

DIALOGUE

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DIALOGUE
a journal of mormon thought

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DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.

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SACRED GROVES AND WICKED PROBLEMS

Jared Farmer

This is a lightly revised script of a plenary lecture—a “lunchtime polemic,” in the words of the speaker—delivered on June 3, 2022, at the Mormon History Association Conference, in Logan, Utah, on the campus of Utah State University, the speaker’s alma mater.

I’m standing at this lectern in large part because I wrote a book called *On Zion’s Mount*. Many, many times since 2007, the year I finished the manuscript in Los Angeles and relocated to Long Island, I have promised myself I will never ever write more words about Mormondom.

I now accept: This is a vow I’m predestined to break, again and again.

In my new book, *Elderflora*, a study of sacred trees, tree-ring science, and long-term thinking, I write explicitly about my LDS upbringing, and go out of my way to use Mormon language and referents. I even structured one chapter as a chiasmus! I guess I’ve reached that stage of life when I accept what I can change in myself, and what I cannot—or would not.

As part of becoming a western expat in Suffolk County, New York—the orient of the American East—I had to confront The Question at every wine-and-cheese event. “Where are you from?” a friendly academic stranger would begin. “Well, I was born and raised in Utah,” I would begin. “Oh . . .,” they would reply, their face turning cloudy. “Really? Utah—that’s . . . interesting.” And then they would half whisper: “May I ask you, are you . . . a Mormon?” In these episodes of exoticization, I never knew what to say. The available identifiers seemed

unsuited for me, unintelligible to them: Jack Mormon, recovering Mormon, ex-Mo, po-Mo, lapsed, inactive, less active, backslider, “it’s complicated.” So, when the current prophet announced that Latter-day Saints should not be called Mormons, I felt sweet relief and existential clarity: I’m a Mormon, yes, I am!

Heck, yeah.

Fifteen years ago, though, when I wrote *On Zion’s Mount*, I was much more circumspect. That’s the most personal book I’ve written, and the least revealing to my readers, including my imagined audience of tenure file reviewers. I didn’t tell them I’m from Provo. Moreover, I didn’t divulge how my analysis of Utah Lake and Mount Timpanogos, of Lake Utes and mountain-home Mormons, is the story of the author losing his religion.

I’ll tell you what I mean by that. Although I never had a testimony to bear about the restored gospel, I became, in my college years in Cache Valley, deeply enthused by the nineteenth-century idea of gathering in a sacred homeland. I felt I belonged in Utah, belonged *to* Utah, and I wanted to assist societal reconsecration of an intermountain landscape that was, in my view, being defiled by improvident, unbeautiful development. I hoped that my Timpanogos project would reveal something exalted, or at least redemptive, about the post-1847 record of place-making in the eastern Great Basin—something that could sustain my heterodox practice of being LDS. In other words, I was looking for something within the violent story of US settler colonialism that could be rehabilitated—something sacred, something cross-cultural, and also something more than human.

I can’t speak for my readers, who now own that book as much as I do, but speaking personally, I failed in my spiritual task. When I closed *On Zion’s Mount* with a performative statement about the healing power of place-love, I was, to be candid, faking it. The burning in my heart had gone out. Although I secured my academic future by writing that book, I lost, in the process, my deepest sense of belonging.

I did give it one more try in 2014, a sabbatical year when I lived in Salt Lake City. I broke my vow, again, and wrote a place-based manifesto in the form of an illustrated e-book, *Restoring Greatness to Utah*, in which I applied the historical lessons of Utah Lake to Great Salt Lake. This work was, I now recognize, a product of the Obama era, when I foolishly permitted myself to feel some optimism about the United States creating a more perfect union in order to address the planetary crisis of anthropogenic climate change. In 2014, I could write this paragraph:

Long before Great Salt Lake diminishes to an emergency level, Utahns should decide as a citizenry that they are willing to sacrifice suburban lawns for avian habitat; that they are willing to pay more for recycled water; and that they will never allow the quantity and quality of the lake's water to fall below the level and standard necessary to support the bird refuges. Unless Utahns build a constituency to save their terminal lake, they will terminate it by degrees. The Great Salt Lake will lessen from a life-sustaining habitat to a truly dead sea.

Now, just eight years later, Utah's lakes and reservoirs have reached emergency levels. Antelope Island is a peninsula; so many marshlands are dusty salt pans; the land itself has become an inversion layer. As of 2022, the "Great" in "Great Salt Lake" is about as accurate as the "Point" in "Point of the Mountain."

And what about Utah Lake, that overlooked body of water I tried so hard to place at the center of Utah history? Well, if you've been following the news from Happy Valley, you've probably heard about a shady real estate proposal with backers in a legislature overrun with unscrupulous developers. The litigious company behind the plan calls itself Lake Restoration Solutions. Its promotional literature attempts to marry the language of ecological restoration with that of the Restoration with that of the de facto religion of contemporary Utahns—capitalism. The mockup for the proposed "restoration" looks like Dubai-on-Lehi: A double causeway leading to a beehive island set within a Delicate Arch archipelago.

I put this scheme in the same category as the proposed Lake Powell aqueduct. It's mind-boggling to witness developers—who share a genealogy with confidence men—dreaming up megaprojects as if it's morning in the American Century, when in fact the heating of the atmosphere has made the world system and the birth climate of everyone in this room, regardless of your age, obsolete.

When my maternal grandfather, the priesthood holder who confirmed me, was born, the global average atmospheric carbon level was 294 parts per million; when my mother, who turns eighty this month, was born, it was 310; when I was born to her, it had climbed to 330 parts per million. It passed 350—what's now the illusory decarbonization goal for the *least*-bad worst-case scenario—in my high school years. When my eight-year-old, who already understands something about carbon accountability, was born, the Keeling Curve read 395. Today, the number is 422 and rising, the highest level in four and one-half *million* years.

All is not well.

Because I'm a Mormon who never unlearned the habits of magical thinking; because I'm a Mormon who's tired of feeling embarrassed and ashamed of my home culture; because I'm a human who acknowledges the sacred beauty of the evolutionary inheritance on Earth, what Darwin called the Tree of Life; and because I'm a parent who worries about trees and forests, and the children who must grow and play in the ruins we are preparing for them—I cling to the hope like unto a slender reed that maybe, just maybe, Latter-day Saints will, someday, *as soon as possible, please*, accept the urgent moral responsibility to be one of the few politically powerful Christian groups in America to take the wicked problem of climate seriously.

In 2015, the pontiff raised the bar for engagement with the climate crisis, the extinction crisis, and the moral calamity that connects them. I'm not expecting the Corporation of the President to be as progressive as Pope Francis, or even the Community of Christ. I'm not holding my

breath for a frameable document called “The Kindred: A Proclamation to the Biosphere.” No, I’m merely waiting for the corporate church to be like other multibillion-dollar nonprofit corporations—like, say, private universities.

I work for the University of Pennsylvania, which is hardly a radical left-wing socialist institution. Penn is best known for the Wharton School, regularly ranked #1 in business and management. Wharton helped create what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls “business as usual.” On Walnut Street in West Philadelphia, Wharton has a raised temple to entrepreneurship called John M. Huntsman Hall; it looks something like a premium Marriott. But you know what? When it comes to climate ethics, I would take Penn over the Brethren any day of the week, including Sunday. Penn, like all major universities, like most Fortune 500 companies, has a Sustainability Office. Penn issues five-year climate action plans and yearly assessments. To its community of donors, Penn discloses metrics on Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions in line with IPCC protocol. Penn has a policy on divestment (too bad it didn’t arrive sooner, but at least it exists). Penn has target dates for net-zero energy use and a net-zero endowment.

By comparison, what does the Corporation of the President and its financial arm, Ensign Peak Advisors, publicly present to its community of donors? Effectively nothing. There’s no plan, no pledge, no disclosure, just a few platitudes and scriptural citations. What on Earth is the Church doing with one hundred billion dollars? Heck, with money like that, it could by itself save the Great Salt Lake by leasing or purchasing additional water rights. As I said, I’m not a Latter-day Saint, so I’m not in a tithe payer’s position to feel aggrieved. But as a *Mormon*, I feel embarrassed; I feel ashamed. Forget about climate action; there’s not even *less-active* Earth stewardship discernable here.

Who can glory in un-Christlike inactivity when everyone knows who will suffer most from drier droughts, hotter heat waves, rising seas, intensifying storms and floods, shortages of water, and failures

of crops? *Everyone knows*. The victims and the refugees of fossil-fuel profligacy will be the weak, the lowly, the vulnerable, the poor—all the kinds of people that Jesus embraced in his fold.

Bear with me here. Maybe this is just a mental exercise, but how would we—and by “we” I mean Mormons like me as well as Saints like most of you—how would *we* encourage anxious engagement in the good cause of Earth care? What would it take for BYU to employ hundreds like George Handley, and to graduate whole classes of students akin to Katherine Hayhoe, professor of climate science, world-renowned science communicator, all-around choose-the-right person, and evangelical Christian?

The most direct path would be to simply relate the teachings of the New Testament to the facts revealed by climate science. The gospel doctrine on global heating seems clear: Inaction is wickedness.

But would-be Earth stewards could also work with heritage. LDS history, being shallow in time compared to Catholicism, which itself encompasses so much pagan and Indigenous material, does not have so many cultural footings. Perhaps just a couple. For simplicity’s sake, I’ll call these less-than-firm foundations the standard of the Josephites and the land of the Brighamites.

If you’re inclined to be a Josephite, what could your ensign evoke? You’ve got seer stones and divinations, a revelation in a woodlot, the plat of Zion, the concept of the gathering, prophetic statements on diet and animals and economy—all of which could, hypothetically, become the basis for, let’s say, a low-carbon, plant-forward, back-to-the-land movement of degrowth based on self-sufficiency, the generosity of frugality, and the sacred commonwealth of plants, animals, and the children of God. Something not unlike Wendell Berry’s Kentucky homestead. Denmark, a country of heritage for so many Utah Mormons, and one of the greenest polities on the globe, could be another source of inspiration. Communities of Josephites might be established anywhere, regardless of environmental or political setting, including Africa and

Latin America. The movement would transcend the Mormon Culture Region. However, in the context of the Beehive State in the election year 2022, I must point out that Josephites would cast out the GOP and vote independent.

By way of comparison, let's say you're inclined to be a Brighamite: what's in your toolbox? You've got not just the concept but the *practice* of the gathering in the Great Basin; you've got apocryphal statements about This Is the Place, apocryphal comments about resources belonging to all; real experiments in communalism like the United Order; and, of course, irrigation ditches, backlot gardens, welfare farms, fire-and-brimstone sermons about the evils of mining, and all that hymnody about our dear mountain home above a desert made to blossom as the rose. As part of the rich inheritance from the pioneer past, you get tarnished things, too: a legacy of adopting Indigenous children that looks a lot like enslavement, multiple misnamed "Indian wars" that included massacres of innocent Natives, and wholesale dispossessions of Utes, Goshutes, Paiutes, and Shoshones. But Brighamites could, hypothetically, atone for their ancestors, brush up on their John Wesley Powell, read the scholarship of Tom Alexander, look to modern Israel for ideas on environmental design and urban planning, and become water-wise, smart-growth, high-tech bioregionalists with a long-term resource management philosophy. This renewed place-making project would be specific to the Intermountain West. In Utah, Brighamites might support a weaker form of federalism, and, with it, the responsibility of managing national parks and forests, but they would do so as true stewards, not as extractivists and developers posing as flag-waving, gun-toting Sagebrush Rebels. Brighamites could plausibly vote Libertarian or independent, but, after Trump, they would never again support Republicans.

In my twenties, when I conceived my Timpanogos project, I yearned to be my own kind of Brighamite. *On Zion's Mount* was intended, at least in its conception, to provide a useful history. Then my historical

training got in the way. Or, perhaps I should say, the past got in my way. The archives revealed too much. Maybe I shouldn't have looked so diligently. As it says in the Hebrew Bible, more knowledge brings more sorrow.

To my surprise, I now find myself reapproaching the flagstaff of the Josephites, whereto I was drawn in my teenage years. Back then, I actually liked the peculiar idea of the Prophet communicating with a salamander, and I was a shade disappointed when the story turned out to be a deception. I wanted to belong to a culture of supernatural rocks—not just pebbles that fit in the hand or hat, but cobbles and boulders and mesas and mountains; I wanted additional animals with personhood, and thousand-year plants with communicative powers. The closest thing to a faith-promoting experience I had growing up was attending a book launch with my dad at BYU's Bean Museum. The promoted book was *Coyote's Canyon*. I would have been fifteen, I think.

The author, Terry Tempest Williams, struck me as more prophetic—possessed of bolts of peculiarity that pierced the fog of business as usual—than any GA I'd ever heard; and the animistic manner in which she invoked ancestors, animal persons, and slickrock shook me. I wanted to join the Coyote Clan. But in graduate school, as part of my disciplining in historical thinking, I became disenchanted with Williams. I grew ironic, then cynical, about so-called “spiritual-but-not-religious” people, including myself. Only now, in middle age, amid the pervasive American culture of death and the palpable decline of the US republic, have I re-evaluated Williams as both the feyest and the sanest Mormon in a world befogged by fossil fuel capitalism. I want to dance alongside her in the Garden of Earthly Delights. I want to join her in a prayer circle in a sacred grove of piñon and juniper.

However, I'm still a card-carrying historian, so, when I was preparing this address, I felt compelled to do some research on *the* Sacred Grove—capital S, capital G. Several fine scholars have recently

published on this place-topic, including Steven Harper and Anthony Sweat. (As an aside, I have to give props to MHA archivists, librarians, booksellers, bloggers, genealogists, and historians, both professional and amateur. You are amazing! Only after I left Utah and became a professor did I appreciate the LDS emphasis on archival and historical excellence—truly one of the remarkable outcomes of this nineteenth-century millenarian movement.)

As many of you know, the first Church-sponsored artistic depiction of the cordwood patch where Joseph received his celestial visitation came *after* the Manifesto, and that timing is not accidental. The Sacred Grove was yet another sign of aspirational Americanization as well as respectability within the world's parliament of religions.

For the word "grove" was overgrown with canonical allusions. Educated Americans of the 1890s could still recite by heart William Cullen Bryant's "Forest Hymn" from 1824, which began, "The groves were God's first temples." And the phrase "sacred grove" had long been used by English translators for various consecrated places with trees in the ancient Mediterranean: the Greek *alsos*, the Roman *lucus* and *nemus*. It's significant that early tourists and rangers in the Sierra Nevada referred to populations of giant sequoia—the all-American supertree—as groves. The life of a sequoia was compared to Roman and Christian spans of time, and a grove of *Sequoiadendron* was, in painterly representation, clearly a *lucus*: a forest with light-filled clearings. Likewise, the site of the First Vision, as now canonized in LDS art, was a *lucus*.

But back when Joseph F. Smith visited western New York in 1905 after dedicating the obelisk near Sharon, Vermont, he was a not-quite-pilgrim to what he referred to as "the woods." The site began to be called the "Sacred Grove" the following year; gradually, over the next decade and a half, it became a heritage site with arboreal monuments—organic obelisks, if you like—including, believers said, the very maple that witnessed Joseph pray. In the meantime, several ward chapels in Salt Lake

and Los Angeles commissioned their own stained-glass depictions of the First Vision.

After World War II, it became common throughout the Mormon Culture Region for self-taught local painters, primarily women, to donate Sacred Grove paintings to their chapel or stake center. In Queens, New York, the Church displayed a life-sized diorama with trees for the 1964 World's Fair. A similar diorama became a fixture at Temple Square, as commissioned from the same artist who built the Grand Canyon at Disneyland.

By 1966, the Sacred Grove had become sufficiently correlated by the Brethren and internalized by members that Bruce R. McConkie, in the second edition of *Mormon Doctrine*, felt obligated to clarify that Latter-day Saints were in no way paganish or Catholic when they went on pilgrimage to Palmyra. He wrote, "It is not a shrine in the sense that many denominations have shrines, nor is there any sanctity now attached to the trees and land there located. But it is a spot held sacred in the hearts of those who believe in the truth of salvation, because they glory in the transcendent event that took place there." In other words, these maples were witness trees, not consecrated trees; things, not beings.

In the 1960s and 1970s, at Mormon BSA camps, leaders often referred to campfire devotional meetings under canopies of conifers as "sacred grove moments." "Every grove can be a sacred grove," said a General Authority in 1975, speaking instrumentally about leveraging such environmental cues to inspire boys to resolve to serve missions.

Something similar, minus the missionizing, took place at MIA girls camps. At Camp Zarahemla in the northern Wasatch, at Camp KoHoLoWo in the southern Wasatch, and at Camp LoMia on the Mogollon Rim, leaders instructed young women to pray in patches of pines, firs, and spruces designated as sacred groves. Some of these camps also featured pseudo-Indigenous playacting, as described in Judith Freeman's *Latter Days*, the best Mormon memoir I've ever read. (I could say much more about "playing Indian," but I'll refrain.)

My point is simply to acknowledge a seven-decade-old artistic tradition—including beautiful stained glass at the new Palmyra Temple—that imagines second-growth sugar maple as the Sacred Grove; and a secondary tradition, slightly less old, of imagining western conifers as simulacra of eastern angiosperms. That's pretty interesting, and shows again how traditions are adaptable. What I didn't yet find in my research is any example of Latter-day Saints adapting further—that is, sacralizing groves-to-be through planting and tending, extending this tradition to arboriculture.

While writing *Elderflora*, I was struck by the number of religions and spiritual traditions that feature sacred groves. Some of these practices and sites are millennia old. You find consecrated trees in Africa, the Mediterranean, South Asia, East Asia, and Mexico, among other cultural hearths. By comparison, the veneration of plants within modern Mormonism could be described as a scrawny sapling. This is a religion with a singular sacred grove, not a religious culture of grove-keeping. Indeed, the culture has prioritized orchard ownership and orchard land redevelopment. Rows of fruited trees don't make a grove. But I wonder, could the welfare farm and the sacred grove come together in a distinctively LDS form of stewardship?

I think about the stake center in Provo where my father baptized me, and where my mother played the organ each Sunday. It's an edifice of master-planned blandness at the base of majestic mountains, with nary a picture window for worshipers, surrounded by a large parking lot, adjacent to a larger expanse of overwatered turf. It's hard for me to imagine a religious landscape more at odds with its God-given surroundings. If this is what it means to make the desert blossom as the rose, I'll take sagebrush and Brigham Tea. On second thought, I'll take trees—as many trees as possible, drought-tolerant species and varieties, native *and* non-native, all the shade givers and air purifiers and carbon storers we can plant and tend—cultivated less for us than for those who follow. Arboriculture can be an act of communion with future

descendants, congregants, and neighbors. Cared-for trees are living embodiments of charity.

As I leave you, in the bowels of the Taggart Student Center, within the shadows of the Bear River Range, I offer you seeds from a volunteer tree of wisdom.

What if Latter-day Saints replaced church lawns in the Intermountain West with community gardens, and gave the summer bounty to the local needy? What if they dug up half of every Church-owned parking lot—for, growing up, I never once saw the hardtop more than half-filled with cars, as if anyone on my block needed to drive in the first place—and replaced all that heat-trapping petroleum-based tarmac with the durable solar-powered carbon-capture devices called trees? What if every temple, tabernacle, stake center, and ward building had an adjacent sacred grove for praying to heavenly parents and for contemplating earthly ethics? What if Saints turned McConkie on his head and *always* attached sanctity to *all* the groves and *all* the lands on which they grow?

Is it remotely possible that, by the end of my career, when a stranger asks me, “Are you a Mormon?” their follow-up question will not concern missionaries, polygamists, fundamentalists, MLM, Coca-Cola, or secret underwear, but rather the prominent, inspiring, worldwide practice of sacred groves?

If Latter-day Saints can stage large-scale festivals, pageants, roadshows, parades, and reenactments, all with volunteer labor, I have no doubt they can belatedly carry out urgent, meaningful climate action—from the level of asset management by Ensign Peak Advisors to the level of chapel landscape repair by local ward members. True, compared to Catholicism, there may be scant cultural material to work with, but there’s enough to get going. And the more we make, the more there will be. The short history of the LDS Church is basically a tradition of reinvention. There have been so many different Mormonisms in just two hundred years, not even counting the schismatic offshoots. There

are permutations and adaptations yet to come. Some could be worse; some could be better.

In the Holocene's terminal phase, a forced ending to a geological dispensation that could nonetheless go on for centuries, I pray, in my own secular way, that this ice-capped blue planet with elderflora, this perfect terrestrial kingdom, inspires all seekers of goodness and beauty to labor together to make these latter days last longer.

JARED FARMER is the Walter H. Annenberg Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania.



Charlotte Condie, *Call the Bishop*, 2022,
paper sculpture, 8" x 10" x 5"

“A REMARKABLE VISION OF HER FATHER”: THE MANY USES OF OF IN THE BOOK OF ALMA

Kyle Jepson

In the Book of Mormon, when Ammon is preaching to King Lamoni and his household, we meet a believing Lamanitish servant named Abish, who had “been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father” (Alma 19:16). This stunning piece of backstory is delivered at a key moment in the narrative. The king, queen, Ammon, and all the other servants had just lost consciousness, “being overpowered by the Spirit” (Alma 19:13). Only Abish remained awake, apparently because of her earlier conversion. She then performs the crucial labor of gathering as many people as possible, supposing “that by beholding this scene it would cause them to believe in the power of God” (Alma 19:17).

Once the multitude is gathered, Abish takes the queen by the hand, and the queen “arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!” (Alma 19:29). The queen then wakes the king, who calls the gathered people to order. Ammon and Abish’s fellow servants wake up, “And behold, many did declare unto the people that they had seen angels and had conversed with them; and thus they had told them things of God, and of his righteousness” (Alma 19:34).

This passage is a rare instance where the Book of Mormon tells of either a layperson or a woman having a vision, and this scene has both simultaneously. The queen and all the servants are converted after

having remarkable visions—or, it seems, all the servants except Abish. Apparently Abish, who played such a critical role in the conversion of the kingdom, was the only member of the king’s household who did not have a vision.

Or did she?

Abish was converted “on account of a remarkable vision of her father,” but this statement is, as Matthew L. Bowen explains, “formally ambiguous and yields several interpretive possibilities.”¹ The trouble, here, is the word *of*. Although a small and common preposition, *of* has a knack for introducing ambiguity into English prose. As linguist Dallin D. Oaks has observed: “Many prepositions can in fact represent a variety of relationships. In the *American Heritage Dictionary*, for example, I see that the preposition *of* has 20 listed definitions—21 if I count an archaic definition that it provides. I have a lexicographer colleague, Cynthia Hallen, who tells me that even this is an understatement of the number of possible meanings for this preposition, though of course any such number depends on how we lump or split definitions.”² Readers are fortunate that, in the specific case of “a remarkable vision of her father,” there are only two functions that *of* might be performing. In what Bowen calls “the traditional reading of this event,”³ Abish’s father had the vision. However, Kevin and Shauna Christensen say, “It seems a better reading to credit Abish with having a vision of her father, which led to her conversion.”⁴ Daniel H. Ludlow explains the ambiguity in more detail: “The brief account of the conversion of Abish . . . may have

1. Matthew L. Bowen, “Abish, Theophanies, and the First Lamanite Restoration,” *Religious Educator* 19, no. 1 (2018): 62.

2. Dallin D. Oaks, *Structural Ambiguity in English: An Applied Grammatical Inventory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 294.

3. Bowen, “Abish, Theophanies, and the First Lamanite Restoration,” 62.

4. Kevin Christensen and Shauna Christensen, “Nephite Feminism Revisited: Thoughts on Carol Lynn Pearson’s View of Women in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10, no. 2 (1998): 16.

two possible interpretations. One interpretation is that Abish herself had this vision and in her vision she saw her father. Another possible interpretation is that the vision was actually had by the father of Abish.”⁵

In the traditional interpretation, where Abish’s father had the vision, *of* denotes possession, as it does in a phrase like “the first vision of Joseph Smith.” In the alternative interpretation, where Abish had the vision herself, *of* describes the content of the vision, as it does in the phrase “the vision of the tree of life.” In these phrases—“the first vision of Joseph Smith” and “the vision of the tree of life”—*of* may be ambiguous from a grammatical perspective, but the content of each phrase can do a lot to reduce that ambiguity. For example, “the first vision of Joseph Smith” is ambiguous in the same way “a remarkable vision of her father” is, but because “the first vision” is the name often used for the vision Joseph had near his home as a young man, anyone familiar with that story is likely to understand that “the first vision of Joseph Smith” means a vision he had, not a vision he was in. In the case of “the vision of the tree of life,” there is effectively no ambiguity at all because the reader will likely assume trees do not have visions, so the tree must have been in the vision. But in the case of the phrase “vision of her father,” both interpretations are plausible.

Many commentators who notice this ambiguity are quick to dismiss it as inconsequential. Ludlow says, “Regardless of which interpretation is correct, this conversion of Abish plays an important role in converting large numbers of Lamanites.”⁶ Brant Gardner says that attributing the vision to Abish’s father is “a reasonable assumption for a firmly patriarchal society.”⁷ It seems to be Bowen alone who recognizes that

5. Daniel A. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 207.

6. Ludlow, *Companion to Your Study*, 207.

7. Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 4: Alma* (Sandy, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 302–303.

the difference between these two interpretations is significant: “If the vision belonged to Abish, she, along with Lamoni’s wife, would have become one of the few women reported in the Book of Mormon to have experienced a theophany or have a vision.”⁸ However, Bowen avoids coming to any firm conclusion as to whether Abish or her father was the one who had the vision. This article, therefore, seeks to explore whether a grammatical analysis can settle it.

In wider Christianity, the idea of grammatical exegesis has been around for a long time. In fact, the sixteenth-century theologian Philip Melanchthon said, “It is impossible to understand Scripture in its theology without having first understood its grammar.”⁹ More recently, William Arnold Stevens wrote an article entitled “Grammatical Exegesis” to explain the value of this approach to scripture study. For anyone uncertain about the relevance of grammar to theology, the introduction to this article is instructive: “All real and effective Bible study begins with grammatical exegesis, that part of exegesis with which the present article is especially concerned. Grammatical exegesis . . . takes one sentence at a time, and applies the laws of thought and language in order to understand it. It aims immediately and principally . . . to ascertain the writer’s thought as determined from the meanings of the words, and from their relation to one another in the given sentence.”¹⁰ Near the end of the article, Stevens adds: “One caution must not be omitted. The grammatical process . . . does not embrace the whole of interpretation. Grammatical exegesis is only the first stage of the exegetical task—the gateway into the temple of biblical science. Yet all who will really know the Bible must humbly and obediently enter that gateway.”¹¹

8. Bowen, “Abish, Theophanies, and the First Lamanite Restoration,” 62.

9. William Arnold Stevens, “Grammatical Exegesis,” *The Old and New Testament Student* 9, no. 4 (1889): 206.

10. Stevens, “Grammatical Exegesis,” 199.

11. Stevens, “Grammatical Exegesis,” 206.

As for the Bible, so for the Book of Mormon. Before we can dive deep into its theology, we need to make a careful study of the words and structures of individual sentences. In the specific case of Abish's conversion, significant theological implications hinge on our interpretation of a single preposition. So let us not shy away from this "first stage of the exegetical task." Instead, let us closely examine the grammar of the Book of Mormon and venture a conclusion as to who had this remarkable vision.

The Function of *of* in Alma 17–20

The first step of this analysis will be to dig into the grammar of the Book of Mormon to see whether *of* appears in a pattern that will help us interpret the phrase "a remarkable vision of her father." A full answer to this question would require an analysis of the Book of Mormon's more than 10,000 instances of *of*, which is more analysis than this solo author can manage. Thankfully, the text itself is broken into sections,¹² and there are 248 instances of *of* in the section our passage appears

12. These sections are masked by our current chapter/verse structure, but you can see them in Skousen's reconstruction of the original text. In the editor's preface of that book, Skousen explains the nature of these sections:

The original text had sections that Joseph Smith decided to call "chapters," even though the word *chapter* itself is extracanonial and is never used by any writer within the Book of Mormon. Apparently as part of the revelatory process, Joseph would from time to time perceive breaks within the text. At those points in his dictation he would tell the scribe to put the word *chapter* into the manuscript but without any numerical specification (the chapter numbers were added later, sometimes months later). The RLDS church (now known as the Community of Christ) has maintained these original chapters in their editions and has added versification. The LDS system, in comparison, has divided the original longer chapters into shorter ones so that no chapter ever reaches a hundred verses.

Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), xl.

in (Alma 17–20), which is more manageable. That is the analysis this article undertakes.

Before we get started, it will be useful to define some key terms that will be used throughout this paper, particularly as relates to the functions *of* performs in the text. Similar to the dictionary cited by Oaks, Merriam-Webster's online dictionary gives a total of twenty-two different definitions for the preposition *of*.¹³ Of these, Alma 17–20 has instances of ten. Additionally, *of* frequently appears in phrases that are non-compositional, meaning that the definition of the phrase cannot be derived from the meaning of the words that make it up. Examples include “because of” (which Merriam-Webster calls a preposition¹⁴) and “in search of” (which Merriam-Webster calls an idiom¹⁵). In both of these examples, it is difficult to analyze the function of *of* because the phrase functions as a unit independent of the meanings of the individual words in it. Therefore, a “Non-compositional” category was created for these instances, bringing the number of categories up to eleven.

Table 1 gives a list of the eleven categories used in this study, ranked in order of frequency in Alma 17–20. Each row of the table provides a category's name, its Merriam-Webster definition, the number of times it appears in Alma 17–20 and what percentage of instances that number represents, and an example from the text.

The categories were typically unambiguous. Of the 248 instances of *of* in Alma 17–20, “a remarkable vision of her father” was the only one ambiguous enough to defy easy categorization using the definitions provided in table 1. There were other instances that theoretically could have been ambiguous, but these were invariably made clear by context.

13. Merriam-Webster.com *Dictionary*, s.v. “of,” accessed December 20, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/of>.

14. Merriam-Webster.com *Dictionary*, s.v. “because of,” accessed December 21, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/in%20search%20of>.

15. Merriam-Webster.com *Dictionary*, s.v. “in search of,” accessed December 21, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/in%20search%20of>.

For example, "the service of the king" could be service rendered either by or to a king, but the full phrase reads "after he had been in the service of the king three days," (Alma 17:26), which clearly means service rendered to the king. Similarly, "the thoughts of Ammon" (Alma 17:30) and "the thoughts of the king" (Alma 18:16) could be thoughts had by Ammon or the king, or they could be thoughts about Ammon or the king, but the larger context makes one interpretation the clear choice. Only "a remarkable vision of her father" remained truly ambiguous, so table 1 accounts for the other 247 instances of *of* in Alma 17–20.

The question at hand, then, is whether "a remarkable vision of her father" should be categorized as POSSESSIVE (meaning the vision belongs to her father, which suggests he was the one who had the vision) or as ABOUT (meaning the content of the vision was about her father, which suggests Abish had the vision). The other nine categories are mostly outside of this article's scope, but when we encounter instances of *of* that belong to one of these categories, the category's name will be given in all caps to make finding the relevant definition in table 1 as easy as possible.

One thing that should be noted about the categories in table 1 is that POSSESSIVE is by far the most common, accounting for nearly 40 percent of all instances. It should come as no surprise, then, that many people read "a remarkable vision of her father" as POSSESSIVE—nearly half of the instances of *of* in the verse's immediate neighborhood are exactly that, while ABOUT only occurs roughly once in every twenty-five instances. The human brain, reaching for analogous structures as a means of interpretation, makes the statistically smart choice if it chooses POSSESSIVE. And certainly it does not help that the ABOUT interpretation entails a Lamanitish servant woman having a heavenly vision. Visions in the Book of Mormon are typically the purview of Nephite men in the ruling class. It would be "remarkable" enough for Abish's father to have a vision and truly astounding for Abish herself to have one.

But just because a given interpretation is statistically (and socially) more likely does not mean it is actually correct. We should look

Table 1

Name	Merriam-Webster Definition	Count	Example
POSSESSIVE	6a. used as a function word to indicate belonging or a possessive relationship	96 (39%)	the house of the king (Alma 19:18)
CLASS	8a. used as a function word to indicate a particular example belonging to the class denoted by the preceding noun	33 (13%)	the waters of Sebus (Alma 17:34)
PARTITIVE1	4a. used as a function word to indicate the whole that includes the part denoted by the preceding word	20 (8%)	half of the kingdom (Alma 20:23)
NON-COMPOSITIONAL	N/A	20 (8%)	because of being bound (Alma 20:29)
COMPOSITION	3. used as a function word to indicate the component material, parts, or elements or the contents	17 (7%)	the cloud of darkness (Alma 19:6)
ORIGIN	2a. used as a function word to indicate origin or derivation	13 (5%)	a descendant of Ishmael (Alma 17:21)
DELIVER	7. used as a function word to indicate something from which a person or thing is delivered or with respect to which someone or something is made destitute	13 (5%)	born of a woman (Alma 19:13)
OBJECTIVE GENITIVE	9a. used as a function word to indicate the object of an action denoted or implied by the preceding noun	13 (5%)	the creation of Adam (Alma 18:36)
ABOUT	5a. ABOUT	10 (4%)	the knowledge of the truth (Alma 17:2)
PARTITIVE2	4b. used as a function word to indicate a whole or quantity from which a part is removed or expended	6 (2%)	What desirest thou of me? (Alma 18:15)
QUALITY	10. used as a function word to indicate a characteristic or distinctive quality or possession	6 (2%)	men of a sound understanding (Alma 17:2)

for textual patterns that suggest one interpretation is more grammatically justified than the other. That analysis is covered in the first section of this paper, "How Does *of* Function in Alma 17–20?"

Additionally, we should not ignore the fact that our ambiguous phrase is introduced by "on account of," which is a NON-COMPOSITIONAL phrase that Merriam-Webster defines as a preposition.¹⁶ Given that "a remarkable vision of her father" is embedded in a prepositional phrase, we should investigate whether that has an impact on its structure. The phrase "on account of" appears ten times in the Book of Mormon, and a brief investigation into its usage is covered in the second section of this paper, "How Does 'on Account of' Function in The Book of Mormon?"

How Does *of* Function in Alma 17–20?

In order to determine whether "a remarkable vision of her father" should be categorized as POSSESSIVE or ABOUT, we need to examine the contexts where *of* performs these functions and see whether any patterns emerge. There are ninety-six instances of POSSESSIVE *of* in Alma 17–20, and ten instances of ABOUT. If we can find a pattern that exists in one category but not the other, we can use that pattern to judge whether "a remarkable vision of her father" belongs in a particular category.

Before discussing a particularly striking pattern that emerges from the ninety-six instances of POSSESSIVE *of*, let us first consider how indefinite and definite articles are used in English. In basic terms, indefinite articles (such as *a*) are used when a topic is first introduced in a given discourse ("discourse new"), while definite articles (such as *the*) are used when a topic has already been established ("discourse old"). For example, when Lamoni loses consciousness, his servants put him onto a bed. In Alma 18:43, the bed is discourse new because it is being

16. More accurately, Merriam-Webster defines "on account of" as equivalent to "because of," which it defines as a preposition. See Merriam-Webster .com *dictionary*, s.v. "account" and "because of," accessed December 29, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/account> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/because%20of>.

mentioned for the first time, and the text uses an indefinite article (*a*) as we would expect: Lamoni's servants "took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon **a bed**." A few verses later, in Alma 19:11, the bed is now discourse old, so we see a definite article (*the*) when we are told the queen "watched over **the bed** of her husband."

With that in mind, one surprising pattern exists in the ninety-six instances of POSSESSIVE in Alma 17–20: They all occur in noun phrases that begin with *the*.¹⁷ There are no indefinite noun phrases

17. POSSESSIVE constructions in Alma 17–20:

1. the [altar / spirit / glory / image / name] of [God / the Lord] (7 instances)
2. the [countenance / eyes / pleasure] of the king (3 instances)
3. the [house / pasture] of the king (2 instances)
4. the arms of [those who sought to slay him / my brethren / others] (3 instances)
5. the bed of her husband (1 instance)
6. the borders of the land (1 instance)
7. the brethren of Ammon (2 instances)
8. the coming of Christ (1 instance)
9. the conditions of repentance (1 instance)
10. the curse of God (1 instance)
11. the custom of the Lamanites (1 instance)
12. the edge of his sword (1 instance)
13. the enemies of the king (1 instance)
14. the faithfulness of Ammon (2) (2 instances)
15. the fall of man (1 instance)
16. the fame of Ammon (1 instance)
17. the father of Lamoni (4 instances)
18. the first year of the judges (1 instance)
19. the flocks of [Ammon / Lamoni / the king / the people] (6 instances)
20. the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people (1 instance)
21. the hands of God (1 instance)
22. the hearts of the sons (1 instance)
23. the hearts of these my fellow-servants (1 instance)
24. the journeyings of their fathers (1 instance)
25. the king of the land (3 instances)
26. the land of the Lamanites (1 instance)
27. the manner of the Lamanites (1 instance)

being possessed. Of the ninety-six instances of POSSESSIVE *of* in Alma 17–20, all ninety-six are preceded by *the*. That is 100 percent. To see such consistency in a linguistic analysis is shocking. In contrast, the

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28. the minds of the people (1 instance)
 29. the mouth of Ammon (1 instance)
 30. the people of God (1 instance)
 31. the people of Nephi (1 instance)
 32. the power of [their words / Ammon / God] (6 instances)
 33. the practice of these Lamanites (1 instance)
 34. the promises of the Lord (1 instance)
 35. the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel (1 instance)
 36. the records and the holy scriptures of the people (1 instance)
 37. the servants of [Lamoni / the king / my husband] (7 instances)
 38. the strength of [his arm / the Lord] (2 instances)
 39. the sword of Ammon (2 instances)
 40. the thoughts and intents of the heart (1 instance)
 41. the thoughts of Ammon (1 instance)
 42. the thoughts of my heart (1 instance)
 43. the thoughts of the king (1 instance)
 44. the tradition of Lamoni (1 instance)
 45. the traditions of their fathers (2 instances)
 46. the voice of the Lord (1 instance)
 47. the wickedness of these men (1 instance)
 48. the word of Ammon (2 instances)
 49. the word of God (6 instances)
 50. the word of our servants (1 instance)
 51. the words of Ammon (1 instance)
 52. the work of the Lord (1 instance)
 53. the works of the Lord (1 instance)

ABOUT constructions in Alma 17–20:

1. a knowledge of that which is just and true (1 instance)
2. a testimony of the things which they had done (1 instance)
3. the fear of being slain (1 instance)
4. the knowledge of the baseness (1 instance)
5. the knowledge of the truth (3 instances)
6. to know of the plan (1 instance)
7. told them things [. . .] of his righteousness (1 instance)
8. told them things of God (1 instance)

ten instances of ABOUT are quite diverse: Only five have definite noun phrases.

Consider that for a moment. Intuitively, we should expect the more common construction to show more diversity. If the construction that occurs ninety-six times had more variability than the construction that occurs only ten times, we would be forced to consider the possibility that maybe the rarer construction has the same amount of variability but did not occur frequently enough for us to detect it. But what we have here is the opposite case. Four of the ten (40 percent) instances of ABOUT contained indefinite noun phrases.¹⁸ So we might expect nearly forty instances of indefinite phrases in our ninety-six instances of POSSESSIVE, but there are zero. That is a very striking pattern indeed.

In addition to being remarkable from a probabilistic perspective, this pattern has significant implications for our analysis because the phrase we are seeking to disambiguate begins with an indefinite article: “a remarkable vision of her father.” The question then arises—if this is a POSSESSIVE construction, why is it alone in having an indefinite article?

There is the possibility that “a remarkable vision of her father” is, indeed, POSSESSIVE, and it just happens to be the only discourse new POSSESSIVE in Alma 17–20. Perhaps this section of the Book of Mormon just happens to have a lot of discourse-old noun phrases.

This hypothesis is immediately suspect, since Alma 17 is the beginning of the narrator Mormon’s account of the sons of Mosiah. Being the beginning of a story, we would expect this part of the record to have at least some discourse-new material. Even so, we cannot dismiss the hypothesis out of hand because of a subtle pattern that has already been hinted at by the one example we have seen: King Lamoni’s bed. When

18. There are five instances of ABOUT starting with a definite noun phrase and four starting with an indefinite noun phrase. The tenth instance begins with a verb phrase: “that perhaps they might bring them to know of the plan of redemption” (Alma 17:16).

it was first introduced, it was just called "a bed." Later, when the bed is already discourse old, it is called "the bed of her husband." Could it be that POSSESSIVE phrases are generally introduced only after the object has already been mentioned non-possessively? If so, it could be the case that "a remarkable vision of her father" is POSSESSIVE, but it is mentioned so briefly that there is not space to follow the normal pattern.

There does seem to be this kind of pattern in Alma 17–20. For example, when the Lamanite robbers start attacking Ammon, he defends himself by "smiting their arms with **the edge of his sword**" (Alma 17:37). The edge of Ammon's sword has not been mentioned before, but his sword has been: Earlier in that same verse, we read "he smote off their arms with **his sword**." It is interesting that this sword is initially introduced with a possessive pronoun rather than an *of* construction.¹⁹ Just as the sword is discourse old by the time we read about its edge, Ammon is discourse old by the time we read about his sword. Similarly, "the father of Lamoni," which appears four times in Alma 17–20,²⁰ likely uses *the* because Lamoni is discourse old, even if his father is not. This does seem to suggest a pattern.

However, there is one POSSESSIVE instance in Alma 17–20 that solidly shows that inherited discourse status, if it is even a real phenomenon, cannot fully account for the preponderance of definite articles in POSSESSIVE phrases, and it comes in the very last verse of the section: "And, as it happened, it was their lot to have fallen into **the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people**" (Alma 20:30).

Here "a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people" is discourse new and takes *a* as its article, and yet the POSSESSIVE construction still takes *the*. So it seems the article for the POSSESSIVE phrase does

19. This is true even if we back up to the first mention of swords in the account of the sons of Mosiah: "Nevertheless they departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and took their swords" (Alma 17:7).

20. Alma 18:9, 20:8, 20:9, 20:14

not coordinate with the discourse newness of the possessor. Could it be that POSSESSIVE phrases do, in fact, prefer definite articles? If so, we have a good case for interpreting “a remarkable vision of her father” as an ABOUT instance of *of*.

One possible counterargument is that some noun phrases only make sense with a definite article. Looking again at “the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people,” it is hard to think of an indefinite rendering. Since *hands* is plural, the indefinite form would have no article at all, and “it was their lot to have fallen into hands of a more hardened . . . people” offends my native speaker intuitions.

This counterargument is strong in this instance, but it’s still insufficient to explain why POSSESSIVE phrases only have definite articles. Consider this passage from Alma 18: “Now it was **the practice of these Lamanites** to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people, that thereby they might drive away many that were scattered unto their own land, it being **a practice of plunder** among them” (Alma 18:7).

In the current analysis, “the practice of these Lamanites” is an instance of POSSESSIVE, while “a practice of plunder” is an instance of QUALITY. The curious thing about this passage is that the first (discourse new) instance of *plunder* in this passage takes *the*, while the second (discourse old) instance takes *a*. Presumably, “a practice of plunder” takes an indefinite article because these Lamanites had more than one “practice of plunder,” but that cannot be the full explanation. If it was, we would expect the verse to start “now it was a practice of these Lamanites.” The fact that the word *practice* takes an indefinite article in one part of a sentence and a definite article in another part of the sentence, and that the articles occur in an order opposed to discourse newness, is noteworthy. It suggests that either POSSESSIVE prefers definite noun phrases or QUALITY prefers indefinite noun phrases. We have already seen a lack of indefinite noun phrases with POSSESSIVE—do we see a similar lack of definite noun phrases with QUALITY?

No. In fact, even though Alma 17–20 only has six instances of QUALITY compared to its ninety-six instances of POSSESSIVE, the QUALITY instances show more variety in their articles. We have already seen “a practice of plunder” taking an indefinite article. Elsewhere, “the spirit of prophecy” and “the spirit of revelation” take a definite article.

Since QUALITY seems equally accepting of indefinite and definite articles, the articles in Alma 18:7 suggest POSSESSIVE really does prefer definite articles. Given that “a remarkable vision of her father” is an indefinite noun phrase, it’s unlikely that this is a POSSESSIVE construction. The grammatical patterns suggest that it cannot be. In light of this, rejecting the POSSESSIVE interpretation of “a remarkable vision of her father” is the wisest course of action, which is a strong point in favor of accepting the ABOUT interpretation—assuming that the phrase “on account of” is not somehow affecting the syntax of the phrase.

How Does “on Account of” Function in The Book of Mormon?

The phrase we have been focusing on is “a remarkable vision of her father,” but we should not ignore the fact that this phrase is introduced by “on account of,” which is a NON-COMPOSITIONAL *of* phrase. Oaks observes that “compound prepositions such as ‘in view of’ or ‘on account of’” can be “interpreted as subordinators.”²¹ Could it be that this subordination is affecting the structure of the phrase we’ve been examining?

As mentioned previously, “on account of” functions as a preposition, meaning that “a remarkable vision of her father” is itself embedded within another prepositional phrase: “she having been converted unto the Lord for many years, **on account of** a remarkable vision of her father.” If “a remarkable vision of her father” is POSSESSIVE, we have

21. Oaks, *Structural Ambiguity in English*, 295.

already seen that its structure is markedly different from other POSSESSIVE phrases in Alma 17–20 because of its indefinite noun phrase. Is there a possibility that being embedded in a prepositional phrase would force the POSSESSIVE construction to behave differently? If so, that would undermine the previous argument and once again make the phrase ambiguous.

The verse we have been examining is the only instance of “on account of” in Alma 17–20, so we will need to look at the broader text in order to find instances to examine, though perhaps not as broadly as we would expect. Including the verse in question, there are ten total instances of “on account of” in the Book of Mormon, and all ten of them are in the Book of Alma.²² The list below gives the phrase immediately following “on account of” in each instance:

- their exceeding faith and good works (Alma 13:3)
- their faith (Alma 13:4)

22. While this phrase is unique to the Book of Alma, we cannot conclude that it is unique to Alma himself, since his record concludes at the end of Alma 44, and there is one instance in Alma 53. Still, it would be interesting to analyze the other nine instances of “on account of” to see if they are all from Mormon or if some or all of them come from Alma himself. It is theoretically possible to determine this, given that a wordprint study of the Book of Mormon by Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher found that “the writers of each verse, or partial verse, could be identified according to the information given in the text. We found very little ambiguity as to who wrote what. However, identifying the source of each verse or portion of a verse required careful scrutiny, since authorship or source shifts approximately fifteen hundred times in the text of the Book of Mormon” (162). Sadly, Larsen and Rencher did not provide authorship data for each individual verse, and I am not qualified to achieve their level of scrutiny. If it turns out that “on account of a remarkable vision of her father” came from a different author than the other instances of “on account of” examined here, that could be a potential weakness in the arguments provided here. Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, “Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982).

- the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds (Alma 13:4)
- their exceeding faith and repentance (Alma 13:10)
- his wickedness (Alma 15:3)
- a remarkable vision of her father (Alma 19:16)
- their fear to take up arms against their brethren (Alma 27:23)
- their many murders and their awful wickedness (Alma 27:23)
- their wickedness and abominations and their murders (Alma 37:29)
- some intrigue amongst the Nephites (Alma 53:8)

One striking feature of this is the predominance of possessive phrases. Indeed, at first glance, one might be tempted to suggest “on account of” only accepts possessive phrases, which would be a strong reason to suppose that “a remarkable vision of her father” is POSSESSIVE. However, the final instance—“some intrigue amongst the Nephites”—is not possessive. Thanks to this one passage, we see that “on account of” can introduce non-possessive phrases, which allows us to accept “a remarkable vision of her father” as either ABOUT or POSSESSIVE, but let us focus on the other examples to see if there is any evidence that “on account of” forces syntactic changes to POSSESSIVE phrases. If so, we will have another pattern we can compare “a remarkable vision of her father” to in order to disambiguate it.

The majority of the possessive phrases following “on account of” use possessive pronouns, which are not directly relevant to this study because they do not use *of*. However, the second instance of “on account of” in Alma 13:4 uses two instances of *of* in parallel: “the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds.” This is an especially helpful *of* phrase because it is introduced by the definite article *the*, so if this is a POSSESSIVE phrase, then we can rule out the possibility that “on account of” somehow forces POSSESSIVE phrases to have an indefinite article when they normally prefer definite articles.

But is this a POSSESSIVE phrase? Remember, we have a QUALITY category that is used to indicate a characteristic or distinctive quality or possession, and *hardness* and *blindness* feel like characteristics. Luckily, these categorizations do not have to be based on feel. If we compare the

structure of QUALITY phrases and POSSESSIVE phrases, we see that they are ordered differently:

- POSSESSIVE: the house of the king
- QUALITY: men of a sound understanding

In the POSSESSIVE phrase, the king possesses a house, and in the QUALITY phrase, men possess a sound understanding. However, in the POSSESSIVE phrase, the possession comes before *of* and the possessor comes afterward, while in the QUALITY phrase, the order is reversed: The possessor comes before *of*, and the possession comes afterward.

In “the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds,” *hearts* and *minds* are the possessors, and *hardness* and *blindness* are the possessions. The structure of these phrases is possession-*of*-possessor, which matches the POSSESSIVE structure. Because of this, we can determine that this phrase is POSSESSIVE, and it is yet another instance of a POSSESSIVE phrase being introduced by *the*, so we are maintaining our 100 percent rate of definite articles—even when the phrase is introduced by “on account of.”

We can therefore reject the possibility that “on account of” might force POSSESSIVE phrases to have indefinite articles. Since all other instances of POSSESSIVE constructions in Alma 17–20 have definite articles, the fact that “a remarkable vision of her father” has an indefinite article is a key detail and a strong point in favor of rejecting the POSSESSIVE interpretation. In other words, the patterns inside the text argue against interpreting the phrase as meaning that Abish’s father was the one who had the vision, leaving us to conclude that Abish did in fact have this vision herself.

What Did We Learn?

In Alma 19:16, we read that Abish was converted “on account of a remarkable vision of her father,” which could either mean her father

saw a vision (POSSESSIVE interpretation) or she saw her father in a vision (ABOUT interpretation). We've seen that the POSSESSIVE function is by far the most common function *of* performs in Alma 17–20, so we should not be surprised if readers interpret "a remarkable vision of her father" as a vision Abish's father saw. However, if this is a POSSESSIVE phrase, it is the only one in Alma 17–20 that begins with an indefinite article. All other instances of POSSESSIVE *of* are introduced by *the*, even in contexts where we would expect *a* based on discourse newness, and there is no evidence that this pattern is disrupted by the subordination of "on account of." Therefore, it seems unlikely that "a remarkable vision of her father" is a POSSESSIVE construction, leading us to conclude that it was Abish, not her father, who had the vision.

With that established, we have completed the grammatical exegesis for this verse and provided a foundation for theological exploration. As was mentioned at the outset, many authors have noticed the ambiguity of the phrase we have been examining, and a few have even suggested some theological implications that would arise if it turned out that Abish was the one who had the remarkable vision. But, lacking the grammatical evidence that the ABOUT interpretation was the correct one, these authors have had to treat their insights as mere speculation. With the grammar now disambiguated, these insights can be explored with more confidence. Below are a few brief examples.

First, in her 129-page *Brief Theological Introduction* for the first half of Alma, Kylie Nielson Turley allots ten pages to Abish, exploring her story from a variety of angles. In a section about social justice, Turley observes: "Abish . . . is a low-ranking person in every sense. She is a woman in a book that only names six women. . . . Having been converted 'many years' ago, Abish is probably somewhat older in a society that rarely speaks of the elderly. Perhaps being the queen's servant gives her some status, but she is still a servant. . . ." ²³ Turley's conclusion in

23. Kylie Nielson Turley, *Alma 1–29: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo: Brigham Young University Neil A. Maxwell Institute, 2020), 118.

this section is that “Abish is of no consequence in all the ways that seem to matter most. But God sees her, and she sees God’s power”²⁴—which is a powerful conclusion to draw from this story. However, her arguments leading up to this conclusion are tripped up by the ambiguity of who had the remarkable vision: “Did Abish see a remarkable vision of her father, which converted her to the Lord? Or did her father see a remarkable vision, which converted her to the Lord? Either way, this woman is a believer.”²⁵ If Turley had been able to confidently state that Abish was the one who had the vision, then instead of observing that God *chose to work through* someone who was unvalued in their society, she could have made the even more powerful theological point that God *chose to give a vision to* someone who was unvalued in their society.

Indeed, there are likely a great many theological points that could be made from the fact that God chose to reveal himself to “a low-ranking person in every sense,” putting Abish among the ranks of Enoch the hated lad, Moses the stutterer, Matthew the tax collector, and Joseph Smith the farmboy, “that the fulness of [the] gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers” (D&C 1:23). Abish, who had every reason to feel unremarkable, was given a remarkable vision and then played a key role in the conversion of the royal household she worked in.

To take this even further, Bowen suggests the possibility that the father Abish saw in vision was not her earthly father: “Could Abish’s ‘father’ (‘*āb*’) here constitute a divine or Christological reference? If so, the ‘remarkable’ nature of Abish’s vision would consist in her having seen ‘the Lamb of God, yea even the eternal father’ (1 Nephi 11:21, printer’s manuscript) condescending to the earth to be incarnate as a ‘man,’ just as Lamoni and others saw in Lamoni’s court—the very context

24. Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 123.

25. Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 118.

in which the 'remarkable vision of her father' is mentioned."²⁶ Again, without a solid argument to support the idea of Abish having the vision in the first place, Bowen is forced to give this notion short shrift. Even so, he has highlighted a key difference between the two interpretations of this verse: If Abish's father had the vision, then we have no explicit mention of its content whatsoever, but if Abish had the vision, then we know for certain "her father" was in it. With that fact firmly established, the door is opened for a wide range of theological exploration, regardless of whether Abish saw her father or The Father. And perhaps further textual analysis could suggest which interpretation of "her father" is more likely to be accurate.²⁷

Bowen additionally observes, "If Abish saw a vision of her own earthly father, it would constitute the only vision of a postmortal parent or ancestor in the Book of Mormon."²⁸ In the absence of solid evidence that Abish was the one who saw the vision, Bowen is forced to move on without exploring this much deeper, but if we accept the grammatical

26. Bowen, "Abish, Theophanies, and the First Lamanite Restoration," 62.

27. Turley makes the fascinating suggestion that, since Alma 19:16–17 is written from Abish's perspective, it may have come from an account she herself wrote. Turley's argument is based on the fact that these verses contain "eight words or phrases that are completely unique, two phrases that are not used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, and eight more phrases that are used in the Book of Mormon but only after Abish's story." Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 119. It would be interesting to see how this number of unique words and phrases compares with other passages of similar length in Alma 17–20, particularly since Alma was not present for any of Ammon's adventures among the Lamanites so must have compiled his narratives from other people's accounts. If the text does indeed suggest that these are Abish's words, that could have interesting implications in the way we choose to interpret the phrase "her father."

28. Bowen, "Abish, Theophanies, and the First Lamanite Restoration," 62.

evidence that Abish had the vision, someone can now study out whether Abish's vision does indeed hold this distinction.²⁹

These are only three examples of the opportunities for theological exploration that are available now that the ambiguity of "a remarkable vision of her father" has been unraveled. Others may well arise. But perhaps the most straightforward theological insight is this: God, who can reveal himself to anyone he chooses, once chose to reveal himself to a Lamanitish servant, so he may well choose to reveal himself to us as well.

29. That being said, I feel obligated to point out that it does not necessarily follow that Abish's father was deceased at the time of her vision—after all, Lehi saw living family members in his vision—but it may be that Bowen has reasons for believing Abish's father was deceased that he didn't share in his paper because it was too far into the realm of speculation.

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UTAH NAMING PRACTICES, 1960–2020

David Ellingson Eddington

1. Introduction

You can tell you are from Utah if you are *Jaxton*, your mother is *Sariah*, and your grandparents are *Alma* and *LaRue*. Jokes such as this one, which center on the creative names many residents of the state of Utah in the United States give their offspring, abound.¹ It is not just the more modern varieties like *Kaylee* and *Kaden* that have caught people's ears. In 1945, Henry Louis Mencken noted unusual names in the state belonging to the now uncommon *LaNae*, *LaVelle* variety.² More contemporary observers note the abundance of female names ending in *-lee* such as *Ashlee* and *Kaylee*.³ The pseudo suffix *-lyn*, as seen in *Kaylyn*, is also common, as are the suffixes *-den*, *-son*, *-ton*, and *-der* that prevail in male names like *Brayden*, *Jaxton*, *Grayson*, and *Zander*.⁴ The prefixes

1. Cari Bilyeu Clark, "What's in a Utah Name?," The Original Utah Baby Namer, last modified June 5, 2017, <https://utahbabynamer.blogspot.com/2017/06/front-page.html>.

2. Henry Louis Mencken, *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

3. Jennifer R. Mansfield, "It's Wraylynn—with a W: Distinctive Mormon Naming Practices" (Master's thesis, Utah State University, 2012).

4. Eric A. Eliason, "Nameways in Latter-Day Saint History, Custom, and Folklore," in *Perspectives on Latter-day Saint Names and Naming: Names, Identity, and Belief*, ed. Dallin D. Oaks, Paul Baltes, and Kent Minson (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2013), 70–100.

Mc- and *Mac-* are used principally in female names such a *MacKenzie* and *McCall* but they find their way into the occasional male name as well: *McClain*.⁵ Another naming trend is the conversion of surnames into given names: *Dustin*, *Colton*, *Skyler*, *Tyler*, and *Colby* for boys, and *Whitney*, *Haley*, *Courtney*, and *Madison* for girls.⁶

The unique nature of names in the Beehive State has given rise to a number of well-visited websites. The (Original) Utah Baby Namer pokes fun at the naming trends in the state, while at the same time providing an extensive list of baby names for mothers- and fathers-to-be to choose from.⁷ The other Utah Baby Namer takes a computational approach to naming trends.⁸ The site owner programmed a computer with given names that are twice as popular in Utah than in the remainder of the country. The algorithm, which appears online, outputs a wonderful variety of novel names, many of which have a particular Utah flavor to them.

While some observers treat the naming phenomena in the state under the rubric of Utah names, others suggest that bestowing unique names is a practice limited to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) and discuss them as Mormon names. Of course, about 55 percent of Utahns belong to the LDS Church, and the influence of religion is certainly present. However, most naming studies fail to distinguish the two groups, making it unclear whether the unique names in Utah are limited to members of the LDS Church or not. Also, the question of whether US members of the church outside of Utah follow similar trends has not been examined. The data used in

5. Cleveland Evans, "Contemporary Latter-day Saint Naming," in Oaks, Baltes, and Minson, *Perspectives on Latter-day Saint Names*, 111–60; Mansfield, "It's Wraylynn."

6. Evans, "Contemporary Latter-day Saint Naming."

7. Clark, "What's in a Utah name?"

8. "17 Mainstream Naming Fads We Stole from Utah," Utah Baby Namer, accessed June 14, 2008, <https://www.utahbabynamer.com/>.

the present study do not contain information about the name giver's religion. For this reason, the names discussed are referred to simply as Utah names.

There are, of course, naming trends whose origins are related to the LDS Church. Jennifer R. Mansfield limited her study to Utahns who were members of the LDS Church.⁹ She sorts names into a number of categories, some of which are religion-based. These include names taken from the Book of Mormon such as *Alma*, *Nephi*, and *Moroni*. Others, such as *Dallin* and *Talmage* are homages to Church leaders. Given the LDS Church's emphasis on families and family history, many of Mansfield's interviewees acknowledged having plucked baby names from their family tree. The experiences that missionaries have in foreign countries may account for some unusual names such as Utahns with foreign names (*Alitaya*) or names derived from distant places (*Alaska*).

African Americans are also known to use creative names as a form of ethnic identity marker.¹⁰ Some draw a parallel between African American names and naming practices in the Mormon community.¹¹ They suggest that Mormon parents give their children names that are intended to identify their children's faith. As appealing as that may sound, it does not hold up. Mansfield conducted interviews with Utahns in which she asked the interviewees about naming practices and their perceptions of Utah names. In those interviews, parents never identified the bequeathing of unique names on their children as a way of marking religious identity or cultural roots. Instead, the

9. Mansfield, "It's Wraylynn."

10. Rebecca Bateman, "Naming Patterns in Black Seminole Ethnogenesis," *Ethnohistory* 49, no. 2 (2002): 227–57.

11. Christy Karras, "Different Is Good for Utah Names," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 29, 2002; Don Norton, "Composite LDS Given Games," in Oaks, Baltes, and Minson, *Perspectives on Latter-day Saint Names*, 101–10, "Names Reflect Cultural Origins," *Washington Times*, May 13, 2003.

motive expressed by most was that “their particular combination of these sounds is fresh and unique to their baby and free from fitting into any types or being bound to any existing expectations.”¹²

The search for uniqueness in naming is not limited to Utah, however. One study of naming practices in the US came to a similar conclusion.¹³ Many of the parents interviewed expressed the hope that their child would not turn out ordinary, but special. Their use of less common names was the parents’ attempt to endow a unique identity on the child from the outset of their life.

One drawback to the majority of studies on Utah names is that they are based on the authors’ own observations of names they have come into contact with. In contrast, Cleveland Evans’s study makes an important contribution by providing some quantitative evidence. He contrasts the names given to Utahns with those given to Coloradoans born in 1982, 1990, 1998, 2012, and 2021, drawing the data from the Social Security Administration. While he does find some Utah-centric names, he concludes that “the great majority of babies born in Utah are given names which would arouse no comment in the rest of the United States. . . . Even some of the more creative names found in Utah probably wouldn’t seem to be out of place in the rest of the country.”¹⁴ Mansfield concurs with his conclusion.¹⁵

Although many have discussed Utah naming practices, it is disheartening to realize that most published works are founded on anecdotal evidence at worst, and very limited evidence at best. The most extensive study that examines naming practices with quantitative

12. Mansfield, “It’s Wraylynn,” 11.

13. Hannah Beth Emery, “What’s in a Name? American Parents’ Search for the Perfect Baby Name” (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2013).

14. Evans, “Contemporary Latter-day Saint Naming,” 142.

15. Mansfield, “It’s Wraylynn.”

evidence is found on the Utah Baby Namer website.¹⁶ The data appear to come from the Social Security Administration list, but the author's methodology is not laid out explicitly. However, the author identifies seventeen names that were popular in Utah before catching on in the rest of the US: *Evan, Brittany, Brent, Kent, Scott, Chad, Corey/Cory, Brayden, Jadon, Jaxon, Kaden, Beth, Bryce, Ryker, McKenna, and Brody*. The author concludes: "Looking at the last 100 years in America, newly popular names have gotten popular in Utah an average of 5 years earlier than the rest of the country."

The extant studies raise a number of questions that need to be answered. Can anecdotal observations stand up to scrutiny when they are tested against a large data set? How common are the creative Utah names people have given as examples of Utah names? What Utah names are not found outside the state? Is Utah truly a trendsetter as far as baby names are concerned? What characteristics comprise a Utah name? Evans compared Utah names to Colorado names in five different years, and this article is designed to expand on his work to comprise the entire country.¹⁷

The US Social Security Administration has kept a tally of baby names for many years.¹⁸ Their current list only includes names with a frequency of five or greater and every different spelling is counted as a different name. The present study is based on a subset of this data consisting of the names given to children in the US between 1960 and 2020. As a first foray into the topic, the twenty most popular names given to children in the twenty-first century (2001–2020) were examined. The top twenty Utah names in each year were compared with the top twenty

16. "17 Mainstream Naming Fads."

17. Evans, "Contemporary Latter-day Saint Naming."

18. "Beyond the Top 1000 Names," Social Security Administration (website), accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/babynames/limits.html>.

US names. Names that made the Utah list but not the nationwide list appear in table 1. Women's names ending in *-lee* and *-lyn* appear here, as do men's names ending in *-son*. The list is reminiscent of a wedding: something old (*Eleanor*), something new (*Grayson*), something biblical (*Isaac*), something Trekkie (*Ryker*).

Table 1: Twenty-First Century Names More Popular in Utah Than They Are Nationwide

Girls Names	Boys Names
Brooklyn	Asher
Claire	Austin
Eleanor	Brooks
Ellie	Caleb
Hazel	Carson
Ivy	Carter
Kate	Ezra
Kaylee	Gavin
Lucy	Grayson
Lydia	Hudson
Nora	Hunter
Oakley	Isaac
Paisley	Landon
Rachel	Leo
Ruby	Lincoln
Savannah	Luke
Sophie	Miles
Sydney	Owen
	Ryker
	Samuel
	Theodore
	Thomas
	Wyatt

2. Methodology for Comparing US and Utah Names

Some researchers studying Utah naming practices have identified characteristics purported to identify Utah names. Among them are the pseudo suffixes such as *-lyn* for girls' names or *-son* for boys'. Once again, the question that needs to be answered is whether such observations hold up to empirical investigation. In order to get a sense of which names are popular in the state and when a name first appeared, a list of possible Utah names was needed as a point of departure. This was accomplished by comparing all Utah names in sequential two-year periods, for example 1978 and 1979. When a name appeared in 1979, but not in 1978, 1979 was considered the name's first appearance. A better name for it would be *quasi first appearance* since some names may have occurred in the state prior to 1978, for example. However, these quasi first appearances highlight names that appear in Utah and provide a starting point for comparing Utah names with names in the rest of the US. The comparison between 1960 and 1961 indicated no new names in 1961, while there were new first appearances in 1962. In other words, the data for the present study is actually based on the years 1962 to 2020.

In order to make a comparison, the number of instances of each of the 12,809 unique quasi first appearance names in Utah was divided by the total number of each of those individual names in the US. The resulting percentage for each name in each year was averaged across the years 1962 and 2020. Any name that had an average frequency of 1 percent or more across that fifty-eight-year time span comprised the Utah names data set. Of course, this methodology only gleans more frequent Utah names and does not find a single name, for instance, that only occurs in the state and nowhere else.

US names with a frequency of one hundred or greater were extracted from the Social Security database for comparison. For the purposes of the study, it was not relevant when a name first appeared in the US. Names from the Utah data set were then eliminated from the US data set of names with a frequency of one hundred or greater. This

comprised the US names data set. This resulted in five hundred female Utah names (table 2) and 1,764 female US names. On the other side, there were 474 male Utah names (table 3) and 2,416 male US names for a total of 5,154 names in the data set that was considered.

Table 2: Female Names in Utah from 1962 to 2020 That Comprised an Average of 1 Percent or Greater of US Names

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Mckell	0.36	Kaybree	0.02	Elisabeth	0.02	Austyn	0.01
Mccall	0.19	Holland	0.02	Teisha	0.02	Marie	0.01
Oaklee	0.15	Baylee	0.02	Oaklyn	0.02	Kara	0.01
Oaklie	0.14	Amberly	0.02	Breklyn	0.02	Darci	0.01
Oakley	0.13	Mindi	0.02	Amelia	0.02	Oaklynn	0.01
Janalee	0.12	Brooke	0.02	Laurel	0.02	Emmie	0.01
Mikelle	0.11	Madisen	0.02	Saydee	0.02	Macie	0.01
Makell	0.11	Marilee	0.02	Kinlee	0.02	Averie	0.01
Shaylee	0.1	Tess	0.02	Allyson	0.02	Becky	0.01
Taylee	0.1	Jodee	0.02	Jana	0.02	Jillyn	0.01
Brinlee	0.09	Quincey	0.02	Shellie	0.02	Sienna	0.01
Afton	0.09	Shaylynn	0.02	Liberty	0.02	Summer	0.01
Cami	0.09	Sage	0.02	Robyn	0.02	Jacey	0.01
Brynlee	0.08	Maycee	0.02	Shayla	0.02	Kiera	0.01
Mele	0.08	Pyper	0.02	Charlee	0.02	Nichole	0.01
Mckelle	0.08	Hallie	0.02	Lucy	0.02	Jami	0.01
Kambree	0.08	Kenzie	0.02	Brightyn	0.02	Trisha	0.01
Maren	0.08	Mindy	0.02	Allie	0.02	Goldie	0.01
Janae	0.07	Brooklyn	0.02	Dixie	0.02	Emmeline	0.01
Brinley	0.07	Swayzie	0.02	Amber	0.02	Kaiya	0.01
Taylie	0.07	Britney	0.02	Preslie	0.01	Kennedy	0.01
Kamree	0.07	Saige	0.02	Jenny	0.01	Mandee	0.01
Mikell	0.06	Brittany	0.02	Holli	0.01	Jovie	0.01
Hadlee	0.06	Mckayla	0.02	Sadee	0.01	Ireland	0.01
Kami	0.06	Shalese	0.02	Corinne	0.01	Savannah	0.01
Tylee	0.05	Hallee	0.02	Kelsee	0.01	Tayler	0.01

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Sariah	0.05	Tori	0.02	Jennie	0.01	Taytum	0.01
Gentry	0.05	Kilee	0.02	Shilo	0.01	Savanna	0.01
Brighton	0.05	Gwen	0.02	Lydia	0.01	Madilyn	0.01
Brynlie	0.05	Josie	0.02	Colette	0.01	Tristan	0.01
Mckaylee	0.05	Karlie	0.02	Marcie	0.01	Staci	0.01
Karalee	0.05	Janalyn	0.02	Merrilee	0.01	Ladawn	0.01
Emilee	0.05	Shaunna	0.02	Andie	0.01	Alice	0.01
Camie	0.05	Halle	0.02	Paisley	0.01	Lindsay	0.01
Bostyn	0.05	Shantel	0.02	Ashtyn	0.01	Madison	0.01
Aspen	0.05	Bree	0.02	Brook	0.01	Joni	0.01
Aspyn	0.05	Chantel	0.02	Quinlee	0.01	Lesieli	0.01
Jennilyn	0.05	Berklee	0.02	Bonnie	0.01	Weslie	0.01
Cambree	0.05	Cassidy	0.02	Emily	0.01	Mckynlee	0.01
Brynley	0.04	Karli	0.02	Shaelyn	0.01	Ruby	0.01
Makelle	0.04	Callie	0.02	Scottie	0.01	Charlotte	0.01
Kayzlee	0.04	Marianne	0.02	Jessie	0.01	Carly	0.01
Aubree	0.04	Kira	0.02	Chelsea	0.01	Mckinzie	0.01
Kaylynn	0.04	Janessa	0.02	Kylie	0.01	Chelsee	0.01
Quincee	0.04	Shandee	0.02	Jenifer	0.01	Eve	0.01
Skylee	0.04	Capri	0.02	Tawnya	0.01	Emmy	0.01
Kenadee	0.04	Makaylee	0.02	Kaisley	0.01	Katelyn	0.01
Boston	0.04	Breann	0.02	Kassie	0.01	Bailey	0.01
Charly	0.04	Kimber	0.02	Tiffani	0.01	Cambry	0.01
Mckenna	0.04	Abbie	0.02	Addilyn	0.01	Abbey	0.01
Shaylie	0.04	Shailee	0.02	Sierra	0.01	Sidney	0.01
Meg	0.04	Elsie	0.02	Kaylee	0.01	Kiley	0.01
Quincy	0.04	Charity	0.02	Aimee	0.01	Kelli	0.01
Brynnlee	0.04	Breeann	0.02	Brandee	0.01	Skye	0.01
Ambree	0.04	Kenna	0.02	Millie	0.01	Shalise	0.01
Cozette	0.04	Celeste	0.02	Ashlyn	0.01	Lainee	0.01
Haylee	0.03	Haylie	0.02	Kiersten	0.01	Kali	0.01
Brylee	0.03	Kimberli	0.02	Tausha	0.01	Liv	0.01
Hadlie	0.03	Ellie	0.02	Calli	0.01	Gracie	0.01

Table 2 (continued)

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Cambria	0.03	Lacie	0.02	Tiffanie	0.01	Whitley	0.01
Kylee	0.03	Paislee	0.02	Annika	0.01	Cali	0.01
Jacee	0.03	Maylee	0.02	Jaycie	0.01	Jenica	0.01
Nayvie	0.03	Rachelle	0.02	Rilee	0.01	Dayna	0.01
Eliza	0.03	Emmalee	0.02	Mckenzi	0.01	Tami	0.01
Aubrey	0.03	Sydney	0.02	Cedar	0.01	Collette	0.01
Mckenzie	0.03	Kenlee	0.02	Abby	0.01	Marlee	0.01
Jaycee	0.03	Kalli	0.02	Maddison	0.01	Haley	0.01
Ashlee	0.03	Lacey	0.02	Alex	0.01	Nikole	0.01
Camilla	0.03	Shaylyn	0.02	Alisha	0.01	Kristy	0.01
Bentley	0.03	Shae	0.02	Mandi	0.01	Tamera	0.01
Amberlee	0.03	Ashlie	0.02	Beth	0.01	Sophie	0.01
Indie	0.03	Alisa	0.02	Kamry	0.01	Bethany	0.01
Rylee	0.03	Mylee	0.02	Stacie	0.01	Brinnley	0.01
Shalee	0.03	Elise	0.02	Stevie	0.01	Mandy	0.01
Ember	0.03	Makenzie	0.02	Lindsey	0.01	Swayzee	0.01
Kambrie	0.03	Emery	0.02	Rylie	0.01	Anistyn	0.01
Brecklyn	0.03	Tessa	0.02	Paityn	0.01	Emma	0.01
Mckinlee	0.03	Shanna	0.02	Audrey	0.01	Shelby	0.01
Hailee	0.03	Indy	0.02	Kaylie	0.01	Brianne	0.01
Kallie	0.03	Jovi	0.02	Lindy	0.01	Kortney	0.01
Whitney	0.03	Kapri	0.02	Kellie	0.01	Hillary	0.01
Sydney	0.03	Addie	0.02	Macee	0.01	Shawnee	0.01
Kennadee	0.03	Paizley	0.02	Kinley	0.01	Misty	0.01
Macady	0.03	Lexie	0.02	Jamie	0.01	Karly	0.01
Mckinley	0.03	Katie	0.02	Alyson	0.01	Hazel	0.01
Kimberlee	0.03	Carlee	0.02	Sunny	0.01	Taryn	0.01
Paizlee	0.03	Arikka	0.02	Hayley	0.01	Ginger	0.01
Kamille	0.03	Hinckley	0.02	Kirsten	0.01	Adison	0.01
Sadie	0.03	Mckall	0.02	Sicily	0.01	Cortney	0.01
Jentry	0.03	Shalayne	0.02	Jayne	0.01	Leslee	0.01
Natalee	0.03	Gracee	0.02	Ruth	0.01	Alexis	0.01
Ivie	0.03	Emmaline	0.02	Danika	0.01	Natasha	0.01

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Emree	0.03	Harlee	0.02	Jayden	0.01	Kelsey	0.01
Kaylene	0.03	Ali	0.02	Shayli	0.01	Autumn	0.01
Jane	0.03	Breanne	0.02	Marinda	0.01	Angie	0.01
Karlee	0.03	Carlie	0.02	Jolynn	0.01	Halli	0.01
Shaelynn	0.03	Cori	0.02	Makenna	0.01	Mandie	0.01
Brittney	0.03	Rebekah	0.02	Aubri	0.01	Jade	0.01
Bailee	0.03	Chantelle	0.02	Baylie	0.01	Danica	0.01
Shaelee	0.03	Tamra	0.02	Nellie	0.01	Harmony	0.01
Mindee	0.03	Emilie	0.02	Kambria	0.01	Jolene	0.01
Lyndee	0.03	Lacee	0.02	Kathryn	0.01	Melinda	0.01
Annalee	0.03	Kaizlee	0.02	Kamri	0.01	Amie	0.01
Navie	0.03	Brielle	0.02	Mercedes	0.01	Kayleen	0.01
Aubrie	0.03	Shay	0.02	Lexi	0.01	Emry	0.01
Berkley	0.03	Chelsie	0.02	Cecily	0.01	Ashlynn	0.01
Kaydee	0.03	Ranae	0.02	Adalyn	0.01	Addison	0.01
Brynn	0.03	Brexlee	0.02	Trista	0.01	Jacie	0.01
Jenessa	0.03	Adelaide	0.02	Sharee	0.01	Lyndsie	0.01
Kaycee	0.03	Carli	0.02	Tiffany	0.01	Adilyn	0.01
Cambrie	0.02	Kassidy	0.02	Elli	0.01	Sally	0.01
Tawni	0.02	Cambri	0.02	Skylie	0.01	Ryann	0.01
Alta	0.02	Penny	0.02	Codi	0.01	Esther	0.01
Brynli	0.02	London	0.02	Tayzlee	0.01	Jessica	0.01
Taya	0.02	Cassie	0.02	Andelyn	0.01	Brynnley	0.01
Hailey	0.02	Hollie	0.02	Eden	0.01	Kamrie	0.01
Annie	0.02	Hadley	0.02	Wendy	0.01	Jackie	0.01
Bentlee	0.02	Chelsey	0.02	Brooklyn	0.01	Merilee	0.01
Preslee	0.02	Jaylee	0.02	Rachael	0.01	Avonlea	0.01
Jennica	0.02	Megan	0.02	Kailee	0.01	June	0.01
Kelsie	0.02	Karma	0.02	Sydney	0.01	Maggie	0.01
Cosette	0.02	Brittanie	0.02	Bryndee	0.01	Mylie	0.01
Kamie	0.02	Scout	0.02	Kodi	0.01	Darcy	0.01
Kate	0.02	Ivy	0.02	Julianne	0.01	Mackenzie	0.01
Kambri	0.02	Elle	0.02	Kori	0.01	Lara	0.01
						Shantell	0.01

Table 3: Male Names in Utah from 1962 to 2020 That Comprised an Average of 1 Percent or Greater of US Names

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Mckay	0.4	Tate	0.03	Davis	0.02	Rylee	0.01
Dallin	0.34	Jens	0.03	Bentley	0.02	Brennen	0.01
Hyrum	0.32	Beckham	0.03	Milo	0.02	Sawyer	0.01
Rulon	0.26	Burke	0.03	Chance	0.02	Walker	0.01
Stockton	0.25	Jayden	0.03	Darin	0.02	Nolan	0.01
Ammon	0.24	Corbin	0.03	Brexton	0.02	Jeffery	0.01
Jarom	0.24	Jaron	0.03	Gabe	0.02	Holden	0.01
Kimball	0.22	Cutler	0.03	Cooper	0.02	Rustin	0.01
Alma	0.2	Tytan	0.03	Dustin	0.02	Rick	0.01
Bridger	0.19	Dallas	0.03	Mason	0.02	Bryant	0.01
Brigham	0.19	Ty	0.03	Judd	0.02	Rylan	0.01
Talmage	0.18	Bryson	0.03	Travis	0.02	Colt	0.01
Sione	0.17	Rex	0.03	Levi	0.02	Eli	0.01
Parley	0.16	Ledger	0.03	Broc	0.02	Eldon	0.01
Cache	0.16	Tyrel	0.03	Merrill	0.02	River	0.01
Dallan	0.16	Hagen	0.03	Miles	0.02	Clinton	0.01
Dallen	0.14	Trent	0.03	Trey	0.02	Teegan	0.01
Bracken	0.14	KC	0.03	Oaks	0.02	Makay	0.01
Tayson	0.13	Preston	0.03	Seth	0.02	Packer	0.01
Tevita	0.13	Kasey	0.03	Jefferson	0.02	Dillon	0.01
Daxton	0.12	Camron	0.03	Hazen	0.02	Jax	0.01
Moroni	0.11	Trever	0.03	Linkin	0.02	Kole	0.01
Jaren	0.11	Stratton	0.03	Brennon	0.02	Bradon	0.01
Korver	0.11	Stryder	0.03	Landen	0.02	Dirk	0.01
Porter	0.1	Korbin	0.03	Lynn	0.02	Paden	0.01
Mckade	0.1	Tanner	0.03	Mitchell	0.02	Adam	0.01
Nephi	0.1	Ridge	0.03	Shayden	0.02	Dawson	0.01
Dallon	0.09	Brecken	0.03	Kip	0.02	Treysen	0.01
Kade	0.09	Val	0.03	Kaleb	0.02	Riggs	0.01
Thayne	0.09	Enoch	0.03	Karter	0.02	Dyson	0.01
Kayden	0.09	Reed	0.03	Kelby	0.02	Warren	0.01

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Kyson	0.09	Trevin	0.03	Deegan	0.02	Dayton	0.01
Tyson	0.08	Kason	0.03	Cassidy	0.02	Alex	0.01
Kaden	0.08	Beck	0.03	Sheldon	0.02	Jon	0.01
Ryker	0.08	Morgan	0.03	Kirt	0.02	Karsen	0.01
Heber	0.08	Trenton	0.03	Treyden	0.02	Lyle	0.01
Krew	0.07	Boyd	0.03	Jordan	0.02	Ike	0.01
Boston	0.07	Payson	0.03	Garrett	0.02	Ethan	0.01
Layne	0.07	Lane	0.02	Tad	0.02	Van	0.01
Jed	0.07	Cannon	0.02	Mathew	0.02	Nickolas	0.01
Rockwell	0.07	Cayden	0.02	Branden	0.02	Diesel	0.01
Taggart	0.07	Skylar	0.02	Jamison	0.02	Brennan	0.01
Jaxton	0.06	Wyatt	0.02	Brandon	0.02	Zack	0.01
Brayden	0.06	Colten	0.02	Tysen	0.02	Karston	0.01
Taysom	0.06	Chandler	0.02	Zackery	0.02	Will	0.01
Treyson	0.06	Coby	0.02	Mac	0.02	Alec	0.01
Mccoy	0.06	Heston	0.02	Jameson	0.02	Garth	0.01
Glade	0.06	Kelly	0.02	Isaac	0.02	Lewis	0.01
Shad	0.06	Tayden	0.02	Siaosi	0.02	Nick	0.01
Stetson	0.06	Hinckley	0.02	Grant	0.02	Koen	0.01
Weston	0.06	Kaiden	0.02	Jory	0.02	Stuart	0.01
Tage	0.06	Kolter	0.02	Brent	0.02	Brant	0.01
Rhett	0.06	Kory	0.02	Brodie	0.02	Brendon	0.01
Jaxon	0.06	Trevor	0.02	Marshall	0.02	Luke	0.01
Bronson	0.05	Semisi	0.02	Logan	0.01	Cash	0.01
Cade	0.05	Zane	0.02	Kendall	0.01	Matt	0.01
Colter	0.05	Keaton	0.02	Bronx	0.01	Rowdy	0.01
Taft	0.05	Jensen	0.02	Jacob	0.01	Jayce	0.01
Kanyon	0.05	Blaine	0.02	Vance	0.01	Caiden	0.01
Brody	0.05	Bode	0.02	Houston	0.01	Ian	0.01
Kayson	0.05	Cole	0.02	Jackson	0.01	Conrad	0.01
Daxon	0.05	Cory	0.02	Kael	0.01	Micah	0.01
Viliami	0.05	Mackay	0.02	Paxton	0.01	Jonas	0.01
Dax	0.05	Braeden	0.02	Dallyn	0.01	Jeff	0.01

Table 3 (continued)

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Braydon	0.05	Trevan	0.02	Deven	0.01	Jones	0.01
Skyler	0.05	Nash	0.02	Jett	0.01	Forrest	0.01
Kaysen	0.05	Krue	0.02	Tavin	0.01	Asher	0.01
Canyon	0.05	Gordon	0.02	Kenyon	0.01	Dylan	0.01
Braiden	0.05	Beau	0.02	Bo	0.01	Emerson	0.01
Jaden	0.05	Casey	0.02	Sam	0.01	Ezra	0.01
Oakley	0.05	Kameron	0.02	Ender	0.01	Bruce	0.01
Brighton	0.05	Titan	0.02	Duncan	0.01	Cortney	0.01
Kolby	0.05	Bodee	0.02	Zachary	0.01	Douglas	0.01
Kody	0.04	Kache	0.02	Hayze	0.01	Drake	0.01
Braxton	0.04	Brandt	0.02	Curtis	0.01	Tait	0.01
Jace	0.04	Gavin	0.02	Ben	0.01	Joshua	0.01
Kelton	0.04	Kent	0.02	Sage	0.01	Carsen	0.01
Brady	0.04	Jade	0.02	Grey	0.01	Taylor	0.01
Beckam	0.04	Clint	0.02	Kolten	0.01	Cael	0.01
Kyler	0.04	Braxten	0.02	Trevyn	0.01	Xander	0.01
Jared	0.04	Max	0.02	Shem	0.01	Kysen	0.01
Braden	0.04	Lance	0.02	Daren	0.01	Jaxen	0.01
Easton	0.04	Quade	0.02	Blair	0.01	Jeremy	0.01
Helaman	0.04	Carter	0.02	Kooper	0.01	Stewart	0.01
Briggs	0.04	Branson	0.02	Maverik	0.01	Cedar	0.01
Lorin	0.04	Taysen	0.02	Corbyn	0.01	Davin	0.01
Benson	0.04	Bret	0.02	Drew	0.01	Jagger	0.01
Teancum	0.04	Kaladin	0.02	Conner	0.01	Griffin	0.01
Nixon	0.04	Shaun	0.02	Gideon	0.01	Jaydon	0.01
Britton	0.04	Jake	0.02	Jess	0.01	Hudson	0.01
Colby	0.04	Dane	0.02	Dalan	0.01	Dan	0.01
Sterling	0.04	Monson	0.02	Payton	0.01	Axton	0.01
Clark	0.04	Remington	0.02	Clayton	0.01	Kalin	0.01
Talon	0.04	Collin	0.02	Tegan	0.01	Erik	0.01
Brigg	0.04	Chad	0.02	Cohen	0.01	Reggie	0.01
Chet	0.04	Devin	0.02	Soren	0.01	Bodie	0.01

Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT	Name	Prop. In UT
Colton	0.04	Mack	0.02	Anders	0.01	Don	0.01
Crue	0.04	Clay	0.02	Calvin	0.01	Darren	0.01
Parker	0.04	Brett	0.02	Tayton	0.01	Rusty	0.01
Tyler	0.04	Ashton	0.02	Rory	0.01	Riggins	0.01
Riley	0.04	Zackary	0.02	Kurtis	0.01	Dash	0.01
Cody	0.04	Ryken	0.02	Kirk	0.01	Mikel	0.01
Quinn	0.04	Ephraim	0.02	Damon	0.01	Maxwell	0.01
Kolton	0.04	Braedon	0.02	Brad	0.01	Craig	0.01
Carson	0.04	Bowen	0.02	Tucker	0.01	Karl	0.01
Truman	0.03	Kasen	0.02	Bronco	0.01	Ross	0.01
Karson	0.03	Austin	0.02	Rocky	0.01	Caleb	0.01
Devan	0.03	Hayden	0.02	Corban	0.01	Ryder	0.01
Caden	0.03	Ruger	0.02	Koda	0.01	Greg	0.01
Brock	0.03	Kru	0.02	Quinton	0.01	Jakob	0.01
Mckoy	0.03	Shay	0.02	Brixton	0.01	Rafe	0.01
Jedediah	0.03	Treven	0.02	Zakary	0.01	Leland	0.01
Lincoln	0.03	Brooks	0.02	Payden	0.01	Kai	0.01
Taylor	0.03	Shayne	0.02	Ren	0.01	Dean	0.01
Landon	0.03	Chase	0.02	Gage	0.01	Zachery	0.01
Dee	0.03	Jayson	0.02	Trace	0.01	Shawn	0.01
Jaxson	0.03	Coleman	0.02	Trayson	0.01	Coen	0.01
Bryton	0.03	Kim	0.02	Kacey	0.01		
Tyce	0.03	Todd	0.02	Oliver	0.01		

The US and Utah names were converted into a series of variables to make them appropriate for data mining. More specifically, they were transformed into bigrams and trigrams, that is, a series of two- and three-letter sequences. As an example, consider the name *Brian*. It is first surrounded by hash marks to delimit the beginning and end of the name (*#brian#*). Starting from the left, the first set of two letters is *#b*. The next bigram is made by shifting one letter to the right and choosing the next two-letter combination—*br*. The remaining bigrams

are *ri*, *ia*, and, *n#*. The trigrams are formed in a similar way resulting in *#br*, *bri*, *ria*, *ian*, *an#*. This left-to-right alignment allows letters at the beginning of the names to be aligned for comparison. In contrast, right-to-left alignment allows name endings to be examined. These are made in a right-to-left fashion (bigrams: *n#*, *an*, *ia*, *ri*, *br*, *#b*; trigrams: *an#*, *ian*, *bri*, *#br*). Ten letters in each name were encoded. This resulted in a series of fifty-nine variables for each word along with an output variable that indicated whether the name belonged to the US or Utah data set. Two machine learning algorithms were applied to the male and female US and Utah data sets.¹⁹

2.1 Results of Utah and US Name Comparison

The idea behind using data mining techniques was to determine what set of trigrams or bigrams of letters distinguish Utah from US names. Neither algorithm was able to separate male Utah names from male US names based on any of the letter combinations. However, a number of variables were extracted for the female Utah names (table 4). What the letter combinations *-ee*, *-ie*, and *-y* have in common is that they all represent the sound [i]. Moreover, names beginning in *Sha-* are about twice as common in Utah names since there are twenty-three in Utah and only twelve in the US. Names beginning with *Mc-* are not found among US names with a frequency of one hundred or more.

3. Methodology for Utah Naming Patterns

While the data mining results indicate some initial patterns in Utah names, they have two drawbacks. First, they are based on spelling, not

19. William Cohen, "Fast Effective Rule Induction," in *Machine Learning Proceedings 1995*, ed. Armand Prieditis and Stuart Russell (Lake Tahoe, CA: Morgan Kaufmann, 1995), 115–23; Geoffrey Holmes et al., "Multiclass Alternating Decision Trees," in *European Conference on Machine Learning*, ed. T. Mannila and H. Toivonen (Berlin: Springer, 2002), 162–72, https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-36755-1_14

Table 4: Letter Combinations Typical of Utah Female Names

Letter Combinations	Example	Number of Utah Names	Number of US Names
Word Final <i>-ee</i>	<i>Kaylee</i>	97	13
Word Final <i>-ie</i>	<i>Wendie</i>	86	50
Word final <i>-y</i>	<i>Candy</i>	143	82
Word Initial <i>Mc-</i>	<i>McKell</i>	13	0
Word Initial <i>Sha-</i>	<i>Sharee</i>	23	12

sound patterns, and second, they give no indication of trends across time. More specifically, they cannot address the question of what names become popular first in Utah, then spread in popularity in the rest of the country. In order to answer these questions, the 5,154 names used in the data mining were searched for in the total data set of 12,809 quasi first occurrence names. Of the 5,154 names, 930 were of such low frequency that they were not found among the 12,809, resulting in a smaller set of 4,224 names used to investigate naming patterns. For the analysis of these names, however, the measure of frequency was the popularity of the name per capita. The number of names given to children in each year from 1962 to 2020 was divided by the Utah and US populations. For example, in 2011 the population of Utah was about 2.8 million and fourteen *Alicias* were born, meaning that there were five *Alicias* per million in Utah. In that same year, the US population was 312 million and 1,201 children were christened *Alicia* in the country for a smaller 3.89 *Alicias* per million.

3.1 Results for Utah Naming Patterns

Consider all the variants of the name *Brittany* (i.e., *Britney*, *Brittani*, *Brittanie*, *Brittny*) in table 5, which only shows frequencies of one in one million or greater. *Brittany* first reached a one per million frequency in the US in 1971. As the table illustrates, in all of the variant spellings, the name first gained popularity in Utah, and then later it caught on

Table 5: Popularity of *Brittany* Variants in Utah and the US

Frequency per Million	Brittany		Britney		Brittani		Brittanie		Brittny	
	US	Utah	US	Utah	US	Utah	US	Utah	US	Utah
1971	1									
1972	1	7								
1973	1									
1974	1	5								
1975	2	17		8						
1976	2	12		19						
1977	2	14		19						
1978	3	17		16						
1979	4	19	1	19		28		5		
1980	6	26	1	25		17				5
1981	7	23	1	29		4		4		
1982	13	14	1	28		7		3		
1983	19	13	2	28	1	11				
1984	32	25	2	23	1	12		5		
1985	65	13	4	30	2	9	1	11	1	
1986	85	15	6	22	3	14	1	11	1	
1987	92	11	7	30	3	9	1	5	1	
1988	109	15	9	28	4	9	1	4	1	3
1989	153	16	10	26	5	12	2	6	1	3
1990	146	7	9	34	5	8	2	4	2	4
1991	115	16	7	28	4	11	2	6	1	
1992	97	9	6	37	3	4	1	6	1	4
1993	84	16	5	19	3	7	1	5	1	
1994	72	10	4	31	2	10	1	4	1	3
1995	62	17	3	29	2	9	1	4		
1996	51	17	3	28	2	9	1	4		
1997	42	16	2	26	1	6	1	3		
1998	36	13	2	38	1	6				
1999	28	19	5	39	1	4				
2000	18	10	9	30	1	3				
2001	10	13	6	31		7				

Frequency per Million	Brittany		Britney		Brittani		Brittanie		Brittney	
	US	Utah	US	Utah	US	Utah	US	Utah	US	Utah
2002	7	10	5	32			3			
2003	5	10	3	27						
2004	5	10	3	26			3			
2005	4	11	2	24						
2006	3	6	2	24			2			
2007	3	10	2	23						
2008	3	5	1	21			2			
2009	2	5	1	20						
2010	2	8	1	15						
2011	2	6	1	14						
2012	2	8	1	16						
2013	2	5	1	16						
2014	2	8	1	15						
2015	2	4	1	13						
2016	2	3		12						
2017	1	3		13						
2018	1	3		9						
2019	1	2		5						
2020	1	2		6						

in the rest of the country. It is important to note that the popularity of the name Britney was established in Utah before Britney Spears gained fame in the late 1990s. In any event, a similar pattern can be found for 337 names in which Utah was the trendsetter (table 6). It is important to note that not all names have a trajectory that spans several decades. For example, *River* appears in Utah at three per million in 2004, and the next year its popularity in the rest of the country reaches one per million. There are, of course, many names where Utah follows the national trajectory. Perhaps the best explanation for baby names to gain popularity in Utah and then spread outward is due to Utah's high birthrate

Table 6: Names Popular in Utah before Becoming Popular in the Rest of the US, 1962–2020.

Abigale	Baylor	Deena	Jacque	Kianna	Marigold	Sadie
Abrielle	Bentley	Deja	Jaidyn	Kimber	Marin	Saige
Ada	Bernadette	Delaney	Jalen	Kinzley	Marissa	Saoirse
Adaline	Birdie	Denice	Janae	Kip	Marlie	Sariah
Adalyn	Blakely	Destiney	Janell	Kirra	Marshall	Sasha
Adalynn	Blythe	Devin	Jasmyn	Kirsten	Mason	Sawyer
Addalynn	Bobbie	Diann	Jaycie	Kloe	Maycee	Scottie
Addisyn	Brandi	Dina	Jaylynn	Kya	Mazie	Shae
Adelaide	Brandy	Eleanora	Jazmine	Kylah	Mckayla	Shana
Adelynn	Breanna	Elena	Jeanine	Kyleigh	Mckenna	Shandra
Adison	Brianna	Elinor	Jeannie	Kylie	Mckenzie	Shanell
Adyson	Brieanna	Elly	Jenifer	Lacey	Mckinley	Shantell
Alayna	Britney	Elodie	Jenna	Lacy	Mckinzie	Sharee
Aleena	Brittani	Emalee	Jeremy	Laurie	Melia	Shelbie
Alex	Brittanie	Emberly	Jerrica	Laylah	Michaela	Shellee
Alexys	Brittany	Emery	Jess	Lennox	Mika	Sherri
Ali	Brittny	Emilia	Jocelynn	Lenora	Millie	Sherrie
Alisha	Brookelyn	Emilie	Joselyn	Lesli	Misty	Shyann
Alora	Brooklyn	Emmaline	Kacey	Leticia	Mona	Sienna
Alysha	Brylie	Emmalyn	Kadence	Lexi	Mylee	Siera
Alysia	Brynn	Emmie	Kai	Lexie	Name	Skyler
Amber	Camden	Emmy	Kaili	Lindsay	Natalee	Sofie
Amberly	Campbell	Erika	Kairi	Lisbeth	Oaklee	Sonja
Amelia	Carlee	Evelynn	Kalli	Liv	Oakley	Stacia
Anastasia	Carri	Evie	Kamille	Logan	Oaklyn	Stephani
Angelique	Celeste	Fawn	Kamryn	Londyn	Oaklynn	Susie
Aniston	Channing	Frankie	Karlee	Loren	Ocean	Suzy
Annabel	Chantell	Gabrielle	Karli	Luella	Olive	Sydni
Annalisa	Charlee	Gage	Karlie	Lyndsay	Opal	Sydney
Annika	Charli	Gayla	Karly	Lyndsey	Patrice	Tabatha
Aranza	Chelsea	Gianni	Karma	Mabel	Paulette	Talia
Ari	Chelsy	Ginny	Kassidy	Mackenzie	Payten	Tami
Aria	Cherie	Glenna	Kassie	Madalyn	Pennie	Tammy

Ashly	Cherise	Gracelynn	Katalina	Madalynn	Penny	Tatiana
Ashton	Chevelle	Gracey	Kaycee	Maddie	Phoenix	Taylor
Ashtyn	Christiana	Haisley	Kayden	Maddison	Quinn	Tegan
Aspen	Chrystal	Hali	Kaylyn	Madilyn	Rae	Terra
Aspyn	Cielo	Harley	Keegan	Madilynn	Randi	Tess
Aubri	Cienna	Hattie	Keeley	Madisen	Raquel	Theresa
Aubrianna	Ciera	Hayden	Keilani	Madison	Raylee	Trista
Aubrie	Cierra	Hilary	Keira	Madisyn	Reece	Tristen
Aubry	Cleo	Holland	Kelcie	Madysen	Rilee	Tyra
Aurelia	Cody	Hunter	Kelsey	Madyson	River	Whitley
Austyn	Cori	Ireland	Kendall	Maisie	Rowen	Windy
Ayva	Corie	Izabelle	Kenley	Makenzi	Rowyn	Winifred
Azalea	Cristal	Jacey	Kenzie	Makenzie	Rudy	Wren
Baylee	Dalary	Jaci	Kerri	Makinley	Rylee	Zella
Baylie	Dani	Jacie	Kerrie	Mari	Ryleigh	Zhavia
						Zoey

of about fifteen babies for every one thousand Utahns.²⁰ The overall US rate is 11.6 per 1000. Of course, particular names catch on first in many states before becoming prevalent nationwide. Only a similar evaluation of all fifty states would ultimately determine if Utah is actually the trendsetter.

3.2 Characteristics of Utah Names

The 4,224 name data set described above is an excellent source to examine Utah naming patterns in more detail. In addition to the trendsetter names in table 6, names were sought that had frequency of at least one per million in the state in any given year, but whose popularity did not reach that level at any point in the rest of the country between 1962 and 2020. This provides a set of 1,013 names that are common in the state,

20. “Birthrate by State 2021,” World Population Review, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/birth-rate-by-state>.

Table 7: Common Ethnic Names in Utah

Spanish	Spanish	Arabic	Jewish	Scandinavian	Polynesian
Alba	Mariano	Ahmed	Coen, Cohen	Ander	Kainoa
Alfonso	Marinda	Khalil	Lev	Anders	Kehlani
Alonso	Matias	Malik	Yael	Anderson	Kekoa
Andres	Moises	Mohamed, Mohammed, Muhammad		Bjorn	Keona
Antonio	Mauricio	Samir		Hans	Malea
Diego	Noe	Yusuf		Leif	Malosi
Felipe	Octavio			Monson	Mele
Guadalupe	Oswaldo			Soren	Semisi
Hector	Rafael				Siaosi
Jairo	Rigoberto				Sione
Javier	Rio				Sosaia
Jorge	Santino				
Leonardo	Sergio				
Lisandro	Xavi				
Marcelino	Xavier				

while at the same time excluding low frequency names in Utah. Only samples from these 1,013 names will be presented. Ethnic names appear in table 7. Spellings appear as they were found in the Social Security database.

The presence of Spanish and Polynesian names is not surprising since those groups represent the largest two ethnic minorities in the state. Scandinavian names are also expected; about 12 percent of Utahns claim Scandinavian ancestry, which is the highest density in the US.²¹ These may be considered ethnic heritage names. The names of Arabic and Jewish origin are unexpected since only 0.2 percent of Utahns are

21. "Utah," Wikipedia, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utah>.

Table 8: Religion-based Names

Bible	Bible	Book of Mormon	LDS Figures
Alijah	Malachi	Helaman	Benson
Amos	Mathew	Jared	Canon
Asher	Matthias	Jarom	Dallon
Cain	Nathaniel	Lehi	Hinckley
Enoch	Nehemiah	Mosiah	Kimball
Esekial	Phineas	Shem	Lorenzo
Isiah	Raphael		Monson
Izak	Ruben		Oaks
Jasher	Samson		Porter
Jedidiah	Sarahi		Rockwell
Jerimiah	Saul		Talmage
Jerusha	Shilo		
Jethro	Silas		
Jonah	Simeon		
Levi	Simon		
Luke	Solomon		

Jewish, and the Arabic population comprises only 0.5 percent of all Utahns.²² A number of these given names, such as *Cohen*, *Anderson*, and *Monson*, are originally surnames.

The majority of Utah adults are Christian (74 percent), and 55 percent are members of the LDS Church.²³ As a result, scriptural names are common in the state (table 8), some of which are given unique spellings. Biblical names are more common than names from the Book

22. Ira M. Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, “United States Jewish Population, 2019,” in *American Jewish Year Book 2019*, eds. A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020);, 135–231.; “Utah,” Yalla Count Me In, accessed December 30, 2021, <https://yallacountmein.org/states/utah>.

23. “Major Religions Practiced in Utah,” World Atlas, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-the-religious-composition-of-the-adult-population-of-utah.html>.

of Mormon. A few names may possibly be attributed to prominent figures in the LDS Church as well, such as *Benson*, *Hinckley*, *Kimball*, and *Monson*, the surnames of presidents of the LDS Church. Others may be homages to George Q. Cannon, Dallin H. Oaks, Lorenzo Snow, James Talmage, or Porter Rockwell.

Utahns are quite fond of converting surnames into given names, which is evident in the 145 names of this type that are frequent in the state (table 9). Other attested naming patterns include naming children after a variety of objects (e.g., *Hawk*, *Jet*, *Lyric*) and places (e.g., *Rome*, *Seattle*). While abbreviated names such as *Matt*, *Ken*, and *Danny* are often used in familiar settings, the given names that they are derived from generally grace the birth certificates: *Matthew*, *Kenneth*, *Daniel*. In Utah, however, thirty-two abbreviated names are often used as given names.

Table 9: Given Names Based on Surnames, Objects, Places, and Abbreviated Names

Surnames	Surnames	Surnames	Surnames	Common Nouns	Objects/ Places	Abbreviated
Addison	Clinton	Keaton	Neymar	Acacia	Link	Abbi
Adler	Cohen, Coen	Keenan	Nixon	Ace	Lyrik	Al
Ames	Coleman	Kegan	Noble	Amethyst	Mace	Ben
Anderson	Coleson	Kelton	Oakland	Andromeda	Maple	Brad
Archer	Connor	Kelvin	Payson	Aries	Maverick	Cal
Baker	Cruze	Kemper	Pierce	Arrow	Maxim	Dan
Banks	Decker	Kenadee	Porter	Azure	Race	Danny
Baron	Doyle	Kenton	Preslie	Bastion	Sequoia	Son
Barrett	Easton	Kenzington	Quade	Bear	Steel	Evey
Beckham	Emmit	Kenzley	Quincee	Blaze	Stone	Fred
Bennet	Finnegan	Kiefer	Radley	Breezy	Talon	Izzy
Benson	Fisher	Kimball	Ridley	Buck	Zephyr	Jamee
Benson	Fletcher	Knox	Riggin	Cameo	Zeppelin	Jimmie
Bentley	Flynn	Kolby	Riggs	Candy		Joe

Surnames	Surnames	Surnames	Surnames	Common Nouns	Objects/ Places	Abbreviated
Benton	Ford	Kolter	Rockwell	Cash	Places	Josh
Bowen	Forrest	Ledger	Rooney	Chevy	Berlin	Ken
Bowie	Foster	Linkin	Roper	Clarity	Cache	Lizzie
Bradford	Gentry	Lochlan	Rush	Coco	Cairo	Marty
Brady	Gilbert	Locke	Sagan	Cove	Everest	Matt
Brandt	Hadlie	Makady	Schuyler	Flint	Houston	Max
Branson	Hadyn	McKay	Shepard	Havyn	Kenya	Mitch
Brantley	Harris	Madden	Sherman	Hawk	Rome	Nate
Brenner	Harrison	Maddex	Steele	Jet	Scotland	Pete
Bridger	Hartley	Mallori	Stetson	Journie	Seattle	Rob
Brinkley	Hayes	Maxton	Stockton	Jubilee		Rod
Brock	Hinckley	McKell	Stratton	King		Stan
Broderick	Hudsen	McKensie	Sullivan	Lavender		Ted
Brody	Isley	McKinlee	Swayze	Leviathan		Thad
Callahan	Jackson	McKinsey	Taggart			Tuck
Canon	Jacoby	Merrill	Tanner			Wes
Carson	Jagger	Milton	Tesla			Xavi
Carston	Jamison	Mitchell	Theron			
Cash	Jefferson	Monson	Truman			
Chadwick	Jones	Morganne	Turner			
Clifford	Kane	Morris	Walker			
	Karver	Murphy	Wells			
	Keagan	Nash	Weston			

Four pseudo affixes appear in many Utah names (table 10). For example, thirty names end in *-lyn* or its variants *-lynn*, and *-lynne*. In a similar manner, given names ending in *-son* and *-sen* appear in forty names that are popular in the state. Twenty common Utah names are derived from *Mc-* and other alternate spellings such as *Mich-*, *Mac-*, *Mak-*, *Mick-*. Another 46 end in the *r*-colored vowel [ə] that is spelled *-Vr* (*-er*, *-or*, and *-ur*).

Table 10: Names with *-lyn*, *-son*, *Mc-*, and *-er*

-lyn	-son	Mc-	-er	-Vr
Allyn	Addisen, Addison, Adisyn, Adysen	Michaela, Mickayla, Makaela	Abner	Ryler
Ashlyn	Alisson, Alyson	Mckinsey	Ander	Sayler
Avelynn	Anderson	Mckinlee, Mckynlee	Arthur	Spenser
Azlyn	Benson	Mckensie, Mckenzy, Mackenzi	Asher	Tanner
Breklyn	Branson	Mckell, Mckelle, Makelle, Mikelle	Baker	Turner
Brooklynne	Brysen	Mckaylee, Makaylee	Brenner	Tylor
Dallon, Dallyn	Carsen, Carson, Karsen	Mckay, Makay, Mackay	Calder	Viktor
Emberlyn	Cason, Caysen, Kaison, Kason	Mckade	Conner, Connor, Conor, Konner, Konnor	Walker
Emmalin	Coleson, Colson	Macady	Decker	Xavier
Evelynne	Dayson		Evander	Zander
Ezlyn	Dyson		Ever	Zephyr
Flynn	Greysen, Grayson		Fisher	Zyler
Gwendalyn	Harrison		Fletcher	
Jamilyn	Hudsen		Foster	
Janalyn	Jackson		Iker	
Jessalyn	Jameson, Jamison		Jagger	

-lyn	-son	Mc-	-er	-Vr
Jolyn, Jolynn	Jayson		Jasher	
Josslyn	Jefferson		Kemper	
Rosalynn	Kason		Kiefer	
Scotlyn, Scottlyn, Scotlynn	Maddisen		Kristofer, Kristoffer	
Shalyn	Monson		Kyler	
Sharilyn	Nixon		Lavender	
Shaylyn, Shaylynn, Shaylyn	Payson		Ledger	
Taralyn	Stetson		Lester	
	Tayson		Olyver	
	Trayson		Oskar, Oscar	
	Treyson		Porter	
	Wesson		Roper	

Data mining identified names ending in *-ee* and *-ie* as common patterns in Utah names. However, when the name's phonetics are considered, the two most prevalent Utah naming patterns emerge (table 11). Of the 1,013 popular Utah names, 21 percent end in the vowel sound [i]. This vowel appears in forty names ending in *-lee*, *-lie*, and another 173 ending in [i] spelled as *-ee*, *-y*, *-ey*, *-i*, and *-ie* (table 11). The other pattern, which is attested in about 21 percent of Utah names, are those ending in a vowel followed by *n* (*-Vn*).

As the names presented to this point attest, Utahns are fond of applying uniquely spelled names to their children. This may be true elsewhere as well, but that comparison was not made here. In any event, the spelling variants in the Utah data set are principally related to the use of the letters *ae*, *k*, *x*, *y*, and *z* (table 12). The diphthong [eɪ], which is more commonly spelled with *ay* and *a* in English orthography, is represented as *ae* in thirteen names. The letter *k* replaces the more expected *ck* in names such as *Mavrik*, the *ch* in *Malaki*, the *c* in *Klinton* and *Izak*,

Table 11: Names Ending in $-Vn$, $-[i]$, and $-[li]$

$-Vn$	$-Vn$	$-Vn$	$-[i]$	$-[li]$	$-[li]$	
Alden	Corban, Corben, Korben, Korbin	Julian, Julien, Jullian	Paden, Payden	Adrie	Kortni	Amberlee
Allen	Corwin	Kaden, Kaeden	Paetyn	Ambree	Kyrie	Angelee
Alton	Damion	Kamdyn	Payden	Audrie	Lacey	Bentlee, Bentlie
Anton	Damon	Kanyon	Penn	Avary	Laynie	Bexlee
Aron, Arron	Dan	Kaydon	Raiden	Averee	Lehi	Brexlee
Aryan	Daren, Daron	Keagan	Reván	Avie	Lettie	Brilee
Austen	Darrin	Keaton	Rogan	Avree, Avrie	Lexee	Brinklee
Aven	Daven	Keenan	Ruben	Barry	Lindsie, Lyndsee, Lyndsi	Brinnley
Avin	Daxten, Daxtin, Daxton, Daxtyn	Kegan	Ryden	Bode	Lizzie	Brooklee
Axton	Degan	Kellen	Ryken	Bodee	Lonnie, Lonny	Cailee
Baden	Deion	Kelton	Sagan	Bowie	Luci	Finlee
Baron	Deklan	Kelvin	Sebastian	Breezy	Lyndee	Hadlie
Barton	Deven	Ken	Shandon	Brie	Maizee, Maizie, Maizy	Haizlee, Haizley
Bastian	Dillian	Kenton	Shon	Brody	Malarie, Mallori	Hartley
Benton	Donavan, Donovan	Kenyon	Simeon	Bryndee	Malosi	Kaizlee

-Vn	-Vn	-Vn	-Vn	-Vn	-[i]	-[i]	-[li]
Boden	Draven	Kenzington	Simon	Cambri, Cambry, Kambree, Kambri, Kambry	Marty		Kenlee
Bowen	Drayden	Keven	Solomon	Capri	Mayzie		Kinzlee
Braden, Bradon, Braeden,	Easton	Kian	Soren	Casi, Kassi	Mckade		Lauralee
Braydin, Braydon							
Brandan	Emaline	Kieran	Stan	Chandi	Mckensie, Mckenzy, Mackenzi		Lynlee
Braylon	Ethen	Kristian	Stefan	Cheree	Mckinsey		Maelee, Maelie, Mailee, Mailey
Breann, Breeann	Favian	Kyden	Stockton	Chevy	Navi, Navie, Navie		Mckaylee, Makaylee
Breken, Brekken	Finn	Kylian	Stone	Danny	Nery		Mckinlee, Mckynlee
Brenan, Brennan	Finnegan, Finnigan	Kyrsten	Stratton	Denny	Nikolai		Sharlee
Brendan	Fynn	Ladawn	Sullivan	Eli	Quincee, Quincey		Skylee, Skylie
Brenton	Gannon	Landon	Susann	Elli	Ray, Rey		Taisley
Brevan	Glen, Glenn	Lane	Talan	Emmi	Ridley		Tayzlee
Britton	Gordon	Linkin	Talon	Emree, Emri	Rocky		Tylie, Tylee

Table 11 (continued)

-Vn	-Vn	-Vn	-Vn	-Vn	-[i]	-[i]	-[i]
Brixton	Griffin	Lochlan	Taran	Grace, Graci, Graycee	Rodney	Whitlee	
Brogan	Haiden, Haydn	Lucian	Theron	Gregory	Romee	Wrenlee	
Bronwyn	Houston	Lyndon	Thorin	Griffey	Ronnie	Wrenley	
Bryon	Huxton	Madden	Traven	Henry	Rooney	Wylie	
Cain	Ian	Maddisen	Trevan	Indie, Indy	Roxy	Allee	
Callahan	Irvin	Marlon	Tristian, Triston	Izzy	Roy	Aly	
Callan, Callen, Kalin	Jadin, Jaeden	Maryn	Truman	Jacoby, Jakob	Sadee	Amberlee	
Camren, Camron, Kamren	Janean	Maximilian	Tyrone	Jamee	Sarahi	Aisley	
Carden	Jaxon	Maxton	Tytan	Jaycee	Saydie	Avonlea	
Carston, Karsten, Karston	Jaxton	Merlin	Van	Jaymie	Shelbey	Bayley, Bayli	
Cassian	Jayceon	Milton	Waylon	Jentri, Jentry, Gentry	Siaosi	Bradly	
Chayden	Jaydan, Jaydin, Jaydon	Morganne	Weston	Jerry	Sidnee	Brantley	
Clinton, Clinton	Johnathon	Nolan	Wynn	Jimmie	Sonny	Hallee, Halli	
Coleman	Jordann	Norman	Zaden	Journie	Sophee	Hinckley	
Colten, Colton, Koltan, Kolton	Jorden, Jordon	Owen	Zayden	Jovi, Jovie	Stacie	Isileli, Isley	

-Vn	-[i]	-[ij]	-[i]	-[ij]
Zayne	Junie	Steffanie	Jubilee	
Zeppelin	Kacee	Sunnie	Kallee	
	Kamie	Swayze	Kenzlee, Kenzley, Kenzlie	
	Kamree, Kamri	Tiffini	Kyley	
	Kassidee	Tiffiny	Lilee	
	Kayci	Toby	Merrilee	
	Kaydee	Trey	Milly	
	Kenadee,	Trudi	Mollie	
	Kennadee,			
	Kennadie,			
	Kennedie			
	Khloee, Kloee, Kloey	Wendie	Mytie, Milee	
	Kolby	Whitni	Paizley	
	Korey	Zachary	Preslie	
			Nellie	
			Ollie	
			Radley	
			Raelee, Railey	
			Shailee	
			Whitlee	

and the [k] portion of *x* as in *Maksim*. The thirteen instances of *x* in table 12 are difficult to categorize, but the use of *x* seems creative in each instance. As far as *y* is concerned, the fifty cases of distinct spellings involve using it following *a* as in *Jason* > *Jayson* and *Caleb* > *Kayleb* or replacing another vowel such as the *i* in *Brian* > *Bryan* and *Lindon* > *Lyndon*. The twenty-two creative uses of the letter *z* all involve its use to replace *s* as in *Izzabelle* and *Kenzington*.

Table 12. Spelling Variants with the Letters *ae*, *k*, *x*, *y*, and *z*.

ae	k	x	y	z
Michaella, Makaela	Aksel	Bexlee	Alyson	Azlyn
Shaela	Breken, Brekken	Brexlee	Alyx	Ezlyn
Ranae	Breklyn	Lexee	Aysia	Haizlee, Haizley
Raelee	Izik, Izak	Brixton	Braydon	Izaiah
Paetyn	Kache	Daxten, Daxtin, Daxton, Daxtyn	Brynli, Brynlie, Brynnlee, Brynnley	Izik, Izak
Maelee, Maelie	Kairo	Huxton	Bryon	Izzabelle
Larae	Kaison	Jaxon	Brysen	Kaizlee
Kaeden	Kalin	Jaxton	Caysen	Kenzington
Jaeden	Kallee	Jax	Chayden	Kenzlee, Kenzley, Kenzlie
Deserae	Kambree, Kambri, Kambry	Knox	Dallyn	Kinzlee
Braeden	Kamie		Daryl	Maizee, Maizie, Maizy
	Kamree, Kamri		Daxtyn	Mayzie
	Kamren		Drayden	Mckenzy, Mackenzi
	Kannon		Dyson	Paizley
	Kanyon		Fynn	Tayzlee

ae	k	x	y	z
	Karsen		Graycee	
	Karsten, Karston		Havyn	
	Karver		Jaymie	
	Kason		Jayson	
	Kassi		Jaydan, Jaydin, Jaydon	
	Kassidee		Kamdyn	
	Kayleb, Kaleb		Kayleb	
	Klay		Kendyl	
	Klinton		Kyden	
	Kody		Kyler	
	Kolten, Kolton		Kylian	
	Konner, Konnor		Kyrsten	
	Konrad		Lyndon	
	Korben, Korbin		Lyndsee, Lyndsi	
	Kruze		Malynda	
	Lyrík		Mayzie	
	Maksim		Myka	
	Malakai		Myles	
	Markus		Mylie	
	Mavrik		Paetyn	
	Myka, Mikah		Payden	
	Oskar		Payden	
	Viktor		Sayler	
			Tylie, Tylee	
			Tylor	
			Tytan	
			Zayden	
			Zayne	

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to examine some aspects of naming practices in Utah over the past sixty years with quantitative data. The study uncovered a number of names that are more common in Utah than in the other forty-nine states, and those names reflect the ethnic, heritage, and religious groups in the state. Is Utah the baby name innovation state? The idea that some names gain popularity in Utah before spreading to the rest of the country was supported for 337 names. What do unique Utah names have in common? A number of patterns emerge, including using surnames as given names, applying names that begin with *Mc-*, or end in *-lyn*, *-son*, and *-er*. Phonetically, there are two common characteristics of popular Utah names: they either end in the [i] vowel, which is written *-ee*, *ie*, or *-y*, or they end in a vowel followed by *n*. What about the name spellings in the state? Most of the spellings involve uncommon uses of the letters *ae*, *k*, *x*, *y*, and *z*. Some of the most characteristically Utah names combine these features. For instance, *Oaklie* is a surname ending in *-ie*. *Konnor* is a surname ending in *-er* with an unusual initial *K-* as well. *Makenzi* is based on a *Mc-*surname ending in *-i* that contains an unusual *z*.

Fashions and fads are always ephemeral, and this is true for names as well. This is evident in the lack of names like *LaRue* and *LaVelle* that were fashionable Beehive-state names for the pre-1960s generation. Only *Ladawn* appears in the present data set as a remnant of that trend. There is no doubt that future generations will eschew the naming patterns described here for whatever becomes the future naming trend.

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ROUNDTABLE: SHOULD THE CHURCH
OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
APOLOGIZE FOR HISTORICAL RACISM?

“THE BEST OF US”:
A CONVERSATION
WITH CORNEL WEST

James C. Jones

James C. Jones interviewed Dr. Cornel West in February 2023 in New York, New York.

JONES: One of the first things that I wanted to just ask, Dr. West, is about your general experience or even your introduction to Mormonism or to our world. I do know that Chase N. Peterson was the president of the University of Utah and there is an intersection of the two of your resumes at Harvard.

So can you tell me a little bit about what that relationship or that encounter was like? What role did Chase N. Peterson have in that particular phase of your life?

WEST: Well, one is, my brother, I want to begin by saluting you. I want people to know that you have been exemplary in terms of what it means to be a person of integrity, courage, love, both open-mindedness, but also taking a stand, you know, with a backbone so that in that regard, I mean, if you represent the public face of Mormonism, Mormons got a magnificent future! And I tell you, I've been very, very blessed to meet such high-quality Mormon folk. My dear brother David Holland at Harvard, who was a distinguished historian. He was just a magnificent

human being in terms of kindness. He was my dear colleague, has always treated me with deep love and respect. And then Brother Chase, he was the first Mormon I really met. He was the head of admissions at Harvard.

He actually hired David Evans, who was the Black brother from Arkansas with a degree from Princeton, Tennessee State. They together fundamentally transformed the multicultural diversity and multiracial diversity at Harvard. They together admitted over 85 percent of the Black folk in the history of Harvard in the few years they were together.

It's unbelievable! Now it happened in 1970 up until—it was right at the moment where Harvard opened up its white supremacist doors and allowed all these folk to come through. And it's fascinating that you would get my magnificent brother Chase—Mormon brother, straight outta Utah—and David Evans, straight out of Black Arkansas.

They worked like hand in glove. It was a beautiful thing, and I was blessed to write the foreword to the memoir of Brother Chase Peterson. In fact, when he asked me, I said, man, you don't realize how big an honor this is. And we spent time together. When I would go to Utah, we were on radio, we did national public radio together for the book and so forth.

So that I have been blessed to meet the best of Mormonism with yourself and those two. And my hunch is, you know, there's got to be some much lower quality Mormon brothers and sisters out there! Because that's exactly true with my own church, Shiloh Baptist Church. You know, we had some of the best people and we had some of the worst people in the church.

Just like I got some of the best and the worst inside of me, you know, so that's just who we are as human beings made in the image and likeness of an almighty God. But I'm so glad you began on this note, because I certainly have a certain bias of deep positive orientation toward the Mormons owing to the particular Mormons I have been blessed to get a chance to know—you, Chase, and Brother David.

JONES: Thank you so much, Dr. West. And thank you for clarifying that we have multitudes in us. I think about this a lot, particularly with members of my own faith, I definitely can see that, you know, I see the best of us, I see the worst of us, and sometimes I see more of one than the other. And that makes me either elated or profoundly discouraged or even depressed on occasion. So I appreciate you saying that. That calls me in a little bit and also gives me cause for reflection. So thank you for sharing that.

We got some regular debates going on within Mormonism regarding race, regarding a variety of other forms of oppression or bigotry, whatever the case is.

One of the hottest debates right now is around the temple and priesthood restrictions that were laid on Black people for approximately 130 years, that those restrictions were lifted in 1978. So, a while ago, but nonetheless, we cannot deny the effect of that particular discrimination. Less than about 1 percent of the American Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is African American, even here in Harlem, a neighborhood, that's about 40, 45 percent Black, the Harlem LDS congregation is only about 25 percent Black on its best days, and we just barely got a Black man in the presiding body of this congregation. And I don't remember when the last time we did something like that was, but point is we have a legacy. We have a history of racism that needs to be dealt with, but one of the first things that a lot of people feel like we should do as a Church is corporately confess to our crime of discrimination against Black people—to apologize for it. And, if you can believe it or not, there is debate on whether or not the Church should do that.

Now, based on what I've just told you or what you just generally know, how would you feel—do you feel, actually, that the LDS Church should corporately confess to the sin of racism and if the answer is yes or no, why or why not?

WEST: Well, first, I would first look at it as a Christian, which is to say through the lens of the cross, and all of us fall short.

And this is true for every religious denomination. It's true for every person, especially those of us who have been so deeply shaped by a nation—an empire—that is shot through with white supremacist legacy, past and present. There's just no doubt about that. Beginning with the treatment of Indigenous peoples and then enslaved Africans and so forth, we've got anti-Jewish attitudes shot through our Christian denominations so we cannot deny that. So the question becomes, "What evil inside of us is?" It's not a question of just looking at the evil in others—"What evil inside of us is operating and what are the conditions under which we want to be changed and transformed?" And I would think that repentance and apologies are a part of the healing process because all you're doing when you apologize is you are acknowledging that which has been rendered invisible. And yet, even as it's been rendered invisible, there's human beings down there suffering. There's Black folk been suffering, There is people suffering and so forth, and we know that we are made in the image of God like anybody else, with the same status, the same significance, the same sanctity, the same dignity.

You know, I had a wonderful run-in with the brother in Italy. What was his name?

JONES: Ah, yeah, Dallin Oaks, right?

WEST: Yeah! Dallin Oaks. He and his loved ones though. He is a wonderful brother, you know. He got a wonderful spirit about him, and he was so open and warm and welcoming in that sense. And yet all of us know, he and I, roughly the same age, we grew up under the Jim Crow-like conditions, so how could we not be affected by how we grew up? No matter how committed we are to our own distinctive faith—it's not distinctive because it overlaps in very deep and profound ways. So, it is just a matter of being candid.

I think there's a fear of people apologizing because they feel as if somehow they are being associated with the conquerors and the slaveholders and the colonizers and that solely because of their skin color or

skin pigmentation, that they somehow are being targeted—not demonized—but targeted in a critical way. And we simply say, “Look, we—and this is part of the legacy of Martin King and Fannie Lou Hamer—That this is a love affair.” We wanna create a context where people can apologize about the legacy and the beneficiaries of white skin privilege as it relates to the vicious legacy of white supremacy, but in such a way that they recognize they’re not being tarnished with the brush of the white supremacy of their ancestors. They can choose and go another way, and they have!

Man, I never talked about this with Brother Chase, but Chase and I reveled in each other’s humanity and had marvelous times, and his wife and his family, we’ve had marvelous times. Now, if I were to sit down with Brother Chase and say, “Now tell me about your granddaddy.” [Laughter]

“Tell me about your granddaddy in relation to Jamal and Leticia and Ray Ray.” I don’t know what he would say. His granddaddy could be a very extraordinary vanilla brother who fought against white supremacy. But my hunch is he was deeply shaped by his time too! And he would say the same too: “Brother West, tell me about *your* granddaddy.”

Oh, I’ll tell you about my granddaddy, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who had a loving spirit, who invited white folk into his church at all times. Who told me, “Cornell, don’t you ever, ever hate white people. You hate the sin, not the sinner. You hate white supremacy without hating white people.”

That’s what I was told. I believe it to this day. That means what? That means that we all are shaped for better or worse by those who came before, but we can make choices now. So apology in some ways is a weak response because after apology comes some kind of action . . .

JONES: Some kind of reparation.

WEST: Exactly! Some kind of action. But this is not quid pro quo. This is the truth of the past, the damage done, and the attempt to repair the damages done in some way. It’s not about money. It’s about the soul of

a congregation, of a denomination, of a nation, of a people. It's about your soul, it's about my soul, and all of us, our souls fall short.

I think that's the thing that a lot of our white brothers and sisters have overlooked. You see, when we call for apologies or reparations, somehow they think that we're looking down on them and imposing this definitive judgment on them and condemning them. No, not at all. There's white supremacy inside of Black people. There's white supremacy inside of Black institutions. And that has to be wrestled with. It's just that the black skin lack of privilege for so long and the white skin privilege for so long are major effects and consequences of the institutions, of the structures, of the attitudes, of the perceptions of too many white supremacists in the making of this nation and country.

JONES: So thank you, first of all, for saying that an apology is not gonna be enough because my next question was going to be what might this look like, this apology, because I'm of the opinion that the best apology is changed behavior. And what might that behavior look like? Because we have seen examples of corporate confession from some Baptist, some Methodist churches. We've seen it modeled well what this corporate confession might look like. But, for the LDS Church, I can't help but wonder what might an apology look like for us where we have kept Black folks out of full fellowship, kept them out of leadership, kept them out of temples. In some cases, kept them out of pews. And now we're at this point. Even though Black people are the most likely demographic in the US to seek religion, 13 percent of the population, we're still around 1 percent of the American LDS population. So, based on what you've seen in the good examples of the people who have actually done corporate confession, what might this apology, or what might a proper restitution, if I can use that word—what might that look like for us do you think?

WEST: Well one, I think that it would be a matter of digging deep into the rich wells of the Mormon tradition and saying that when we excluded precious Black people, that was not the best of us. That was not the best of Mormonism. There's another side of Mormonism. We

have spiritual and scriptural resources in our tradition that bring critique to bear on white supremacy and we can do that as Mormons.

And we could do that in such a way that—it's a matter of embrace so that Mormonism looks better and stronger and more loving and more courageous and more true to Jesus and Joseph Smith and all the others. And I'll say it this: if Mormonism can attract a magnificent artist like Gladys Knight, one of my favorite singers of all time, then I know—cuz she's a wise sister and she's a great artist—that she got something going on inside of her that leads her to that. And the same as true for James [Jones] and his parents and so forth. Something is going on that's important, that's rich, that's deep. And all Mormonism has to do is to say, "The worst of who we are was at work in our exclusion of these precious Black folk made in the image and likeness of God. We're not only sorry, we're going to execute policies in such a way that it accents the best of Mormonism."

JONES: [Laughter] Sorry. The next question I got is literally a poetry, and it leads into what you just said. This is the best of us. And you're totally right about that because what I wanted to highlight was just this paradox of us having this past, this history, this legacy, yet us having a theology that is, in my estimation, profoundly inclusive, profoundly expansive, profoundly radical, and revolutionary, and affirming.

Whereas I do see our history in our past. I see whole sections, whole chapters of the Book of Mormon that are so affirming of Black people that read like whole treaties or cries of Black America that I can't help but wonder how people have missed this the entire time. Like that was probably one of the greatest victories yet tragedies to me when I first decided to pursue this course was the fact that I could see things other people couldn't, simply because I was a Black American.

I could hear my people's cries in the text. I could hear the best of us. I could hear and see the radical and the revolutionary, the expansive, the robust, the beautiful. And like you just pointed out earlier, Dallin Oaks grew up in Jim Crow. He's a straight white man who grew up in

Jim Crow and pretty much everybody else on his level in Church leadership is a white man that grew up in America during Jim Crow. So, it's no wonder that I've never had anybody unfold the scriptures to me in a way that affirms what I just shared with you. I don't understand how or why predominantly straight white leadership born in the Jim Crow era would know that or would be able to and would consequently be able to teach it. I'm so glad you highlighted that.

WEST: Well, I'll give you a fascinating analogy which really doesn't hold, but I say it to be highly provocative. One of the greatest of the Afrikaner Christians—close friend of Desmond Tutu—was named Beyers Naudé. He was the head of the South African Council of Churches. He invited me to come to South Africa—underground cause it was against the law to go from America to South Africa at that time. And I had to be an honorary white in order to get through the airport.

And so we were underground with Tutu and Allan Boesak and others. And Beyers Naudé, his family was one of the founders of the Afrikaner Brotherhood and Theology. And this is apartheid. This is not just exclusion [from the] organization the way it was with the Mormons in the past, this was a whole apartheid society across the board with a built-in subjugation of Black folk in every sphere of life.

And I went to the Afrikaner Group—99 percent Afrikaner. See, I'm the only Black brother in this whole vanilla crowd. And I read and I said, "We believe in a God of a persecuted people. We believe in a God of the oppressed that allowed us to move so many miles to migrate. The lot was with us in the most excruciating circumstances and adverse conditions."

And a guy jumped up and said, "We don't want to hear all of this liberation theology from James Cone and others." I said, "I'm reading from the Afrikaner Formulation in 1905 against British imperialists!"¹ I said, "This is your history! Because you were a persecuted people. You

1. *Dialogue* editors are unable to locate this particular document that Dr. West is relaying from memory.

were oppressed people. Yes, you oppressed others—Black folk—but they were fighting the Boer war against the British.”

I said, “Liberation theology’s not alien to you. The problem is you were too narrow in your tribalism and the best of your tradition is universalism that embraces everybody. So this is not James Cone. This is an Afrikaner theologian in 1903.” I said, “This is the best of your tradition. I’m reading about you, and I believe in the best of your tradition as a Christian.”

Now, of course, the Mormons are not Afrikaners in the same vicious way, but the white supremacy has still been there in a deep way. And I could go back to the best of Mormonism and read about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, tied to a God of the persecuted and subjugated and demeaned and demonized. I mean, Mormonism’s been one of the most demonized groups in the history of the American Empire. You got Indigenous peoples, you got Black folks, you got Jews. Mormons are on that list! Including Abraham Lincoln and others who wasn’t in love with them in his own way. So then the question becomes, well, let’s look deep into the wells of the best of Mormonism.

You can look deep into the wells of the best of any oppressed people, and you’ll find, lo and behold, especially if they’re serious about their belief in an almighty God who looks low and who cares for the orphan and the widow, and the fatherless, and the motherless and believes in trying to ensure that the good news can be made available all around the world, in every corner of the globe because of that good news that you already received.

I said, “Hey, I mean Mitt Romney, you got to go! Put in your two years brother!” It is something built into the sense of joy to spread the good news and when it’s not ugly and coercive in an imperial way, there’s nothing wrong with trying to sit down and talk to folk to share the good news in one’s own life.

That to me, is so much of the best of Mormonism and that is what needs to come back with power and potency for the future of Mormonism to be what I think it can be.

JONES: Yeah. You did it again. Dr. West. You just, I mean, you brought up the history of Mormonism. You understood and acknowledged that we too were once an oppressed people. As a new religion in the Americas. And I think often about the fact that we were once an oppressed people and think how we got from there to here.

Now, like there's already been a lot of work done about that transition, that kind of institutional code switch that Mormonism did. But I fully agree with that. We really need to dig back into it. And it, what you just said has echoes of the development of the social gospel here in America.

I'm thinking a lot about Rauschenbusch in particular and Gladden and these other folks who kind of came in with the social gospel and how their efforts were trying to recover the best of the Christian tradition and how that started basically, at least for Gladden and Rauschenbusch that it was the suffering of others.

So, I wanna ask, how do you feel that tradition might be recovered? I mean, I got my thoughts, but how does that typically look or how do you think that might happen for us in terms of recovering the best of us?

WEST: You know, I think that every moment in the history of humankind, there is a struggle taking place on the battlefield of the souls of each and every one of us past and present. With greed, hatred, envy, resentment, insecurity, anxiety, and the countervailing forces against it—love, service to the weak, compassion for the vulnerable, humility, integrity, honesty. And those countervailing voices always appear weak and feeble because so much of human history is, as Hegel said, it's a slaughterhouse.

Edward Gibbons said it's a history of crimes and follies. And as Christians, we understand the history of the species that's so much of the history of domination and subjugation. We try to create those interruption moments, those *kairos* moments that can turn us around to push the greed inside of us, the hatred and injury, resentment inside,

push that far enough away so we can become new beings. And a love or that freedom and love and love and freedom that is distinctive in so many ways with the Christian gospel.

And when you look at it that way, then the question becomes, “What are the conditions under which the best of the species, the best of Mormonism, can flower and flourish?” And it’s only by means of example. Only by means of example. Emanuel Kant says examples are the go-kart of judgment. When you find those Mormons who muster the courage and love to say, Jamal and Latisha are as much a part of the human family as those who have been part of the Mormon family, they have to cut against the grain. Brother Chase was cutting against the grain. I loved the brother. Not just cuz he cut against the grain. He is just a wonderful brother. But the very fact that he did that was courage. He knew that the best of Mormonism was something worth fighting for.

And I would say the same thing about my own tradition. You see the Black church got all kinds of blindness and faults and foibles, and we have to cut against the grain. These days, you gotta cut against the commodification of religion and the marketization of religion so that success, worldly success and financial success become the idols, the dominant idols of our day.

No, no, the best of Mormonism says “God is almighty.” That dollar might be mighty within the world, but God is all and God has a calling for us. And the calling is not just our careers. God’s got a vocation for us. Vocation’s not just a profession. And when you understand what that vocation and calling is, it has a whole lot to do with loving kindness to others and steadfast love to the least of these. That’s what Walter Rauschenbusch understood as a Baptist. Now he’s a German Baptist and I’m a Black Baptist. So we got overlap, we got differences. But this is true for any denomination or any religious tradition, I think, actually.

JONES: So that brings me to kind of wondering on this subject of leading by example. We have a little bit of a problem in the Mormon Church in

terms of checks and balances. We don't really have—there's not really a way for the common man to hold them accountable with the way that the Church's power structure is set up.

It's very centralized. And even when they give us the ways that we can express any kind of dissatisfaction with the way things are, whether it be the Church's lack of strategy, policy or curriculum when it comes to racism, the lack of Black people in leadership, or the lack of queer voices who are making queer policies, we don't really have a way to check that. So what might accountability look like for an institution like ours that doesn't necessarily have those checks and balances?

WEST: That's a wonderful question, brother. I don't think I'm equipped to answer it because I don't know enough about the internal dynamics of the Mormon Church.

I know it's fascinating, complicated, and complex with its own rich history, and it's not static. It's changing over time, like any tradition. But I don't really know enough. But I'll tell you this, that when I look at other examples, I'll give you just, just probably the greatest Catholic in early modern Europe was Erasmus.

Now in 1559, all of his works are put on the index of prohibited texts—his own church! His own church because the truths that he was putting forward about the corruption of the clergy and the indulgences in terms of paying people—asking for people's money to get into heaven.

The same thing that Martin Luther would make so much of. Erasmus was making the points, but he stayed in the church. Luther made the same points, he said, "I got to break." He said, "No, Luther, I'm not breaking with you." James Buchanan, another great figure, held on as long as he could, and then later became Presbyterian in Scotland, but he held on for a long time too.

Well, so it is with Mormonism. If Mormonism wants to run out some of its high-quality people who want to preserve the best of Mormonism by means of whatever it is—excommunication, marginalization,

pushing to the periphery—then you fall into the worst of the other denominations. Mormonism is not alone.

All these denominations do that. Martin Luther King Jr. was booted out of the National Baptist Convention by J. H. Jackson, another Black preacher. He had to form his own convention. He's still a Baptist, but he had to form his own convention. Why? Too much prophetic juices flowing. Martin, you got to go.

Now they all want to claim them. The Catholic Church today, "Erasmus is one of our greatest figures in the history of our tradition." You put him on the index of prohibited—Ah! That's the history of traditions that have to learn their lessons and say we were wrong in what we did. We were wrong in pushing our prophetic voices.

A whole wave of folk. Queer voices. It could be women's voices. It could be Black voices or brown voices. When they have a genuine love and concern and are fundamentally committed to the spreading of loving kindness to each and every one of us and they're still cast as heretics, traitors, public enemy number one, we're fallen to the worst of our history.

If we learn and say, "Oh lo and behold, we've got to reexamine ourselves. We don't have a monopoly on the truth at this moment because we are fallen human beings like everybody else." Chase got a point. How do we keep the vitality of the tradition alive? And you don't keep it alive by ossifying or petrifying it.

There's got to be an engagement, and there's got to be ways in which the best of the tradition can be held onto as you're beginning to meet new circumstances and new conditions. And when it comes to race or gender or sexual orientation or empire, all of these challenges are very real. The challenges inside of us and our souls, the challenges outside of us in our society.

JONES: Well, if I can just hang on to one thing that you said in there. You talked about the prophetic, when you talked about Erasmus, when you talked about Luther, and they needed to speak up, but they often had

to speak up in ways that were not institutionally sanctioned. I fear, but also am a little excited that this might be what the Mormon Church has to come to, and not that I think that people are going to have a problem with that, but at the same time, it shouldn't be that way. And you know, might be excommunication, might be marginalization, might be disfellowshipment, just like you said. There are ways that those stories can end.

But what I'm hearing—because I am familiar with the tradition, I do believe I understand the way the dynamics operate within the tradition—for me, as somebody who ticks every box of Mormon respectability, nearly every box of Mormon respectability, I don't feel like excommunication is off the table for me. I don't think they are gonna do it, but I don't think it's off the table, even though I meet every box, because at some point, to adequately address the things that are going on in Mormonism with regard to race, with regard to gender, with regard to orientation, I cannot operate within the same parameters of the institution that set those parameters. And I do fear excommunication. I'm not scared of it. I mean, if that's the worst they can do to me, I'm not scared, but what I'm hearing is that to be prophetic is to engage in an act of courage that could potentially be costly.

WEST: No, there's always a high cost of discipleship. There's no way around it. We wrestled with this in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer and James Baldwin class together last year, you know what I mean?

And Bonhoeffer and Baldwin have no monopoly on truth, but my God, they exemplify levels of the love and courage and the willingness to be true to what they understand they're calling to be. I mean, what I would say with you is what we see in the case of, you know, Erasmus and others.

You don't want to ever allow anybody to excommunicate your relation with God. And your calling and that as you decide to remain within the Mormon Church with a sense of humility—cuz you got

much to learn from the best tradition. This is not just you bringing the truth. No. This is you residing. You've been shaped and molded by the Mormon tradition.

And there's a rich tradition. But with you refusing ever to be excommunicated from your God and your faith, that is a critique of the institution. You're holding on. And that's something that must always be one possibility and option among a host of others.

But I mean, in many ways, it's in God's hands in terms of calling you. And it's in the Church's hands in terms of, are they sensitive enough, courageous enough, open-minded enough to see God working through you? Not just to see James, but to see God working through you to make Mormonism the best that it can be.

And sometimes the institution makes bad choices. We've known that. Mormons are not alone. Every religious institution across the board, across nations, has made bad choices in terms of pushing their prophetic figures to the side. Now prophetic figures can sometimes be wrong too. That's where our humility comes in.

And myself, of course, as a Christocentric Christian, you see—you know, we Baptists, brother, it's "love Jesus and the rest is commentary." Oh, that's a wild position. That's why we've got in such deep trouble. And that's why sometimes our congregations can be pure chaos, whereas Mormonism is much more tied to hierarchy and order.

I can understand that. There's wisdom on both sides. We don't want too much chaos.

JONES: We do say something similar though! We say that it all comes down to Jesus Christ or the atonement of Jesus Christ and everything else is an appendage.

WEST: Is that right?

JONES: That's true. Yes, sir.

WEST: That's what Mormonism say? Dang, I thought we Baptist had something new!

JONES: You said it yourself. The truth can be found in a variety of different places.

WEST: Exactly. But that's really what it is. Now, of course, you know, loving Jesus and being taught the atonement of Jesus is a whole lot.

JONES: It's a lot to unpack.

WEST: That's why our humility—exactly, it's a lot to unpack in terms of the kind of lives we live and the kinds of fruit we bear.

But sometimes our institutions are too obsessed with the foliage and aren't concerned with the spiritual fruits of love.

JONES: That's probably one of the most frustrating things to me. I was on Twitter the other day and I saw somebody say something along the lines of, you can tell 95 percent of how faithful a Mormon is based on how they feel about queer people. And that will tell you everything you need to know. And I just remember thinking to myself, "That is sad. That is pathetic. That is awful that you have essentially reduced the entirety of our faith to disliking queer people." And I'm just like, that is a profound example of missing the mark because our theology, and you know, we've said this already, but it's far more expansive, far more robust, far more life-giving than that. Than us merely absolutely discarding and disliking queer folks.

WEST: Absolutely, but it's amazing, though. I mean, Jesus himself is silent on the issue. Jesus himself says over and over and over again you got to love thy God with everything inside of you and love thy neighbor as thyself.

JONES: I would argue that is saying something, though.

WEST: That's saying a whole lot, and it's embracing of people across gender and race and nation and sexual orientation. So why, how could somebody say 95 percent of what it's about? It's just about targeting this particular slice of humanity? It's a major clash in the fundamental Mormon commitment to the atonement of Jesus and the rest is an appendage. Or what we Baptists would say, "Love Jesus and the rest is commentary." But we have the same thing among, you know, my fellow Baptists. Many would say the same thing about precious queer brothers and sisters.

JONES: Yes, sir. And that kind of brings me to one of the last things I wanna bring up, which is the role of the Church when it comes to social ills.

I'll just bring Rauschenbusch back in here one more time. He says something along the lines of, "If people are suffering because of politics and economy, then the church has to address the human suffering because of politics and the economy." Now, my church personally is notoriously apolitical.

We don't speak to a lot of what ails our society, which is one thing that I do struggle with, but I just wanted to get your feelings on the role of church in addressing social ills. Because to claim, as our church does, to be the restored church of the brown-skinned Palestinian, Jewish Jesus Christ, who was lynched by the Roman Empire—he was lynched by the state. And it stands to reason that if we claim to be disciples of that Jesus Christ and be the bearers of the same church that he had, restored on the earth today, then we should be the first and we should be the best at addressing society's ills.

That is my general feeling. But how do you feel about the role of the church when it comes to addressing society's ills? I've heard you say several things in your different writings. I listened to you at Proctor, like last year at Proctor. You said something that was like so profound to me. It's burned into my memory. You said two things, but the one I'm

thinking of right now is that you cannot drive the money changers out the temple when you're on Pontius Pilate's payroll.

WEST: Oh, you can't follow Jesus when you're on Pontius Pilot's payroll. Well, it's hard to really be with Moses if you're on Pharaoh's payroll. That's true. But I think human beings can have an integrity in whatever context they find themselves. The question is how do you work it through us like Nathan working with the King David?

But I would say this. That I do not for a minute believe that my precious brothers and sisters in the Mormon Church are apolitical. Not at all. I believe that they have their own political biases in terms of how they vote. In terms of whether they're open to different peoples in their neighborhoods and in their schools and churches. Of course, the Mormons are in no way homogeneous and monolithic. You got a whole lot of different kinds of Mormon brothers and sisters. But it's never been apolitical. You couldn't be apolitical. There's no way, under the conditions of persecution and oppression, that you can act as if the nation-state doesn't exist. They trying to crush us. They're trying to crush us.

Finally, we find a place where we can begin to flower and flourish, but we have to preserve the conditions for us flowering and flourishing. That's a political move. You either adjust and accommodate to the powers that be, and you make certain kinds of arrangements—allow us to do this and we won't do that—that's a political arrangement.

But in addition, when it comes to Black people, if my precious brothers and sisters of the Mormon Church had one out of three of their males, between eighteen and twenty-five incarcerated or on parole, if 40 percent of their children were living in poverty, if they were dealing with the bombardment of degradation and tax on Black beauty and Black intelligence and Black moral character, and just change that to attacks on Mormon beauty and Mormon intelligence and Mormon moral character—and there have been such attacks in the Mormon past. If that were the condition, there's no way under God's heaven that

the Mormon Church would say, “We are apolitical.” No way. It’s a matter of not just privilege, but of blindness, and that blindness should be shattered by the example of Jesus, shattered by the atonement of Jesus, shattered by the love of Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus rightly says, “We are first and foremost a spiritual people.” Which means we have a way of pushing back indifference, pushing back callousness, pushing back coldness of heart, pushing back meanness of spirit. And when you push those back, there are political consequences.

So I don’t believe Mormons should be first and foremost political. No, I’m a Christian. I’m not first and foremost political. I’m a follower of Jesus! But to follow Jesus has political consequences. And that’s why we’re highly suspicious of the world’s secular schools of thought and isms and so forth and so on. We talking about a love and a faith and a hope that cuts through all of these isms, but it does look at the world through the lens of the cross.

And that’s a whole different way of looking at the world. I’m telling you, you can’t look at the world through the lens of, you know, Wall Street or Silicon Valley or the Pentagon, even Congress. No, no. You gotta look at the world through the lens of some spiritual and moral views of the world. You see when Brother Mitt Romney says what he says about Sister [Marjorie Taylor] Green, he’s not hating on her. He’s simply saying, “On moral and spiritual grounds, you are wrong, sister. And you in my party!” Now, I got my other critiques of brother Mitt Romney I won’t go into now, but giving my love for the brother. But, at that moment, you can still see the best of Mormonism coming through and most Republicans won’t say a mumbling word. That says something. That says something.

I do want to give him credit, even given my strong critiques of him on other issues. And in that sense—I do believe that the work that you are doing and all of your courage and love and humility and concern about preserving the best of Mormonism—I hope and pray that the

Mormon Church at the highest levels of its hierarchy learns and listens and heeds to what you actually and the others are trying to say.

JONES: As do I. And I think that's a wonderful note to end on. Pretty much answered all the questions I had here and more, and I think the people listening are gonna be incredibly grateful.

WEST: Oh, but I salute you dear brother. Indeed, indeed, indeed, indeed.

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“BLESSINGS DEFERRED”

Daylin Amesimeku

“So how does the priesthood ban make you feel?” At the time I didn’t have the right tools to answer my freshman year religious studies professor at Brigham Young University, so I muttered something about how it didn’t really affect me because my family joined a couple years after the ban was lifted. I still have a clear memory of the nerves running through me knowing the professor would call on the only brown face in the class. As uncomfortable as those feelings were, I was glad for them, because in those moments I began to consider and eventually learn about the implications of the priesthood ban on men, women, and children of African descent.

BYU provided me with many more occasions to think about this history. In college, I was privileged to learn about beloved LDS pioneer Jane Manning James while participating in a theater adaptation of her life.¹ The script recounts her and her family’s journey from New York to Nauvoo and finally Salt Lake City. In Nauvoo, Jane becomes employed in the Smith mansion as a laundress where she became well acquainted with Joseph and Emma Smith. After some time, they offered her to be sealed to them as their daughter—which she declined. Jane recalls that at the time she did not understand temple ordinances.

After Joseph’s assassination Jane and her family moved west. In Salt Lake City, Jane was a devoted member of the faith until her death. During her time in Utah, she repeatedly contacted Church leadership pleading for her temple blessings, as had been offered by Joseph Smith. In a letter to President John Taylor, she wrote, “I called at your house

1. Margaret Blair Young, *I Am Jane*.

last Thursday to have conversation with you concerning my future salvation. I did not explain my feelings or wishes to you. I realize my race & color & can't expect my Endowments as others who are white. My race was handed down through the flood; God promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blest; as this is the fullness of all dispensations is there no blessing for me?"² Eventually Jane was granted a "special" ceremony and was sealed to Joseph and Emma as a servant. Additionally, she was not allowed to enter the temple to perform this sealing, someone else was used as proxy. Displeased, and again invoking the Smiths' earlier offer, Jane continued to petition for her blessings.³

Like many members of African descent from 1852 to 1978, Jane died without the promises of temple blessings. Jane preceded her husband and several children in death. I cannot begin to imagine her dismay and agony thinking about the dissolution of her family. Because of the color of their skin, there was no promise of an eternal life together. And not only that—the God she loved supposedly wanted her to be sealed as a servant for all eternity. This was a woman who had not only escaped the horrors of slavery, but then lived to see this most evil institution instated in Utah by Brigham Young. I often wonder how in her quiet moments of contemplation she reconciled that God, who she may have believed delivered her from slavery, would reinstitute those same conditions through his prophet and his Church.

How does the Church move forward from its racist history if it will not be clear about its past? There are some members of the

2. Quincy D. Newell, "Is There No Blessing for Me? (ca. 1880–1894)," in *Your Sister in the Gospel: The Life of Jane Manning James, a Nineteenth-Century Black Mormon*, online ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199338665.003.0008>.

3. Quincy D. Newell, "Jane Elizabeth Manning James," *Century of Black Mormons*, accessed May 12, 2023, <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/james-jane-elizabeth-manning>.

Church—most often those outside of the United States—who are not even aware of this history. Others have a surface-level understanding of the significance of these decisions and ramifications to members that were victimized by it. Many do not understand the full extent of its effects. For example, many members are not aware that this was a priesthood and temple ban. Most understand that men of African descent could not pass the sacrament, baptize their children, or bless their families with authority from their God. Many don't know or forget that all members, men and women, of African descent were not allowed into the temple buildings to participate in the ordinances therein. Husbands could not be sealed to their wives, and children were not sealed to their parents. In effect, the eternal progress of members of African descent was halted. This meant that in a church that performed baptisms for the dead and provided them the ordinances of the temple by proxy—members of African descent would still have to stand aside, permanent second-class citizens in God's kingdom.

These issues, however, are not in the distant past. A few years ago, the Church released a new Sunday School manual with racist justifications for the priesthood and temple ban.⁴ This was even more curious because the Church had just previously released the Gospel Topics essays where they had disavowed these racist teachings.⁵ In my opinion, the Church had been forced to acknowledge that the justifications for the priesthood and temple ban were racist but could not disavow the ban itself because of the far-reaching implications to undermining prophetic authority. Yet somehow, this Sunday School manual made its way through the hands of those same Church officials and into every church building. Yes, they fixed their mistake for the online version,

4. Peggy F. Stack, "Error in Printed LDS Church Manual Could Revive Racial Criticisms," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 18, 2020.

5. "Race and the Priesthood," *Gospel Topics Essays*, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood>.

but those printed versions are still in the family room of every Church member who took their complimentary copy home and saved it.

This recent past is antithetical to President Russel M. Nelson's admonition "to lead out in abandoning attitudes and actions of prejudice."⁶ Moreover, it is damaging for those of us who are left to feel invisible to our religion because of ongoing failures.

Should the Church apologize for its history of racism? Sure. However, to me, an apology matters much less than the unlearning and reteaching they must embark on. If I were to go back to my freshman BYU religion class and answer the question "so how does the priesthood ban make you feel?" I would have a different answer. I would talk about the hard work of shedding feelings of inferiority and alienation that comes from internalizing racist teachings. I would also point to inspirations of hope and action from pioneers such as Jane Manning James, and I join with her in continuing to speak up and call for change. Let us all follow her example.

6. Russel M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," Oct. 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2020/10/46nelson>.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR AN APOLOGY FOR AFRODESCENDANTS IN BRAZIL

Fernando Pinheiro

I am not Black, but my ancestors are. Had I been of age before 1978, I would not have received the priesthood. I think about this as I consider the history of racism in Brazil. The priesthood ban in Brazil was an attempt to continue American racial segregation in a country that was once a colony of exploitation and ravaged by slavery for over three hundred years. Even after the abolition of slavery, racism was present in the Brazilian social structure. However, it is important to point out that Brazilian racism was different from other known experiences, such as South African apartheid or the situation of the Black population in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, in which racism was explicit and institutionalized by laws and official practices. While institutional racism was prohibited in Brazil, social racism was not. The damage caused by this practice in all its aspects left a lasting mark.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, racial theories from Europe arrived in Brazil. They were accepted in the various scientific, teaching, and research institutions of the national elite, constituted by the white dominant classes. Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945) instituted a project to whiten the nation, which wandered like a ghost for many years in the minds of supporters of eugenic ideals, including policies that prevented certain ethnic groups from receiving a visa to enter the country.

When the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to Brazil in the late 1920s, it restricted its activities to the Germanic colonies. According to population data from the end of the nineteenth century, there were around eight million Black people and their mestizajes out of

just over fourteen million inhabitants in Brazil.¹ Before going to South America to open the Brazilian Mission in 1935, mission president Rulon S. Howells met with J. Reuben Clark of the First Presidency. Clark told him: “You know, I’m quite concerned over the problems that you will have with the Negro in Brazil, because they are so dominant.” Clark had made a stop for one day in Rio de Janeiro while on a diplomatic mission to South America. He told Howells that when he disembarked from the boat, “all [he] could see there was black people.” Clark continued: “The problem you’ll have with the gospel and the Negro race—I don’t know what,”—President Clark paused and shook his head before continuing—“I don’t know what you’ll do.”²

Mission president John A. Bowers, who succeeded Howells in Brazil, answered Clark’s concern with a clear policy on racial segregation: “We immediately started to segregate the people we went to.”³ But further clarity was needed. In the 1950s, the missionary lessons for proselyting “were greatly improved” to “quickly bring investigators to a desire to repent, pray for a testimony and be baptized.”⁴ In Brazil, the next mission president, Asael T. Sorensen, created another lesson specifically to address the issue of race, teaching that “God has revealed that blacks cannot yet receive the priesthood.”⁵ This meant that they often did not teach anyone suspected of African ancestry. Sorensen commented, “So when they find a Negro family then just encourage

1. “Território brasileiro e povoamento—negros—população negra no Brasil,” Brasil 500 anos (website), <https://brasil500anos.ibge.gov.br/territorio-brasileiro-e-povoamento/negros/populacao-negra-no-brasil.html>.

2. Rulon S. Howells, interview by Gordon Irving, Salt Lake City, UT, Jan. 18–19, 1973, transcript, 19, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT.

3. John A. Bowers, interview by Gordon Irving, Salt Lake City, UT, Apr. 25, 1974, transcript, 54, Church History Library.

4. Asael T. Sorensen, Sr., “A Personal History,” unpublished manuscript (Salt Lake City, UT, 2001), 139, Church History Library.

5. Brazil North Mission (1970–1974), Lineage lesson, December 1970, Church History Library.

them to study the Bible and to be good Christians, and then they go on to the next house.”⁶

Church missionaries continued to segregate based on “lineage” when they were sent to the Brazilian northeast in the 1960s. This region is known for its beautiful beaches with warm seas, rivers, historic cities, and its accentuated racial mixing. Mission president William G. Bangerter blessed his missionaries by saying that “it was an ‘awesome responsibility’ preaching to a corrupted people which we have to avoid, seeking the good souls—but are to go the corrupt when necessary.”⁷ This meant that missionaries did occasionally teach those with African ancestry, but focused on the “good souls” of white people as their primary responsibility.

Anthropologist Nádia Amorim explains the damage that the prohibition of the priesthood to afrodescendants caused. While studying racial dynamics within the LDS Church in the coastal city of Maceió (Alagoas) in the 1970s, she recorded some testimonies from white

6. Brazil North Mission (1970–1974), Lineage lesson, December 1970, Church History Library.

7. Michael M. Norton, journal dated Aug. 17, 1958–Mar. 21, 1961, April 1, 1960, 189, Brazilian Mission papers, 1958–1961, Church History Library. Soon after, one of the first missionaries assigned to northeastern Brazil, Michel M. Norton, wrote in his diary: “This afternoon we got a good look at the city, and were surprised to find 70–80% of the people with full or mixed negro blood.” Norton, diary, April 3, 1960, 190. Bowers recorded a narration of a young Black man who was baptized at the time: “We preached the gospel to a light-skinned Negro man who was very interested, and we felt that we were going to have a problem. But he was such a fine man that we kept on preaching the gospel to him. He readily accepted and was baptized. And when it became known among his Catholic friends they started to chide him about becoming a ‘Mormon.’ It got so bad that he couldn’t take the persecution that his friends gave him, and his wife too. [The elders] wanted to know what to do. We told him that he’d have to do the best he could. He said he had a testimony of the gospel, but he just couldn’t stand the chiding any more. So we lost that man.” See John A. Bowers, interview by Gordon Irving, Salt Lake City, UT, Apr. 25, 1974, transcript, 54, Church History Library.

Church members about the ban on priesthood. One member said, “They, black people, need our support. Poor people, they will have their time. Your situation is sad. But what can we do? With our guidance, if you are humble, you will progress. The Church is inspired. You know what you do. As much as we regret it, we cannot face it.”⁸ One American missionary warned a member about how to share the teachings of the Church in this way: “Be careful, sister, in your choice of investigators. Look for good-looking people; clean, well-cared for, that have no ‘lineage.’ It’s not that hard to notice when it exists. The traits, in general, reveal it. Not just the color. For being the hair, the lips, the nose. It’s just that it’s no use bringing to the Church, *now*, individuals who bear it. Since they cannot *yet* receive the priesthood, it’s better to avoid them.”⁹ Other testimonies appear throughout Amorim’s text, some members of the Church affirming a hope in the belief of the millennium, when “the blacks, . . . will have their time to join the Church and know the restored Gospel.”¹⁰ Testimonials from less active members were also recorded:

A gentleman, already priesthood holder: I started to disagree on several points that I didn’t understand well before. They hadn’t explained it to me. I got bored. You see, the “*problem of lineage*” . . . *here in Brazil, the Church will always have this problem.*

A young woman, high school student: *The Church selects its chosen ones.* Look what they did to [name omitted] . . . so good, with so much faith, but they didn’t want it. Just because it has “*lineage*.” All of this was pissing me off.

Another gentleman, also a priesthood holder: It’s hard to find people who can join the Church. You know how it is: *Brazilians, especially here in the Northeast, always have a “lineage.”* If you choose how they want, the Church does not grow. And I don’t know if that’s fair. . . .¹¹

8. Nádia Fernanda Maia de Amorim, *Os Mórmons em Alagoas: religião e relações raciais* (São Paulo: FFLCH/USP, 1986), 104.

9. Amorim, *Os Mórmons em Alagoas*, 105.

10. Amorim, *Os Mórmons em Alagoas*, 106.

11. Amorim, *Os Mórmons em Alagoas*, 111–12.

These reports show how the church's teachings on racial lineage alienated many members and became a source of internal dissatisfaction.

There are numerous examples of how these teachings and practices divided church members and even families. Researcher Mark L. Grover described the unfortunate experience of a young man who was denied the Aaronic priesthood during a sustaining vote at a branch conference. The missionaries who raised their hands in opposition explained: "During visits with the boy's family they had noticed that two younger brothers exhibited some negroid physical features. Even though the young man was fair-skinned with brown wavy hair, it was not uncommon for African ancestry to show itself in one member of a family and not in another. If their suspicions were correct, he would be ineligible to hold the Mormon priesthood because of African ancestry."¹² After an investigation by local leaders and missionaries, they discovered "evidence of black ancestors" for the young man. He "was informed of the decision," that "the priesthood could not be given to any of the children in the Family."¹³

Like this young man, many discovered their ancestry after baptism and many after they had been ordained. One member had joined the Church in São Paulo in 1963. Three months after his baptism, he was called as branch president in that city. As time went on, he observed that genealogy was not being practiced satisfactorily in the unit. With a great willingness to serve in religion, he decided to be an example to research his family tree. What he found was not pleasant. "At a determined point, I encountered a datum, a document, that demonstrated that I had [African] lineage. I looked at that thing and said, 'Ok, this

12. Mark L. Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (1984): 23–24.

13. Grover, "Religious Accommodation," 24.

is not good,” he recalled.¹⁴ The mission president Wayne M. Beck described the situation of this man:

There’s one particular case where we had a branch president who was an excellent man, one of the best branch presidents we had. He came to my office one day very upset. He had received some information from his family and had some pictures where he claimed his grandmother was black. We told him maybe the wise thing to do was to withdraw his hand. “Withdrawing his hand” meant that he wouldn’t ordain people and that we would release him as branch president so that he wouldn’t be embarrassed as a result of it. And so that’s what he did. He withdrew his hand and he was released as branch president.¹⁵

When asked if it was common for members to discover they had African ancestry, Beck responded, “Yes. Yes, that happened on numerous occasions, and we tried to treat it just as graciously as we possibly could, because he can’t help it.”¹⁶

Scholars who have analyzed these stories confirm just how common they were. Grover recorded that the priesthood issue “was much more than an occasional embarrassment or a matter for theological debate. It was a very personal issue which had to be confronted often.” In addition, there was a permanent effort by members to observe “this policy which openly discriminated against family members, friends, and occasionally themselves. It was also a source of conflict between local members and missionaries and many times resulted in limited growth and development for the Church.”¹⁷

The priesthood ban also affected interracial marriages, which have been common in Brazil since colonial times and are a source of pride for

14. Eduardo Alfieri Soares Contieri, interviewed by F. LaMond Tullis, 1976, typescript, 6–7, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

15. Wayne M. and Evelyn M. Beck, interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1974, typescript, 64, Church History Library.

16. Wayne M. and Evelyn M. Beck, interview, 65.

17. Grover, “Religious Accommodation,” 24.

many Brazilians, who view them as a reflection of the country's cultural and ethnic richness. Miscegenation is a fundamental part of Brazilian identity and is celebrated in culture, music, cuisine, and many aspects of the daily life of Brazilians. During his leadership of the Brazilian Mission, Asael T. Sorensen, taught the congregation "the Importance of the Priesthood bearers teaching their children to marry those who have proven their genealogy that they might not lose their priesthood by intermarrying those who have the Blood of Cain."¹⁸ Many Latter-day Saints sought to follow Sorensen's guidance, apparently without any resistance. Nevertheless, eventually, interracial marriage families emerged in the church. The children in these relationships face particular challenges. Although white fathers might receive the priesthood, their sons from a Black mother would not have the same privilege. There are reports of Black mothers who cried when they saw their children growing up in the Church and who would not bless or distribute the sacrament.¹⁹

There is a vast record of experiences, in addition to those cited in this essay, that justify a formal apology for racism from the Church. The way that these teachings perpetuated anti-Black racism among investigators, members, and families calls for a reckoning. Further, the history of these practices continues to negatively affect the Church and its members. Many Brazilian members do not know the Church's history. When they do learn about the priesthood ban, it can demotivate or weaken them. Their concerns can get worse when the Church does not try to repair the past in some way or when they decide to remain silent.

An apology from the Church can make a difference for all Black people of African descent, especially in Brazil. Apologizing for the banning of the priesthood demonstrates recognition and responsibility for inappropriate, offensive, and harmful behavior that has affected untold

18. Brazil São Paulo North Mission manuscript history and historical reports, 1927–1977, Part 1, 1956 January–1956 December, 329, Church History Library.

19. Fernando Pinheiro, *Gravação de vídeo da história da Igreja em Alagoas* (video recording of interviews with members about the history of the Church in Alagoas), 2014–2016, Church History Library.

numbers of people and generations. Furthermore, it can be a way of expressing sincere remorse and a desire to repair the deep damage done to these individuals.

An energetic apology response from the Church could also beneficially affect youth and new converts, two groups that have always been a concern for the Church. Fortunately, many young people today are increasingly aware of racial issues and the importance of promoting equality and social justice. They tend to be more open to diversity and more engaged in fighting racism compared to previous generations. Somehow, these characteristics can also be found in potential adult individuals to become members of the Church. An official apology would close the subject, bringing an end to it. Making a new direction in the history of the Church would be ideal for the younger members, both in age and in faith.

Admitting a mistake and genuinely apologizing can be an effective solution to resolving the issue, and doing so would allow the Church to rebuild the trust that has been undermined by its inappropriate behavior in the past. In addition, the institution will show that it values the memory of those who have been denied the priesthood and that it is ready for an open and constructive dialogue.

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HOW THE LDS CHURCH CAN FOLLOW ITS PRESCRIBED STEPS OF REPENTANCE TO REDUCE ITS SYSTEMIC RACISM

Carol Brown

Because some leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have endorsed and promoted racism in their theology, practices, doctrine, curricula, and culture for much of its existence, an organized, multifaceted approach is needed to undo this bigotry. The 1978 reversal of the Church's refusal to allow Black members to receive temple blessings and the 2020 pronouncement by President Russell M. Nelson urging members to "lead out in abandoning attitudes and actions of prejudice" in General Conference has not eliminated systemic racism in the Church.¹ During that same year, the LDS Church distributed a manual with racist teachings to all adult members, refusing to reprint

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," *Liahona*, Oct. 2020, 92. President Nelson also joined with Derrick Johnson, NAACP president and CEO; Leon Russell, NAACP chairman of the board; and Reverend Amos C. Brown, chairman emeritus of religious affairs, NAACP in a Joint Statement, which said in part: "We likewise call on government, business, and educational leaders at every level to review processes, laws, and organizational attitudes regarding racism and root them out once and for all. It is past time for every one of us to elevate our conversations above divisive and polarizing rhetoric." See Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Locking Arms for Racial Harmony in America: What the NAACP and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Are Doing Together," Medium, June 8, 2020, https://medium.com/@Ch_JesusChrist/locking-arms-for-racial-harmony-in-america-2f62180abf37.

the manuals and remove a bigoted statement. The 2020 “Come Follow Me” manual, which LDS members were asked to study with their families each week, included this statement by then apostle and later church prophet Joseph Fielding Smith: “The dark skin was placed upon the Lamanites so that they could be distinguished from the Nephites and to keep the two peoples from mixing. The dark skin was the sign of the curse. The curse was the withdrawal of the Spirit of the Lord.” After the statement was discovered, the manuals were not revised but were mailed to members throughout the Church.² Congregational leaders were not required to make a correction or apology over the pulpit, and many members continued to feel justified in their belief that dark skin in the scriptures is—or was—a curse.

Even long after the ban, Church leaders taught forms of racial segregation and separatism. In 1995, then apostle Russell M. Nelson warned BYU students about interethnic and intercultural marriages, stating that “the commandment to love our neighbors without discrimination is certain. But it must not be misunderstood. It applies generally. Selection of a marriage partner, on the other hand, involves specific and not general criteria. After all, one person can only be married to one individual. The probabilities of a successful marriage are known to be much greater if both the husband and wife are united in their religion, language, culture, and ethnic background.”³

It is true that the Church has attempted to make some progress on this issue. In 2013, the Church released a Gospel Topics essay on “Race and the Priesthood” that clearly stated that “the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor

2. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Error in LDS Printed Manual Could Revive Racial Criticism,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 18, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/01/18/error-printed-lds-church/>.

3. Russell M. Nelson, “A More Excellent Hope,” *BYU Speeches*, Jan. 8, 1995.

or curse.”⁴ This disavowal stopped short of an apology. President Dallin Oaks, then apostle, stated in 2015 that “I know that the history of the church is not to seek apologies or to give them.” He added, “We sometimes look back on issues and say, ‘Maybe that was counterproductive for what we wish to achieve,’ but we look forward and not backward.”⁵ This decision not to apologize might be one thing if it was clear that racism had disappeared. But it has not.

In 2021, Brigham Young University released a study that showed its BIPOC students “consistently feel isolated and unsafe, undermining their sense of belonging and interfering in their educational efforts,” explaining that they feel a lot of stress regarding the rise of alt-right movements among some students. Further, they express higher levels of distress than white students when they seek counseling, and they don’t know where to file complaints for racism on campus or where to go for support.⁶

The Church will not change its systemic racism until it acknowledges, apologizes for, and atones for it. Since top leaders claim that they speak to and for God, diety is implicitly blamed for past LDS racist doctrine and practices about the denial of priesthood blessings to Black males, temple blessings to Black families and their ancestors, and excluding Black members from leadership positions in the Church until 1978. In 2015, an extensive research study showed that two-thirds of Latter-day Saints still believe that the priesthood/temple marriage ban

4. “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics Essays*, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood>.

5. Al Hartmann, “No Apologies? Really? Members Question Dallin H. Oaks’ Stance,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 30, 2015, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=2122123&citytype=cmsid>.

6. Shane Reese et. al., *Report and Recommendations of the BYU Committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging*, Brigham Young University, February 2021, 11–12, <https://race.byu.edu/00000177-d543-dfa9-a7ff-d5cfc1dc0000/race-equity-belonging-report-feb-25-2021>.

on members of African descent was “inspired of God and was God’s will for the Church until 1978.”⁷ Such historic racism done in God’s name includes blood atonement for interracial marriage; Brigham Young issuing an extermination order against the Timpanogos, which resulted in the Battle at Fort Utah where many Timpanogo men were killed and women and children were taken into slavery;⁸ and the removal of Native American children from their homes to live in boarding schools or with LDS families in educational placement programs.⁹

During the past thirty years, other churches have apologized for the sin of racism and offered redress for it. In June 1995, the Southern

7. See Jana Riess, “Forty Years On, Most US Mormons Still Believe the Racist Priesthood/Temple Ban Was God’s Will,” Religion News, June 11, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/11/40-years-later-most-mormons-still-believe-the-racist-priesthood-temple-ban-was-gods-will/>.

8. Howard A. Christy, “Open Hand and Mailed Fist: Mormon-Indian Relations in Utah, 1847–1852,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1978): 221–26, 302. Militia commander Daniel Wells reported to Brigham Young that on Feb. 13, 1850, fifteen or twenty warriors surrendered to the militia unit, who were then killed. Their fifteen to twenty wives and children were taken as prisoners to the Great Salt Lake. Speaking about LDS members who “mingle their seed with the seed of Cain (Black people)” or intermarry, Brigham Young said that “it is one of the greatest blessings to some to kill them.” See “Brigham Young Address to Legislature,” Feb. 5, 1852, folder 17, box 1, Historian’s Office Reports of Speeches, Church History Library, <https://archive.org/details/CR100317B0001F0017>.

9. Apostle Spencer W. Kimball said: “The day of the Lamanites is nigh. For years they have been growing delightful, and they are now becoming white and delightful, as they were promised. In this picture of the twenty Lamanite missionaries, fifteen of the twenty were as light as Anglos; five were darker but equally delightful. The children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation.” See Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of -Latter-day Saints, October 1960 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual). See also Matthew Garrett, *Making Lamanites: Mormons, Native Americans, and the Indian Student Placement Program, 1947–2000* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016).

Baptist Convention, with a membership of fifteen million, apologized for “condoning” racism, stating in part: “We apologize to all African Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime, and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously.”¹⁰ In 2000, leaders of the United Methodist Church “apologized to black United Methodists who still face racial prejudice.” Their report explained, “The churchwide mea culpa is the latest apology in an unprecedented season of repentance that has seen Pope John Paul II apologize to Jews for the Holocaust and Christians apologize to Muslims and others for the medieval Crusades.” Bishop William Boyd Grove, the ecumenical officer for the Methodist church’s Council of Bishops said: “Racism has lived like a malignancy in the bone marrow of this church for years. . . . It is high time to say we’re sorry.”¹¹

There are more recent examples as well. In 2016, the Presbyterian Church in America voted to repent for its racist actions during the civil rights era, the sin of segregating worshippers by race, barring Black people from membership, and opposing interracial marriages, to name a few. They confessed to failing to “lovingly confront our brothers and sisters concerning racial sins and personal bigotry” and said they would devote the following year to focusing on racism.¹² In 2020, officials of the Church of England apologized for decades of racism and admitted that the church is “still deeply institutionally racist.” The Most Reverend

10. Timothy C. Morgan, “Southern Baptists: Racist No More? Black Leaders Ask,” *Christianity Today*, Aug. 1, 1995, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1995/august1/5t9053.html>.

11. “Methodists Issue Sweeping Apology for Church’s Racism,” BeliefNet, May 5, 2000, <https://www.beliefnet.com/news/2000/05/methodists-issue-sweeping-apology-for-churchs-racism.aspx>.

12. Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “Presbyterian Church in America Apologizes for Old and New Racism,” *Christianity Today*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/june/pca-apologizes-for-new-and-old-racism.html>.

Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, said also he was “ashamed of the history of racism.”¹³ The church announced £100 million for an investment program, research and engagement to try to “address past wrongs” and “also appointed its first racial equality director to work alongside the Archbishops’ Commission for Racial Justice to tackle discrimination in its ranks.”¹⁴ In 2022, Pope Francis issued an apology to Indigenous peoples in Canada for the “deplorable” abuses they suffered in Catholic-run residential schools, meeting with an audience of members of the Metis, Inuit, and First Nations communities. He also said he would compensate tribes with eighty million dollars in addition to the billions of dollars that Canada and the churches transferred to the Indigenous communities on behalf of ninety thousand surviving students. “Your identity and culture has been wounded, many families separated, and many children have become victims of this homogenization action, supported by the idea that progress occurs through ideological colonialization, according to ideas studied at the table rather than respecting the lives of the people,” he said.¹⁵

Some scholars have begun to study the efficacy of institutional apologies. In the *Harvard Business Review*, Maurice Schweitzer, Alison Wood Brookes, and Adam D. Galinsky explain that “in assessing whether or not to apologize, organizational leaders must also focus on the extent to which they are willing—and able—to change the company’s behavior. If they can’t or don’t want to do things differently in the

13. Caitin O’Kane, “The Church Apologizes for Decades of Racism,” CBS News, Feb. 12, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/racism-in-church-of-england-officials-apologize-for-decades-of-racism-in-uk-against-windrush-generation/>.

14. Nadine White, “Catholic Church Unveils Black Mary and Jesus Posters in Anti-Racism Drive,” *The Independent*, Feb. 6, 2023, https://news.yahoo.com/catholic-church-unveils-black-mary-203139630.html?fr=sycsrp_catchall.

15. Nicole Winfield, “Pope Makes Historic Indigenous Apology for Canada Abuses,” AP News, Apr. 1, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-europe-religion-vatican-city-08a842346f2dd0ca645571d879d3124a>.

future, the case for making an apology is weak, because it will sound hollow and unconvincing.”¹⁶ This provides a useful template for thinking about what to prioritize.

An LDS apology needs to include not only an acknowledgement that specific teachings and policies were wrong, but also a willingness to implement policies and practices that change the Church’s behavior. Leaders would need to admit that modern-day prophets are fallible just as biblical prophets were, and that some of their past speeches and doctrines were racist. This would include Ezra Taft Benson’s attack on Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement, Joseph Fielding Smith’s teaching that Black people were fence-sitters in heaven, and Brigham Young’s fiery rhetoric that Black people will be servants for all eternity.

In an interview with Peggy Fletcher Stack, historian Patrick Mason says, “Prophets make not just little mistakes on inconsequential matters; they can be deeply wrong and for a very long time, yet they retain their authority as prophets and apostles.” He continued, “The Bible provides plenty of examples of prophets and other religious heroes who were profoundly flawed (Moses, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Jonah, David and Peter, to name a few), but that’s part of the mystery that the Bible wants us to grapple with. So far, Latter-day Saints haven’t leaned into that theology. But embracing a richer scriptural theology of flawed but chosen prophets, God’s fallen people and the ongoing perfection of the body of Christ, both individually and collectively, could help change that.” He continued by saying that it would help Latter-day Saints “be even more moral and ethical, and produce better repenters and apologizers.”¹⁷

16. Maurice Schweitzer, Alison Wood Brooks, and Adam D. Galinsky, “The Organizational Apology,” *Harvard Business Review*, Sept. 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/09/the-organizational-apology>.

17. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Dallin Oaks Says the Church Doesn’t Apologize, but It Hasn’t Stopped the Question of Whether It Should,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 31, 2022.

The Church expects and exhorts its members to practice daily repentance and it should do the same. To atone for its racism, the Church needs to include more people of color in all levels of leadership to speak up for minorities in the Church. No Black woman has served in any general leadership calling until Sister Tracy Y. Browning was called to serve as the second counselor in the General Primary Presidency in 2022.

The Church also needs to create and implement a curriculum that teaches members how to respect, include, and value people of all races, ethnic groups, and minorities groups. Lessons for every age group could help to undo the Church's past messages regarding the superiority of whites, God's preferential treatment of his white children, and the assumption of white privilege that is found in scripture and past prophets' teachings. A review of the "Come Follow Me" lessons shows that nothing about cultural sensitivity or inclusivity is included in the lessons or manuals.¹⁸ The training manual for teachers has no cultural competency training nor does it specify ways teachers can respect and include those who are marginalized. Church leaders, teachers, members, and missionaries also need regular training in cultural sensitivity that focuses on conscious and unconscious bias, recognizing and understanding what racism is, and ways to avoid macroaggressions that make the Church intolerable for too many BIPOC members.

Church leaders must also address the verses in the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price that some use to justify bigotry, including scriptures in the Book of Mormon that teach that dark skin is a curse from God and those in the Pearl of Great Price that state that the seed

18. The Primary children's "Come Follow Me" lesson about "love one another" includes the question "How can we show love for our family and friends?" but mentions nothing about showing kindness or respect to people of other religions or races. "May 29–June 4, Matthew 26; Mark 14; John 13, 'Come Follow Me,'" *Primary*, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/come-follow-me-for-primary-new-testament-2023/23?lang=eng>.

of Cain was denied the priesthood because of their black skin.¹⁹ These should be corrected with the teachings such as God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34) and that “[The Lord] denieth none that cometh unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33). Because leaders teach that the Book of Mormon is the most correct book on earth, some members might assume that the racism found in too many of its pages is ordained by God and that dark skin is a consequence of sin.²⁰

Church history lessons should include the fact that “during the first two decades of the Church’s existence, a few Black men were ordained to the priesthood,” including Elijah Abel and Q. Walker Lewis, who Brigham Young described as “one of the best Elders, an African.”²¹

The curriculum writers can also include scriptures that promote ways to become more accepting and respectful of others with differing racial and ethnic backgrounds.²² Jesus’ conversion of the Samaritan woman, Paul’s revelation that the gospel should be extended to the gentiles as well as the Jews, and the references in 4 Nephi and the Book of

19. These might include: 2 Nephi 5:21, 23; Alma 3:6; Mormon 5:15; Moses 7:8, 12, 22; Abraham 1:21, 27).

20. *History of the Church*, 4:461, instructions given by Joseph Smith on Nov. 28, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois, as reported by Wilford Woodruff. See also Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194. Joseph Smith said, “I told the brethren that the Booi of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get near to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

21. “Race and the Priesthood”; Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, Mar. 26, 1847, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, spelling and punctuation modernized.

22. These might include: 2 Nephi 26:27–28, 33, 29:7; Mosiah 4:15, 18:21, 23:7; Mormon 9:13; D&C 38:25; Moses 7:18; Genesis 1:26; 1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 22: 37–39; John 7: 24, 13: 34–35; 1 Corinthians 12: 12–26; 1 John 2:11, 4:21; Acts 10: 34–35; Romans 2:11, Revelations 7:9

Moses being of one heart and one mind and becoming a Zion people teach powerful principles about inclusivity and compassion.

Darius Gray, a founding member and the former president of Genesis, a group established in October 1971 by the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that helps serve the needs of African American members, wrote an article, “Healing the Wounds of Racism,” that said in part, “The first step toward healing is the realization that the problem exists. We cannot fix that which we overlook or deny. Our attitudes toward others of a different race or of a different culture should not be considered a minor matter. Viewing them as such only affirms a willingness to stay unchanged.” Gray focused on how individuals can change racist attitudes by acknowledging the problem, recognizing it in ourselves, learning a new approach to look beyond racial differences, and truly listening to those that we consider as “the other.”²³ In a 2014 interview, Gray said, “There are kind, loving people in the church, but there are those who are less kind and those downright hostile to people of color.”²⁴

It is clear that there is a strong need for such corrective action in our faith. In a 2022 interview, Gray said that in the past five or so years he has seen a “resurgence of insensitive comments and attitudes the likes of which I have never experienced before. He added that he has heard fellow Black Latter-day Saints across the United States say, “I can’t do this anymore. I don’t feel safe in my home ward [congregation].”²⁵

23. Darius Gray, “Healing the Wounds of Racism,” *Gospel Living*, June 7, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/healing-the-wounds-of-racism?lang=eng>.

24. Tad Walch, “Black LDS Leader Darius Gray Makes, Contributes to Mormon History,” *Deseret News*, June 16, 2014, <https://www.deseret.com/2014/6/16/20543422/black-lds-leader-darius-gray-makes-contributes-to-mormon-history>.

25. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Racism is ‘Endemic’ in U.S., Utah and LDS Church, Panelists Say,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/racism-is-endemic-in-u-s-utah-and-lds-church-panelists-say/ar-AAYfWb2>.

Others have noticed a similar trend. At a 2022 Mormon History Conference at Utah State University, Ross Peterson, an emeritus Utah State University history professor who also taught African American history, echoed the others' statements about growing "anger and prejudice." A Latter-day Saint, Peterson would like to see Church leaders "use the pulpit more than every six months [at General Conference]" to talk less about "Old Testament topics" and more about "what they strongly believe the people need to do." Grace Soelberg, a Black woman in the audience at the conference who grew up in Davis County, Utah, said, "It was Mormon kids who bullied me the worst and the most. I would sit in Sunday school with them, and then they would call me the N-word at school."²⁶

Several years ago, I was teaching a Primary class where I showed a picture from the manual showing children of differing racial backgrounds to a group of five-year-olds when one of the children, pointing to the fair-skinned children replied, "But God loves those kids the most." The other children agreed. Having no training in anti-racism or inclusion and shocked at the young person's response, I moved on to the next part of the lesson.

This essay is, in part, an attempt to atone for that mistake. The Church missed an opportunity to include in that lesson a statement that all children are precious and beloved to God and that our heavenly parents love each of their children perfectly without regard to their skin tones. Questions could have been included in the lesson, such as "How can we show kindness to others who may look or seem different than us?" "What can we do to be a better friend to others who may not look like you do?" "Jesus said, 'Love one another.' What does that mean to you?"

The Church cannot undo nearly two hundred years of systemic racism without a robust effort to train students, children, teachers, leaders, and members about the signs and symptoms of racism and the

26. Stack, "Racism is 'Endemic.'"

specific attitudes, words, and actions that must be adopted and enacted to overcome bigotry. The Church could produce short films that focus on loving all of our neighbors regardless of their skin color or differences and encourage members to view the videos in their homes, at Church firesides, and during Sunday classes or youth activities. These films could focus on specific ways children, youth, and adults can listen to, respect, and befriend people of varying races and ethnic groups. They could also teach viewers how to identify and correct words, actions, and images that marginalize others, including people of differing abilities, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.²⁷ Viewers could also learn how to avoid and diffuse bullying, belittling, and badgering of those who are different and could learn how Christ reached out with love to everyone of differing religions, ethnic groups, and social classes. The Church could also occasionally portray Jesus as an olive-skinned Middle Eastern man, which some scholars believe he was, instead of depicting him with white European features.²⁸ The Catholic Church has created a portrait of a black Madonna and baby Jesus in an effort to tackle racism.²⁹

Overcoming systemic racism will not happen overnight, but will take years of hard work, curriculum development, leadership and teacher training, and general instruction from every level of the Church, including stake and general meeting talks, Sunday lesson manuals,

27. There are some existing models, including one video entitled “The Good Samaritan: A Bible Story for Children,” Media Library, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2016-05-0007-the-good-samaritan?lang=eng>. See also, “Parable of the Good Samaritan,” Media Library, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2011-10-0010-parable-of-the-good-samaritan?lang=eng>.

28. See Joan Taylor, “What Did Jesus Really Look Like?,” *BBC News Magazine*, Dec. 24, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35120965>.

29. Nadine White, “Catholic Church Unveils Black Mary and Jesus Posters in Anti-Racism Drive,” *The Independent*, Feb. 6, 2023, <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/catholic-church-unveils-black-mary-and-jesus-posters-in-anti-racism-drive/ar-AA17ba00>.

and seminary and institute lessons. As the Church seeks to overcome racism, it needs to include training that helps members identify and overcome prejudice of any kind and teaches them how to better love, respect, and include all in the body of Christ.

We cannot correct nearly two centuries of racism in the Church by ignoring that it existed or by speaking a sentence or two about it. Racism will continue to be a systemic problem in the LDS Church until the Church creates an extensive plan to replace racism with respect, bigotry with benevolence, and unfairness with unity. The Church needs to focus on overcoming racism and prejudice with the same energy it devotes to tithing, temples, and testimonies so that it can become a Zion society filled with kindness, goodness, and the pure love of Christ.

Two years before the march of Washington, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a sermon in which he said, “The church also has the responsibility of getting to the ideational roots of racial prejudice. Racial prejudice is always derived from or based on fears, and suspicions, and misunderstanding that are usually groundless. The church can do a great deal to direct the popular mind at this point and to clear up these misunderstandings and these false ideas. . . . The God that we worship is not merely a self-knowing God, but he is an ever-loving God, working through history for the salvation of man. So with this faith we can move on.”³⁰

Let us move on.

30. Martin Luther King Jr., “The Church on the Frontier of Racial Tension” (address given at the South Baptist Theological Seminary, Apr. 19, 1961), <https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2751/King-ChurchOnFrontier.pdf>.

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Charlotte Condie, *Good Memories*, 2023,
collage, 8" x 8"

YES CULTURE

Terrie Petree & Hollands

The brussels sprouts were good, the falafel was good, and the fries were better than good, but what Farmer and the Seahorse did spectacularly were its bathroom stalls. They were narrow and wood-walled with thick panels that went from ceiling to floor. The doors didn't vibrate with flimsiness. The bathroom was clean and private, and while the music in the corporate chic main dining room throbbed, the music inside was soft and reedy like ensembles of instruments carved from bamboo. I made a point of going to the bathroom whenever I had lunch at Farmer and the Seahorse. When I was in the bathroom, I stood in the locked stall and confirmed that, yes, it was a safe place. If I ever had to hide, I hoped it would happen while I was at Farmer and the Seahorse. My security checks in the bathroom were fueled by American gun rampages, but they began at the stake center in Salina, Kansas, when I was fourteen years old.

Our stake center was ninety miles from the town where I lived, but we made the hour-and-a-half drive for conferences and firesides, or in my terrifying case, stake dances for teenagers fourteen to eighteen. I hadn't been in the semi-dark, carpeted gym long when a young man I'd never met asked me to dance. He wasn't the kind of guy I was interested in as a teenager, or ever, but I said yes with an immediacy that, in retrospect, could have been mistaken for alacrity in the same way that an obtuse drill sergeant convinced himself that his recruits were fond of him because they were quick to respond in the affirmative.

I said yes because I was told to say yes. More to the point, I was told that I didn't have the right to say no. At church on the Sunday before

the dance, our Young Women leaders explained that because it was so difficult for young men to gather the courage to ask young women to dance, we were required to say yes the first time and encouraged to say yes ever after. The directive confused me. Wasn't that what got Satan kicked out of heaven—his plan to make people say yes? Then I wondered what was happening down the hall in the Young Men meeting. Were they equally schooled? Did the Young Men leaders explain how emotionally devastating it was for the Young Women who weren't asked to dance? Were the Young Men required to ask all of the Young Women at least once before going back for seconds? They were not.

After we danced, the young stranger asked again and again and again until I fled to the hallway for water. He was large and self-important, and he followed me to the fountain and hovered while I drank. Thinking spastically, I tried to pinpoint a place where I would be safe from him. It was difficult because he, a male, could go anywhere. The tucked-in alcove at the back of the chapel where the priests washed the sacrament trays? That was his rightful domain. The bishop's office? It might be his someday. It would never be mine. The mothers' room? They were mothers' rooms in name only. The doors didn't lock, and they had more toys for toddlers than they did comfortable seats for nursing women. There was one place, one place in the whole block-long rectangle of classrooms and meeting rooms and offices where I, a fourteen-year-old female, could be safely alone.

I locked myself in a stall and endured the humiliation of other, older teen girls whispering about the Mia Maid from Hays who was suffering severe gastric distress based on time inside. They knew it was me because the dividing panels stopped mid-calf, exposing the lower half of my floral dress and the emerald green flats chosen to match the stems and leaves. I didn't care about their whispers. No, I cared—I was fourteen—but I cared less about them than I did about being free from clammy hands and supercilious conversation. I prayed that he would be gone when I came out. He wasn't. He stepped in front of me when I tried to walk the other way. He was a predator.

Or, he was a teenage boy who fell as hard as I did for the practical joke my brother played that night. He surveyed the gym, picked out the guy I was least likely to be interested in and told him that I had a crush on him. When my brother confessed on the way home, I was relieved. It was possible that the young man was being persistent, not aggressive. He thought his dogged approach to filling his dance card was what we both wanted. Relief was short-lived. Joke aside, being at a stake dance had not been enjoyable. It had been an evening of Church-sanctioned lying. "Would you like to dance?" "Yes." It had been an evening of powerlessness. Hiding in the stall, I instinctively felt danger. Intellectually, I could not articulate or understand that feeling because I had been instructed in the culture of yes.

The inculturation began before I was a teenager. Our home teacher loved John Wayne. He was the father of four boys and held leadership positions in our branch. During childhood, my father wasn't a member, so this man came to my house and gave me a blessing when I broke my nose. He baptized me. Throughout those years, he called me "Little Missy," the John Waynism he felt most appropriate for cutting down to size the free-thinking girl he believed he had the right to corral. He believed he was my priesthood and patriarchal superior and, in the way of small-town congregations, he assumed he would one day be my father-in-law.

Being called "Little Missy" made me uncomfortable. The home teacher was trying to force a familiarity between us that did not and would never exist. When I was ten, I told him that I didn't like being called "Little Missy," and I asked him to stop. That was what I had been taught in school, "Just say no." Just say no to drugs. Just say no to strangers. Just say no to things that weren't good. When I told him it bothered me, he said, "Oh does it, Little Missy?" He used that pejorative until I graduated from high school and left town. It was my first experience with toxic patriarchy, and its poison was long lasting. It taught me that LDS girls lived a double set of rules. In the world but not of it meant that in the world I could say no to things but if I tried the same at church, the priesthood would not have it.

Brigham Young University doubled down on that teaching. In the required American Heritage class for freshmen, we watched a slide movie in which a young female student had to decide between a date with a guy who expected her consent for a weekly frozen yogurt outing or the athlete who asked her out for the same night. In class, the ethical debate centered on who the woman should say yes to first. Saying no to one or both wasn't discussed. Saying no was unethical.

For years, I couldn't say no. Part of that was personality and upbringing. In a home with strong temperaments, it was easier to agree outwardly and dissent inwardly. Away from home at BYU and beyond, I wasn't nonconfrontational so much as I was private. Because I still believed that being a good LDS woman meant I had to say yes, and because I was too much of a coward to figure out how to say no, I let big talkers mistake my passive response for tacit agreement and then felt confused by their anger when I didn't sign up as a downline recruit for their MLMs or was so bold as to contradict their interpretations of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as a morality play about sinful women because it ended with Edna's suicide. I said yes to ice-blocking and clogging and hiking the Y on dates even though they were activities that I found un compelling and with men I knew I wasn't compatible. Again, I felt confused by their anger when my disinterest seeped into their awareness.

At some point, I realized that anger was a byproduct of yes culture. Some Young Men were surely told that the Young Women had been instructed to say yes. "Don't be afraid to ask the girls to dance. They'll say yes. They have to!" In the frontal lobe-forming years, the brains and hormones of teenage LDS males had been steeped in the idea that a good woman said yes. The young men who weren't given pre-dance pep talks went in blind. Every time a young woman said yes, the young man doing the asking was led to believe that the girl wanted to dance with him. She wanted it.

Where the Church might have had a balancing effect, it chose not to. Where it might have steered its women for the many noes they would

need to say in order to hold to the rod, it muddied the waters instead. Unafraid of taking tough stances on temptations that might lead young Saints astray, the Church was maddeningly mixed up when it came to encouraging females to say no. No to sex before marriage, but yes to any man who hoped to lead you to marriage and sex? That was a winding, wobbly line to follow, but I followed it so exactly that I was a woman in my late twenties with two degrees who said forceful noes to the sexual overtures made by the nonmember men with whom I was intellectually and artistically compatible and pallid yeses to dates with members with whom I didn't connect. It got so bad that when I was serving as the Relief Society president in my YSA ward, I had my roommate call and tell me to come home so that I had an excuse to leave the apartment of a male ward member who was making dinner for me.

Days later, he called me out on the pathetic maneuver. I felt two things. First, shame. Shame for not realizing that he would see through the call and into my spinelessness. Second, anger. Anger that he didn't come up the way I did, groomed to make life easier for men. The shame and anger changed me. Not drastically, but by degrees. I still said yes to occasional dates with members hoping that I'd find someone from inside the margins to spend eternity with. When I didn't, when the biggest yes I ever got as an answer to prayer was to marry a nonmember, I said no to the naggers and naysayers and finger wagers.

Serving as the Young Women president in my ward as a newly married woman, a member of the stake presidency called me the night before I was to be a panel member during a question-and-answer session at a youth standards fireside. The presidency member said I was required to tell the youth that my marriage would be better if we had been sealed in the temple. I refused. Did Nephi tell his children that the plates would read better if he hadn't killed a man to get them? Why would I throw shade at the Lord's will when all I did was marry a man, one man, not multiples, and without shedding blood or breaking the Sabbath or any of the many things men in the scriptures did when the Lord commanded them to do something that was outside the norm?

When the presidency member pushed, I told him to find someone else to sit on the panel. It felt good to say no and follow it up with a more resounding no, but it also filled me with panic—as if I'd broken a commandment, committed a sin, kicked against the pricks.

The last time we cycled through the Old Testament in Sunday School, I was visiting my sister's ward when a brother said that Bathsheba consented. It couldn't be rape, he stated, because Bathsheba conceived. In his view, a woman could not say no to David. That was where yes culture got dangerous—when it went beyond dates and dances, when it bled into the interpretation of scripture and the scriptural interpretation of what defined a righteous woman. In yes culture, and perhaps in the time of the great King David, Bathsheba didn't have the right to say no. In terms of the covenants she made with God when she married Uriah, Bathsheba didn't have the right to say yes. She was caught between two masters: the king and his culture, and the King and his commandments. Righteous women have been walking the winding, wobbly line for millennia.

It doesn't change. Today, yes culture teaches that women must protect unborn life. They must say yes to carrying a pregnancy to term at all times and in all places. Yes culture also teaches that women cannot protect already born life. They cannot say no to broad interpretations of the Second Amendment. Embryos matter. Elementary schoolers do not. That is Sanhedrin-level hypocrisy. It centers on saying yes to men. Yes to their babies. Yes to their guns. Sure, women have babies and can get guns. The problem arises from a culture that allows men to mandate a controlling stake in both. Weapons and babies. That old, tired story. Bathsheba carried David's baby. David sent her husband to get killed on the front line. It began with the same common denominator, men raised on yes.

After David sent for Bathsheba, after she understood that he stood on his roof, looked into her home, observed her toilette and, worst of all, possibly watched her mikveh, did she run security checks? Enjoying

the ancient Israelite predecessor of falafel, did she, like me, habitually interrupt her meals and enclose herself in a place with floor to ceiling walls like the stalls at Farmer and the Seahorse?

For thousands of years, women have inured themselves to acculturation costumed as religion. In my life, it began when my home teacher refused to stop calling me names. I believed that name calling was something I had to say yes to. It was the gateway yes. I said yes to dances. Yes to dates. Yes to seeking safe places. Yes to dishonesty and double standards. Jesus himself said that no man can serve two masters. Nowhere did he say, "But a woman can." He didn't say it, because the Lord's gospel does not include the false morality of yes culture. Nor should his church. Nor should his people.

No, I didn't want to dance. No, I didn't want to date. No, I don't want to hide. No more. No. No. No.

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HOME AS A SACRED CENTER FOR FAMILY LIFE

MARIBETH CARROLL LORA BETH BRADY
PROPHETIC STATEMENTS ON HOW FAMILIES CAN
MAINTAIN A SACRED CENTER FOR FAMILY LIFE



HOMES AND FAMILIES

The word home does not appear in the Proclamation. Instead, the specific components are singled out: marriage, husband and wife, parents, children, and family. Home is the implicit but it is to the family men and women, the principles of the Proclamation are directed. This is in harmony with a tendency of the Church to use family and home interchangeably. Carlos E. Asay writes that "marriage, family, and true religion are so interrelated that one cannot be said that they are one and the same." The Proclamation, and each one builds the others. The following statement by President Stephen L. Richards, home is a complete synonym for family.

Charlotte Condie, *Mother in Waiting*, 2023, collage, 8" x 8"

THE POWER TO JUDGE

Lara Merlene Preston

Author's Note: The following essays were based on dreams. Special thanks to Cheryl Preston for editing support.

I stood in a winding stone corridor. At the end of the hall was an inviting bright light. Unclear as to where I was, I slowly and carefully headed in the direction of the glimmering brilliance, as if destiny itself was calling me onward.

Eventually, I reached an ornate golden archway. There was no door, just sheer fabric draped over the opening. I could faintly see into the next room, bustling with people. I felt drawn into the warmth and light it offered.

As I crossed through the threshold and pushed through into the light, the soft sheer fabric glided across my face and hands. The room was beautiful AND warm. Everything sparkled, not like diamonds or earthly treasures, but with light like thousands of stars had been used to erect the very walls of this enclosure. I realized I had crossed over into the next life and heaven was far more magnificent than anything I could have ever imagined!

In the distance, atop a short flight of stairs, I saw three large thrones. They were absolutely breathtaking! Every detail intricately crafted and covered completely in golden light. The back of the chairs consisted of two wings folding over each other, while the arms and feet looked like lion's paws. Seated in each was a divine being adorned in fine brightly colored robes. I knew at once it was my Heavenly Parents and my brother, Jesus Christ.

My gaze shifted and I realized I was not alone in this grand throne room. Around me were people I had known throughout my earthly life,

faces that brought me pain. The room was filled with those who had abused me, violated me, judged me, betrayed me, and beat down my soul. Desperation and tears these people brought rose within me. The warmth of the room began to fade.

Jesus stood up, tall and kingly. He called me by name and asked me to approach. "Welcome to the final judgement, my sister. Before you rest, you have a task to complete."

The crowd turned to look at him and parted to clear a pathway for me to walk towards my Savior. All eyes were on me as I moved forward. I took in every face I passed and the painful memories they had brought me.

I walked slowly up the stairs to the landing where my savior stood next to my divine mother and father. Jesus Christ turned me around and loudly exclaimed, "Behold! Before you are all the people who mis-used you in your earthly life. I give you the power to satisfy justice, to return to them what pain they caused you."

Wow! I felt confused and humbled by this gift. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and then looked out into the crowd before me. I would finally get the justice and validation I had so longed for on earth!

The first person in the room hesitantly approached me. She was a woman who had harshly judged me as a young mother, who had said cruel and untrue things to me and about me and left me in tears so many times. I knew exactly what I was going to give back to her. The closer I got to her, her personage became increasingly blurry. I hesitated. Eventually, she transformed completely before me. The woman I had originally seen was no longer standing before me. In her place stood a past version of myself.

I blinked in disbelief. But it was true! Before me was myself. And not just any version of myself, but a version that represented a time when I had unfairly judged another and said cruel things about her behind her back. Shame crept across me.

I soon noticed that the entire crowd had changed. No longer was the room filled with people who had hurt me. Instead, it was populated

with past versions of me. Each personage had one thing in common: each version represented a time in my earthly life when I let my weaknesses, insecurities, and fears get the best of me. I was embarrassed and guilty. I looked upon each face, and as I did, the features displayed both pain and guilt. They bowed their heads in shame before my gaze. It was a heartbreaking sight to behold.

I approached myself as a young woman. I was exhausted, filled with doubts and fears. I made mistakes. I lashed out at others. I judged harshly because I was insecure and jealous. I did not mean to cause so much pain. The young woman, now fully realizing what she had done, looked at me with guilt and shame.

I took her trembling hands in mine and looked deeply into that young face. I knew this woman was doing the best she could with the limited knowledge and tools she had at the time. I embraced the beautiful, broken woman before me. We both began to cry. When the tears subsided, I whispered gently in her ears, "I love you and I forgive you. May you finally find peace."

I moved throughout the room, personally reenacting this scene with each version of myself, feeling raw with the recollection of my life experiences. I looked into each woman's eyes and took the time to acknowledge fully what I had done, and to understand truly that moment in my life. Eventually, I made peace with each of them. And as I did, each woman disappeared within my embrace and softly faded away into the light of the room.

I finally reached the current version of myself, and in that moment, I recognized one final truth: I am who I am today because of the experiences of all those past versions of myself. Each played an important and vital role in my character development and refinement. Each version was necessary and helped me to grow. I could find the beauty in each face.

With tears flowing, I looked back at my divine brother and parents. They smiled with love and warmth. The glory of the room returned. Humbled, I proceeded to walk back up the steps to join them. Now, there was a throne for me.



Charlotte Condie, *Magnolia*, 2023,
paper collage sculpture, 12" x 12"

THE ULTIMATE BATTLE

Lara Merlene Preston

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

—2 Nephi 2:11

The meticulously handcrafted Toledo steel was light but mostly indestructible, and I felt safe inside my protective armor. Across my chest was an elaborately etched breastplate with the image of a regal lion surrounded by roses. I was that powerful lion.

I felt the weight of my trusted combat-tested shield in my hands. I hefted my sword, newly sharpened and gleaming in the moonlight. I took a deep breath and settled the golden helmet on my head. Although sweat beaded inside my helmet and slowly rolled down my brow, I was ready for battle. I did not want this war, but someone had to confront the monster that finally escaped from a thousand-year prison.

I marched determinedly towards an enormous, heavy, metal-studded gate. As I approached, the door slowly creaked opened as if to say, “Welcome, Brave One! Your final test awaits within!” I did not hesitate, although I knew full well what awaited me inside.

The dragon. Always the dragon. The repeated dance between him and me. Although both seriously wounded, we each barely survived for another, and hopefully final, brutal confrontation.

The beast sat waiting for me. Fire and hate burned in the creature’s flaming eyes and an acrid smoke curled around its nostrils. The demon

was coated in a thick layer of deep crimson scales and each foot was adorned in deadly, sharpened talons. His cry was bloodcurdling and his snarl relentless. His long serpent's tail coiled and waved behind him, mocking me.

The darkness of his presence enveloped my very soul as stabs of anguish tormented in my rapidly beating heart. In some inexplicable way, the serpent knew how to reach inside my mind and play on my fears, weaknesses, and longings.

Today, however, I came with more confidence and faith in myself and my abilities. I pushed through his dark influence inside my head by fervently repeating this battle cry to myself: "You were built for this moment! This victory is your destiny! Today the war ends!"

I held the sword tight in my hand, sweat accumulating in my anxious palms. I narrowed my gaze, laser-focused on the task at hand and my responsibility. Before me towered Satan, the prince of darkness, the source of all corruption, suffering, and hate. Yes! I was staring face to face with the devil. He was here to fight and so was I.

The anger within me expanded and boiled; the pressure was near to explosion. The beast moved forward. I raised my sword high to the right, above my head, the blade sharp and deadly. As I pressed my lunge, something happened.

In a split second, my mind played a series of the most painful moments in my entire life. Each a wound, betrayal, loss, and heartbreak. And then, without the passage of time, I vividly saw myself inflicting harm on others and knew their pain and heard their desperate cries as well.

I knew, of course, that this evil fire-breathing creature had been at the very source of all these experiences. The bane of all existence.

The serpent laughed a deep, spine-chilling laugh. I looked deeply into those dark, numb eyes and took in all the pain he had caused me. Instead of charging at the demon like I had always done in the past, the voice of the light in my head said, "Choose a different path."

Almost as violently as the anger had raged, I felt it failing me. My sword arm weakened. For the first time ever, I could see a small break in his shrouded evil eyes and nestled deep within was a glimmer of something else. Something almost childlike.

As my mind repeated my most painful sufferings, I realized each one had been the chisel and file that had sharpened and refined me in a process much like the flames and tempering that had created my armor.

To the dragon's dismay, instead of choosing to fight. I put down my weapon, took off my helmet, unlaced my bracers, and undid all the layers of protective armor until I was completely vulnerable. Lucifer looked on confused at the sight, but no less angry and hateful.

The dragon slowly lowered his fearsome face toward me. Steam billowed from his nose. Sharp teeth protruding from his salivating mouth—a mouth turned up slightly at the corners in anticipation of his feast.

He lunged forward. I gently extended my arms, palms up. He paused. I reached out to hold his snout in my small hands. I looked into those eyes of fire and turmoil and said, "Brother! I see you now. Morning star! I see the truth. You are not the monster in my story. I am who I am because of YOU, dear Brother. I am so grateful for you. Thank you for pushing me. I love you and I forgive you with all my heart!"

Almost immediately the fire in those menacing eyes dissipated. The angry features softened. The smoke ceased. Tears gathered in his eyes that were once burned with hate and destruction.

A soft light fell around us and as I stepped back, I watched the beast in a new glow as he transformed into the image of our makers.

The light glowed brighter, more intensely, almost overpowering both of us. Through the blinding brilliance, I saw figures emerging. In due time, I recognized them as my other brother, Jesus Christ, and my Heavenly Parents, God the Father and Goddess the Mother.

Not thinking to bow, I blurted out, "Behold! My brother has come home to us at last!"

Lucifer stood still, silent, face turned to the ground. There was much shame in his features; his shoulders slumped, and his head bowed low. Without hesitation, Jesus's face lit with an enormous smile. He stepped toward the son of the morning and embraced him. "Welcome home, my brother Lucifer! You have been punished enough. You have fulfilled the measure of your creation."

I felt completely whole and healed in that moment. The evil in my soul healed with a family reunited. Everything that was lost and broken was fully restored. The Atonement's healing power had wrought a mighty change, perhaps the mightiest of all.

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SONYA

Tamara Pace Thomson

Sonya has been sober almost a year—six months in treatment and six months on her own—and goes to AA meetings at noon or at 7:00 p.m. (sometimes both times) every day. She smokes Camel 100s in hard packs. She and her boyfriend save up the yellow Camel bucks tucked in the cellophane of every pack with Joe Camel's goofy mafia-inspired face and send away for chrome Zippos and mini pocketknives, all with the Camel logo. At nineteen she is the youngest person in AA by almost ten years. Her sponsor, her friends, and her boyfriend are all much older.

Frances is Sonya's sponsor. Frances lives in welfare housing beside the train tracks. When Sonya and her boyfriend visit, Frances brings out her two-pound ashtray shaped like a fly. The fly's wings attach on a hinge to be moved off the body that is shaped like an oblong bowl then moved back to cover up the spent ashes and butts. Frances rocks slightly back and forth in a creaky rocking chair smoking, and she laughs between puffs on her Kool, *I can't ever read the Bible without masturbating—with all the incest and concubines and all*. Sonya laughs, looks at her boyfriend, and raises her eyes. Frances seems old to the girl with her silver hair, folds of fat, and big, outdated glasses, but Frances talks constantly of sex with her lesbian friend and sex with her big, mean retired cop boyfriend who says that lesbians ought to be shot but watches lesbian porn videos that he buys from a kid who works at the gas station who sells them on the sly from under the counter. The kid is saving up money to go to college. The word gets out that he has videos, and men in trucker hats and men in suits and junior high kids all come

in and say, *Are you the kid with the videos?* And he stashes the money in an old *Star Wars* lunch box in his closet.

Sonya taps a Camel on her thumb before lighting it. She read a series of books as a kid—*A Bargain for Frances*, *Bread and Jam for Frances*, and *Best Friends for Frances*—about a badger who likes tea sets and bread and jam and exclusive friends. Sonya never knew if Frances was a girl or a boy. Suddenly she realizes that she must be a girl, since Frances, her masturbating, smoking sponsor from AA, is a girl. In fact, the badger Frances and the AA Frances look a bit alike—small eyes and gray streaks in their hair. Sonya rubs a bulging, wormlike scar on her arm where she sliced through a muscle not very long ago. The muscle still tweaks with pain when she moves it wrong.

Brandon is getting married, Sonya says, *to a blond cheerleader who wears a pound of makeup and rides around on a scooter with fake-tan legs and white Keds without socks.*

That son-of-a-bitch, Frances blows the smoke out through her teeth. *I wonder if that cheerleader knows he's a pedophile.*

Sonya would never talk in an AA meeting about being raped, but she told Frances. It happened when she was a girl—not yet ten years old—by a high school boy in her neighborhood where all the families were friends and her rapist's little sister was her best friend. Frances supports her in not talking about it. *You don't want to throw your pearls before swine*, Sonya.

Frances herself was molested for years by her stepdad. It seems to Sonya that every woman and half the men she knows in the program have been molested or raped at one time or another. From Frances, she hears stories about bishops and babysitters and house guests and men in prison who had molested her fellow recovering alcoholics. It is practically commonplace. Sonya knows she shouldn't care so much about something that happened so long ago and that seems so unexceptional. She thought maybe it mattered to her because her neighborhood had doctors and lawyers and professors and virtually everyone went to church and professed certain Christian beliefs. All of the kids she

grew up with were now in college. All the talk of the spirit, of following Christ, and of serving the widows and orphans in her neighborhood made the rape more ironic somehow. A stupid thought, she knew.

Sonya chuckles and says, *Maybe I should tell his fiancé that he raped me.* She taps her ash into the open belly of the fly. Her boyfriend walks into the ten-by-eight-foot kitchen. His 501s are fraying at the corner of the pockets. His arms are dark and sinewy and his shoulders from behind look like a brick wall. Sonya feels a surge of recklessness in her blood—like the ice water her friends once shot up when they ran out of cocaine. She doesn't know if it is rage or lunacy that she feels, but she wants her boyfriend to see this, to know this about her. *I should call her,* Sonya says.

Wouldn't that be brilliant? Frances rocks back and forth more quickly. *What is her name?*

Kelly.

Frances holds her chunky fingers up like a phone to her head and mimics Sonya's voice, *Hi Kelly, did you know that your fiancé raped me when I was a little girl? Good luck on your wedding night.* Frances sneers then throws her head back and guffaws.

I am going to do it. Sonya half-jumps off the couch—her own 501s that she dyed in a big canning pot on her mom's stove are Irish green and the fraying cuffs are the color of spring grass. Her boyfriend is leaning his back against the dirty sink. She glances at his bare feet on the linoleum. But she doesn't look at his face. She doesn't need his approval. She grabs the phone off a corner desk. The plastic fills her hand. Her fingers tremble as she dials the number she has known her whole life.

A man answers. She can't tell if it is Brandon or his dad. *Is Kelly there?* The girl tries to quiet the quaver in her voice. There is a vein near her collar bone that feels like it might burst. The blood in her head feels like a fire hose.

Hello? Kelly's voice sounds just like Sonya imagined it would. High. Sugary.

Did you know your fiancé is a pedophile? Sonya hears herself speak before she thinks the words.

Oh, really? Kelly's voice is sharp now—a little lower. *Who is this?*

Yes. Really. He likes to rape little girls in the stand of scrub oaks behind his house. You should ask him about it.

Ha ha, I will ask him . . . but Sonya hangs up on Kelly before she can say more.

Frances is standing now. Her pudgy hands pressed up against both her cheeks. *Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god,* she says.

Sonya is still shaking. She tries to hide it. But the tremble is in her voice, in her knees, in her gut. It feels good, like the movement of the earth when she would stand next to a train roaring past when her veins were full of vodka and her head was full of shrooms. The power and the danger of it.

Her boyfriend lights another Camel for her. He holds up her hand so she can grasp it. Even her lips feel like they are shaking when she lifts the cigarette to take a deep drag. She avoids his eyes. He wraps his fingers around her quivering bicep and his thumb almost imperceptibly strokes one of the many scars still pink and still lined with marks from the stitches.

In the storybook, Frances the badger wants a real china tea set. Her best friend tricks her and buys the last china tea set herself. Frances waits and makes a plan. In the end, Frances tricks her friend into selling her the tea set. Frances jumps rope and makes up rhymes. She is sketched in black and white and the furniture in her house is simple. Frances is clever and patient.

Soon it is time for Sonya's boyfriend to go home. He has not spoken since she called Kelly. He has sat on the sand-colored couch and smoked one Camel after another, cupping the cigarette with his palm by pinching it between his thumb and first finger, listening to Sonya and Frances rant about Brandon and his cheap, fake fiancé.

Sonya walks him out to his truck. There are stars above the apartments and no street lamps. She is calmer but her stomach still churns. It is late spring. She hasn't been hospitalized for cutting on herself since Christmas. She sees a gibbous moon and what must be Mars not far

from the moon. So many nights of her childhood she spent studying the sky on her big front lawn, just down the street from Brandon's house and the scrub oaks where he and his friends had a clubhouse.

Her boyfriend is tall. He smells like coffee and cotton. He lifts his rough hands to her face and pulls it close to his. He looks into her eyes. He says, *I love you, you know. None of this matters. We have each other.* This isn't the first time he has said such things. But tonight his eyes are more blue than they have been before—the sea and its relentless movement seem tangible in the fibers of his eyes. *The sea, the sea,* she thinks, and she imagines him joking back, *The sky, the sky.* This is what she needed. His silent listening and observing. She wanted him to hear and to see. This is all.

Sonya watches him pull out of the dark lot. There is a bony locust tree with low-hanging seed pods that rattle in a thin breeze. She looks up at the red planet. Night is all around her and people watch TV in their small, dank apartments with yellowing linoleum and broken furniture. She feels safe here. There is a coffee can full of stinking cigarette butts next to the sidewalk. Two crooked lawn chairs with a few snapped rubber pieces sticking out crouch on the lawn. The chain-link fence along the back of the apartments is half covered in weeds and vines. Not far from the apartments is the railroad yard, where she and her friends used to drive in their parents' Volkswagens and Beemers to smoke pot and feel the rush of the moving trains. When she was a kid, she could only hear the trains far away when she lay on the grass watching the stars, but here the trains are so close she could walk to them. She waits for the sound of a train. But the tracks are quiet.

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Charlotte Condie, *Four Sisters*, 2023,
collage, 8" x 8"

THE INVESTIGATOR

Todd Robert Petersen

We shall be driven to great extremities. I know not what to think of it.
—Daniel Defoe, *Journal of a Plague Year*

By the end of the fifth wave, people didn't want to hear about staying safe and healthy. "Liberty" was the only word in play. People wanted freedom from tyranny, or they wanted death. In the end, nobody had to choose. They got both. In a single season, the sickness took half of those who remained.

There were vaccines for the early strains, but many refused to take them because someone on the internet told them the shots would make them infertile or subject them to government satellite tracking devices. And then the virus mutated. Early bioengineering successes could not be duplicated. People grew impatient and followed any of a dozen pied pipers to their doom.

On top of that, wildfires kept burning, which inflamed people's lungs. The virus exploited that weakness and took a third of those that remained. In the sixth wave, we lost half again. This is what they mean by cataclysm.

The factions that remained fought among themselves as food production and supply chains failed. The stores emptied out, and no trucks came to resupply. Some people were able to carry on for a couple of weeks with what they had, but most were destitute. There was nothing left to loot. Things were better for people living in the country or developing countries. Maybe it was a "first-will-be-last-last-will-be-first" kind of thing, but in the cities, where everyone had moved because life was better, our invisible systems began shutting down—internet, Amazon, cell phones, electricity—it all sputtered and went dark, spreading like a mist.

After that, we only knew what was going on around us in a narrow radius of a quarter mile, maybe. In the beginning, we'd hear sirens, then it would go quiet, except for gunfire, which didn't last long, but it reminded us this wasn't a dream, or a game, or a simulation. It was the beginning of the end of things.

Before all of this began, I was working for a locksmith, learning the trade. I knew how to open pretty much any door. During one of the lockdowns, maybe it was the third, I realized the key to my survival would be my tools, so I snuck out after curfew and stole them. It was a risk to be out there, but the cops were "responding" to looters, and I didn't care about what my boss would say. I had a strong feeling nobody would be going back to work. At this point, anyone who could leave had already fled. We weren't a country, a state, a city, or an anything, just people and an absence of resources.

When I got down to the last of my supplies, I moved outward to see what the neighbors had left in their vacant homes. Those few who remained were down to their last rations and had cleaned everyone else out. After scouring my quarter mile and gathering only enough for a week or two, I made plans to leave my condo and scavenge more broadly.

I found one of those baby carriers for joggers, with inflatable tires so I could sneak around the empty neighborhoods. Sometimes I'd walk into an abandoned house that would give me a strange feeling, the stillness amplified, like the buzzing of power lines, but it had to be something else because we hadn't had electricity for weeks. Mostly, the homes would be ransacked, completely picked over, which would leave me feeling sick and angry, though I had no right to feel slighted by others doing exactly what I did.

As you might imagine, poor folk didn't have much, but I found more in their homes than I did in rich houses. It makes sense. The rich were targets. Their houses were vast but empty. I suspect that somewhere once people ran out of food, they just started eating rich people, just like in that Aerosmith song.

This is all to give you a general sense of things, in case the only thing anyone remembers is the wasteland.

People weren't all gone, but I knew to stay away from them. I used to watch a lot of those shows—*The Walking Dead* and all that. So, I had this sense that ordinary people died early, and the only ones left were those who would do what it takes to keep going and come back for more. Those shows seemed like a good way to kill time. Everyone was watching them. Who would have thought it was training for the future?

One day while I was out on the scavenge, I wheeled up to a gated community with a big wall around it. The iron gate had been ripped open and lay mangled on the ground, and there was just enough room to get my little pushcart through.

A road ran up a slight incline that forked into a circle with five or six empty mansions all facing each other. The biggest house on the circle was surrounded by pickup trucks, most of them with flags in the back, mounted on poles. American flags, Confederate, the ones with the blue line, don't tread on me, things like that. They hung down in the windless air. The trucks had their windows shot out, and as I came closer, I saw the lawn was littered with bodies that had been torn apart by animals. What was left of the flesh had blackened, and the bodies had been there long enough that there was no smell. It looked like maybe seven guys spread out in front of the house and fallen in the doorway like they'd died trying to get in. All of them were in camo and red ball caps. Both garage bays were open, and the front door was only hanging from its top hinge.

I masked up before I went in, out of habit mostly, because wearing one worked for me so far, but also because these places could be rank. I'm not talking about the cloth masks we all made before, or even an N95. I had a full-on military-issue Avon M50 gas mask. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The whole place was shot up. Blood streaks down the walls. Corpses in the kitchen. Women. More in the dining room. In the great room, there were dead kids huddled together in the corner. A happy birthday

banner dangled from the lights. A bunch of those Mylar balloons were down on the ground.

I'd seen a lot of dead people by that point, but I didn't even have a way to think about it. I tried to imagine what chain of events could end like this. Could a person be so hungry they'd go to these lengths? Maybe it was to save their own kids. Was it a mistake, over before anyone realized what they'd done, too late to take it back?

I walked to the front of the house and found more dead. Men. The windows were all shot out, and the walls behind them were in shreds. It didn't take long to put it together. These other guys busted through the gate, probably saw the lights on, smelled the barbecue going, thought they should be sharing the wealth. When they came to rob the place, the homeowner stood his ground. Instead of losing their food, they lost their lives.

The cupboards were bare. Pantry, too. I went room-to-room. Medicine cabinets empty. Down in the basement there was a whole room that was maybe supposed to be full of stored food or something. Flour dusted the floor, and in addition to all these shelves made of two-by-fours, there were these special homemade racks to dispense cans. There were tracks for little soup cans up to big #10 size. There was some rice, dried beans, just enough to kick around. But the place had been stripped bare.

There was also a child's room down there, and a home theater with a Bowflex. In the back of one of his drawers was a half bag of dried marshmallows. I crunched one and felt the burn of sugar in my cheeks. I slipped the bag into my pack and went back upstairs.

I looked around on the wall, and there was a family picture: a mom and dad, grown kids, a couple of grandkids. There was something like twenty people in that picture. They were all in blue jeans and white polo shirts, on a beach somewhere, maybe Mexico. Next to that was a sign that said "Families Are Forever."

I sat with that for a while. In the kitchen was a small desk. On it, there was a blue paperback that said Book of Mormon in gold type.

I picked it up, and stuck inside was a bunch of paper folded in half. Someone had written “Stake Map” on it.

Turns out that was a list of addresses of all the Mormon people in the area. I thought Mormons were all out in Utah, but I guess not. From the looks of the map, there were plenty of them here in Missouri, but spread out. I thought about how somewhere on this map there must be some Mormon house with nobody in it. I never knew any of these people, but I remember people making jokes about their underwear and their Jell-O and their basements full of food and water. None of those things was a joke to me anymore. With a little bit of luck, I might just be able to make it.

According to the map, the closest house was five miles as the crow flies.



The next house was the opposite of the place I left behind, plain and simple, one story with a carport. Easy to overlook. I went around back, checked all the windows. The curtains were drawn. The back door was locked with a cheap Schlage deadbolt, so I was inside pretty quick with a bump key.

The place didn't have much. The furniture was worn but clean. Everything was orderly, especially the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in the front room. A half-basement was filled to the brim with food, first aid supplies, and water jugs. It was the most organized thing in the world, like a library. I opened a Tupperware thing filled with those big Hershey bars. I sat on the floor and tore off the plastic, then snapped off one row of squares. I wanted to eat the whole thing right there, but I could not do it. The sugar burned my mouth. I thought about what happened to these people. Did they run, leaving all these provisions behind? Were they taken? The questions were a distraction, and the answers didn't matter.

Occasionally, I would hear others outside, moving along the street. They would pass by this invisible house looking for something better. I

knew that kind of cost-benefit thinking. Sometimes it was just a pair of teenagers in hoodies, pushing shopping carts full of gear. They'd hustle along quickly, looking all around. As each day passed, I saw more and more people dressed in fatigues, moving down the street in formation, in squadrons. This was a pass-through part of town, near stores and gas stations. There was a mall a half-mile away, and they all headed for it. It was a good distraction, I guess.

I was able to live securely in this house for eighteen months without being disturbed or leaving. It was boring, but safety is boring. I didn't think it would be this easy, like getting to the promised land, but luck can't be all bad. I would have liked a little something to keep myself occupied, solar panels and a PlayStation, but this place belonged to old people. The list said their names were Mike and Evelyn.

I worried that I'd get soft and make a mistake, so I had a regimen: pushups, squats, crunches. I did all this to offset the fact that the rest of the time I ate and read. I started with that Book of Mormon because there wasn't any Stephen King. The rest of the books in that house were about the Mormon religion, so it seemed like the only starting point.

To be honest, I didn't take much interest in the book until the end. That is when I felt my story stacked on top of its story, and its story stacked upon the earlier stories, all of it converging in the past like a long stretch of interstate going out to the horizon. I read that book to try and understand the people I was living off. The dull, wandering story of a family following their dad into the wilderness turned into something I felt like I needed to pay attention to. It became the story of a civilization that thought it couldn't fail. I had to read it in bits and pieces. I found some newspapers from the mid-2000s in the garage, which gave me something else to think about. I'd already forgotten so much.

When I came back to the Book of Mormon, I noticed there were a lot of people in it like Superman's dad, shouting warnings, being ignored, calling people out, getting killed for it. So much of that book seemed like it was speaking to this moment. I wondered why Mormon

folk hadn't said anything about it. I mean, like I said, I didn't know any Mormon people, but I would have been interested to hear what they were saying in their churches about how the world was coming apart. Then it hit me, why would they say anything? People killed their prophets. It looks like they kept their mouths shut out of self-preservation.

When I came to the end of the book, I realized I should keep some kind of record myself, tell people how we got to this point and put it out there like a message in a bottle. Someone in the future would want to know what happened.

As the days passed, I moved on to other books about hope and faith and history and these Mormon pioneers who had fled from here in Missouri out west to Utah, fearing for their lives. I read about how they built Zion out there, and I learned how they massacred a group of people in a place called Mountain Meadows.

Winter came and went, and I read. If I had been religious when the end came, I don't know that I would have become more that way. I think I would have been angry. I can see now that this wasn't about there being no God. It was about God walking away from us. One of the books said God could weep. That caught my interest. Maybe God needed some alone time. Maybe it hurt him too much to see what we were willing to do to each other.

In the spring, I found the journals of the people who lived in this house in the back of a filing cabinet. Mike and Evelyn married when he was twenty-three and she was nineteen. He went on some kind of mission, preaching to people in the Philippines, then he came back and tried college, but he didn't like it. He joined the army and found himself headed to Iraq. He came home because an explosive device flipped over his vehicle. He thought he was going to lose his legs, but some other Mormon officers gave him something Mike called a blessing, and somehow the surgeon was able to put him back together. He came home and met her at a church dance. After that, the journals for both of them got thinner.

Every now and then, I'd read something like, "I should probably start keeping notes, for the family history." There would be a start, then nothing for a while until something sad happened: a miscarriage, a lost job, the car and the fridge going out in the same week. There were a lot of January 1sts in there. There was only a little happiness. Religion didn't seem to stop trouble. Not really.

Evelyn kept some scrapbooks of high school and had an envelope of class pictures of the kids. There were seven of them. Four boys. Three girls. There were pictures of other families all over the house, and one that showed them all together. This wasn't like my family at all, which was just me and my mom and a guy named Jerry, who my mom said left us a week before I was born.

Back in the first Mormon birthday party house, you could see they went down hard. It was scorched earth. But it looked to me like Mike and Evelyn had been taken out of this place in a helicopter, like they vanished. Mike's wallet was on the dresser, next to the keys for his Kia, which was sitting there outside covered in grime and dust. They took no photos, no supplies. There were no bodies, no blood, no bits of glass, only a stillness, and I was grateful.

When I ran out of Mike and Evelyn's food, I knew I had to leave, but I didn't want to. I fled to the next house on the list at night to avoid the patrols that still went by regularly.

I found it on the map and made it there in about an hour. It had already been broken into, so I didn't expect to find much, but in the front room, the skeletons of the family were laid out in the living room next to the piano on one side and the fireplace on the other. The mother was holding a chalkboard, and on it was written the message, "RETURNING WITH HONOR." Next to each skull was a small cup. The whole thing left me cold.

In the kitchen, I saw bottles and bottles of pills, and there was a bowl filled with dust and the empty capsules, like a heap of dead bugs. This had happened so long ago, there was no longer a stench, but the

house was stained with a feeling of unease. I couldn't stay there, but I felt like there was enough food here to get me through a month.

While I was downstairs gathering supplies, I heard footsteps. It seemed like two, maybe three people. They moved through the house and stopped in the living room. They spoke in clipped voices. Then I heard them leave. I stood there in the unfinished basement staring at the ceiling, listening to the emptiness of the house until I could hear my pulse and a ringing in my ears, like static on a radio that couldn't find a station. How did I go so long at Mike and Evelyn's without anyone coming? It had to be something a little more potent than luck. That's clear to me now, you know, in hindsight.

A verse from the Old Testament came into my mind. A prophet went up on the mountain to stand with God. The Lord came but passed him by. A strong wind rent the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake and God was not there. Then a fire, and still no God. But after the fire was gone, there was a still small voice.

I listened and listened for it, for those people to come down the stairs, for the ghosts of that dead family to stir. I strained so hard to hear something, like I was trying to roll a boulder with my mind.

Then, with my heartbeat climbing, I heard a voice. Was it mine? It said, *What doest thou here?*

"Where else should I be?" I whispered, which I know was ridiculous, but it made sense then.

There was no answer, but I kept staring ahead, waiting. In the dark, at the end of a corridor, sunlight crept in through one of the basement egress windows and fell across a photo of a huge building. It was kind of familiar. I went up to it and read that this was the St. Louis Temple. I'd seen it before near the interstate. It looked like a fortress. I thought, that's where I'll go.

I loaded my stroller and backpack and found the temple, which was close. Maybe just a couple of miles. I had wanted to wait until dark, but I

just couldn't stay. The streets were silent. To get there, I had to cut across a golf course and follow the interstate on the frontage road. There was a college football stadium near it.

I came to the front doors and was able to get in, but it took a while. Good locks. The doors swung inward, and I pushed my jogger inside. When I closed and locked them behind me, I could feel something new. I guess you'd call it security. It looked like a very nice hotel on the inside, but it had offices, sofas, telephones. There were no signs of disarray. It was the most organized place I'd ever been in. The air was neither fresh nor stale, but still. The furniture had been covered with sheets as if someone had prepared this place to be shut down.

The place was dark inside. The only light was right there, by the entryway. I sat on one of the couches and was so overcome with peace that I fell asleep. When I woke, it was dark. There were no blankets, so I dug my sleeping bag out and went back to sleep on the couch, feeling the safest I had felt for as long as I could remember.



In the morning, I rose and ate a sparse meal that did not require cooking, then I cranked up the hurricane flashlight I used for my early supply runs and explored the dark corridors. Based on everything I'd read in Mike and Evelyn's place, I expected something else, something more mystical maybe. There were a lot of chairs. As calm as I felt in here, there were rooms I did not enter. I shined a light inside, and at the threshold, I told myself no. There was no force field or feeling of dread, just a simple, wordless understanding that these floors were not for me.

I returned to the ground level and continued looking through the offices, found a laundry and a kitchen, which, if there had been power, might have turned this place into a good option for a permanent residence while I waited for whatever was going to happen next.

I slept and woke, stared a little, thought about this path I was on, then slept and woke again. Long yellow slats of daylight angled through

the windows. It was late afternoon. I gathered my thoughts and considered how I might occupy a building that was this dark even in the middle of the day, then I saw movement and heard a thump on the doors.

I rolled to the floor, waiting for the noise of shattering glass that never came. After I got my breathing under control I crawled along the floor until I could see the entryway. A person was out there, spray-painting a biohazard symbol on the glass. The last few lines were very light, and the spray can quit working. They shook the can, banged it twice against the glass, and threw it against the concrete. After that, there was nothing. I waited a few minutes. Then I moved through the shadows to a place where I could see out. The vandal joined a legion of others moving together down the frontage road.

I had a pair of tiny binoculars in my backpack. I got them and scanned the army. I'd seen one or two of this kind before: shaved heads and their skin and jackets stained red. Some wore goggles or yellow sunglasses. Others wore clear face shields because, in the final days, people believed the blood of the infected might make you sick. A single droplet would do it. These people were the type to spread that kind of talk around.

They turned sports equipment into armor, which looked like rhinoceros plates under the morning light. Some drank from cheap plastic bottles. Others rested on spears they planted on the asphalt. Eventually, they turned and marched on, a phalanx of the most heavily armored out front, a few dozen others in the middle, and another few rows of foot soldiers bringing up the rear. At the back of the column, people pulled wheeled carts behind them on yokes made of rope and silver duct tape.

I thought about who these people had been in their other lives. They must have been regular salt of the earth types turned from honest work into people who needed to survive a fallen world that had fallen even further.

I remember reading that Mormons came to these temples once for themselves then returned to care for the dead, but there were no dead

here, not even the feeling of haunting I felt so often in the homes I relied on. It was clear to me that these glass doors wouldn't protect me. I would always be worried about the next group of whoever came along. That was life at this point. Now that the building had been marked, maybe there would be a kind of protection or warning or something.

I sat in the dark, listening to the silence, eating small meals, and exploring more of the rooms. There was a sterility here, like a tomb, but an empty one. For the first time since I was a kid I knelt, and I asked this building if it thought I could stay. It had spoken to me earlier, and I wanted it to clarify itself. I asked only once and sat until the answer came: "This is the house of the Lord."

I knew I could not stay, and I had no idea where I might go that might be secure. I prepared myself to leave, wrote out these events, and stashed it here in the temple so my story will not be lost, and I will set out to find others, hoping that if I meet my end, it will happen suddenly, without hesitation. I hope I might feel peace like this again, but I fear that once I leave, the heavens will close up behind me.



It has been three years since I left that temple, and I have now returned. When I zipped up my story and left it behind, I thought there would be nothing more to add. I knew I couldn't stay, and I had no idea where I would go. I wandered as others have wandered at the end of their stories, wondering why God didn't just end it for them. They looked for direction and found none. That was the most baffling part of this Book of Mormon. It ended in catastrophe. How do you pin your hopes on that?

Many times, in desperation, I thought I might take my own life. It took so much time and energy to find enough food, shelter, water, and for what? It seemed to be for the purpose of making me able to find more food, shelter, water. As I moved about, I saw many churches had

been marked with the biohazard sign like they had done to the Mormons' temple. It seemed to be a commentary on the times. I can't say they were wrong to suggest that religion was toxic. It was in line with what I learned from scripture. The righteous always have the farthest to fall.

My exhaustion was complete. Reality became elastic. I saw movement where there was silence. I heard voices where there was emptiness. I would drift off to sleep as I walked, sometimes waking as I stumbled. Sometimes I found my way to houses on the map. Mostly I took shelter where I could. I zigzagged, foraged, and grew frail. Eventually, even with my skeleton keys, I could find no sustenance other than that which I could catch or kill, but I was a poor hunter, so I ended up gathering.

Eventually, I came to the last house on the map. It was beyond the city limits, isolated, next to an open field that had become choked with weeds after years of lying fallow. The door was unlocked. Like so many other places, this house had been picked clean. I stopped there because I could go no further. I had not eaten in days, so as the sun slipped low against the horizon, illuminating the tree line in a belt of pink and crimson, I sat in a chair in the front room and asked to be taken up. The heavens did not open. I prayed to find others who believed. I had so many questions the books didn't answer. And what good is a church of one? I looked, but they did not reveal themselves. I prayed for ravens to feed me but saw only crows.

In the silence that followed, darkness gathered and fell. I let go of this place and drifted off. During the night, I dreamt I was traveling along a road that cut through a dark wilderness. I followed the road for some time, noticing lights in the distance, dancing for brief moments before extinguishing themselves.

After I traveled the road for what seemed like hours, I came to a figure seated in an oversized stuffed chair. He wore a white seersucker suit and was fanning himself in the darkness. He smiled and gestured around himself then swiveled in the chair and pointed in a direction

that ran perpendicular to the road. I followed his finger with my eyes, and in the distance, a tree flashed for an instant like it had been lightning struck. Blue energy coiled around it then flickered and went out. When I turned back, the man was gone. I walked ahead and struck an iron rail that did not follow the road but led off into the darkness in the direction of the tree.

I ducked under that rod and continued on until I came to another rod that likewise crossed the road. I followed it until I could no longer see the road. My feet sank if I stood still, but if I stayed in motion, I moved along just fine. There was a flash behind me, and I saw the tree fizzling, so I turned and followed the rail in the other direction. As I walked, I crossed a river then heard voices speaking in a distant room. Eventually the way led upward, and I often stumbled in the darkness.

When I awoke, the house was filled with sunlight.

I was lying face down on the floor, and under the sofa, I saw a yellow plastic Easter egg. It was so far back, I had to lift the sofa to retrieve it. It rattled. I cracked it open, and three small chocolate eggs fell out into the palm of my hand, along with four jelly beans. Saliva welled in my mouth as I ate the red bean, chewing until it dissolved completely. The sweetness was overwhelming. I then picked the foil off one egg and bit into it. The chocolate filled my mouth with a full and delicious warmth. I ate the rest of the candy, alternating between bean and egg until it was all gone.

I looked back under the couch, and of course, there was nothing. I stood and left and went out through a small side gate. As I closed it, I thought about how many times at Mike and Evelyn's I'd read about the gate through which we must enter. In all that time, I couldn't remember any discussion of leaving, only coming in. Was there any difference between an entrance and an exit? I never read the words "straight is the gate through which we must depart," but it makes sense. Coming into this world and leaving it are two sides of the same coin.

For a time, I thought I had died.

But the hunger returned almost immediately. I took the empty egg, clicked it shut, slipped it into my bag, and continued on, looking for any small thing that might have been placed here for me. Mostly there was nothing. But if I kept looking, I would see wild berries, gardens that had reseeded themselves. Orchards.

Where had all this abundance been hiding?

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Charlotte Condie, *Granny*, 2023, collage, 8" x 8"

My Dream

M. Rather, Jr.

In sleep voices fall upon me once again
with bladed-tongues that run against their teeth.

The voices' chorus a grind of bone saws
and caliper-fingers that force open
my mouth to let loose words. Thousands of words
bled from tongue, from lips. And the words they pour
out until the very air tastes sour
with alkaline spit. The voices' laughter
is cicadic, perpetual, constant.

The voices fall upon me once again
with sanded-lips raised in snarls. They are bent
to suck the spirit into the open
air where it will feel the growing blackness
of light, where it will do what it is asked.

The First Wound

M. Rather, Jr.

The Good Doctor Muses,

Beetle-pupil swell, perpetually red
halo-iris fist-sized and yellowed-teared
the abscess winks, another eye for God
to see sticks shake in our hands over sod
as we water witch the fields desperate
to pay the lancing fee.

Can He ferret
out of our dowsing, the smallness of our faith?

The wound's eye is warming. Its soft worm-lashes
react to each hobble, each shift of wool
trousers crossing and separating skin's legs.
The new eye's rheum a puckered blueing scab
interlacing the veins as gold and the soil.

*At least that is what my father has claimed
when he answered by calling upon God's name.*

Healing the Wound

M. Rather, Jr.

*The Good Doctor Muses,
Will You be bound?*

*And I Remember,
Surgeons ask and tap
my swollen shin and splinter the skin to leech
out the infection. The leather straps snap
in calloused hands while others reach
into cowhide and pigskin bags. Their fingers
pull out glass whisky jars and worn scalpels.*

*They place them lovingly on the pine dresser,
line the bright metal tools on the wool
the blanket mother spread to protect the wood.*

*When the surgeons begin to pour
The whiskey I said,
Not a drop of Satan's blood,
No whiskey, not one particle. No stupor.
I will feel every second of that blade.
I will know every layer of flesh you raise.*

A Memory of Prayer

M. Rather, Jr.

My shins are dirt-covered. My hands tighten
round piles of leaves. These trees rise round
clothed in woolen bark and silver lichen.
Stained glass sky, branches flux and foil,
and kaleidoscopic light strikes the ground
whose green intersects the red soil.
This cathedral of helices, of dust
motes that are caught in beams of eye-width light
is where I wait to be lifted beyond
this ground. Lifted bodily through the hushed
leaves. It is for this my soul I do dight
with hours here. Pine needle-awned
knees press the dirt. Here a quiet voice speaks
between the croaks and mutters of birds' beaks

The Town Minister Reacts to My Prophecy

M. Rather, Jr.

I am surprised your pale lips lack froth
at their edges, that you come to me clean,
you claim that Jesus and Elohim
separate appeared in temporal cloth
before you. You lie. We know from scripture
father and son are one and the same,
joined at the root, revealed in the flower
that becomes the fruit. And what of his name?
Did he not use Hebrew or Greek?
You do not know Aramaic, Latin?
Repetitions are all that you can speak.
All this you most likely had imagined.
God does not appear in these later days.
He leaves his work to men, not mystic saints.

Seer

Robbie Taggart

—*Moses 6*

Even as a young child he saw in ways others did not
When his mother sang him the old stories
he would open his inner eyes and see
the lanky cerulean legs of clouds
as they walked across the open sky
In the footprints of cats on the earth
he saw the settling distillations of treesong

He saw under the surface of things
the other world that was always
breaking through into this one
The glistening ways the colors of God
shone through in the voices of frogs
and in the redolent smell of the mosses' yearning
He knew that the earth was God's body

He perceived an intricate connectedness
between the cedar leaves' whisper swish
and the glimmer of the raven's wing
He saw the sound of the mountains' exhale
nestled under the blankets of their winter snows
Saw the flavors of autumn winds
tickling delight in angels' tongues

But he could not see God in the people
among whom he walked in the marketplace
with their waxy hearts weighed down with
greed and lust and their dull yellow ears
listening only for the tinny sound of praise
These beings who could not perceive
beyond the length of their own ugly noses

Their children who mocked his inability
to articulate why in the games he played
there was no triumph at another's loss
but only a lilt of melody when a bee's
joy erupted into ecstatic light
These children whose laughter taunted him
like giants who jeered their rancor for the small

All the people hate me he told God
that day in the meadow with
the lilies of the field catching fire all around them
And not until he anointed his eyes with dirt
did he learn to see through the mire
the holiness that abides incarnate
in every breathing soul

And only then did he speak
of the things he saw beyond

Keturah Considers Abraham's Hands

Robbie Taggart

—*Genesis 25*

as he sits across the room holding a pear in one and a knife in the
other

She thinks of all the things those hands held and touched
before they held and touched her

Unlike the hands of this child, her sixth son who nurses at her breast,
which grasp tightly to all things as if everyone and everything
could be taken away in a moment

there is something free and confident in Abraham's old hands
like the open sky which holds whatever God puts into it:
sun, moon, cloud, stars, emptiness

This is what it means, he told her, that eternity is our covering
We hold our hands palm up and receive all that the day places there
We do not wonder about tomorrow

Now he cuts the pear, making small slices he will share
with the small boys who gather around him like
dogs around a wounded animal

Somewhere the second son sits alone in a field listening to
the cypresses creak in the wind thinking of the way his
mother's voice walks the desert

Tell me about the time, she begins, but his fingers are so gentle
These old supple hands like the water whose fluidity
makes it stronger than the rocks it erodes

Hands turned downward and laid indiscriminately on all things
Benediction flung across vast spaces he cups each face to bless
all the families of the earth

There is a learned gentleness in these hands that will cease to hold her
and as she walks with her sons into the east country she yearns
to be held so completely in the hands of God

A Girl Named No Mercy

Robbie Taggart

—*Hosea 1; 2:15, 18, 23; 8:7*

She digs a hole and blows into it
plants the breath of her mouth
and waits for the storm

She waters the seeds until
her garden of wind sways with
the rhythmic cadence
of her father's imprecations

Each gale becomes
a brother or sister
infinite in number
and beloved as the sun
Though they looked into her
dark infant eyes and named her
the girl on whom no one
shows mercy

and her older brother
whose raucous laugh
causes her to flinch
is called Jezreel—a
scattershot divine planting,

the tenderness of her
father's whispered stories
holds her still like strong arms

When he's home
his music is a balm
and when he's gone
his absence fills every room

Like an injured cat
her mother lies curled
in the corner nursing
her newborn sorrow

You are my people
the girl chants to the wounded imma
and the sickly suckling child
and will always hold my heart

She has made a covenant
with the beasts of the field
and a promise to every sparrow
to cherish and be cherished

Every fig tree has become Jacob's ladder
she climbs and descends with angels
she smells the ghost
of the coming smoke

She sees every instant as a door
God might walk through
to call her father away
or tell her she is loved

There are doorways
into the infinite
everywhere she turns
and from beyond—
the scent of hope

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Charlotte Condie, *Auntie*, 2023,
digital illustration, 8" x 8"

Feeling Our Way Toward Each Other

Gary Ettari. *Mormonism, Empathy, and Aesthetics: Beholding the Body*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 216 pp.

Reviewed by Julie Bowman

In 1997, while I was a student at Brigham Young University, the BYU Museum of Art (MOA) hosted a traveling exhibit of sculptures by Auguste Rodin, *The Hands of Rodin: A Tribute to B. Gerald Cantor*. The exhibit's stop at BYU made national news when museum and university officials left four sculptures from the exhibit crated for the duration of its installation on campus. There were, as there always are, a variety of factors at play in the decision to omit the four works from the exhibit's tenure at BYU MOA, but one factor was certainly Mormonism's complex reverence for the human body coupled with its leaders' long-standing assumptions about the purpose and value of art. Though this event is but a footnote (175n47) in Gary Ettari's *Mormonism, Empathy, and Aesthetics: Beholding the Body*, it provides neat entry into the problem Ettari tackles: what is the significance and role of the body and art in Mormonism, and more importantly, what might it be? Grounded in the aspects of Mormon theology that emphasize universal humanity at least as much as a peculiar, orthodox one, Ettari proposes a more expansive, one might say sophisticated, role for the body where the body's response to aesthetic experiences can generate empathy and help build the human community. Ettari's argument consists of three major components: an explanation of the significance of the body in Mormon theology as a locus for confirming spiritual truth and registering emotional affects like empathy, an outline of aesthetics in Mormon theology as it corresponds to truth and morality, and an application of

the theology's expansive view of the human community to present new readings of contemporary Mormon artists.

To establish the significance of the body in Mormonism, chapter 2, "Embodied Deity and Deified Bodies," covers a wide theological swath regarding the body, including (1) how the body guides moral and ethical action through physical sensation and emotional affect; (2) how the physicality and the emotionality of the body persists in the resurrected body as part of eternal progression toward Godhood; (3) how the embodied Mormon God possesses the same corporeal and emotive qualities; and, finally, (4) how this structure of experience, feeling, and eternal progression cultivates empathy and Christ-like compassion. Yet, Ettari notes, when applied to aesthetic experience, the feeling body's power to be moved and to act becomes a potential danger. That is, if the body can be moved to empathy and morally good action, it can likewise be moved to undesirable emotions and immoral action via aesthetic response to morally questionable art. This danger traditionally defines Mormonism's approach to art, one which privileges protecting body and spirit.

Having established the tension inherent in the corporeal body's ability to respond feelingly and the need to guard the body's purity as a divine instrument, chapter 3, "Aesthetics and Morality in Mormon Thought," explains the narrow, didactic approach to Mormon art and aesthetics traditionally promoted by Church leaders as a consequence. Ettari outlines the specific ways in which Mormonism participates in long-standing debates about the role of art (Mormonism's specific answer: faith-affirming instruction) and the dangers of the body as it relates to art (Mormonism's specific answer: art which promotes bodily passion corrupts sensitivity to moral truths and righteous behavior). Ettari also depicts the fraught way Mormonism's claims of uniqueness isolate its potential for aesthetic engagement and response. A withdrawal from the worldly creates what Ettari identifies as "purposeful exclusivity" (94), which justifies a distinct Mormon art to illustrate its unique narrative. The compelling point Ettari makes here is how this

aesthetic promotes the practice of, for instance, illustrating Book of Mormon events to create a powerful visual history, without the visual information for authentic illustration (of, say, Book of Mormon people and places) or regard for literal history.

In the final chapters, through his reading of the poetry and painting of four contemporary Mormon artists, Ettari demonstrates an expansive, rather than didactic, aesthetic experience in dialogue with faith and belief. Chapter 4, “Bodies in Verse,” considers the poetry of Lance Larsen and Kimberly Johnson. Both poets, Ettari claims, position the body in their poetry as a “conduit to the divine and a means by which to universalize human experience” (135). Chapter 5, “The Painted Body,” turns to the body in visual art. Through the works of two painters, Trevor Southey and Walter Rane, Ettari illustrates an emergent Mormon aesthetic where the nude body evokes our mutual embodiment and connection via a representation of our physicality. Here, one imagines, there must be many artists and works that could be (re)considered through the lens of this empathetic aesthetic experience.

The crux of the argument that Ettari makes—the crux of most intractable arguments—resides in its warring assumptions. Is community exclusive, grounded in the practices of belief, or is community universal, grounded in our shared humanity? How might we reconcile these definitions of community when both views have theological justification? Preferring the expansive definition of community, Ettari’s argument seeks to soften the binaries between faith-promoting art and subjective expression. As these are long-standing tensions between art and religion, between particular communities and the human community, embracing a both/and expansiveness feels optimistic and humane.

If Ettari’s work has a practical weakness, it arises from the challenge of negotiating reader knowledge. On the one hand, Ettari explains Mormon doctrine and theology for the presumably non-Mormon reader, though even the raised-in-the-church reader will find the detailed and complex layering of belief about the body in Mormon theology and history a necessary and helpful foundation for the argument.

On the other hand, not all individuals and academic ideas are as carefully and consistently set out as those associated with Mormon scripture and prophets. For example, “the poet and critic Susan Stewart” gets an identifier, whereas on the next page, Benjamin Lindquist, with an equally robust quotation as evidence, does not. To set out both equally would have lent a more inclusive air to the project. In the same vein, this argument’s precise focus on the body, aesthetics, and Mormon theology leaves this reader with a desire for a more expansive engagement with the way in which the collision of aesthetic experience and theological belief are not singular to Mormonism, even if the contours of the debate are unique.

Ettari’s sense that there is room for an aesthetic experience that allows empathy to generate an expansive community holds so much promise for everyone: art makers and art consumers. Such an aesthetic would abandon the binary created by a faith-affirming, didactic art that limits both the artists and the audience to instead foster the coexistence of the doctrinal truths of virtue and spiritual growth alongside the complexities of subjective human expression. It could, in fact, facilitate spiritual growth and cultivate sensitivity to truth, despite long-standing fears—by many religious groups, as Ettari notes, not just Mormons—that art corrupts the spirit and confuses truth. Ironically, this pursuit might leave behind those the community who believe in or prefer a narrower aesthetic that privileges the didacticism of the obviously faith-promoting over the truth of the messier human complexities. To leave anyone behind, would be a shame for a project like this one, though, perhaps, empathy becomes the key to bridging that divide. One hopes.

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A Freakonomics Spin on Apologetics in Favor of Modern Irrationality

Terryl Givens and Nathaniel Givens. *Into the Headwinds: Why Belief Has Always Been Hard—and Still Is*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2022. 140 pp. ISBN: 0802882439.

Reviewed by Liz Busby

When I received a review copy of Terryl and Nathaniel Givens' new book *Into the Headwinds: Why Belief Has Always Been Hard—and Still Is*, I was warned by the author that as a book about faith, it was unusual. As I dug into the short volume, I found this to be true: rather than a general audience religion book, it read more like *Freakonomics* than anything else. The book rarely cites scripture or doctrine and is focused on evidence from neuroscience, psychology, and economics to support its argument about the nature of belief in the modern world.

Into the Headwinds is written for a general audience and divided into an introduction and three sections. The introduction, titled "Secularism Is Not the Problem," argues against the claim that scientific progress makes religion obsolete, dubbed "the secularism hypothesis." The authors object to the characterization of humans before the Age of Reason as more credulous and therefore vulnerable to supernatural beliefs, pointing out contemporary skepticism about early Christian claims about the resurrection on one end and the conspiracy theories that continue to thrive in the modern era on the other.

"On Rationalism" covers recent advances in neuroscience, sociology, and behavioral economics to dismantle the idea that humans are essentially rational creatures. Though they cite the work of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, Richard Thaler, and others, this section relies most heavily on Johnathan Haidt's analogy of the "divided self," represented as an instinctual elephant and a logical rider, with the rider

coming up with post hoc moral explanations for the elephant's behavioral choices. From this evidence base, the authors argue that seeing faith as a system of beliefs makes little sense since "we are generally in the disappointing position of neither knowing *what* we believe nor *why* we believe those things with any reliability" (49).

The chapter "On Scientism" attacks the idea that science is the only tool for understanding anything worth knowing about the universe. The authors point out that many of the major discoveries in history required an intuitive leap not backed by the scientific method until afterward. The reality of science as "messy affair, full of blind alleys and abandoned digressions" (64) contradicts the popular notion of science as a straightforward progression toward truth. In fact, science relies on the assumed ability of human beings to reason, which remains unprovable in any scientific manner. Indeed, the authors conclude that science and religion are not "nonoverlapping magisteria," but rather "spring from the same root desire to know" (76).

The final chapter, "On Faith," brings us back to the titular "headwinds" that make faith difficult in the modern age. The authors enumerate the various cultural, biological, and psychological barriers to a vibrant faith in the modern age. After presenting these obstacles, they point out that there is no escape from belief: "We cannot decide, in the general sense, to believe or not. We can only decide *what* to believe and, even more fundamentally than that, *why* and *how* to believe" (100). The final section presents faith as a moral reaction to perceived truths. It is a choice to examine the assumptions that underlie our behavior and exert some control over them by making conscious, costly choices in a specific direction.

As a generalist reader, I found in this book a fascinating application of concepts I met in other popular science texts to the problem of faith in the modern age. Some arguments are a little fast and loose, as might be expected from a book scarcely over one hundred pages attempting to cover so many disciplines. I found the authors' quick gloss over the issue of the mechanism of creation unsatisfactory, even as someone

thoroughly convinced that evolution was involved in the creative process. The authors try to sidestep the issue by stating that “whether or not God created humans through directed evolution, literally from the dust of the earth, or by some other method, as biological organisms, we fit within the paradigm of evolution through natural selection” (45). Though technically supportive of evolution, this seemed like a concession to creationists that undermined much of the rest of the argument of the book, which relies heavily on psychological errors induced at least in part by their utility in natural selection.

An additional interesting point is the unusual position of this book in the marketplace. *Into the Headwinds* is being published as a work of popular apologetics by mainstream Christian publisher Eerdmans. In the book as it exists, I found only one explicit reference to Latter-day Saint history as an example of the desire for belief in concrete things (97), and a more oblique reference in a narrative quoted from Elna Baker, a producer at *This American Life* and a former member of the LDS Church (107). Though it may not be the only LDS book to make this jump, it’s the only one I could find published by Eerdmans. A brief search of their catalog reveals only one other Mormon-authored book, Craig Harline’s 2021 mission memoir *Way Below the Angels*, which is explicitly marked as LDS.

The reason this book could make the leap to a general audience is clear: almost nothing in this book is exclusive to the LDS faith. In fact, much of the book is not even specific to the Christian faith. Instead, Terryl and Nathaniel Givens build a rational argument for the importance and continued relevance of the irrational in an age where many assume logic and science to be the highest ideal. Yet the book’s desire to incorporate truth from many scientific fields with religious belief into “one great whole” seems like a particularly Latter-day Saint impulse. Though I could wish for a future edition of this book that might dive deeper into the specifically LDS implications, the argument for the harmony of science and religion as interdependent methods of seeking truth resonated with my own beliefs. For those who likewise seek to

embrace both rational and irrational truths, *Into the Headwinds* provides a foundation for an explanation of modern faith.

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Mormon Extremism and Zombies in Idaho

Leah Sottile. *When the Moon Turns to Blood: Lori Vallow, Chad Daybell, and a Story of Murder Wild Faith, and End Times*. New York: Twelve, a Division of Hachette Book Group, 2022.

Reviewed by Amanda Hendrix-Komoto

On May 16, 2005, Joseph Edward Duncan murdered Brenda Groene, her thirteen-year-old son, and her boyfriend. Police officers in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, found their bodies “face down in a welter of blood” (1). They didn’t discover what happened to Brenda’s two other children for several weeks. In early July, a waitress recognized Brenda’s daughter when she walked into a local Denny’s “with a man in a red American-flag T-shirt” (2). The waitress plied the girl with a vanilla milkshake and called the police. Leah Sottile, who was working as a local journalist at the time, writes that “a story of hell” soon “tumbled from the [girl’s] lips” (3). She described the hammer that Duncan had used to murder her family and the rape that she had experienced with her brother. He eventually killed her only remaining sibling and forced her “to feed

the severed pieces” of his body “into a fire” (4). Sottile never forgot the story. She followed the girl’s life as she appeared in news stories—first as a teenager raising money for animal shelters in nearby Post Falls and then as a young adult with the words “Fear God tattooed over one eye” (4). When Sottile heard a story in 2019 about a brother and sister who had disappeared, she immediately thought of the girl sipping a milkshake sitting next to her family’s murderer.

I had a similar reaction. When I was in the fifth grade, a man named James Wood kidnapped eleven-year-old Jeralee Underwood when she came to collect money for the newspaper. He shot her, sexually molested her body, and then disposed of it in the Snake River. Jeralee had attended the same elementary school as my cousin Misty. Although they were not friends, they had seen each other in the halls. Her mother had received confirmation from the Holy Spirit that her daughter was safe. When she found out that her daughter had already died when she prayed, she reinterpreted the feelings that she believed she had received from God to mean that her daughter was safe with him. That same year, a nine-year-old girl named Stephanie Crane disappeared from Challis, Idaho. Unlike Jeralee, her body was never found. Like Sottile, I immediately thought of earlier murders when I heard about the 2019 disappearance. Many people hoped that Tylee Ryan and J. J. Vallow would be found. I sometimes talked as though I shared this hope, but I ultimately knew that they were already dead.

Sottile’s book *When the Moon Turns to Blood* is her attempt to understand what causes men like Joseph Edward Duncan and James Wood to murder and sexually assault women and children. She focuses on the disappearance of Tylee and J. J. and the lives of their mother Lori Vallow and stepfather Chad Daybell. She details Lori’s childhood in San Bernardino, where she was considered a pretty girl whose devotion to the Church placed her at the center of local Mormon society. Sottile also analyzes Chad’s background as the author of bestselling novels that predicted the end of the world. She argues that Chad’s acceptance within the Mormon community allowed Lori to see him as a prize.

Together, they became convinced that God had chosen them to carry his gospel and that anyone who opposed them were either “zombies” or possessed. The story Sottile charts is complicated. She insinuates that Lori may have had an incestuous relationship with her brother Alex and explores the allegations that both Chad and Lori killed their previous partners. For many people, this information will be fascinating and surprising. Sottile, however, does not reveal information that was not already reported by East Idaho News, an emerging online news platform, or by various podcasts and blogs.

The importance of her story, however, is not in the details of the case. Instead, she connects Daybell’s fascination with the apocalypse to a wider movement among Latter-day Saints. Sottile argues that Daybell is not part of a fringe movement of Mormonism. Instead, she argues that his self-confidence, his tendency to violence, and his acceptance of his own prophetic role are part and parcel of the mainstream LDS Church. In 1993, Daybell had a Near Death Experience (NDE) that convinced him that “he had special access to the spirit world” (85). His publication of a book in 2000 predicted the destruction of the World Trade Center a year later and confirmed his sense that he was a “seer” who received “dispatches from the divine” (87). According to Sottile, Chad was not alone in writing about his NDE or in using it for his own financial gain. In 1992, Betty Eadie published *Embraced by the Light*, which described her decision after speaking with God himself to return to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because it represented “the truest Church on the earth” (Eadie, qtd. in Sottile, 82). Chad came to believe that his visions foresaw the destruction of democracy and the need for American patriots to defend their country. Chad’s books sold in Deseret Book and attracted people to him. Sottile uses his books to connect Daybell to the rise of right-wing extremists and religious radicalism. She points out the similarities between his beliefs and those of Ammon Bundy and Ezra Taft Benson. She argues that his emphasis on the Book of Revelation puts him in the same category as Charles

Manson. Perhaps most controversially, she sees this emphasis as growing directly out of the beliefs of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Her chapter on J. J. and Tylee's deaths is titled "Blood Atonement." In the end, she uses the Latter-day Saints as a lens for analyzing how religion inspires violence. When she describes Lori Vallow's childhood, for example, she quickly points out that Vallow was not "the first famous murderess to come from San Bernardino" (57). She then tells the story of Lucille Miller, a Seventh-day Adventist who burned her husband alive after filing for divorce (57–59).

In many ways, Sottile's book repeats Jon Krakauer's argument. She admits to being inspired by his work, and the blurb on *When the Moon Turns to Blood* explicitly makes this connection. When I first read the book, I resisted her argument that Lori Vallow and Chad Daybell are at the center rather than the margins of mainstream Mormonism. I also find it difficult to argue that religion itself leads to murder. As far as I know, neither Duncan nor Wood gave religious motives for their crimes. Then, I went home for Thanksgiving. When I stopped by *Deseret Industries* in Ammon, Idaho, I was horrified to see how many of the books she had mentioned were on its shelves. Although *Deseret Book* removed Chad Daybell's books from its shelves, I found multiple copies at the thrift store. I flipped through Suzanne Freeman's *The Spirit of Liberty* and discovered an introduction by Daybell. One of his novels was shelved just a few books away. When I checked out, the cashier happily told me about his experience being homeschooled as a patriot. I quickly murmured, "I support public school," as I walked away. My brief experience suggested that there is more truth to Sottile's argument than many people, myself included, would like to admit. I don't believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is inherently violent. I find the comparison between Joseph Smith and Charles Manson reductionist. But it's hard to deny Daybell's influence and insist that he is a marginal figure when his books are so present at a Church-owned thrift store. Ultimately, Sottile's book should be a call to arms. Daybell

should be at the margins of the Latter-day Saint community, and people who care about Idaho and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints need to find a way to make that so.

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The Developing Inclusion of Micronesia into the Utah Mormon Missionary Movement

R. Devan Jensen and Rosalind Meno Ram, eds. *Battlefields to Temple Grounds: Latter-day Saints in Guam and Micronesia*. BYU Religious Studies Center, Jonathan Nāpela Center for Hawaiian and Pacific Islands Studies, and Deseret Book, 2023. 320 pp. Paper: \$24.99. ISBN: 9781950304363

Review by Melvin C. Johnson

Since the 1840s, the leadership and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, even with its global missionary program, has been centered with a focus on the North American Great Basin westward to California. Inevitably, the history and biography of the LDS Church and its members have mostly emphasized the foundational events of the great move and the colonization of Utah Territory and adjacent regions. However, the missionary outreach to the world has shouldered its way into the literature of culture, history, and politics of members far and away from “Zion” at home. *Battlefields to Temple Grounds: Latter-day Saints in Guam and Micronesia* is a thoroughly entertaining and worthwhile read, perhaps the best such endeavor as well as primer so far for history of the LDS mission fields. The studies

of scholars led by R. Devan Jensen and Rosalind Meno Ram chronicle the Church's entry and into Micronesia in the vastness of the Pacific.

Battlefields to Temple Grounds generates a unique record of the Indigenous cultures of Micronesia and their intersections with the colonial imperialism of the nations of Europe, Asia, and the United States. The extensive narrative extends from Magellan's landing in the early sixteenth century. The major emphasis explores and explains the coming of Saints to Micronesia in the Pacific battles of World War II and develops the presence and growth of the Church to the present day in Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Saipan, Guam, Truk (Chuuk), Pohnpei, Palau, Yap, and many other islands.¹

Latter-day Saint missionaries came to Micronesia in the 1960s. Protestant and Catholic missionaries came much earlier. As sea currents intermingle as they roll across the ocean, strong waves of colonial cultures, Christian and non-Christian, vigorously challenged and interacted with the Indigenous cultures. European, Asian, and American nations variously claimed or colonized the islands and peoples, exerting influence in politics, education, and the economy, treating the islands and inhabitants as strategic bases or resources. The imperialists influenced the political affairs and policies, the instruction of the Indigenous peoples, and the economic development of the islands, using them as military bases in the Great Game of global conquest for strategic position and resource extraction. The Indigenous people have reacted to each wave and adapted, intermingling civilizations and cultures. After Japan's bombings of Hawaii and occupation of Guam and Wake Island, Latter-day Saint military personnel would enter Micronesia on the momentum of the American war effort. In the 1960s, LDS missionaries began teaching the military personnel and islanders, leading to the

1. Ironically, my father (US Army) and stepfather (US Marines) participated in the Mariana Campaigns at Guam and Saipan, respectively. They would later be converted to the LDS Church after the war. My father never stepped onto Guam, his invasion craft having been mortar shelled offshore, every man killed or wounded. He woke up in a hospital ship.

creation of the Micronesia Guam Mission and the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission, which includes Kiribati. And on these Pacific battlefields have developed peaceful temple grounds.

I appreciated how the writers developed a maturity of voice that strengthens and enriches the unity and continuity of the book's themes. The first example is that of Marina and Ronnie Oei, who

were originally from New Guinea and of Indonesian ancestry but had raised most of their family in the Netherlands. A little while after her first dream, Marina received another important message in the night. I saw two men ring our doorbell. As I opened the door, I saw two young men standing wearing blue suits and white shirts with a name tag. I heard a voice say, "Do not close your door, but let them in and listen to what they have to say to you." The next day, I and my husband went to visit his niece. When we came home, my son Richard said someone called and asked, "Is this the Oei family?" My son said, "Yes, but my parents aren't home." So the person told my son that they would come the next day at 11 a.m. My son said the person spoke English, so I prepared a meal for them and waited that Saturday. When someone rang our doorbell, I opened the door and saw two young men; one of them looked like the one I saw. (186)

The inclusion of Indigenous voices endows authentic history.

The book may well begin a young missionary's search on how to succeed in differing cultures. Having listened to many returned missionary reports, I finally have had to accept that a Mormon white savior complex, although well-meaning, is a real thing. The book can instruct how to deal with the fact that s/he is the "other" in the mission field, not the local inhabitants. The world's intrinsic values in regional cultures inevitably move and motivate the community's inhabitants' social and cultural pathways. The quicker the young missionary (or senior service missionary, for that matter) can adopt and exhibit an inclusive viewpoint, the experience will become richly rewarding.

The book is timely and worthy and demands that it should attract a large readership. I have no doubt that those who read it will recommend it to others. It teaches lessons in having to surmount societal

chasms of misunderstanding in language as well as cultural and racial prejudices. The work uniquely directs the reader to inspect one's own personality and relationship with Christ when in contact and conflict with the "other." It becomes a measure of the reader's personality.

You want this book on your shelf at home and in the office. I want it on my Kindle, which is either in my pocket or on the night stand next to my bed for when those niggling questions come in the night; and they will.

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The "Prairie Saints" and the "Mountain Saints" Enter the Interfaith Dialogue Movement

Andrew Bolton and Casey Paul Griffiths, eds. *Restorations: Scholars in Dialogue from Community of Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Independence: John Whitmer Books, 2022. xxii + 231 pp. Paper: \$18.99. Ebook: \$18.99. ISBN: 9781950304318.

Reviewed by Katherine R. Pollock

The Restoration's "oldest enemies" have finally come together in their first collaborative publication to examine the similarities and differences between the Missouri-based Community of Christ (formerly the

Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Restorations: Scholars in Dialogue* is a series of ten interfaith dialogues that cover such topics as Jesus Christ, Scripture, Salvation, Ordinances and Sacraments, Prophets and Polity, Personhood, The First Vision and Continuing Revelation, Apostasy and Restoration, Shared Sacred Space, and Zion.

Edited by retired Community of Christ Apostle Andrew Bolton and BYU professor Casey Paul Griffiths, each essay is aimed toward a general audience with some background in the Restoration. The volume is considered an interfaith dialogue, rather than ecumenical dialogue, because of a lack of a shared ecclesiastical understanding. The compilation is the fruition of the Latter-day Saint/Community of Christ scholars dialogue group developed at BYU in 2016. The goal of each chapter was for a scholar from each tradition to author an essay overviewing how their topic is currently understood, thoughtfully reply to the other's essay, and offer a combined short conclusion. Most essayists also explained the historical development of the topic.

There are notable tensions in some of the exchanges between the dialogists. However, readers should see this as a natural part of genuine exchange rather than a source of discomfort. A prime example is the dialogue on Personhood with BYU professor Barbara Morgan Gardner and Community of Christ member Christie Skoorsmith. While the dialogists agree that people from all backgrounds are of infinite worth to God, disagreement about the implications turns into a debate about women's ordination, gender, sexuality, and whether truth about these subjects is eternal or changeable.

Along with the tension are many moments of genuine appreciation between traditions. David Howlett (Zion) says he has admiration for the ways Latter-day Saints use the idea of Zion to help people in need using the nineteenth-century Perpetual Emigrating Fund and the contemporary Perpetual Education Fund as examples. Casey Paul Griffiths (Sacraments and Ordinances) admires Community of Christ's

strong spirit of inclusiveness in administering their sacraments, citing the Community of Christ's use of the internet to offer sacraments at a distance.

The chapter on Apostasy and Restoration shows a different dynamic than the rest of the volume. Gina Colvin, a Latter-day Saint convert to Community of Christ, critiques the current Latter-day Saint perspective, as well as explains the Community of Christ view in an essay wrapped in her faith journey. Her dialogue partner, Jordan T. Watkins, replies that her understandings of both traditions are based more on her personal faith journey than researching the full historical development of the topic. The dialogue might have been improved by the editors providing concrete guidelines for dialogue. Her insider critique may appear as an attack on Latter-day Saint readers. Watkins's reply also shows that the two dialogists were not on the same page about the interaction.

Each chapter can only be considered an introduction; however, I wish contributors had pursued the following insightful topics into their chapters: the reasons that Latter-day Saints do not ordain women and more details about where they can serve in their church without having the priesthood; the differences between the Latter-day Saint patriarchal blessing and Community of Christ's evangelist blessing; education of members and the training of top leaders in both churches and how that relates to scripture. What it means to be a prophet and how prophets are treated by members in both churches.

The book ends with an afterword that includes a review of how the dialogue changed and challenged the participants. Both editors note that this book is not an end but a starting point with many more topics to discuss and people to include in the dialogue. This volume is also an example of how publishers in Mormon studies need to include women in the conversation. Only two out of the eleven Latter-day Saint contributors are women, likely the result of pooling participants from Brigham Young University's College of Religious Education. Only the

Community of Christ side included international members. A future dialogue between international members from both traditions would be significant for the field.

The editors of and contributors to this volume should be proud of this important contribution. Since the 1980s, books dedicated to comparing the beliefs and practices of the two traditions have been single-authored publications that synthesized Church leader statements and official documents with some history. Other unique textbooks, like *Mormonism: The Basics* (Routledge, 2016) described multiple Mormonisms as examples of broader trends of American religion. Using the format of interfaith dialogue, this collaboration brings something new by letting members of both movements themselves describe the nuanced beliefs and lived religion of their churches and bring those experiences into conversation. Such descriptions are harder to find in print for Community of Christ. Church members who are serious about encouraging good relations within the Restoration and scholars who want to expand their understanding of the traditions should read *Restorations: Scholars in Dialogue*.

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WHY STAND YE GAZING
UP INTO HEAVEN [WHEN]
THE KINGDOM OF GOD
IS WITHIN YOU?

Michael Austin

These remarks were first addressed to the Newburgh First Ward in Newburgh, Indiana, on January 29, 2023.

In giving my remarks a title, I have quite promiscuously mixed two statements from the New Testament that come from different speakers, at different times, addressing different audiences for different reasons. I even supplied my own subordinating conjunction, “when,” to link the two statements together. Normally I am against this kind of nonsense, which is how people draw all sorts of unwarranted conclusions from scriptural texts. In this case, though, I am convinced that the two statements come from an understanding of the gospel that the speakers share but that most followers of Christ overlook. So I begin with the question: Why stand ye gazing up into heaven when the kingdom of God is within you?

The first part of the question comes from the opening chapter of the Book of Acts. The resurrected Jesus Christ has been teaching his disciples for “about 40 days,” and his time on earth has come to an end. His disciples ask one last question, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

Jesus politely, but firmly, tells them that they are missing the point. And then, “when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

And this is where the story really starts, because this is where the church really starts—with the confused disciples staring up at the sky and wondering when Jesus was going to come back and create the kingdom he had spent most of his ministry talking about:

¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;


¹¹ Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:10–11)

This question the men in white apparel ask strongly implies a follow-up statement that is not a question: “that is not where you are going to find what you are really looking for.” This follow-up makes no sense if the disciples are really looking for Jesus, since the beings acknowledge that when Jesus does return, he will come from exactly the place that they are looking. But we already know that the disciples are looking for something else. They want to know about the kingdom of God, which they have always believed would consist of a divinely restored version of the united monarchy of David and Solomon.

The key to the New Testament, I believe, is understanding that, and how, they were wrong.

To read the New Testament is to become obsessed with what Jesus, in all four gospels, calls the “kingdom of God.” One gospel writer, Matthew, also calls it the “kingdom of Heaven,” using a Jewish convention of not naming God too frequently to avoid vain repetition. In the New Testament, the “kingdom of God,” the “kingdom of Heaven,” just the “kingdom,” and just “Heaven” all refer to the same thing. It is the main thing that Jesus talks about and the concept that most of his parables attempt to define.

But where is this kingdom? The book of Acts is quite clear that we won't find it by looking up. And fortunately, Jesus told us exactly where we can find it. He does so in the seventeenth chapter of Luke, immediately after Jesus heals ten lepers and only one, a Samaritan, returns to say thank you. The Pharisees who witnessed the miracles, perhaps sensing that they were the basis of a Messianic claim, "demanded" to know when the kingdom of God would come. Christ replies: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20–21).

This is the second half of the question—a statement of so much importance that it should be printed in capital letters, an extra-bold font, and an old-fashioned text manicule saying  **THIS IS THE POINT**. Heaven is not a place in the sky, nor is it something that happens after the world ends, or even when Christ comes again. The kingdom of God is within us. Like a tiny seed, and it can take root and grow, or wither and die, depending on what we do to nurture its potential.

A corollary to this is that the teachings of Christ—what we frequently call "the commandments"—are not requirements that stipulate how we can earn a reward in heaven. They are instructions about how we can build the kingdom of heaven. They are consequential rather than transactional commandments.

I want to focus on the difference between these two concepts, because we often get them wrong. I learned this many years ago when, shortly after our son's baptism, I told our five-year-old daughter and some of her friends in the car that they needed to stop fighting or there would be consequences. My daughter shrieked: "Noooooo. I'm too young for consequences. I'm only five, and I don't get consequences until I am eight."

I realized then that I had been using "consequences" to mean "punishment," and I had to explain that I had been wrong. A punishment

is what you get if you do something that I tell you not to do. A consequence is something that follows naturally from your actions in a way that neither you nor I—nor even God—can prevent.

A transactional view of Christ's commandments frames righteousness and obedience as rational consumer choices that we make to purchase celestial goods and services. Avoiding X cups of coffee and paying Y dollars of tithing gets us to Z level of eternal glory.

A consequential view of commandments, on the other hand, sees certain actions as leading to certain consequences by the very nature of the actions themselves.

For example, in July, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. My doctor told me that it was imperative for me to lose weight because my life literally depended on it. So I searched around and found a diet that I thought might work. It's called the "eat less and exercise more" diet. I gave it a try and, I have successfully lost some, but not all, of the weight that was threatening to shorten my life.

I do not believe that I was blessed by God for my obedience in following the two great commandments of weight loss—eat less and exercise more. I don't believe that, in sacrificing carbohydrates upon the altar, I showed my worthiness to be thin. There was no transactional sense in which I followed a diet and exercise regimes. The things I did produced the consequences I desired. Because that is how consequences work.

The more I have read the New Testament, the more I have become convinced that most, if not all, of the things we call "commandments" are, in fact, simple statements of natural consequences. If we do X, the natural consequence will be Y. God does not tell us what do so much as he tells us what certain things mean. If we treat others as we want to be treated, we do not "go to heaven." People doing unto others as they would do unto themselves is what being in heaven MEANS.

Let's explore this line of reasoning with an example from Christ's ministry. One passage that I have always struggled with is the story of

the rich young man in Matthew 19 who asks Jesus what he should do to have eternal life:

¹⁶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

¹⁷ And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

¹⁸ He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

¹⁹ Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

²⁰ The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

²¹ Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

²² But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (Luke 17: 16–22)

Most traditional readings of this passage are transactional. The rich young man went away sad because Jesus gave him a requirement that he was not willing to meet. He would not be able to go to heaven and have eternal life because he was not able to pay the price demanded by the transaction. I always thought this was unfair. It seemed like the young man was being punished for trying to do better. If he had just stopped before asking “what lack I yet?” he would have been fine.

If we read the same passage consequentially, however, it takes on a new set of meanings. Perhaps the young ruler cannot inherit the kingdom of God until he gives up everything else because giving up everything that is not the kingdom of God is what “inheriting the kingdom of God” means. And Jesus was not offering him a deal; he was providing him with a blueprint.

We find a lot of support for this view in Christ's parables. The kingdom of God is the most common subject of the parables, many of which begin with the phrase "the kingdom of God is like. . . ." As it turns out, the kingdom of God is like a great many things. Like a mustard seed, it begins as something small and grows to immense size; like leaven, it exists among other things but changes their natures; like a fishing net, it will draw in many that have to be sorted out and thrown back. Like workers in a wheat field, we have the responsibility to gather the all people into the kingdom; God, not us, will separate the wheat from the tares.

One of the most constant messages of these parables is that the kingdom can only be inherited by people when they understand that it is more valuable than any other thing they could possibly possess. Like the pearl of great price, its value is incomparable, and like the field with the treasure, anyone who knows the secret of its value will be willing to give up everything to get it.

All of this speaks not to obedience and rewards but to actions and consequences. Wanting to give up everything to build the kingdom of God follows naturally from an understanding of what the kingdom of God is. And only people who understand this will be able to build the kingdom of God.

Which brings us to the two great commandments that Christ gives in Luke 10: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). When his interlocutor asks, "who is my neighbor," Jesus obligingly gives the parable of the good Samaritan to make it clear that the answer is "everybody."

It seems to me that, much like "eat less and exercise more," the commandments to "love God and love everybody else" are not transactional and regulatory but consequential and constitutive. Loving God and loving people are not things we have to do to "get to heaven." They are, rather, the rules that constitute heaven in much the same way that four sides of equal length constitute a square.

If a shape is constituted by three, or five, or eight sides, or by four sides of unequal length, then it is not a square. This is not a moral judgment, just a simple application of a definition. In precisely the same way, if we are not in a place where everyone loves God with all their heart, or do not love their neighbors as themselves, then we are not in heaven. We are somewhere else.

By definition, the kingdom of God is a place where people treat each other as the Samaritan treated the traveler. And where being a Samaritan is not a problem because people love without boundaries and care for each other without conditions. This could be our home, our neighborhood, our ward, or our nation. But we can only have what the kingdom of God is by being willing to give up everything that it is not.

And here's the kicker. If we are standing around with confused looks on our faces, gazing into heaven, and wondering when Jesus is going to come down and make things the way that they should be, then we are missing the point. That is not where the kingdom is going to come from. It will come from me, and from you, when we truly experience conversion—when we understand that we can have what we want the most, so we must to pay very close attention to what we really want the most.

The kingdom of God is within us, but some assembly is required.

And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom we have all been enjoined to create, Amen.

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