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to

16. 1 Kings 17:17

remembrance, and to slay my son?”¹⁷ It is in Elijah’s response and the specific method by which he raises her son back to life that we can see a pattern to follow in ministering to those who suffer. This account, though covered in only a few verses, speaks volumes to Elijah’s prophetic ministry and approach to bringing to pass Israel’s promised salvation.¹⁸

First, Elijah addresses God: “And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?”¹⁹ This cry is more than a formality. Elijah uses the widow’s exact same wording in describing the death of her son. This was not necessary. We might assume that since Elijah is a prophet, he would recognize that God had not, in fact, killed the boy. Elijah, however, accuses God of killing the boy, as had the widow. As Old Testament scholar Nobuyoshi Kiuchi explains, “Elijah identifies himself with the widow’s plight. . . . The widow’s bitter words ‘to kill my son’ in [verse] 18 is taken up in Elijah’s prayer in the form of ‘to kill her son.’ This indicates clearly that Elijah identifies himself with the fate of the woman, and is deeply sympathetic to her condition.”²⁰ Thus, in this first act, Elijah has identified completely with the widow. He has not belittled her or attempted to change her views. He simply stands in solidarity with her and addresses her sufferings to God in the same language that she uses to describe her experience. Furthermore, by referring to the woman as a widow and himself as a sojourner, Elijah appears to be reminding God of God’s obligation to widows and sojourners, an obligation made explicit in the covenant code with

17. 1 Kings 17:18

18. The interpretation in this section is indebted to the work of Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, “Elijah’s Self-Offering: 1 Kings 17:21,” *Biblica* 75, no. 1 (1994): 74–79.

19. 1 Kings 17:20

20. Kiuchi, “Elijah’s Self-Offering,” 76.

Israel.²¹ Thus, Elijah appears to be openly questioning the justice of the widow's suffering.

Next Elijah performs a ritual that to us seems curious: "And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again."²² What are we to make of this symbolic act? On the one hand, it can be viewed as an act of mourning. Elijah grieves and mourns the death of the boy in a very intimate way, indicating his closeness with the family. If we consider this entire episode from the view of Israel's purity codes, however, another meaning presents itself. Elijah has already contaminated himself by taking the dead boy up to his room and laying him on his bed. In this context of transgression of purity codes, the symbolic ritual of stretching himself upon the child can be viewed as further evidence of solidarity by Elijah. As noted by Kiuchi, "If in his prayer Elijah identifies himself with the widow, in his gesture he identifies himself with the death of the child."²³ In identifying with the widow in his prayer, he has questioned whether God is just by suggesting that God has not honored the covenant obligation to widows and sojourners. Now, by stretching himself over the boy not once but three times, he has utterly polluted himself. Kiuchi continues, "Indeed this gesture may imply that Elijah is deliberately making himself anathema to the Lord, so that if God would not revive the child, Elijah wished to be dead as well, thereby showing his dedication and love for the widow's family."²⁴ This is a similar move as that taken by Moses during the golden calf incident, in which he implored God to forgive the Israelites "and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy

21. Deut. 10:18–19

22. 1 Kgs. 17:21

23. Kiuchi, "Elijah's Self-Offering," 77.

24. Kiuchi, "Elijah's Self-Offering," 77.

book which thou hast written.”²⁵ Elijah’s solidarity and advocacy are so complete that he is willing to explicitly transgress the purity laws in an effort to right what the widow has experienced as a grave injustice.

God responds to this act of solidarity and love by raising the dead boy to life. This indicates God’s approval of Elijah’s act of radical solidarity and commends this strategy to us as a means of inviting and petitioning for divine justice in our world. Elijah shows us that standing in solidarity with those who suffer injustice requires us to take their perspective, advocate for justice on their terms rather than in a paternalistic, privileged manner, and be willing to transgress social, political, and religious boundaries that stand in the way of this solidarity.

Promises, Priesthood, and Justice

With the life and ministry of Elijah in context, what can we make now of Moroni’s version of Malachi’s prophecy? The entire prophecy is framed as the result of a revelation of the priesthood by Elijah the prophet. This revelation will plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers and will turn the hearts of the children to the fathers. If this were not to happen, the whole earth would be utterly wasted. In the context of the current discussion, the promises made to the fathers are the justice and equity of the covenant community. God had promised Abraham that his children would be blessed with a land for their inheritance. This inheritance was the continual quest of Israel, and they understood the fulfillment of God’s covenant in explicitly temporal terms. Elijah would have viewed his role as working to bring about a temporal renewal for Israel: a rejection of idols and the political and economic oppression they signified and a return to the justice of the covenant community.

With this context, we can understand the planting of the promises made to the fathers in the hearts of the children as a desire to realize

25. Exodus 32:32.

the promised justice and equity of the covenant community. This community has been abandoned in our day. The rise and spread of global economic systems that prioritize profits over human lives has led to a fracturing of community and covenant relationship. The collateral damage of this covenant fracturing is immense, and growing daily. Only a return to the justice and equity of the covenant community revealed and envisioned by God can lead to a realization of the promises made to the fathers and reverse the utter wasting of the earth that is ongoing.²⁶

One final aspect of Malachi's prophecy remains to be expanded, and that is how to understand the priesthood in light of this recontextualizing of the spirit of Elijah. According to this view, the particular revelation of the priesthood—the keys, in Latter-day Saint parlance, applicable to our dispensation's specific manifestation of injustice—by Elijah is: the power and responsibility given by God to humanity to (1) work to bring about God's justice in the world (to embrace the God of life and reject the idols of death) and (2) stand in solidarity with those who are suffering until the full justice of God is realized. With this expanded understanding of the specific character of the priesthood revealed by Elijah, the spirit of Elijah can be understood as humanity's yearning for God's justice in today's world of suffering and injustice. This spirit of Elijah cries for liberation in the face of oppression, bondage, and exploitation. It leads, as the prophet Joseph made clear, to divine discontent “with blessing [our] family alone,” obliging us to “[range] through the world, anxious to bless the whole of the human family.”²⁷ It plants in our hearts the promises of justice and equity made

26. See Ward, *And There Was No Poor Among Them* for a discussion of the role of the Restoration in this return to covenant community.

27. Joseph Smith Jr., “Letter to Quorum of the Twelve, 15 December 1840,” 2, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-quorum-of-the-twelve-15-december-1840/2/>.

by God to humanity and creation, moves us forward in the hope made possible through the historical and ongoing fulfillment of this covenant, and endows us with love and power to continue the work of bringing to pass God's promised salvation to a suffering world.²⁸

28. Doctrine and Covenants 38:32. The law given to the Saints upon arrival in Kirtland would later be known as the law of consecration, an economic code specifically designed to care for the poor. The fact that the endowment of power follows and is linked to the giving of this law suggests an explicitly temporal component and purpose for this endowment, as does Joseph's framing of the dedication of the temple as a means to "secure a fulfillment of the promises thou hast made unto us, thy people" (D&C 109:11).

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C. C. A. Christensen, *Lehi's Family Leaving Jerusalem*,
1871–1875, oil on linen, 25" x 18.5"

BY THE NUMBERS

John Bennion

Masked and gowned, Isa stood in the corner of the operating room next to his son Cael. Three surgeons stood around the operating table and laid their hands on Vedi's swollen abdomen, working to expand the constricting arteries and vessels in the placenta, the living matrix between her and her baby. *Preeclampsia*. Isa turned the word in his mind—an odd word, danger before worse danger, hypertension before convulsions and coma.

Distracting yourself with semantics, old man?—what Vedi would say to him if she were conscious, but she lay still as death. He sensed her essence—bright, energetic, and irreverent as a blue jay. Not long after Cael introduced them, she figured out that Isa's frown was habitual, the face he presented to everyone, not just her. She was a linguist, not any order of psychologist or mind coach, but she understood how to easily disarm him. “You don't have to always look like you have something tender caught in your zipper.” Somehow her smile made him feel she was laughing *with* him.

He shifted his attention to the fetus, whose psi was a furred bud (Ψ), a coal ready to flame. Isa was not a developmental prognosticator, but the child would likely be less erratic than her mother, softer than her mother's sharpness. Her father's girl. But she would not potentiate if the surgeons failed in their duties.

Cael reached his hand toward Vedi, and Isa felt *déjà vu*, time curling on itself. Forty years earlier, Isa had stood in another delivery room and had reached his arm toward his wife in the same motion, fingers

extended as if to grasp the essence of mother and child. Those decades ago, he had kept his wife but the child had slipped away.

Isa said, "It will not happen again!"

His voice thundered in the small room. One of the surgeons flinched, and the head nurse glared at Isa. Cael put his hand on Isa, pulling him back even tighter into the corner. The room was cold as a walk-in refrigerator, but the surgeons sweated as they augmented the walls of vessels and maintained the flow of blood through thousands of capillaries.

The hospital's projection numerologist sat across the room. That man had already evaluated the surgeons' professional ability, their Ψ -quotients—and was now monitoring the network of constricted arteries and vessels in the placenta. He was calculating and recalculating the numbers to predict when the danger to mother would become deadly, how long before the constricting force would overwhelm the surgeons' power to widen the channels for blood flow. His job was to tell them to take the baby *before* Vedi's kidneys failed. The PN, who had ruddy skin and sandy hair, looked at his hands spread on his knees, wouldn't look up, maybe intimidated by Isa's reputation. *Focus*, Isa nearly said to the coward. *You have one job here.*

Knowing full well he was acting unethically because he was not licensed to project obstetrical outcomes, Isa drew his focus inward, isolating his brain functions and sensing through the Ayin strip of his parietal lobule the hundreds of thousands of constricting vessels, the fractal branching of the villous trees inside the walls of the placenta, the slowing of the movement of blood cells. The sensation was of a sky of falling stars, fading to dark. He sensed again Vedi's Ψ , the infant's, and the surgeons' Ψ -energy, diffused through their synapses and muscles. The net of his cortex translated these sensations into numbers, which he fed through his parietal lobule—the energy needed versus the energy available. The results exceeded the absolute ceiling that governed psychic power—the Einstein Formula, $\Psi=mc^2$. He knew Vedi was in

danger and said in as calm a voice as he could manage, "Take the baby! Vedi doesn't have the strength to push, or the time."

The same surgeon who had flinched at Isa's previous outburst turned his head toward the hospital's PN, who shook his head. "Not yet."

Isa shouted, "Now! Take the baby, now!"

The head nurse, a short and slight man, pushed Isa out of the room and into the hallway and down to the reception area. Isa was silent but the nurse swore at him the whole way, ending with "You imperious bastard." As much as he hated being manhandled, Isa had to respect the nurse, who was only doing his duty. Isa had no such respect for the inept projection numerologist. All the pioneering work in discovering how to perceive and manipulate psi, the essential matter of intelligence, was undone when they had to rely on the precision of dull, physical machinery. It was as if the past hundred years of progress was annihilated by his ineptitude.

Isa waited one minute and then walked back to peer through the window in the door. The surgeons labored on, trying to buy the fetus more days, weeks, months in the womb. Isa watched Cael, who watched his wife. Two minutes later, electronic alarms went off: Vedi's blood pressure had climbed to deadly levels. The fool of a projection numerologist was still calculating, having failed to act before Vedi and the baby were in danger. One surgeon undid the skin and muscles of the mother's belly in a curved line and another lifted the child out, then the placenta, which was both bloody cause and solution.

The pediatrician laid her hands on the child's body. Isa saw her mouth and the mouths of the other doctors and nurses moving but couldn't hear their voices. Suddenly, the baby yawled, and the pediatrician smiled and held the child up for Cael to see. The three obstetricians closed the flap of Vedi's belly, knitted each layer. Then a nurse wheeled Vedi into another room. Cael followed. Finally, the surgeons and PN emerged. "You should have listened," Isa said to him. "It takes gross

incompetence to be less accurate than equipment that's been obsolete for decades.”

“You should know better,” the PN said. “You have no license to work as part of a surgical team—especially not in a maternity ward.”

“But I was right!” Isa said.

The incompetent PN had nothing to say to that.

You certainly told him, Vedi seemed to say in his head. If it wasn't for your constant intervention, I think the entire universe would give in to entropy and flush itself down a black hole. It was as if she stood next to him, laughing him back to self-proportion.

Later, Isa stared down at his new granddaughter, who could have fit in his palm. Her tiny face had Vedi's sharp nose and thin lips. The plastic shell of the incubator looked like a glass coffin, and he imagined a larger coffin with Vedi inside. He hoped that mother and child had not been significantly harmed, but the numbers suggested otherwise. Again, Isa felt his body grow tight with anger and frustration.

Isa's father, an astrophysicist in the metaphysical guild, published articles about the infinity of universes and of dimensions of those universes. He claimed that nearly everything imaginable was happening somewhere. In a different dimension of spacetime, the PN was not incompetent, and mother and child still had viable organs. In another, Vedi had never met Cael because he had been stillborn. In another, Isa's wife, Marta, never contracted ovarian cancer. In another, Isa never met Marta. And on and on, an infinity of infinities.

Seeing this pink child, Isa again felt vertigo and steadied himself with his hands on the incubator. He was possessed by the impulse to rip off his mask, open the coffin, and put his hands on his granddaughter. But he was a researcher, not a healer. His own ability was useless in saving this small child or her mother. Isa had made a career of sensing the potentials in cells for triggering excessive growth and feeding that data to bioengineers who modified the DNA along its doubled helix. The result was the final cure for cancer.

A nurse stood in the doorway, frowning. She had probably heard about the altercation in delivery. Isa nodded and took his hands off the incubator, irked. And it irked him that he was irked at the nurse, who was certainly correct about Isa's impetuous and domineering nature.

"You've tied yourself into knots again." Marta said. Her voice seemed audible, not merely in his mind. "Now you'll be irked that you're irked that you're irked. Your mind is a snake swallowing its own tail." The mask lay against his face, recycling spent breath, and he felt claustrophobic. He wished he had the Ψ -ability to shield the baby from bacteria and viruses in his own breath. "You want to be an uber-Isa," whispered Marta. Still, he didn't turn away; he had set himself as a watchman against blind entropy.

Cael entered and stood by the incubator, opposite Isa. He looked down at his new baby as if he could hold her to life with his will, but being a musician, not a healer, he couldn't. "Vedi's still asleep." His voice liquid, eyes red above the mask, Isa reached across and gripped his son's forearms.

Isa felt Cael shaking and walked around the plastic shell to hold him. Marta seemed to be there also, circling her insubstantial arms around the two of them as they bent over Cael and Vedi's child. Again she seemed to speak: *You are an imperious bastard, but I still love you.* But it wasn't really her. No voice could call across the barriers between this dimension and those that held the essences of the dead.

Her fingers seemed to circle the crown of his head, a tender motion that he had not felt since her death. He thought about the possibility of also losing both Vedi and her unnamed child. He leaned on Cael and thought about his own mother and father, still living, his sisters, Vedi's mother and father—the substance of their affection, which in theory could be redirected and combined, like the focusing of many rays of sun, to hasten the growth of the baby's kidneys and heart. But the calculus of that profound shifting of physic power was at present beyond human ability. If he or someone else had figured out Ψ -transfer, the surgeons might have succeeded in delivering his granddaughter in an

undamaged state. The power of an entire family or community could flow through the brain and hands of a single surgeon. The human race could do anything if they could combine Ψ -energy in that manner.

In Vedi's room, Cael slept with his head inside the crook of her arm. Her skin was pale, stark against hair so deep brown that at first people thought it was black. She opened her eyes and tried to smile at Isa but gave up. She whispered, "Cael said you acted like a dick."

Isa nodded.

"He said you did so in my defense and that you were right."

"They wouldn't listen."

"He said you called the PN an incompetent asshole."

"He was. And the nurse called me an imperious bastard, so it balances."

This time she did smile. "I thought you didn't believe in karma."

"Of course I don't," he said. "I believe in neurons and Ψ -energy. And in you, Vedi. You and Cael balance me, keep me steady."

"Cael is the one. He contains the best of you and the best of Marta." She closed her eyes, and he wasn't sure she saw him nod.

"When I can hold my baby," she whispered. "I'll know her name."

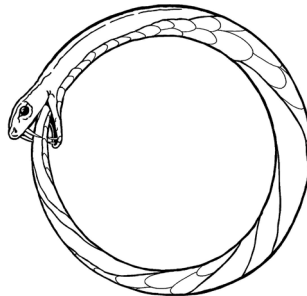
Isa considered Vedi's kidneys, the probability of their healing, ran the numbers. Shook his head. He studied her arm around Cael, Cael's cheek against her chest. The probability of their baby dying, the future memory of a tombstone between the two of them, the probability even of divorce. The projection of Vedi dying. Possibility (γ) branched, rebranched—a calculable fractal of spacetime:

$$\gamma = \frac{\text{entropy}}{\text{negentropy}}$$

Again, with Vedi, the risk of scarring. The surgeons would wait to operate; if both Vedi's kidneys started filtering properly, the medical team wouldn't need to augment muscular growth. The shape of the

word “operate” rolled in Isa’s mind. It functioned like another word he had mulled over—“work.” The doctors operated so her kidneys would work again. A mechanic worked steel and rubber so that those who couldn’t propel their own bodies would have a vehicle that operated. Conceptual action caused physical action, a tiny engine—a perfect linguistic, mathematical, and corporeal cycle. His own work was un-work. He helped to discover how cells with a potential for cancer might un-potentiate.

Sitting in the chair, watching Cael and Vedi, he dozed, woke, dozed again, dreaming of rings, the double helix of a bacteria’s single, circular chromosome, the shape of the earth’s orbit, the moon’s, the silver ring on Marta’s dead hand. Watching his son and Vedi hold each other, another kind of perfect circle, he again felt time folding back on itself, \forall swallowing its own tail:



Forty years before, he had crawled into Marta’s hospital bed, wrapped her in his arms. He told her as she woke from anesthesia that their child was stillborn. Marta’s rhythmic keening sounded across the years.

The child, whom they had named Lieba in the womb, was born dead despite his projection the night before that she would be healthy. As Marta approached her due date, she had grown more and more anxious, so he drove her out of the city into an uninhabited area, hoping to distract her with views of unconstrained plants and animals, chaotic

landscapes. But it hadn't worked. She became even more anxious as they drove farther from the city and the hospital; he had hoped to reach an area where they might see a large mammal, a bear or a carad. As a sop to her worry, he ran the numbers. His calculations predicted that the baby would be fine, but he went through them again. He told her not to worry and convinced or browbeat her into continuing deeper into the wilderness. Ever since, he had wondered what was in his head, going against her intuition. His stubbornness had always made him unable to give up on whatever it was he wanted. Now Isa saw himself clearly—a cocky, bullheaded, imperious bastard. That he was generally right didn't make him any easier to live with. This he knew.

But that day decades ago, he had not been right. He had made a bad projection. Marta had become so anxious that he turned around. She hadn't felt the baby move for some time, but they were still hours from the hospital. When they finally arrived, the nurse couldn't find a heartbeat, so she brought in the PN and the obstetrician. Finally, the fallible machine recorded something, a faint thrum, either an echo of the mother's heartbeat or the fetus's faltering pump. After that, they parted Marta's womb and took the baby cesarean. A nurse elevated their fetus out of the bloody confusion of Marta's opened abdomen, and the pediatric doctor worked on the small body. Isa had stood in the doorway in mask and gown, believing that if he watched the process, the blind forces in the universe would not take his and Marta's child.

When he saw the baby's pink skin, he asked, "She's alive?"

The nurse shook her head. "She's pink from aided respiration. Not alive."

He watched as Lieba turned blue, oxygen fading from her tissues. Later a nurse brought in the small, cold child, wrapped in a blanket, and Isa had held that weight, handed the bundle to Marta, and watched her weep over the scruff of dark hair. Cold blue baby. The PN and obstetrician consulted and judged that the umbilical cord had wrapped around her neck when she dropped, getting ready to be born. As he watched, Isa reworked the formulas and discovered his sophomoric error—failing

to double a derivative, not the slope of the rate of flow of blood but the slope of a slope.

The PN somehow found out that Isa was of his guild. “What did you sense?”

Isa said, “Nothing. I sensed nothing.” Mortified, he couldn’t lift his eyes to see what he knew was pity on the face of the official PN.

Marta wept in bed every night for a year about their lost child. “Lost” was Marta’s word; she felt Lieba wandered somewhere in a different dimension of this universe or an infinite number of other universes, gone to a place Marta couldn’t follow.

Isa had complained to his father. “Marta needs to know where the child’s soul has gone. It might comfort her.” Isa couldn’t say, *I didn’t pay attention*. If they hadn’t been so far from the hospital when Marta’s good sense made her anxious, they might have saved the child. He had read the numbers, or misread the numbers, but had ignored the physical signs. Typical.

His father, his hair unkempt, white flames, had searched his son’s face before speaking. “I can offer no comfort. The child might be anywhere. Parallel dimensions differentiate from each other by something as slight as the death of a butterfly, the dropping of a single scale from its wing, or even less. The survival of a species through a mutation in a thumb or a brain. In another universe Einstein might have not existed, or she might have discovered something other than the formula for psychic intelligence. A whole universe might distinguish itself by an alternative word for this ‘psi’ or it might be represented by something other than the letter ‘Ψ’. In which of the infinity of these possible alternate dimensions might your child be?” He spoke louder, with force. “There is no physics that can find the child. The universe is just too big.”

He peered into Isa’s face. “Worse, if Marta tried to follow. If she somehow succeeded in entering another dimension, she’d displace Ψ and physical mass, creating waves and backwaves of disruption. In that

chaotic state, the memory of the interloper could be erased, identity could dissolve.” His father put one hand on his shoulder. “Do you think she’ll try something desperate?”

“I don’t know.”

“Worry about that. Not about your error in math. Estimating Ψ -potentials is tricky.” His father paused. “You are not fully trained in projection numerology and not at all in obstetrical work. You simply made a mistake.”

At that moment Isa determined he would never make another mistake like that one, and his focus had served him well in his own research and career. Now, standing above his granddaughter’s incubator, his success curing cancer seemed merely ironic. He would gladly trade that achievement for the life of this child.

When Isa and Marta’s next child was born, he also had to be taken cesarean because the muscles in Marta’s abdomen would have split apart at the effort of pushing the baby out her birth canal. Again, Isa stood nearby, watching the surgeon divide Marta’s skin and muscle. He felt time coil back on itself, and he wondered whether he would again be forced to watch a pink baby turn blue. But this child, a son, kicked and squalled. Same scruff of hair, same thick legs as Lieba. But alive. They named him Cael, a Celtic name that meant both “victorious people” and “slender,” and the boy grew into an adult and married Vedi.

Isa loved his son, that miracle lifted out of parted muscle and pooling blood, but he came to love equally his daughter-in-law, the woman Cael met at college. Vedi teased Isa when Cael couldn’t budge him. Teased when even Marta occasionally gave up on influencing her husband. Marta had believed his inflexible sense of entitlement started in childhood when he was the first son, with three younger sisters. He was the prince to his mother, tyrant to his sisters. Marta had said, “They crowned you king. It’s a good thing you’re basically a good man, or you’d be unbearable *all* the time.”

Not long after Cael’s marriage, when Isa and his son had argued about something Isa couldn’t remember, Vedi had said with a serious

face, “Do you know that the penis of a blue whale is one foot thick and ten feet long?” Isa had stopped midsentence and turned to Marta, but she had no sympathy. She just laughed with her daughter-in-law.

He could have resented the girl, but she smiled, took his arm, asked him about his work. Through the years she became their peacemaker, Isa-bender. Her rough, irreverent language and her disarming smile that was as pleasant as a rising moon. When she and Cael visited, if Isa insisted on which restaurant, which movie, which conversation, she might say, “Do you know that male goats piss on their own heads?” Or she might sing, “Gruff, gruff, gruff, gruff, billy goat gruff” to the tune of the opening bars of the *1814 Overture*. Or she might repeat the word “scrotum” in different tones—an opera singer, an auctioneer, a robot, or a speaker of Indian, Arabic, Egyptian, Eurlandic, or Hebrew, the languages she knew.

He had never been able to successfully respond to the girl’s bawdy inanities. If he sputtered words or numbers back, trying to argue his point, she sang, in an astonishingly accurate imitation of his voice, “Nothing really matters. Nothing really matters to me.”

“People matter,” he told her.

She smiled like the Mona Lisa, like she had won again.

It got to where all Vedi had to do was arch one eyebrow, and Isa knew that Cael or Marta had reached their limit. Or she’d ask him, “How can an agnostic nihilist be so pompous?” She always unstrung his inflexible volition. Because he knew the shape of his own Ψ (the numbers never lie), he knew his own arrogance and became patient with and eventually pleased by her teasing. What she did by giving him another option for behavior was to make him gradually into a better person, luring him to follow one set of projections over another.

Also, Isa loved the girl because she was good for Cael, whose sensitivity and reclusiveness blossomed into empathy and wisdom. With Vedi, Cael was more himself; and he and Isa weren’t alone in being improved through her influence. Often Marta spoke of Vedi as a blessing to the whole family.

Eventually, Vedi was the one who comforted him when Marta developed ovarian cancer and the cells multiplied faster than the surgeons could retard their growth. Faster than the square of the square of the exponent. Isa felt injured by his wife's sudden departure—from diagnosis to death in one month. He was angry at the screening pathologist, at himself, at Marta. He vowed again to unravel cancer, which gave his career even more impetus. He began to rage less and felt merely loss, as if a wall he had been leaning against unawares for decades had given way. Had the Ψ -material that made up her identity simply dissipated as she slipped into another dimension? If so, then Marta was triply lost: lost to him and lost to herself, her essence perhaps rejoining the unorganized intelligence of the universe. This thought was unbearable, inoperable.

Years before Marta's death, during the first year after the loss of their child, she had said that she felt unafraid of death and that suicide seemed easy or inevitable, a heartbeat away. At the time he had watched her, fearful that she would follow Lieba. After Marta's death from cancer, he felt the same way she had; following her into another realm would have been as easy as walking through a doorway. Instead of doing that, he intensified his efforts to cure what had killed her. And Vedi had helped him process his sorrow by repeating memories of Marta until tears came for both of them. Gradually his sorrow drained enough that he could engage again with life.

That evening, Cael and Vedi's baby died. Her tiny kidneys and heart had disintegrated faster than the pediatric surgeons could mend their cells. He had watched from the viewing room, had seen the beads of sweat run down the surgeons' faces. As the baby turned from pink to blue, her essence must have felt like sand or water sifting through their fingers. Isa sensed not only the sublimation of her tiny Ψ -mass, but also the slow grind of the wheel of spacetime, increasing in entropy as it turned, turned again. How had the poet put it? "Tighter and tighter in the encircling spyre, the time-snake crushes its victim."

Two months passed, then two more, but Vedi was inconsolable. Isa worried that she wouldn't make it through the first year, after which Marta's sorrow had become manageable. Cael said Vedi wept every night, asking, "What if her soul is alone in a deep, lightless dimension?" When Cael tried to contradict that idea, she became angry. "You don't know. All I know is that I can't find out where she's gone. She's lost." A precise echo of Marta's anguish.

Isa knew his father had in the past year done experiments with tracing Ψ -material as it entered another dimension, so Isa went again to him. His father was bowed so low, his spine so curved, that when he walked, his head was nearly at waist level. They sat, and Isa described the cycles of sorrow he had experienced. The old man looked at the floor, then slowly lifted his head. "I entangled quanta in the brains of two different mice," he rasped. "Then I killed one mouse and used the living mouse to track Ψ -material of the dead mouse through six dimensions. The living mouse became more and more disoriented and then lost all brain function. I must assume that the same had happened to the dead mouse—intelligence scrambled into chaos, identity lost. I'm sorry, but what you want is still impossible."

Isa thought about the array of dimensions folded like napkins or tulip petals—each a mutation of the next. Or perhaps they were like the feathers of a peacock, waves of the ocean, notes in a symphony. The swirling waves of barley heads in a grain field, a murmur of starlings. All turning on a Word, turning and turning. All those universes unknowable because a visitor's former identity couldn't survive entering another dimension.

Isa wanted to comfort Vedi, as she had comforted him, but she wouldn't see him. She told Cael, and Cael relayed her words to Isa: "He'll try to make me feel something different. I'm not ready, not yet."

Isa gave her two weeks and then entered their house without asking permission. She turned her back to him as she lay on the couch. He started speaking in a low voice, "Those incompetent assholes. Those bastards. Those cockheads. Damn them. Those eunuchs." He paused.

She turned her head toward him. “Go on.”

So he swore all the way from “fuck” to “zag.” Then he described what she, Vedi, had done for him, Marta, and Cael, turning them toward joy. He then described the universe for her—the beauty of the numbers when spacetime bent around a gravity well. He told her that inside a cluster of massive stars and inside the simplest atom, spacetime might take any form: a spiral, a Möbius band, a globe, a Klein bottle, or a shape in a geometry foreign to those they could imagine. Then he told her jokes about projection numerology, jokes only funny to others of his profession. “Why did the armadillo cross the road?” Pause. Pause. Pause. Vedi looked up at him, shaking her head. “He was weary of three-dimensional math and wanted to try making calculations with just two-dimensions.” When she just stared at him, he said, “I knew that joke would fall flat.”

At last she smiled, wonderful reward! “That’s the dumbest joke I’ve ever heard.”

But she didn’t smile again. Indeed, each time he drove to see her, she was less responsive, her face like a wall. Cael said that she ate almost nothing, less than a finch. Vedi’s therapist noted that her mood scores lowered a few points each session, so Isa and Cael hired the best psychoneurologist in their city. The specialist found Vedi’s mind a tangle of darkness. When Isa ran the numbers himself, he had to use theoretical calculus to make sense of them. Not a good sign.

“Postpartum depression,” the neurologist said. “Worst case I’ve ever seen.” Vedi’s weight went from forty-five kilos to thirty-six to thirty-one. “We should have given our baby a name,” she rasped in Cael’s ear.

Then, four months after the infant’s death, Vedi staggered out of bed and asked for a chocolate milkshake. She sat at the kitchen table, smiling at Isa when he came to visit. “I finally understand your joke.”

“What joke?”

“Why the armadillo crossed the road.”

“And?”

“The armadillo crossed the road and the armadillo didn’t cross the road. Both happened, just like with Schrödinger’s rabbit.” Then she laughed for the first time since her child died.

Isa looked at Cael and both of them frowned.

Isa read the numbers, still tangled even though VEDI seemed much better. She sat at the kitchen table drinking fruit smoothies—fig, raspberry, mango, beeberry—and staring at the wall, her smile fixed. She listened as Cael or Isa spoke to her, but she didn’t say much. Cael consulted the neurologist, who said that because she was eating again, she might heal emotionally. For the first time in months, Isa had hope. He kept his mind on the numbers, waiting for her to come back to herself. After another week, she started walking, first around the block their house sat on. Then down the street to the food dispensary and back. To the edge of the foothills and back. Color returned to her face. One day she sat and talked to both of them, about the baby, about Marta, their memories.

The next morning, she told them she wanted to walk up the canyon behind their house. By lunchtime she hadn’t come back. The police found her at the bottom of a cliff. They said she hadn’t just stepped off. She was far enough from the base of the cliff that she must have sprinted into the air. She had waited until she was strong enough to leap toward the barrier between life and death.

After two find and rescue officers put the white body bag in the back of an ambulance, Isa sat on a huge boulder near the bottom of the cliff and held Cael. Together they rocked forward and back; Cael made an animal sound that Isa thought would never end. Isa watched the ambulance drive away, flashing lights now turned off. While Isa held his son, he tried to project the numbers backward, something he had learned in his first numerology class was as illogical as dividing by zero. Still, he cast his mind on alternative pasts, believing that in some other universe each past was possible. If he had walked up the canyon

with her or gotten Cael to walk with her. If the neurologist had seen the warning signs. If Isa had paid more attention to the numbers. If Marta had lived and had talked Vedi through the depression. Any of these and an unlimited number of other events could have prevented Vedi from concluding that she had to potentiate her existence into another dimension.

Finally, after a paramedic calmed Cael's brain and body, he stopped keening, and Isa drove him home and put him to bed. The paramedic had done good work, and Cael fell directly to sleep.

Isa turned his mind to the future. Possibility seemed unhinged. Time branched infinitesimally and rapidly, and he felt the rushing sound of alternative universes passing. All of them curled into diverging parabolic curves; one path veered left, one right, one farther right, a blossoming of lines of time, like the streams of smoke behind fireworks. The strand remaining to him, the strand in which he was forced to have his being, seemed unbearable—bleak, dark, lonely.

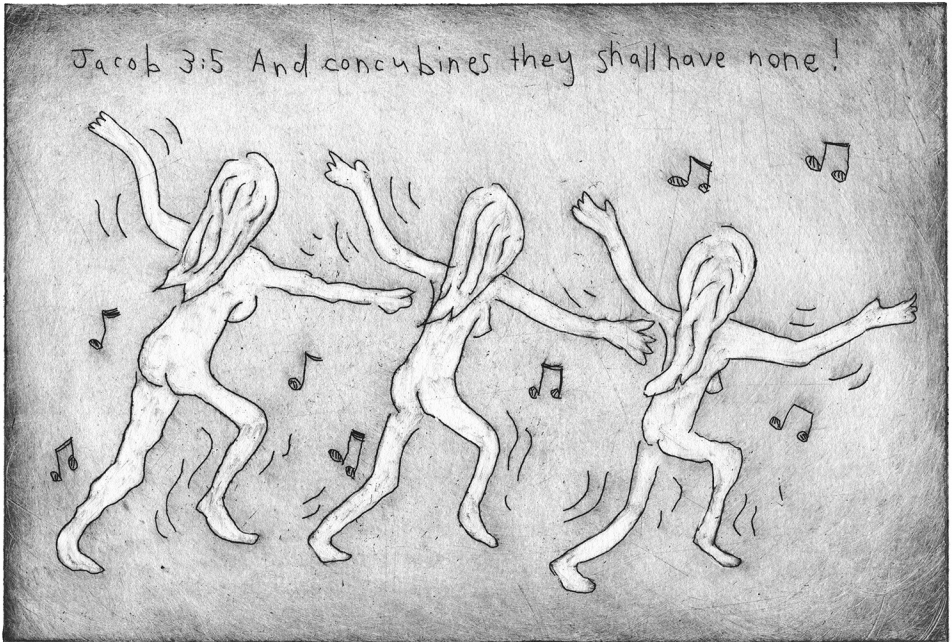
Isa lay on the couch, half forgetting Vedi's death each time he dozed but remembering the horror anew each time he jerked awake. He imagined or dreamed that Marta walked through the room and looked at his face, walked on. He did the math, desperate now: the physical mass of Vedi's body plus the mass of her stillborn infant as their spiritual essences slipped sideways into other dimensions. The derivative of a derivative of the motion of her Ψ -mass, here and then lost, sinking toward oblivion. The bright numbers here, darker numbers there, the equations of her absence, spacetime bent by the gravity of her passing. He believed that Vedi had purposefully gone after her child. But without knowing anything about probability, how would she know where she might find her baby? Would Marta help, or was she also lost?

Isa didn't know what to tell Cael. Nothing would help except having Vedi alive again, and that was impossible, Isa's father said so. Nothing

Isa did could save his son, and Cael's projected sorrow at the loss of *all* his loved ones weighed less than Isa's desire to follow them. Finally, Isa just wrote a note: "I've gone to find VEDI and the child. I will bring them back to you."

As he closed his eyes again, he again sensed the strands of space-time coursing past, his body a hand thrust into a stream of water, a spiral of harp strings plucked at a central point. He added a dimension and sensed another; they streamed parallel to each other. He heard animal moaning at the base of the cliff, imagined VEDI falling forever without hitting the ground, her never jumping, a sleeping infant opening her eyes, MARTA's ironic smile as she sat up from her sickbed, which was not her deathbed. All the universes with minute differences. He was not a surgeon or a mother growing a fetus, he only sensed Ψ and did projection math. But the numbers shaped themselves, formulae turning on edge like a conceptual razor, and he felt the muscles of spacetime separate faster than he was ready. As the traces of MARTA and LIEBA, VEDI and her unnamed child faded, Isa forced himself through headfirst, terrified that no one's hands might be there to bear him up.

JOHN BENNION {johnsergebennion@gmail.com} has published a collection of short fiction, *Breeding Leah and other Stories* (Signature Books, 1991), and five novels: *Falling Toward Heaven* (Signature Books, 2000), *An Unarmed Woman* (Signature Books, 2019), *Ezekiel's Third Wife* (Roundfire Books, 2019), *Spin* (BCC Press, 2022), and *Ruth at the End of the Earth* (BCC Press, 2023). He has retired from teaching creative writing in the English Department at Brigham Young University.



Annie Poon, *Concubines*, 2019, etching

Transition

Janessa M. Ransom

Soon the deer will leave the mountains.
Search our garden for vegetation.
Bite the tops off tea roses,

their teeth leaving scars.
In the yard the ash tree drops
leaves into the browning grass.

My husband rakes around each rose,
making brittle beds of insulation
against the winter cold.

Frost turns tender stems black.
Rootstalk retreats inside itself.
Late petals fall to the ground, bruising.

I don't know which way to grow.

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A Reminder of the Diverse Particles
that Form Your Identities—Ancestry
in the Language of Geography
and Theoretical Physics

Simon Peter Eggertsen

For my younger children

So you will know, here is a recounting of the quantum influences, the little arcs of familiar experience that accelerate within your own beings, tickling the protons of personality, exciting your identities into existence, *top to bottom*:

i. *charm*—

the intricate cosmology of questions in Caribbean folklore, the stories retold in the brown-girl songs of your own

West Indian *mother*—which village slave auntie first added a *deepa-greena* taste, *chado beny*—coriander—

to spice up the sloppy *callaloo*? how many *cocoa beans* it takes to make a packet of Hershey's Kisses once your

great-uncles sweat, dance, oil them up for the marketing board's fifty-kilo bag? how as giggling children, without

knowing why, you learned to call the sharp reach of the *sword plant*—“*mother-in-law's tongue!*”;

ii. *strange*—

the fluctuating warps, the stellar images of relativity embedded in your *father's* quirky English thoughts—

the size, the shape, the spontaneity of a solar wind, now
just a mild spring breeze in Cambridge, as it twists
and twirls medallions of green-stained glass in laneways
near Rose Crescent, the Sun, bending new Light, perfecting
its prism work, scattering soft spectrals, little rainbows,
here and there, then, lessening at Evensong
in King's College Chapel, casts last Light on Rubens's
Adoration of the Magi, brings its own reflection to an end;

iii. *down*—

the diminishing Time your *grandmother* has left on either
side of the present, the spontaneous entanglement awaiting
the monarchs near Monterey Bay as they bunch together
at evening, camouflage into the pines, the eucalyptus,
share their warmth, rest, tremble subtly in the night sea
breeze, wait for the yellow blaze of another morning's
Sun to remind their wings they can fly again, the length
of the next generation's journey to their summer home
in Canada, the fallow fields, the sustaining sweetness of
Manitoba milkweed;

iv. *up*—

the pulsing quasars, the Light-laden intimations hidden
in the flash of fireworks set off by your Chinese *forefathers*
—how they ricocheted red off the dragon-arched village
gate, then in Canton, split, curled, then scrawled, like

a child's sparkler writing, ancient calligraphy for *joy* and *luck*
and *prosperity* on the slate of a New Year's night air,

the length of the moment it took your *great-grandfather*
to realize he would someday drag that bright practice,

and his shopkeeping, to other side of the world, to the green
rolling green hills of Trinidad, the cricketed village of Rio Claro;

v. *bottom*—

the earthy ambience of your half-Danish *grandfather's* Wildwood,
deep in the folds of a Utah canyon, where the Sun has to fight

for space in the morning, where on Sundays, dappled by the Light,
we learned to softly ask for God to be with us, the swinging

bridge at Dr. Weight's, where each crossing was always
an adventurous leap, a rising toward some kind of nervy

blue limbo, whenever another child jumped on, flexed the bridge
works back, lofted you up, away, stood you on air 'til

gravity brought you down;

vi. *top*—

the expanding, smooth Space occupied by the density of
your island *grandmother's* own black matter—as dense and

lyrical as this poetry—the undulations, the slowing pace of
Time encountered on Zanzibar, the event horizon of five

female figures, draped as night in their *bui buis*, moving
along uneven cobblestones on Gizenga Street, the peaceful

lilt of their greeting, "*Asalaamu alaikum*," the amount of Light
they swallow up, reflect back late in the afternoon as they

slide their shade across a mosque's sun-perfected presence—
an Aleph in Old Stone Town, the mystery of their transform-
ation into sails on spice-laden *dhow*s, drifting away from
Jozani at midnight, side-by-side, vibrating, curving, moving
north, a slow, expanding wave front headed toward Oman,
to the *souks* at Muscat, eyeing to trade for handfuls of golden
earrings, bags of honey-yellow amber.

—Montreal, June 2021

The text of this poem, now revised for *Dialogue*, was part of a much longer poem selected by Lloyd Schwartz, a Pulitzer Prize winner, as an Honorable Mention for the Samuel Washington Allen Prize, New England Poetry Club, 2021 (nepoetryclub.org/simon-peter-eggertsen).

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Emma Stands at Her Doorway:
Nauvoo, 1846

Abby Parcell

Rinse out the rag while you stand at the door; there is no more
ripe fruit at this point in the season. Those wagons that
rise on the opposite bank are filled with what they hope won't rot. A
risk to stay or to go, but what goes are
rituals that brought you in and left you out, made you a
rival. They will build their own kind of empire, as the
river crossing ends another. A boundary, but not a fixed one. You are
robed in your choice, weary of the
romance of all things new, aching to
root by this river and rest.

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Moroni 12

Dennis Clark

My father has appeared—not in a dream—
and shown me where to haul the plates off to,
a harder task now that I had the records
of Mormon whole and Ether shortened up
and needed a bigger box to haul them in—
but I was still accustomed to the pack.
He told me I must take the records off
somewhere the sons of Laman do not live,
but led me back to Akimel Hakathi
to visit with my wife and son, a Kumen,
after the one who married us. I found it
hard to return, and harder yet to leave,
for this was the only family I had known.

I left her once again with child and made
my way with Mormon helping me evade
patrols that Laman sent to trap the few
they could not kill, and so my father, from
his pillar of light appeared and guided me
in wandering to that new and far Cumorah,
north through a waste of rock cut like a corpse,
into high watered valleys—to a dead
sea. Then, guided by a line of peaks,
into the rising sun. The mountains shrank
until I came down to a sea of grass
and sentries where the herds of cumoms feed.

“Moroni 12” is part of a larger sequence published in *Donetsk Interval* by Waking Lion in 2022.

All this was new to me, of forest born.
I moved with care, hunted and marked for death—
and though I found the sites where men would yet
raise temples, there were now no cities there,
and others moved like me. I hid from them,
not knowing how far Laman's sons would seek
to find and kill survivors. I was caught
trying to kill a calf that strayed, with just
my knife, and butcher it. My captors had
no blood of Laman. When they strung me up,
needing to know I was a man like them,
then cut me down, they named me newly theirs.
I wanted to stay, live in a house of skins
and follow the herds across the scroll of seasons,
but I had made a desert river home
and could not tarry where I could become
a bigger target as a stranger here
for anyone who wondered why I'd fled,
what treasure drew me into desolation
and out the other side—richer than fear,
stronger than feud, more wicked than despair.
I could not draw the wolves upon this fold.

I left in greater stealth than I had come
traveling down a river brown with silt
my friends had said would take me to the sea,
with all that soil its flood was bearing off.
This brown earth led me to the red, where God
had fashioned from the dust the first of men
and women. There I left and moved again
across the prairie rolling like a sea
to where my father showed me. There I made

an altar to my God where he would soon,
or late, arrive—not now, but far enough
into the future I could not neglect
the task my father set me, so again
I tracked the river bank to where it joined
a larger, greener river moving slower,
crossed it by night and found a city there
(where on the other shore a river joined),
first one I'd come across. I skirted it
but lingered too long spying on its mounds
and ramparts. None knew what to make of me.

They made me prisoner, and when they saw
the scars across my chest they made me come
before their king, his war-chief, council chiefs,
and tell the story I had kept concealed,
or die. I'd learned the people's tongue enough
to tell another captive who had come
from that same people in his tongue—but he
knew I was not a warrior of that folk,
and told them I was not his kin. Through him
I told my story, how I'd fled sure death,
a fugitive from Laman and his justice —
the story of two brothers who had fought:
the younger fled, the elder had pursued,
a thousand years, at first just from the shore
to upland, thence into secluded valleys,
and fought more often than they'd loved, for all
those years, till finally like a festering wound,
their civilization split and drenched both tribes
in pus and blood. "No innocent brother's blood
cried from the ground. I only am escaped

alone to tell you. All my people dead—
slaughtered or made betrayers of their own
and only. Some who know me help the sons
of Laman. I have watched them miss my path.

“This is the reason I cannot remain.
I would not willingly expose you to
such hatred. They who follow will proclaim
that you have welcomed death in hosting me
unless there is no trace that I was here.”
Such was my plea. They sent me off in stealth
and I have moved in stealth across the land,
living by bow and knife, trading sometimes
with peoples in their camps out hunting meat—
but mostly moving in the shadows, slow,
sleeping in trees, hiding in thickets, caves
that masked my scent, & copses in open country,
not daring to believe I would escape,
led by my father like a liahona
to find this hill whence he would move the plates.
I made this journey to secure the plates
of his and Ether’s records, which I’d finished.
So now they’re hid across a sea of grass,
and now I have to let it be, and vanish.

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Commitment Beyond Custom

Michael Fillerup. *The Year They Gave Women the Priesthood and Other Stories*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2022. 284 pp. Paper: \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-445-6.

Reviewed by Heidi Naylor

I once had a bishop who was as guileless as he was faithful, a good and generous man who worked hard and loved us, his ward members, tirelessly. He liked to tell our ward's young men that if they'd serve a mission and give the Lord their best for two years, they'd come home and marry a gorgeous woman for eternity.

It was a cultural promise, of course, taking its traditional place in a long series of Latter-day Saint customs and sayings.

What I love about the new collection from Michael Fillerup is that he—Fillerup—is well-versed in these customs; he understands them top to bottom and inside out; and he's not really having them.

What happens, for example, when you do everything right, you sacrifice and obey and serve . . . and you don't get the spouse, the family, the life, the happy consequence of your dreams? "Psalm for the Man Who Has Everything" concerns a forty-seven-year-old, modern-day Shiblón who lives in the same ward as his pre-mission girlfriend. She Dear-Johned him decades earlier for the hometown hero: a "mannequin good," successful future bishop and mayor, "all of which meant she [now] lived in the triple-decker on the hill and drove the biggest, shiniest sports utility vehicle in the country . . . [as] he was fast-tracked to the top" (149).

Our Shiblón, Brother Collins, settles into bachelorhood as a decent, neighborly, and hardworking cabinetmaker with a little condo. He nurses this private grudge for decades, while perfectly lovely women (and life) try to catch his attention. Still, Collins has eyes for little except

Pre-Mission Girlfriend, and one night he allows his obsession to get the best of him.

Inevitable personal shame ensues, along with a deific showdown: “Why the hell?” he pleads. “How?” he wonders. “What’s all of this *for*?” (159).

Fillerup says that he doesn’t “sprinkle fairy dust” on his characters but doesn’t “feed them to the Minotaur” either. What he does, and does so well, is insist that they take up the hard questions that many of us find ourselves asking, even if quietly, as we experience the pains and betrayals of ordinary life. The answers to these questions are hard-won. They arrive packaged in the earthbound, raw materials of daily living—the tools God uses to help us hear him: a rock song lyric, moments on the pitching mound “throwing sidearm strikes” to a kid (188), a third-world Catholic chapel in which the “pale Virgin” is “not exactly the same God [we] worship . . . but close enough for the moment” (106).

There are seventeen stories here, and the first two read like novels. I hope you’ll get the collection for the first (and title) story alone: “The Year They Gave the Women the Priesthood.” I laughed and laughed but also felt the sting of discomfiting truth as the story careened forward, upending millennia of cultural practice. After present-day women are ordained to priesthood offices and callings, young men and their fathers get “to act as . . . [baptismal] witnesses . . . [, which] seemed like a consolation prize” (16).

That’s the ousted former patriarch of his family speaking. Now he’s been demoted: husband of a bishopric counselor, watching as his wife confers upon their daughter the Aaronic Priesthood and speaks to her excitedly about her future in Church administration. A few weeks later, their son is baptized by his mother. He’d been looking forward to becoming a deacon one day but must now face a future in which his sister will be the one providing the ordinances of salvation. He . . . well, he’ll get to watch.

It gets tougher, as Husband learns that “worthy priesthood holders can now be sealed in the temple to additional husbands” (17).

Husband recoils by throwing a punch at the household addition of Second Husband, a twenty-five-year-old martial arts champ who “gave a bodybuilding workshop for the young women” (21). His wife steps in with a pointed verbal takedown of Second Husband: “You should know better than to pick on someone twice your age!” (38).

Sheesh.

It all rings so hollow and—yes—painful when these cultural tables are turned. Is this because I’m the devoted wife of a priesthood magnifier, plus the mother of beloved sons, and I feel for them?

Or is it because the long tradition of patriarchy really *is* that damaging and arbitrary, consequential and indefensible?

The second story, the heartbreaking “In a Better County,” concerns the mysterious and unexplained death of a young missionary in Mexico. The young man’s mother has moved painfully through her grief, serving faithfully and with a willing heart. But the father can’t accept what has happened; he travels to a tiny Tarahumaran village to avenge, or perhaps simply to reckon with, his son’s violent death.

Fillerup doesn’t shy away from the blood-soaked consequences of this father’s actions as he confronts an arrogant young teen who is wearing his son’s “bright . . . brash . . . gold Rolex” (90). What follows is a grappling that is as much with God as it is with the violence of revenge—a contest dealing as fully with forgiveness of the self as with accepting both the presence and absence of divine intervention.

I love these stories for their passionate insistence, their energy, their humor, their pointedness, and their compassionate, practical wrestle with the earthbound nature of faith and devotion. It’s a struggle that impels gleaming glimpses of the divine. Can such moments sustain us? *The Year They Gave Women the Priesthood* is a collection you won’t want to miss.

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Voices of Global Mormon Women

Caroline Kline. *Mormon Women at the Crossroads: Global Narratives and the Power of Connectedness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022. 256 pp. Paper: \$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-252-08643-4.

Reviewed by Stephanie Griswold

While some critique oral history methods, Caroline Kline's *Mormon Women at the Crossroads: Global Narratives and the Power of Connectedness* takes significant strides to substantiate the benefits of the method. Among these critiques are the role of memory in providing exacting recaps of past events and the potential for ethical issues; however, there is something to be said about the positive impact of time, information, and retrospect in recording quotidian experiences to nuance or even complicate overarching, typically top-down interpretations of history, known in the field as metanarratives. As Kline notes in her introduction and throughout the book, "oral life histories" not only serve her goal to understand the *agentive* choices of Mormon women of color but add the voices of the very people whom scholars have frequently ignored (18). While Kline admits that her feminist lens caused a faulty assumption about issues her narrators cared about, she finds ways to adjust and center these women's concerns (161). Early oral history tended to focus on people high in sociopolitical hierarchies—then assumed to be the most objective and accurate accounting of the past. However, scholars of gender and religion, as Kline details, make use of this method to add to the metanarratives that dominated the humanities for so long.

Kline's introduction explicitly outlines her positionality, research questions, and the framework of gender, race, and religion she works within. Methodologically, the opening pages offer a detailed explanation of the significant value found in conducting oral histories. The introduction further serves as a primer on Mormonism, the pertinent

historiography, and a user-friendly guide for her methodology. The case study chapters, dealing with different national experiences among women of color in Mexico, Botswana, and the United States, portray distinct reasons these women join or remain in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, culminating in what Kline calls “non-oppressive connectedness.” Non-oppressive connectedness, the vital component of Kline’s argument, is defined as “elements of female empowerment and liberation . . . characterized by a broader moral focus on fostering positive, productive, and vitalizing relationality,” and came about through “womanist and intersectional approaches” and realizations in the field when conducting interviews (3–5). Here is where Kline’s positionality discussion becomes most relevant and reveals the limiting nature of her identity and feminist lens (3–5).

Chapter 4, “Toward a Mormon Womanist Theology of Abundance,” is among the book’s central theoretical interventions, alongside the illuminating insight of the oral history portions transcribed in the text and Kline’s analysis. The conclusion authoritatively restates the argument and addresses themes found in the case studies that are important to both academic and Latter-day Saint audiences. In the conclusion, Kline again restates her positionality as a lifelong Latter-day Saint woman. Also significant in the conclusion is the follow-up with interviewees that offers insight into their current relationship with the Church, especially in response to changes in policies and abuse scandals that coincide with the initial concerns that led them to the Church. Kline reminds the reader of a few examples from the book, like Ana in Mexico, whose experience with domestic violence (DV) was “rarely and vaguely addressed in local Latter-day Saints contexts,” though abuse against women was one of the major concerns of several narrators (164). Kline connected this to scandals like White House staff secretary Rob Porter being accused of DV in 2018 or the broader issue of some bishops encouraging women to stay with their abusive husbands despite eventual updates in Church guidelines (164).

One significant contribution is the examination of Mexican LDS women. Kline's interaction with Elizabeth Brusco's work on machismo and the use of marianismo as the female gender norm is not only theoretically sound but speaks to Latina experiences that are legible to Latinas in both the LDS Church and the academy (48). Kline's scholarly interventions overlapped with my engagement with the text as a Latina. My positionality is adjacent to these narrators as a non-LDS Mexican-Nicaraguan American woman in Mormon studies. Through the interviews and subsequent analysis, I often saw myself or the women in my family and our familial and religious experiences in Kline's findings. None of the women in my family, nor I, have ever been any stripe of Mormon; however, the results of Kline's research reflect the realities of Latina religious intersections across many religious communities. Kline discusses some of those realities that display the tension between lived and institutional religion that can also be seen across faith traditions and reflect historical research on Latin American religious conversion's relationship to local realities, like those described in this text (162–64).

There has been a recent increase in research on Mormonism in Mexico, and Kline's work adds meaningful ways to discuss this particular demographic. In the conclusion, Kline asserts that her argument could be applied to "traditional religious women within other faith traditions" (161). Through her analysis of an interviewee's use of the term "mujeriego," she focuses on the ways Mormonism addresses social and familial concerns of Latina women along with cultural issues of alcoholism and infidelity (26–27, 162). These themes seem to be frequent in narratives of conversion across various conservative Christianities that assume missionary projects in Latin America. We see in this discussion theoretical and cultural terms that reflect scholarship and experiences of the broader Latina community outside of just Latter-day Saint women of Latinx descent.

The only unclear section of the book was which culture's "gender norms" she expressly referred. For example, in chapter 1, there is discussion of "machismo" and the Mexican women's experiences with that

cultural gender dynamic versus norms the US-based and predominantly white, male-led LDS Church uphold. We could benefit from a more direct explanation of the dichotomy of gender norms in each chapter. There are many forms of gender norms that traverse this text: US, Latter-day Saint, western feminist, Mexican, and Botswanan. These different cultures express both the intersections of identity for the narrators and scholars and the agentive choices these women made in their lives that eventually led to this work. Still, this is but one avenue that could be pursued academically, along with the myriad ways Kline discusses where continued scholarship is needed (20, 163). This book will prove foundational in global women's Mormonism and how we use oral history in Mormon studies.

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Faithful Pioneers and the Roots of a Global Church

F. LaMond Tullis, *Grass Roots in Mexico: Stories of Pioneering Latter-day Saints*. Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021. 331 pp. Hardcover: \$27.99. ISBN: 9781950304271.

Reviewed by Erik J. Freeman

F. LaMond Tullis's *Grass Roots in Mexico: Stories of Pioneering Latter-day Saints* explores the lives of nineteen people who influenced the founding and growth of Mormonism in Mexico. Tullis is a retired professor of

political science at Brigham Young University and has been a pioneer in the scholarship of transnational Mormonism. In the 1970s, he traveled to Latin America on LDS Church funds to undertake oral history interviews for what was supposed to become a volume celebrating the 150th anniversary of Mormonism's founding. That book never came about, but since the 1980s, Tullis has built upon his original research in Latin America and has published multiple books and journal articles about international Mormonism for academic and religious audiences. *Grass Roots in Mexico* is primarily written for a mainstream LDS readership. Those looking for faith-promoting stories about Mexicans devoted to Utah's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will find this book most useful.

Grass Roots is separated into two sections. The first section is a brief historical synopsis of Mormonism in Mexico, where Tullis summarizes over 150 years of LDS Mexican history in two chapters. The second section is a series of nineteen chapters of varying length that focus on individual Mexican Mormon "pioneers." These vignettes explore the lives of complex individuals who searched for meaning in life and found the Latter-day Saints. The book's argument is primarily that people from various geographic, educational, socioeconomic, and political backgrounds helped build the LDS Church's foundations in Mexico. The one thematic connection between all the people in this book is their persistent faith in the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The vignettes are the book's strength, especially the ones that highlight the lives of working-class, non-white people—particularly women. One example is the story of Jesuita Mera de Monroy (1854–1937), who never attended school because of her family's poverty. Still, as a young mother, she fought to ensure that her many children (she had thirteen) received an education. Due to their schooling, some of Monroy's children became teachers and ranch administrators in Hidalgo (133). One of Monroy's daughters married an American Mormon, and one of her sons became a Latter-day Saint branch president. The Monroy

family's embrace of Mormonism, however, caused problems. During the Mexican Revolution, followers of Emiliano Zapata attacked the Monroy family's Mormon compound, believing they were aligned with the American government and harbored weapons. The Zapatista revolutionaries even killed Monroy's son, whom Tullis calls a "martyr" (xvii).¹

Monroy's vignette and numerous others hint at important political and social issues relating to Mexican Mormonism. Isaías Juárez's story is one example. Juárez helped found the national peasant union (Confederación Nacional Campesina) and was deeply involved in labor organization and radical politics during the 1920s. At the same time, he served as the branch president and district president for the Latter-day Saints (173–76). Juárez's story alone suggests the possibility for future scholars to analyze the relationship between radical politics and religion from a Mexican Mormon lens. Furthermore, the first Mormon convert in Mexico City, Plotino Rhodakanaty, was a founder of the Mexican socialist and anarchist movement.² Rhodakanaty's story, however, did not appear in the book, likely because he eventually distanced himself from the mainstream Church.

Tullis rarely mentions polygamy, even though the Mormons who founded colonies in the Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua fled the United States to practice plural marriage. Indeed, numerous fundamentalist Mormon groups continue to exist throughout Mexico today. Tullis also dismisses the critical concerns of the Third Convention, a

1. Tullis also recently wrote an entire book on the "martyrdom" of Rafael Monroy and Vicente Morales, which one author claims is "reminiscent of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith." See F. LaMond Tullis, *Martyrs in Mexico: A Mormon Story of Revolution and Redemption* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018).

2. See Bill Smith and Jared M. Tamez, "Plotino C. Rhodakanaty: Mormonism's Greek Austrian Mexican Socialist," in *Just South of Zion: The Mormons in Mexico and Its Borderlands*, edited by Jason H. Dormady and Jared M. Tamez (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), 55–73.

movement that included one-third of the Mormons in central Mexico during the 1930s. Members of the Third Convention were excommunicated in 1936 after petitioning the Church in Salt Lake City for more local autonomy and Mexican leadership. For ten years, Conventionists baptized, preached, and held church services outside Salt Lake City's dictates. In 1946, the Mormon president in Utah, George Albert Smith, traveled to Mexico to ask the Conventionists to return. He reinstated many Conventionists to the mainstream organization without rebaptism. For Tullis, the Conventionists were "dissidents" who broke away from the Church because they did "not like some of the Anglo-European mission presidents" (17). Yet the complaint of the Third Convention, specifically that the mainstream LDS Church was directed almost entirely by white Americans, continues to concern many racial minorities and Mormons living outside of the United States.

This book rightly shows how Mormonism is not only an American phenomenon, and Tullis aptly tells stories about fascinating people often marginalized in the study of Mormon history. Yet the book's silences illustrate the need for a deeper understanding of Mormonism in Mexico.

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Peculiar No More?

K. Mohrman. *Exceptionally Queer: Mormon Peculiarity and U.S. Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. Paper: \$30.00. ISBN: 978-1-5179-1129-4.

Reviewed by Benjamin E. Park

It is a common adage that Mormons are a “peculiar people.” The phrase, taken from the Bible, is meant to imply that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints paved their own path in establishing a distinct culture. The practice of polygamy, belief in theocracy, and other unique principles marginalized the faith throughout the nineteenth century, only to give way to a slow but inevitable march toward cultural assimilation in the twentieth. That is the general story, anyway.

More recently, scholars have taken this argument a step further by arguing that early Mormonism’s peculiarity could be categorized as “queer”—not to mean an attachment to or embrace of homosexuality, but that Mormons’ anti-monogamy, anti-capitalist, and, at least in Joseph Smith’s day, racially universalist beliefs and practices placed them outside normative culture. (It does not hurt that the “Mormons are queer!” slogan is countercultural enough to draw laughs and highlight a juxtaposition with the Latter-day Saint institution’s current anti-queer policies.) The faith’s more recent assimilationist move, therefore, can be cast as a diversion from the Church’s first generations.¹

K. Mohrman, in her provocative new book, argues that this categorization fits well as a narrative arc but fails to capture the story’s complexity. This is for several reasons. First, to cast Mormonism as “queer” is to assume a homogenous culture against which the faith transgresses. Such a forced dichotomy, however, overstates the coherency of mainstream

1. Though Mohrman identifies this narrative as endemic in the field, her primary interlocutor is Peter Coviello, *Make Yourselves Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

society and overemphasizes its distance from the Latter-day Saint tradition. Second, this marginalized-to-mainstream narrative arc exaggerates the changes that took place within the faith following the 1890 manifesto on polygamy. Historians must do better, Mohrman argues, at demonstrating the congruities within the movement (157–66).²

Third, and most importantly, Mohrman posits that in casting Mormons as “others” in the United States—“queer”—historians have understated the extent to which the religion appropriated, expanded, and cemented broader standards of heterosexual and racial normativity. By drawing on “feminist, queer of color, and critical and comparative theories of race, colonialism, and religion to frame its examination of Mormonism,” Mohrman explains, we can see that “ascendant white American nationalist formations” found root in even the most unique communities (14–15). The tradition that Joseph Smith founded was not a complete break with American culture but rather posed a particular “assemblage” of cultural traits, ingredients that were in wider use but now compiled in a “peculiar” recipe. Mohrman argues that the difference between Mormons and Americans was in degree, not kind. They perpetuated, rather than dissolved, ideas of manifest destiny, white supremacy, and gender roles.

By zeroing in on the language of Mormon peculiarity, Mohrman takes aim at scholars of the faith as much as its adherents. “The discursive construction” of Mormons as “queer” is, in the end, “itself a racializing civilizational assemblage in order to recenter the production and management of unexceptional . . . queer subjects” (305). Historians, Mohrman prods, have only fulfilled such an agenda when they reaffirm its narrative.

Mohrman backs up her claims through two strengths. First, she rejects traditional periodization and instead offers a sweeping history of

2. Though she does not cite him, this charge is similar to one that Grant Underwood made in an unfortunately overlooked article nearly four decades ago. Underwood, “Re-visioning Mormon History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 55, no. 3 (Aug. 1986): 403–26.

Mormonism that spans two centuries. This enables her to demonstrate symmetries within the faith rather than just generational changes. Throughout its entire existence, she shows, Mormonism has benefited from its privileges as a community with white, heterosexual, and capitalistic priorities. Yes, polygamy was a challenge to monogamy, but it ended up reaffirming traditional gender roles (39–42); yes, the United Order was meant to critique the free market system, but its consistent failures reveal underlying capitalistic principles within the community (73–83). And while scholarship has ably demonstrated how Mormons were cast as racially “other,” the Latter-day Saints still drew from a racial overlap with Anglo-Protestant citizens that was not available to African American, Native American, and Chinese American residents.

In the twentieth century, the “Mormon peculiarity discourse” evolved to emphasize the faith’s commonalities with its host nation, though once again in a way to prove United States exceptionalism. At first, Mormons appealed to white American citizenship through their anti-communism. This included leadership’s open hostility to socialism, an infusion of capitalistic rhetoric in Mormon theology, and a capitalist reinterpretation of Church history. Then, mid-century Mormons expanded white supremacy, American nationalism, and imperialism by shifting to the color-blindness rhetoric that came to dominate the contemporary United States. Indeed, Americans came to embrace Mormonism as a valuable conservative institution pre-1978 not despite its racial policies but regardless of them, and sometimes even because of them. The assimilation of Mormonism between the 1960s and 1980s, Mohrman notes, was “an important driver in the evolution of white supremacy’s survival as a fundamental component of U.S. nationalism and imperial policy,” as they moved from racial difference and segregation to color-blindness and equal opportunity (235).

The final chapter of *Exceptionally Queer* shifts the discussion once again to marriage. The legalization of same-sex marriage and decriminalization of polygamy, she posits, “were not watershed victories for ‘sexual freedom’ but rather signal a reassertion of heterosexuality,

monogamy, marriage, and, ultimately, whiteness as vested interests of the nation-state” (273). Using the Mormon peculiarity discourse as a lens, she offers a view of the debate that shows how these judicial rulings did not grant extensive sexual liberty but instead broadened regulation for heteronormative practices and rewrote history to emphasize that racial imperialism was left in the nineteenth century.

Mohrman’s argument is deliberately provocative and is a welcome and even necessary challenge to the field. It can also be overstated. Some elements of her analysis, like her sophisticated framing of anti-communism as white supremacy, are stronger than others, like her engagement with the anti-ERA movement (257–75). Just as Mohrman is right when she says that scholars have overlooked nuances in their perpetuation of the Mormon peculiarity discourse, she too overemphasizes some elements while understating others when viewing Mormonism solely through the prism of race. And finally, one can agree with Mohrman’s smart point that historians have focused too much on the faith’s uniqueness while also feeling that Mohrman’s counter-narrative similarly magnifies symmetries.

But such critiques are common when engaging a deliberately provocative book. *Exceptionally Queer* is, at its best, a polemic, a term I use in its best sense: a valiant charge to disrupt the field and provoke response. Indeed, Mohrman’s appeal for scholars of Mormonism to better utilize the tools of ethnic studies—her postscript is a delightful plea for the robust use of theory—is another sign of maturation within the field of Mormon studies. May such conversations continue.

BENJAMIN E. PARK is an associate professor of history at Sam Houston State University. He is the coeditor of *Mormon Studies Review*, editor of *A Companion to American Religious History* (Blackwell) and *DNA Mormon: Perspectives on the Legacy of Historian D. Michael Quinn* (Signature Books), and author of *Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier* (Liveright). His next book, *American Zion: A New History of Mormonism* (Liveright), will appear in January 2024.



Reviving Desdemona

Dayna Patterson. *O Lady, Speak Again*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2022. 112 pp. Paper: \$14.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-464-7.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Cranford Garcia

When I began analyzing literature in high school, I was trained to see a poem as a thing made perfect by intent, by genius, an idea that prepared me to become adept at finding an artistic rationale in everything I'd analyze—but a great stumbling block when it came time to write my own poetry. Letting go of that need to control the language in order to listen to it, to listen for the “muse’s” whispers, has been a decades-long effort.

When I read Dayna Patterson’s poems, I again appreciate the dedication of the craft. Her second collection, *O Lady, Speak Again*, embodies a poetics of intention, of rapt attention, in which nothing is accidental. These are the kinds of poems—perhaps because they live in Shakespeare’s world and share in the same love of wordplay, the same appreciation of the world each word evokes—that my twelfth-grade English teacher would have held up to say, “Look what she does here, and here!” She leaves no aspect of Shakespeare’s dramas untouched as fodder for metaphor—the invocation of goddesses, the cross-dressing, the forest as a place of upending societal structures, the endless puns and wordplay, the space of the playhouse stage, the interplay between the actors and audience.

In these poems, Patterson braids together the stories of Shakespeare’s female characters (both major and minor—I’ll confess, I had to Google some of them) with two more personal strands of narrative: her experience growing up with an absent mother (whose queerness she only came to understand later in life) and her Mormon inheritance of polygamous ancestors and structured religion—two forces that

ultimately grew to be at odds with each other. The arc of the collection expresses her personal journey toward regaining her mother (and herself) and the inner conflict involved in recognizing the flaws in a father's narrative.

By rewriting Shakespeare's characters and stories, she takes on perhaps the most iconic symbol of the male-dominated Western literary tradition, in turn taking on patriarchy itself. In one of the earliest poems, "In this version," she provides alternate endings for some of his most famous tragedies, summing up with an alternate version of her own story: "I chase away my mother's blue beasts, / concoct a strong spell to keep her from breaking / out of my childhood" (8). In "Ophelia, amphibian," she reimagines Ophelia's death as a metamorphosis, "shedding shroud like a skin, / up into the sky's blue burn," creating an afterlife for her outside patriarchal society, absorbed into the natural (perhaps maternal) world. And in "After the Curtain Falls, Isabella speaks in Achromatics," she gives Isabella the vocal response she is denied at the end of *Measure for Measure*, a voice embodied in nonlinear, visual elements.

This last example also illustrates Patterson's pattern of techniques that work to unravel the influence of patriarchal language, such as her experimentation with syntax in "Hermione as Phantom Limb"—"my blame I self [. . .] blame I oracle's slow grace" (37); her incorporation of the visual with shape poems and titles using self-portraiture and still life elements; and her nonlinear string of word associations in her "color" poems like "Self-Portrait as Lady Macbeth in 30 Shades of Red" or "Titania in Yellow." The motif of threes introduced in "Thunder. Enter the Three WITCHES meeting HECATE," which sets up an association between this number and female power, works throughout the collection to deconstruct dichotomies, an inherent aspect of patriarchal language. In "How to Give Birth to Words," she attempts through word-play to reclaim language as a female endeavor.

The implications of the narratives she has braided together carry specific import for LDS readers. By juxtaposing a rewriting of Shakespeare (arguably the most often quoted secular writer at general conference) with LDS institutional statements and quotes from her polygamous great-great-great-grandfather, she indicates a desire to rewrite that religious history. She sets up this conflict early in the collection in “Self-Portrait as Miranda after Shipwreck,” in which the ship is both the unacceptable number of LGBT teen suicides in Utah, as well as the “ship” of her faith—and she is unconvinced of her father’s (read: the Church’s) attempts at consolation. In “O is the sound of Tragedy,” she laments all these losses in a mournful and earnest tone that permeates the collection.

Furthermore, her attempts to reconcile two disparate versions of her mother (a process that unfolds gradually throughout the book) evoke echoes of the LDS tradition’s Heavenly Mother—absent and silent, yet ultimately, discoverable to her daughters. We’re reminded in “usque ad mala” that all of history and religion rely on their daughters “to scrape and stretch the parchment,” to “hunt down a swan / feather,” to “strip barbs from the quill,” to “folio from memory your life’s work”—in essence, to be the receptacles of male secrets, the vehicles of male power (88–89).

Setting technique and critical theory aside however—the experience of reading these poems is a delight for one who craves the challenge and surprise of well-crafted language. Yet I’m never lost in it, the backdrop of story always grounding me in images and place. A (very) small sample of my favorites:

Juliet’s Nurse: “Should you cantilever / the question mark of your sadness, like / a tortoise emergent?” (67). Or Lady Macbeth: “Look: a bonfire of violins, varnish blustering / elegant F holes, strings snapping as they burn” (68). Cordelia (third wife of Charles Ramsden Bailey): “He used to hold me close, proud / of [. . .] the way I churn out son after

son / like pads of stamped butter / with his milky impression. [. . .] I let slip from the pantry / the mouse of my doubts / let its warm brown / scurry into the open, and find myself / shelved, long-languishing in a rough valley” (11). Or Perdita: “To out-mother my mother is easy / as staying this side of a one-inch threshold [. . .] All I have to do is / *Don’t disappear*” (41).

Dayna Patterson adroitly pays homage to the complexity of Shakespeare’s body of work while at the same time pushing back against the patriarchal messaging passed down to us. The title, “O Lady, Speak Again,” an entreaty quoted from Desdemona’s faithful servant as she is dying, evokes a sense of desperation to the collection, a deep yearning to give life back to our foremothers. Patterson fulfills this wish in a way that reminds us of what we have to mourn in our history, yet also empowers us to break the cycle of silence. Shakespeare’s daughter, I think, would be proud.

ELIZABETH CRANFORD GARCIA’S {lizcranford@gmail.com} debut collection, *Resurrected Body*, received *Cider Press Review*’s 2023 Editor’s Prize. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Tar River Poetry*, *Chautauqua*, *Portland Review*, *CALYX*, and *Mom Egg Review*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She is the author of the chapbook *Stunt Double* and recently served as Poetry Editor for *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Read more of her work at elizabethcgarcia.wordpress.com.

THE BOOK OF MORMON
ART CATALOG: AN INTERVIEW WITH
DIRECTOR JENNIFER CHAMPOUX

Margaret Olsen Hemming

MOH: Please introduce the project and tell us a bit about how it works.

JC: Thank you, I'm so excited to share this great new resource! The Book of Mormon Art Catalog is a comprehensive collection of visual art based on the Book of Mormon. It includes images that may be familiar from their use in publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as lesser-known images from artists around the world. Thanks to the support of our sponsors—the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University and the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies—we are able to provide free and open access to the catalog (<https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/>).

My team and I have systematically gathered art from a range of sources including Church media, the Church History Museum, the Brigham Young University Museum of Art, the Springville Museum of Art, Church magazines and books, academic journals and books, private collections, Scripture Central (formerly Book of Mormon Central), commercial galleries, and artist galleries. We've already cataloged more than three thousand artworks and are constantly adding more! The art comes from fifty-one different countries and represents more than six hundred unique artists. I'm especially thrilled that we're able to host hundreds of images that can't be found anywhere else online.

As the only central repository for Book of Mormon art, the catalog seeks to be a resource to scholars, artists, Church members—really, anyone! In addition to gathering the art, we’ve also done extensive research on each piece. We’ve included information on copyright, scripture reference, country of origin, gender of the artist, use in Church media, appearance in other published or digital sources, links to the artist’s website, and much more. If you find an artwork or artist in the catalog that you want to know more about, we’ve provided the tools to get you started.

If you want to simply look through the catalog, a great place to start is with the six browsing categories on our home page. Here, you can look through a list of artists by name or a timeline of art by year. You can find a directory of Book of Mormon scripture chapters or topics. Or you can look through a list of countries or a guide organized by style and technique.

If you have a more specific search in mind, the “Advanced Search” tool will let you filter the catalog in multiple ways. For example, you could look up all images of the tree of life done in textile. Or you could find Diné (Navajo) artists who have been published in Church magazines.

MOH: How do you define Book of Mormon art?

JC: For this project, we’ve limited the scope to images that are inspired by content within Book of Mormon scripture. Most often that means depictions of people and events described in the book. Sometimes it means more abstract visualization of themes discussed in these scriptures. If an artwork portrays a theme such as repentance and references a Book of Mormon scripture either visually or in the title of the work, then we include it. We did not include images of the book itself in modern times (such as Joseph Smith translating the plates).

We’ve attempted to include all known images of Book of Mormon content, with no judgment or exclusion based on their style, interpretive

approach, or skill. Visual arts are defined here as painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, textile, ceramic, carving, pottery, photography, digital illustration, installation, video and film, and mixed media. We've included works that are figurative, abstract, and nonrepresentational.

MOH: You are well-suited to this project with your art background, but what brought you to the idea of doing this project? And what convinced you that something so ambitious was possible?

JC: Sometimes there is a sense in Latter-day Saint culture that we follow a sort of Protestant iconoclastic tradition in terms of our relationship with art. For example, we may use art to beautify the walls of our meetinghouses, temples, and homes, or to instruct children. The famous series of Book of Mormon paintings by Arnold Friberg, for instance, was commissioned by the Primary General President at the time, Adele Cannon Howells, to help children learn about the scriptures. But we generally don't put paintings and sculptures in our most sacred religious spaces, and we don't invest art objects with any meaning other than their didactic purpose. Yet, members of the Church are surrounded with religious art—in their manuals, scriptures, magazines, websites, and places of worship. Often, these images become a kind of background noise to our religious practice. We are very familiar with the art, but we haven't ever thought about it that much. We tend to take it at face value. We don't usually consider the choices that the artist has made to depict something a certain way. We generally don't know how to understand the language of art, so we can't read the ways an image creates meaning.

It's not just members of the Church that suffer from this visual illiteracy—many people today are unfamiliar with the history of art, the meaning of visual symbols, and the ways artists use formal elements (like line, shape, color, and light) to tell a story. Because we don't know the language of art, we feel we can't get close to an artwork or that maybe only highly educated critics are able to understand it. I taught as an

adjunct instructor in art history for a dozen years, and I saw this discomfort in my students over and over again. So, we explored the different ways to interpret a work of art. I encouraged them to slow down and look carefully. I made them spend forty-five minutes looking at a single piece of art before writing about it. Many of these students began to see things they hadn't before and to feel more comfortable looking at art.

I've done some of this kind of work among Church members too, with presentations on how to look at religious art. Here, too, I saw a real eagerness among members to be able to engage more deeply with art. As I studied the history of LDS art it became clear that in addition to the familiar and readily accessible images in the Gospel Art Book, the Church's media library, and the Church History Museum's online galleries, there are many other images out there inspired by LDS scripture, history, and belief. But the sources for this more independent art were far-flung and sometimes inaccessible to the public.

I began by collecting images of Lehi's dream as recounted in 1 Nephi 8. Once I realized how many interesting yet little-known images of this scripture existed, I wanted to create a space where anyone could have access to the full history of Book of Mormon art. I spent a year researching the images on my own and then decided that for a project of this scope I was going to need institutional support. I'm very thankful for the support of the Maxwell Institute and the Laura F. Willes Center. The grant funding has allowed for several terrific BYU students to work on the project as research assistants. Noelle Baer, Emma Belnap, Candace Brown, Elizabeth Finlayson, and Aliza Keller have each done a fantastic job helping me with research, data entry, design, and content development. Many scholars and artists have contributed to the project as well. I love that this endeavor is, by necessity, a collaborative one. I hope that both the size of the catalog as well as the connections made between scholars, artists, and Church members continue to expand.

MOH: In what ways do you see this endeavor changing Book of Mormon scholarship?

JC: The catalog aims to recover the full history of visual imagery based on the Book of Mormon. This has never been done before, so we are posting some things that people simply haven't seen until now. This will allow scholars to explore the history of Book of Mormon art in new ways, such as considering how members engaged with scripture at different times, which scripture stories or figures have been emphasized in art, and how art has been used in official Church channels.

Pulling this history together also makes possible more careful analysis of issues of race and gender in the arts. There has been a shift in recent years to include more non-American artists and to depict figures in a less Eurocentric manner. But there are depictions of race in Book of Mormon art that are problematic and even hurtful, and they need greater contextualization and awareness so we can move forward with a better understanding. Looking at the statistics from the catalog, it's also evident that the inclusion of women artists and the depiction of female Book of Mormon characters has grown in recent years. But there is still lots of room for growth.

By pulling all this data together, scholars and artists can also start to see what is missing. What are the figures that aren't depicted very often? Which stories tend to always be depicted the same way and might there be an alternative way they could be visualized? Hopefully, the catalog will help inspire new and varied artistic production.

MOH: There is sometimes a sense in the Church that we know how to read the Book of Mormon and that the answers to questions we may have about it have already been answered. To me, art has the potential of opening up that conversation and displaying the broad and diverse spectrum of how people interpret sacred text. In perhaps a more accessible way than the written word, art can show how reading scripture is deeply personal. Can you say more about this?

JC: I think you are right on both counts: that art can help us consider familiar stories in fresh ways, and that art can affect us in a way that

text cannot. In my study of traditional European Christian art and of modern LDS art, I've seen patterns and formulas used to tell a story through a visual medium. Sometimes these formulas are helpful because they make the message of the artwork more readily understood. For example, in Renaissance and Baroque paintings of Christ's deposition from the cross, his mother Mary is often shown collapsing at the foot of the cross with the shape of her swooning body echoing that of Christ's body. Visually, this not only signified Mary's great compassion as the mother of Christ and the mother of the Catholic Church but also reminded viewers that they should likewise seek to emulate Christ in all their actions.

But there are also cases where formulas for depicting a particular scripture are used so repeatedly that it becomes difficult for the viewer to consider the passage in any alternative way. I've written about how this has been the case for images of the New Testament sisters Mary and Martha in both LDS art and in the larger Christian tradition, with very few exceptions to the mold.¹ Tropes have also developed over the years for Book of Mormon art. Lehi's dream, for instance, is most often visualized using a particular set of symbols (e.g., tree, white fruit, iron rod, large building). There is very little art that pays attention to certain other aspects of the dream, including Lehi's harrowing journey before reaching the tree. Perhaps because so little of our Lehi's dream art depicts that journey, our discussions and sermons on the dream also tend to overlook it.

Having a greater variety of visual depictions opens space for viewers to consider scripture passages in a variety of ways. Sometimes, art may even prompt the viewer to have a new insight or a moment of personal revelation. I also think that access to a greater variety of cultural styles and figural depictions creates opportunities for more people in

1. Jennifer Champoux, "Wise or Foolish: Women in Mormon Biblical Narrative Art," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2018): 71–93, available at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol57/iss2/4>.

our global church to have a personal connection with the art and with the scriptures. Art is a very different medium than text. It communicates differently and it can affect us differently.

MOH: I imagine this work as somewhat akin to family history, where sometimes you find a thread of information and start pulling on it and sometimes it leads to a gold mine of more artists and images and then other times there's just one piece there. What sources were the most helpful? In other words, if people are looking for Mormon art that isn't necessarily Book of Mormon art, where would you direct them to start searching?

JC: Great question! I've had a number of people ask if we'll also catalog LDS art on other books of scripture, such as the New Testament. I'd love to see the project expand to include that eventually. There is such a thriving community of LDS artists, and one of the goals of this project is to give them a platform to reach a broader audience. We also want Church members to have access to this wealth of visual sources.

A good place to start searching for other LDS art is the Church History Museum website.² You can browse their Museum Store Catalog or the virtual galleries of their International Art Competitions. Held every three years, these competitions bring in new LDS art from around the globe. Similarly, the Church's Media Library has many wonderful images and videos.³ The *Come, Follow Me* manuals for each course of study include many artworks.⁴ The BYU Museum of Art also has an extensive collection of LDS artists.⁵ If there's an artist that you like, I rec-

2. Church History Museum, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/museum?lang=eng>.

3. Media Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media?lang=eng>.

4. Come, Follow Me, Gospel Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/come-follow-me?lang=eng>.

5. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, <https://moa.byu.edu/>.

commend looking up their Instagram account or website and browsing their digital galleries.

MOH: Are there sections/topics/characters of the Book of Mormon that you personally would like to see more artists engage with?

JC: Absolutely! My analysis based on the catalog has revealed some interesting trends. The sixteen most frequently depicted topics account for more than half of all Book of Mormon imagery. That means that a handful of scenes are getting lots of attention and being visualized in different ways, while most of the scenes or figures have only been depicted a few times. It's worth noting that almost all these most popular scenes in the art are focused on male figures. Lehi's dream and Christ's visit to ancient America are the two most frequently depicted topics.

Many depictions of women from the Book of Mormon didn't appear until quite recently, and there is certainly room for further artistic exploration of these women. The first known image of Abish, for instance, appeared in 2000. And the wife of King Lamoni was not visualized until 2003 (although, technically, she's also in an unpublished 1950 Friberg sketch).

Other figures and topics that have been depicted very few times include Morianton's maidservant, Hagoth, Corianton, the daughters of Ishmael, Giddianhi, Mosiah, and Pahoran. And some topics that have been visualized many times have tended to follow the same interpretation or approach. I hope that artists will use the Book of Mormon Art Catalog to see what has been done and what perspectives may be lacking.

MOH: What's next for the Book of Mormon Art Catalog?

JC: As an ongoing project, the catalog will continue to grow. We are adding new entries constantly. We have a contact form on our website where users can suggest new art or let us know about information that

should be updated or added. We encourage everyone to get involved and help us expand the catalog!

You can also follow us on Instagram or Facebook @bookofmormonartcatalog. We post videos with artists and scholars, spotlights on artworks, fun facts, and news. It's a great place to learn more about LDS art and connect with others. Each week we also post an artwork and message to coincide with the *Come, Follow Me* curriculum. In 2024, when the course study turns to the Book of Mormon, we'll be rolling out an even bigger *Come, Follow Me* art supplement. Stay tuned!

We're also working with the Maxwell Institute to initiate a contest for new Book of Mormon art. This will be a great way for people to get involved and to start filling in these gaps we see in the catalog.

So many people have supported this project and helped make it what it is. I'm grateful for that shared love of art and scripture. Personally, as I've examined these thousands of images, I've felt a stronger connection to the Book of Mormon and to Christ. I'm excited to see the ways in which the catalog will help build community and faith.

JENNIFER CHAMPOUX {jennychampoux@gmail.com} is a scholar of Latter-day Saint visual art and the director of the Book of Mormon Art Catalog. She has taught art history as adjunct faculty at Northeastern University and various colleges. She is the past vice president of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities and a founding board member of Colorado Faith Forums. She lives in Colorado with her husband and three children.

MARGARET OLSEN HEMMING {olsen.margaret@gmail.com} is the art editor for *Dialogue* and sits on the advisory board for the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts. She curated the exhibit *The Sacred Feminine in LDS Art & Theology* (Center Gallery, Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, 2022). She is the coauthor of volumes 1 and 2 of *The Book of Mormon for the Least of These* and the former editor in chief of *Exponent II*.



Jorge Cocco Santángelo,
Mothers of the 2000 Stripling Warriors, 2019,
oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

ARTISTS

Born in Colorado, JAMAL QURESHI is a lifelong member of the LDS Church whose family hails from Norway and Pakistan. His life straddles the LDS and Muslim worlds, of which *Mazmuur Naafi* is an expression. Utilizing ancient LDS scripture and traditional Arabic and Muslim calligraphy and design, he finds beauty in a variety of cultural traditions. He and his wife are the world's northernmost LDS Church members, living on Norway's Svalbard archipelago.

MINERVA TEICHERT (1888–1976) was an American LDS painter known for her Western and Mormon-themed paintings, including works depicting scenes from the Book of Mormon. In all, she created forty-two murals of the Book of Mormon. She studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League of New York.

ANNIE POON is an American animator based in New York City. Her short “Runaway Bath tub” is in the permanent collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art. Poon's works have appeared in other various venues, including the National Gallery, the Brooklyn Museum, the New Museum, and the Museum of Arts and Design.

STEPHANIE K. NORTHRUP is an artist specializing in oils, acrylics, and other media for fine art and illustration. Her works include Christian LDS-themed art and more.

CARL CHRISTIAN ANTON CHRISTENSEN (1831–1912) was a Danish-American artist known best for his renderings of historical events of the early LDS Church. He studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and emigrated to Utah in 1857 after serving three LDS missions in Scandinavia.

JORGE COCCO SANTÁNGELO was born in Argentina in 1936. He is a self-taught artist with international recognition. He calls his style “sacro cubism” because of his sacred subject matter and the clear influence of cubism. As a style, sacro cubism moves the viewer's attention away from superfluous details—textures of fabric, the accuracy of historical backgrounds, or the impossibility of capturing an exact likeness of Christ—by depicting simple shapes that allow the viewer to focus on the essential and most holy aspects of the sacred events themselves.

Filipina American artist ROSE DATOC DALL is an award-winning contemporary figurative painter known for her bold colors and graphic compositions. Her most iconic pieces are sacred works on the life of the Savior. Rose received her BFA in Fine Art Studio and Art History from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. Rose is a wife and mother of 4 adult children, and grandmother or “Lola” to 4 grandchildren.



Rose Datoc Dall, *Sariah in the Wilderness*, 2019,
oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

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Journal of Mormon History

Official Journal of the Mormon History Association

The *Journal of Mormon History* examines the Mormon past through a variety of perspectives, including but not limited to Mormon studies/religious studies, cultural history, social history, intellectual history, reception history, sociology, economics, geography, political science, women's studies, material culture, race studies, and folklore.

Importantly, Mormonism is interpreted to encompass all traditions that trace their origins to Joseph Smith Jr.

Edited by:

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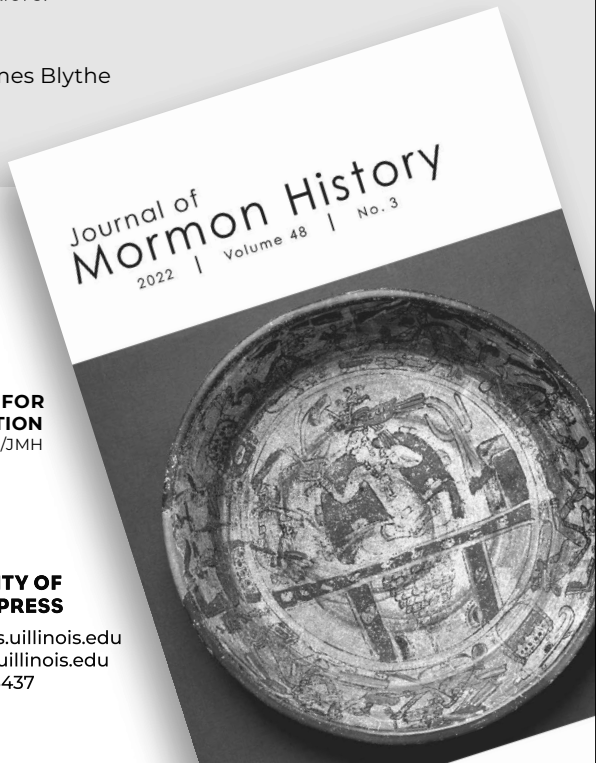


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MORMON STUDIES REVIEW

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It chronicles and assesses the developing field of Mormon studies with review essays, book reviews, and roundtable discussions related to the academic study of Mormonism.

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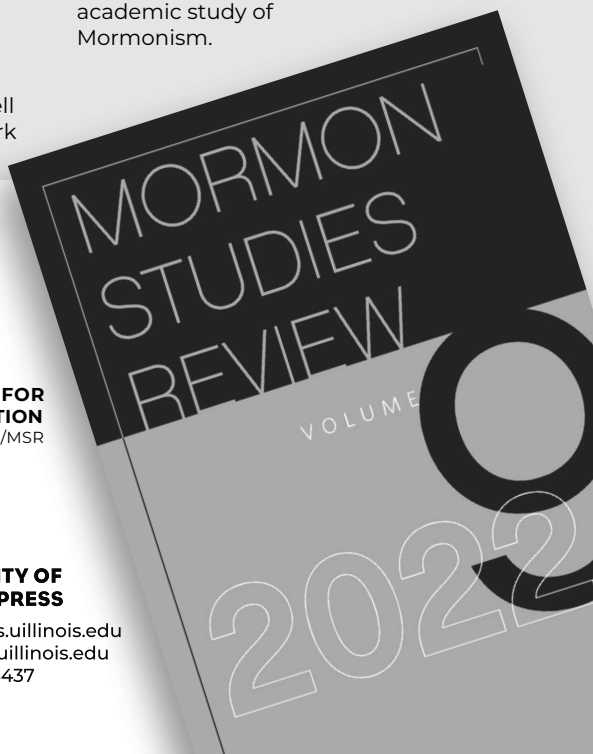


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