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JOSEPH SMITH, THOMAS PAINE, AND MATTHEW 27:51B–53

Grant Adamson

Introduction

Despite its alleged antiquity, jutting back centuries before the Common Era, and its predominant setting in the Americas, the Book of Mormon contains several Matthean and Lukan additions to Mark made in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean. Scholarly consensus in biblical studies today is that the Gospel of Mark was written circa 65 CE, then Matthew and Luke were written in the 70s–90s approximately, and their anonymous authors both expanded and contracted Mark here or there as they reshaped it.¹ One of these add-ons, Matthew 27:51b–53 KJV, describes the earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrection of “many bodies of the saints” who “appeared unto many” in the aftermath of the crucifixion and Jesus’ own empty tomb. The retelling of this same story

Many thanks to David Mihalyfy and Taylor Petrey for their feedback on drafts, both rough and polished. David had also teamed up with me on some of the mid-stage research. As I shopped around my polarizing argument, a total of eight reviewers gave advice, some pro, others vehemently contra. Each brought improvements, and any stubborn faults are mine. I presented initial findings at the Fourth biennial Faith and Knowledge Conference, hosted at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC, in 2013, with a follow-up in the Latter-day Saints and the Bible section of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and American Academy of Religion in 2019. My gratitude goes to the organizers at both venues, especially Jason Combs and Jill Kirby, and to Benjamin Park for his generous engagement at the SBL-AAR.

1. For the decline of Matthean priority and for Matthew’s fusion of Mark, other Jesus-material, and the Jewish Bible, see, for example, Carl R. Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament: Reference Edition* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2017), 193–200.

in the Book of Mormon is no accidental anachronism (Helaman 14:21–25; 3 Nephi 8:6–19, 10:9–10, 23:6–14). It reflects the way that the Book of Mormon intervened in early US debates about the reliability of the Bible.

The chronological priority of the Gospel of Matthew over Mark was still assumed throughout most of the 1800s. But Matthew's added details about the resurrection faced a problem, nevertheless. Commentators had noted that the verses seemed to be missing from Mark and Luke as well as John. What was worse, this and other exegetical observations had been hijacked, and the passage derisively challenged, in Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*; Paine wrote the three installments of the *Age of Reason* in France, but he published the third in New York City, and compendium editions were reprinted there too into the 1820s.² Matthew 27:51b–53 was among the numerous passages in the Bible that Paine attacked. Many Christians felt that all of holy writ was under siege. Joseph Smith, a scrying treasure-hunter from Palmyra, New York, on the Erie Canal, came to the rescue, as did those more qualified. The unlikely apologist did not try to meet reason with more reason in the form of another learned commentary or refutation of the deist "Mr. Paine." Instead Smith shored up revealed religion with more revelation in the form of another bible, one that was recorded by Israelite-American prophets and apostles, then buried in the ground for hundreds of years, and finally translated "by the gift and power of God" (Book of Mormon title page; Testimony of Three Witnesses; see also D&C 1:29, 20:8), hence safe from any manuscript corruption or translation error.³ Smith's solution to the problem of Matthew 27:51b–53 is a prime example of how he endeavored to save the Christian scriptures from skeptics.

On the whole, the biblical apologetic thrust of the Book of Mormon should be obvious (1 Nephi 13:39–40; 2 Nephi 3:11–13; D&C 20:11), and the general thesis, that one of the functions of Smith's text was to defend

2. I will be using one such compendium edition, *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine* (London: R. Carlile; New York: W. Carver, 1824).

3. Quotations are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

the Old and New Testaments against threats such as deism, is quite widely accepted.⁴ There is also a longstanding tendency, however, for Smith's corroboration of the Bible to be minimized by his text's role as new scripture and its status as blasphemy against the Christian canon (see already 2 Nephi 29).⁵ My contribution builds on the general thesis

4. Robert N. Hullinger, "Joseph Smith, Defender of the Faith," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42, no. 2 (1971): 72–87; Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (1980; Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), esp. 121–65; Timothy L. Smith, "The Book of Mormon in a Biblical Culture," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 3–21; Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11, 27; Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7, 186–91; Heikki Räisänen, "Joseph Smith as a Creative Interpreter of the Bible," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (2010): 68–70, 80–81; David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144–47; Philip L. Barlow, "To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith's Project," *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 3 (2012): 40–41; Grant Hardy, "The Book of Mormon and the Bible," in *Americanist Approaches to The Book of Mormon*, edited by Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 107, 111–13; Daniel O. McClellan, "2 Nephi 25:23 in Literary and Rhetorical Context," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 29 (2020): 15–16.

5. Recently Samuel Morris Brown has recharted much of the same territory that Hullinger had (and without citing Hullinger's article or monograph), but whereas the one saw Smith as a champion of the Bible against deism, the other sees him as being almost in league with skeptics against Protestants. Brown, *Joseph Smith's Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), esp. 127–61. I think Brown is right about Smith trying to save the Bible; I think Brown is wrong about Smith trying to "kill it" or "light it on fire" in order to do so. For me, the bulk of perceived inimicalness is, first, Smith's allowances to deism and, second, his frustrations with fellow Protestants who would not appreciate what he was doing for the cause of revealed religion. I can sign onto Brown's proviso that Smith and his movement belong "outside the usual binary of Protestants versus freethinkers or religious versus secular" (11), which makes it odd to have Brown then nearly switch the dichotomy and insist that Smith was "an ardent anti-Protestant" (130). Smith may defy categorization, but he was aligned far more closely with biblical apologists than he was with Paine or any other derider of God's word in the KJV and *Textus Receptus*.

and highlights the intricate if gaudy armor Smith hammered out to protect Protestant Christianity against Paine's battering of Matthew 27:51b-53, a passage they and their contemporaries thought was absent from the other gospels—not added to Mark by Matthew—on the venerably wrong assumption that Matthew was the first evangelist and an apostolic eyewitness.⁶

To be explicit about what I myself am postulating, in this article I connect three literary occurrences that stretch from the late 1600s to the early 1800s, namely, (1) the writing and publication of a few influential British commentaries, (2) Paine's theological works, and (3) responses to the "arch-infidel" in England and America including the Book of Mormon.⁷ I understand these occurrences to have a loosely reactionary link, not just a heuristic connection. Whether directly or

6. In the 1920s in an essay that languished for over half a century, B. H. Roberts discretely explored the chance that the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite and its fulfillment in the Book of Mormon were spurred by the Gospel of Matthew and "other sources" that he figured may have been "available" to Smith, though the source/s eluded him. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 236–38; I thank Colby Townsend for the reference.

7. Within scholarship on Paine, the *Age of Reason*, and its reception, interest has usually dropped off after Paine's lifetime. See, for example, Edward H. Davidson and William J. Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority: The Age of Reason as Religious and Political Idea* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1994); and Patrick Wallace Hughes, "Antidotes to Deism: A Reception History of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, 1794–1809" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013). But that is changing, and in current research, the religious landscape of the early US looks to have been profoundly dotted with deists and skeptics, Paine and others, to whom the faithful were duty-bound to respond generation after generation. See, for example, Mark A. Noll, "Religion in the Early Republic: A Second Tom Paine Effect," *Modern Intellectual History* 14, no. 3 (2017): 883–98; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Village Atheists: How America's Unbelievers Made Their Way in a Godly Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

indirectly, the exegetes influenced Paine, who in turn provoked replies. As for Smith, the business of his sources is doubly fraught since he dictated his “translation” of the golden plates in what could be termed an altered state of consciousness while gazing into a folk-magic peep stone. Smith may have regularly relied on memory for his use of the Bible, although hefty quotations from the KJV strongly suggest that he had a copy in front of him now and then.⁸ At any rate, he was not interacting with the KJV in a vacuum; he was also interacting with the Christian and deist thought of his day. How, exactly, Smith was exposed to that thought, as a semi-educated farm laborer and “money digger,” will remain unknown. Much of the exposure may have been face-to-face in verbal exchanges with relatives and acquaintances during the years leading up to his dictation of the Book of Mormon. Even if he was not familiar with the very exegetical and apologetic literature that I cite, it is representative, and his text can be compared and contrasted with it to great value. I push more for Smith’s familiarity with Paine which I think is unavoidable—whether or not he was always aware of responding to him, given the nature of religious experience.⁹

From Biblical Commentaries to the *Age of Reason*

Paine’s challenge to Matthew 27:51b-53 did not come out of nowhere. English exegetes were both interrogating the pericope and defending

8. See, for example, Hardy, “The Book of Mormon and the Bible,” 118–20.

9. For Smith’s schooling, and for the oral composition of his text through sermon techniques, see William Davis, “Reassessing Joseph Smith Jr.’s Formal Education,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 4 (2016): 1–58; and William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). For the dictation of the Book of Mormon, (half-) altered states of consciousness, (self-induced) hypnotism, and religious experience, see Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 240–69

it against infidels before him. Paine popularized and also radicalized an ongoing discussion and debate. In the British-American theological culture that Paine (1737–1809) and then Smith (1805–1844) shared, some of the most influential biblical commentaries were those by the Presbyterian nonconformist Matthew Poole (1624–1679), the Arminian Daniel Whitby (1638–1726), the Presbyterian nonconformist Matthew Henry (1662–1714), and the Congregationalist nonconformist Philip Doddridge (1702–1751).¹⁰ They were a mixed bag of potential vulnerability and antagonism to freethought.

It was openly acknowledged in these commentaries that Mark, Luke, and John did not contain any accounts of the Matthean earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints at or around Jesus' death. Moreover, a spate of perplexing interpretive issues was discussed but without clear resolution, chiefly who the nameless saints were, who saw them, whether they were raised from the dead prior to or following the resurrection of Jesus, and whether they had ascended to heaven or re-entered the ground to await the eschaton.¹¹

10. Twists and turns of publication and reprinting are beyond my scope, particularly since the annals for the commentaries are wonderfully cluttered with postmortem completions, enlargements, and reconfigurations. But as a signal of lasting influence and of shared British-American theological culture, the volumes of Samuel Austin Allibone's *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature, and British and American Authors . . .* (Philadelphia: Childs and Peterson; J.B. Lippincott, 1858–1871) should suffice. Poole, Whitby, Henry, and Doddridge are endorsed there along with Richard Watson, Elias Boudinot, Thomas Scott, Adam Clarke, Samuel Thomas Bloomfield, and even William Wisner, whom I will be citing. Allibone also had entries on Paine and the literary "impostor" Smith, though he did not recommend either.

11. Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible; . . . The More Difficult Terms in Each Verse are Explained, Seeming Contradictions Reconciled, Questions and Doubts Resolved, and the Whole Text Opened* (repr., New York: R. Carter, 1853), 3:141–42; Daniel Whitby, *A Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament*; repr. in *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha*, by Patrick, Lowth, Arnald, Whitby, and Lowman, edited by J. R. Pitman (London: R. Priestley, 1822), 5:222; Matthew

The exegetes also had to fight off incredulity about Matthew's unique account. As Henry described the problematic passage: "This matter is not related so fully as our curiosity would wish; for the scripture was not intended to gratify that; . . . We may raise many inquiries concerning it, which we cannot resolve . . ." In sum: "We must not covet to be wise above what is written. The relating of this matter so briefly, is a plain intimation to us, that we must not look that way for a confirmation of our faith."¹² Henry's disapproval of curiosity and covetous wisdom was a tacit reply to probing rationalist critiques at the dawn of the Enlightenment, and his disclosure that Christian belief might need to be confirmed was an involuntary admission of their vigor.¹³ Doddridge, in his commentary, did not resort to laments. He struck back and was pleased to say that "a deist lately travelling through Palestine was converted, by viewing one of these rocks," that is, the rent rocks of Matthew 27:51b, "which still remains torn asunder, not in the weakest place, but cross the veins; a plain proof that it was done in a supernatural manner."¹⁴

This was the stage onto which British expatriate Thomas Paine stepped as the first two parts of his *Age of Reason* were published in 1794 and 1795. He challenged Matthew 27:51b–53 in the second part, turning

Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament . . . with Practical Remarks and Observations* (repr., New York: R. Carter, 1827), 4:288; Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor; Or, A Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament, with Critical Notes, and a Practical Improvement of Each Section* (repr., Charlestown, Mass.: S. Etheridge, 1807), 2:555.

12. Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, 4:288.

13. See Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, 4:iv.

14. Doddridge, *Family Expositor*, 2:555. Doddridge got the anecdote from Robert Fleming who heard it from "a worthy Gentleman" on the tour with the deist. Fleming, *Christology, A Discourse Concerning Christ . . .* (London: A. Bell, 1707), 2:97–98 note c.

the observations of the biblical commentators against them at length.¹⁵ Paine devoted more space to those few verses than almost any others from the Old or New Testament. He began with the silence of the rest of the evangelists. Confusing Mark and Luke as apostles, he thought they and John could not have ignored the earthquake and the rending of the rocks; they had to be there with Matthew. More momentous was what happened after the tremor:

An earthquake is always possible, and natural, and proves nothing; but this opening of the graves is supernatural, and in point to their doctrine, their cause, and their apostleship. Had it been true, it would have filled up whole chapters of those books, and been the chosen theme, and general chorus of all the writers; but instead of this, little and trivial things, and mere prattling conversations of, he said this, and she said that, are often tediously detailed, while this most important of all, had it been true, is passed off in a slovenly manner, by a single dash of the pen, and that by one writer only, and not so much as hinted at by the rest.¹⁶

Paine then satirized the interpretive issues surrounding the appearance of the awakened dead in Matthew 27:52–53. He accused the first evangelist of being a liar and a poor one at that:

The writer of the book of Matthew should have told us who the saints were that came to life again, and went into the city, and what became of them afterwards, and who it was that saw them; for he is not hardy enough to say that he saw them himself;—whether they came out naked, and all in natural buff, he-saints and she-saints; . . . whether they

15. Although Paine wrote parts one and two in France, where he was incarcerated, for the writing of the second part he was out of jail and living in the Paris home of US ambassador James Monroe. Under those conditions, he could have had ready access to a sizable English library as well as French books, to say nothing of his prior learning in England and America. See Davidson and Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority*, 54–69, 105–7; Hughes, “Antidotes to Deism,” 35–48, 58–64; J. C. D. Clark, *Thomas Paine: Britain, America, and France in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 339–47.

16. *Theological Works of Thomas Paine*, 132–33.

remained on earth, and followed their former occupations of preaching or working; or whether they died again, or went back to their graves alive, and buried themselves.

Strange indeed, that an army of saints should return to life, and nobody know who they were, nor who it was that saw them, and that not a word more should be said upon the subject, nor these saints have any thing to tell us! Had it been the prophets who (as we are told) had formerly prophesied of these things, they must have had a great deal to say. They could have told us everything, and we should have had posthumous prophecies, with notes and commentaries upon the first, a little better at least than we have now. Had it been Moses, and Aaron, and Joshua, and Samuel, and David, not an unconverted Jew had remained in all Jerusalem. Had it been John the Baptist, and the saints of the times then present, every body would have known them, and they would have out-preached and out-famed all the other apostles. But instead of this, these saints are made to pop up like Jonah's gourd in the night, for no purpose at all, but to wither in the morning. Thus much for this part of the story.¹⁷

Paine's challenge merged a large dose of mockery and a swift indictment for lying. But the two main features of his critique were already in the commentaries. First was the trouble of the missing earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints, all absent from Mark, Luke, and John. Second was the trouble of the limited information in Matthew, yielding the inquiries of who the awakened dead were, whom they appeared to, and where they went after their appearance.

The skeptic did not just exacerbate a well-known exegetical problem, however. He also maintained, with a jeer, that if the risen saints were to be identified among the prophets and other heroes of the Old Testament, one of the options in the commentaries, there should be "posthumous prophecies" on record from these pre-Christians. Paine developed this more earnestly when he augmented the first two parts of his *Age of Reason* with a third, under the title *Examination of the Passages in the New Testament, Quoted from the Old, and Called Prophecies*

17. *Theological Works of Thomas Paine*, 133–34.

Concerning Jesus Christ. It was published in New York City in 1807. As he rejected centuries of christological veiling over Jewish scripture, all the way back to the Gospel of Matthew's fulfillment citations, Paine inadvertently called for a retro-prophecy of the events in Matthew 27:51b-53 and of the darkness in Mark as well:

Matthew concludes his book by saying, that when Christ expired on the cross, the rocks rent, the graves opened, and the bodies of many of the saints arose; and Mark says there was darkness over the land from the fifth hour until the ninth. They produce no prophesy [*sic*] for this. But had these things been facts, they would have been a proper subject for prophesy, because none but an almighty power could have inspired a fore knowledge of them, and afterwards fulfilled them. Since, then, there is no such prophesy . . . , the proper deduction is, there were no such things, and that the book of Matthew is fable and falsehood.¹⁸

Paine's full critique of Matthew, then, hinged not only on the lack of multiple attestation for the evangelist's individual claims, nor solely on the questions of the identity of the resurrected saints and so forth, but also on the fact that, unlike Matthew's fulfillment citations, these events were not supported by Old Testament prophecy. To be sure, Paine did not believe any Jewish scripture had been fulfilled in the life of Jesus. He did not expect anyone to compose the wanting prognostication for Matthew 27:51b-53 either. That is what happened, though, some twenty years later, when another resident of New York, Joseph Smith, dictated the Book of Mormon as a translation of prophetic records from the ancient Americas, imagined to be Israelite-Christian. Smith's text would present a partial solution to the tripartite problem.¹⁹

18. *Theological Works of Thomas Paine*, 241.

19. It was also in France that Paine wrote (much of) the third installment/s of the *Age of Reason*, before returning to America in 1802, but he waited another half decade to publish his *Examination of the Passages*. See Davidson and Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority*, 102–103; Hughes, "Antidotes to Deism," 77–87; Clark, *Enlightenment and Revolution*, 349. Bringing the 1794, 1795, and 1807 installments together, compendium editions were reprinted in New York during

Responses to Paine before Smith

The *Age of Reason* was widely discussed. Between the publication of its three installments and the publication of the Book of Mormon, scores of biblical commentators and other defenders of holy writ were replying to Paine. The vast majority of them were responding to the first two installments, not the third, and only a portion sought to answer his challenge to the passage in Matthew 27: the Anglican Richard Watson (1737–1816), Bishop of Llandaff, Wales; the outwardly Anglican but inwardly evangelical Thomas Scott (1747–1821); and the Presbyterian Elias Boudinot (1740–1821), a US politician and future head of the American Bible Society.²⁰ Their responses are valuable for the contrast they provide to Smith as much as for the comparanda.

Smith's residence. Most fascinating is the edition of a couple thousand copies done in New York City in 1825, sponsored by an associate and ally of Paine. Apprehensive about reprisals, the printer feigned to be operating in London, but buyers hardly worried, and the copies sold quickly. See "John Fellows to Thomas Jefferson," Oct. 3, 1825, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib025537>; also referenced in Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 535n47. A slightly earlier compendium edition, the one that I have been using, was printed jointly in London and New York City with no US trepidation: *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine* (London: R. Carlile; New York: W. Carver, 1824).

20. Watson's response to the first and second installments prompted Paine's third. For more on Watson, Scott, and Boudinot, see Davidson and Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority*, 90–91, 106, 114–15; Holland, *Sacred Borders*, 81–83, 106–7; Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 53–56, 62–63; Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 126–133; Hughes, "Antidotes to Deism," 186–91, 203–4, 259–60, 311–12, 326, 330; David Francis Mihalyfy, "Heterodoxies and the Historical Jesus: Biblical Criticism of the Gospels in the U.S., 1794–1860" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2017), 70–81; Clark, *Enlightenment and Revolution*, 348–52; Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 194, 218, 550n43; and Elizabeth Fenton, "Nephites and Israelites: *The Book of Mormon* and the Hebraic Indian Theory," in Fenton and Hickman, *Americanist Approaches*, 283–87.

About Paine's contention that there should be more accounts of the opened graves and resurrected saints besides Matthew's, Bishop Watson assumed Matthean priority and said that the "omission" of events by the second and third evangelists "does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them." The other synoptic writers' selective retelling of Matthew 27 may be explained from their different audiences and purposes. If the people to whom the saints had appeared were themselves alive when Matthew wrote, subsequently they may have been deceased when Mark and Luke came to write—no need to reiterate the appearance, then. As for the fourth gospel, it was intentionally "supplemental." Furthermore, the bishop averred, Matthew could not have been mendacious because the Jews he was writing to witnessed what did and did not transpire in Jerusalem; he could not have risked being constantly confronted, so the earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints had to be the truth.²¹ Scott applied similar logic to Mark, Luke, and John: "Matthew is generally allowed to have written before the other evangelists; had they not therefore credited his account of the miracles attending Christ's death, they would have contradicted it: for the circumstances he related were of so extraordinary and public a nature, that they could not have escaped detection, had they been false."²² Boudinot likewise stated the events were "capable of immediate contradiction and refutation, had they not been known to be true."²³

21. Richard Watson, *An Apology for the Bible, In a Series of Letters Addressed to Thomas Paine, author of a Book entitled, The Age of Reason . . .* (New York: J. Bull, 1796), 156–61.

22. Thomas Scott, *A Vindication of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Doctrines Contained in Them: Being an Answer to the Two Parts of Mr. T. Paine's Age of Reason* (New York: G. Forman, 1797), 109; see also 105–6.

23. Elias Boudinot, *The Age of Revelation. Or, The Age of Reason Shown to Be an Age of Infidelity* (Philadelphia: A. Dickins, 1801), 196.

About Paine's contention that the Matthean account of the awakened dead itself should be longer, Watson affirmed:

You amuse yourself . . . and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things . . . ; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject: . . . If I durst indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I must be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to these saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of the scripture by the boldness of conjecture.²⁴

The bishop was shifting ownership of the inquiries from the exegetes to Paine and taking a page out of Henry's commentary with its disapproval of overly curious freethinkers. Speculation on the identity of the saints and so forth in the commentaries had become a liability that Paine exploited. Accordingly, Watson retreated to the position that asking to know too much was sinful. He cast Paine as petulantly brazen, whereas he himself was satisfied with the amount of information the apostle Matthew, or rather God, had given. Scott followed suit: Paine's questions were "degrading" of scripture, as if the arch-infidel did not get cues from previous biblical commentators.²⁵ Boudinot said nothing of the interpretive issues per se, but he amplified Watson's point. Not only would Paine have no faith in Matthew regardless of the evangelist's specificity on the resurrected saints, he would be suspicious of the risen Lord too. Boudinot chastened and summoned him to repent for disbelieving the scriptural warrants that Jesus was the messiah—for instance, "the rending of the rocks (to be seen at this day)," a parenthetical allusion to the anecdote of the deist converted in the holy land. Then Boudinot stressed Paine's pride and skepticism hyperbolically: "For although Christ had appeared after his resurrection to every man in Jerusalem, nay even to all the then world, on the principle advanced in

24. Watson, *Apology for the Bible*, 159.

25. Scott, *Vindication of Divine Inspiration*, 110.

the Age of Reason, our author would not have been obliged to believe, because he himself had not seen him. But if the divine Saviour should even now appear to him," Boudinot quipped, "as he did to another unbelieving Thomas, and show him his hands and his sides, I have as great doubts of his assent to the truths of the Gospel, as the disciples had of the Jews, who refused equal evidence."²⁶

Together, these educated elites resorted to summersaults of intelligence in order to explain the missing material, and they contended that neither an increase in information from Matthew nor in revelation from Jesus would be effective because of Paine's bottomless skepticism. The unlearned Joseph Smith was more commonsensical than Watson, Scott, or Boudinot on this tally. In a concession to the skeptic, he would simply blame Jesus' other disciples for forgetting to record the appearance and ministry of the saints. And the translator of the gold bible would exhibit scarcely any satisfaction with the limited information in canonical verse. In the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Jesus would appear to the Amerindians, not for the sake of rhetorical device, but in an alternate reality of salvation history, while deists would be vanquished at last, or so Smith grew to fantasize.²⁷

26. Boudinot, *Age of Revelation*, 195–98.

27. As the young prophet may have been cognizant of, a multipronged threat to Matthew 27:51b–53 was emerging. In addition to the skeptical Paine, there were liberal German Protestant critics on the horizon, with their insidious ideas about interpolations from apocryphal gospels and their budding program of demythologization. What is more, there were commentators such as Adam Clarke in Anglophone countries aiding and abetting German critics of this "skeptical school," to the disappointment of their countrymen such as Samuel Thomas Bloomfield. See Clarke, *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments . . .* (repr., New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1825), 4:258; Bloomfield, *Recensio Synoptica Annotationis Sacrae: Being a Critical Digest and Synoptical Arrangement of the Most Important Annotations on the New Testament, Exegetical, Philological, and Doctrinal . . .* (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1826), 1:522–55. For Smith's potential use of Clarke, either in the Book of Mormon or his other writings, see, for example, Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, 42–44, 174–75, 208n57 and the studies listed there.

The Smiths and the *Age of Reason* in Vermont and New York

Paine's biting critique of revelation and revealed religion affected the Smith family, like other Americans. Per Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith Jr., her Universalist father-in-law Asael so severely recommended the *Age of Reason* that in a disagreement over Methodism, Asael hurled a copy of it at her husband, Joseph Sr., and "angrily bade him read it until he believed it."²⁸ That was when the Smiths were living in Vermont. There is some indication, although from a hostile source, that Joseph Sr. may have acted on the endorsement and gone past what Asael hoped. The Green Mountain Boys, who supposedly knew Joseph Sr., later described him as having frequently said "that the whole bible [*sic*] was the work of priestcraft . . . , that Voltairs writings was [*sic*] the best bible then extant, and Thomas Paines age of reason [*sic*], the best commentary."²⁹

Whatever the state of affairs with Joseph Sr. in Vermont before the family relocated to New York, and whatever lasting talks about Universalism and freethought the Smiths might have had as Joseph Jr. passed his adolescence in Palmyra, the *Age of Reason* was a documented topic of conversation in the village. For example, a newspaper column on "The Effects of Infidelity" was printed in the *Palmyra Register* in 1820, when Joseph Jr. was a religiously anxious minor:

The following anecdote was related about eight[een] years ago in a sermon preached by the Rev. Alphonsus Gunn [1760–1806], at Lothbury Church [in London]. "I was lately (observed Mr. Gunn) called on

28. Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 291; also referenced in Jan Ships, *Mormonism: The Story of A New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 8; Hullinger, *Smith's Response*, 35–36, 43n4; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 25–26, 567n60; Holland, *Sacred Borders*, 144, 170n52.

29. "Green Mountain Boys to Thomas C. Sharp," Feb. 15, 1844, in *Early Mormon Documents*, edited by Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books), 1:597.

to attend the death-bed of a young man at Hoxton [in East London]. On my entering the room, I found him in the greatest agony of mind. Thinking, perhaps, that it arose from that deep remorse sometimes attendant on the death bed of a sinner, I began to point him to Jesus, the Sinner's only friend, and to the glorious promises of the Gospel. When, with an agonizing look of despair, he replied, 'Ah! Sir, but I have rejected the Gospel. Some years since, I unhappily read Paine's Age of Reason; it suited my corrupt understanding; I imbibed its principles; after this, wherever I went, I did all that lay in my power to hold up the Scriptures to contempt; by this means I led others into the fatal snare, and made proselytes to infidelity. Thus I rejected God, and now he rejects me, and will have no mercy upon me.' I offered to pray by him, but he replied, 'O, no, it is in vain to pray for me!' then with a dismal groan cried out, 'Paine's Age of Reason has ruined my soul,' and instantly expired."³⁰

Long after his own demise in New York City in 1809, the skeptic was still haunting both sides of the Atlantic. Britain and the US were not so distant from one another, the reported concerns of metropolitan churchmen in England from farming life in up-state New York. This column originated in a London-based periodical; within a year, it was in the Palmyra news.³¹

The tale of the despairing deist was not the last of Paine's press coverage there. In 1826, another Palmyra newspaper, the *Wayne Sentinel*, printed a "Letter from Dr. [Benjamin] Franklin to Thomas Payne" about a draft of his that Franklin had read and counselled him to destroy for the sake of the youth, whose commitment to morality would not endure if he were to publicize his views on religion: "I would

30. *Palmyra Register*, July 12, 1820; also referenced in Hullinger, *Smith's Response*, 38, 45n24. The "effects of infidelity" are analogous in the Book of Mormon, though the outcome is not always so bleak. See Jacob 7:1–23; Mosiah 26–27; Alma 11:21–12:7, 15:3–12, 30:6–60.

31. *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 27 (Nov. 1819): 455. Before and after its printing in the *Palmyra Register*, the column was printed in the *Washington Wig* (Bridgeton, N.J.), July 10, 1820, and the *Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, Pa.), July 26, 1820.

advise you,” Franklin had penned to an unspecified recipient, “not to attempt unchaining the tiger, but to burn this piece before it is seen by any other person.”³² Further newspapers in the state and elsewhere did more than imply that the letter was about Paine’s infamous title; they prefixed stories to it asserting that the draft Franklin read was in fact the *Age of Reason*.³³ New York divine William Wisner (1782–1871) enlarged the stories into a pamphlet, “Don’t Unchain the Tiger,” amid the many anti-deist ephemera of the 1820s and ’30s.³⁴

Reverend Wisner himself spent the first half of the 1800s preaching across the western portion of the state and may well have visited Palmyra. In his memoirs, he related exchange after exchange with Universalists, infidels, male and female alike, even the rare atheist, and he told of denouncing the evils of freethought to his congregations. In one city, he organized an “infidel Bible class” by inviting the local deists and skeptics to supply him with written cases against scripture and in favor of skepticism. He then would read them aloud and dismantle them in front of his parishioners. The infidels also attended, and he kept the

32. *Wayne Sentinel*, Aug. 4, 1826; also referenced in Hullinger, *Smith’s Response*, 39, 45n26. The paper was not the first to print the letter or have it addressed to Paine. It ran years before in the *Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, Pa.), Nov. 15, 1820, without any proposal of addressee. It was printed once more in the *Adams Sentinel* (Gettysburg, Pa.), July 12, 1826, as a “Letter from Dr. Franklin to Thomas Paine.”

33. *Western Sun and General Advertiser* (Vincennes, Ind.), Sept. 16, 1826; *Black River Gazette* (Lowville, N.Y.), June 9, 1830; *Wabash Courier* (Terre-Haute, Ind.), Sept. 26, 1833.

34. The date of the tract cannot be pinpointed, not even when it was anthologized: *Tracts of the American Tract Society* 8, no. 280. For Wisner’s authorship, see the *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society . . .* (New York: F. Fanshaw, 1834), 14, wherein that reporting cycle alone the society printed 122,000 copies of it (p. 20). For its circulation and importance, see also “Don’t Unchain the Tiger: One of the Prize Tracts of the American Tract Society,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (Chicago, Ill.) 8 no. 6 (Oct. 4, 1833): 21.

weekly class going a full season.³⁵ In another town, he sermonized on “the influence of infidelity upon the moral character and happiness of men in this world,” and to demonstrate he outlined Paine’s rise and fall. Afterward, he ascertained that “one of the young men who heard it . . . had been an admirer of the ‘*Age of Reason*’ and had adopted the sentiments of its author, but had gone home from hearing the sermon and burnt the book, and had taken up his neglected Bible to learn what he must do to be saved.”³⁶ These vignettes, though packaged for consumption as literature, were nonetheless indicative of the revivalist atmosphere in western New York, as it was recalled by one Presbyterian reverend, for whom all Universalists were on the brink of spiritual ruin. In sum, the revivals were not only competitions between this or that style of Christianity; they were also battles against rural deism and skepticism.³⁷

Western New Yorkers who read the Franklin correspondence in the papers or in the many thousands of copies of Wisner’s pamphlet could not have known that the letter itself was left unaddressed, and that it was not about the *Age of Reason*, which Paine wrote several years after Franklin died in 1790.³⁸ Paine’s promoters caught the miscalculation and decried the pamphlet, even the letter, as “fraud” and “forgery.”³⁹

35. William Wisner, *Incidents in the Life of a Pastor* (New York: C. Scribner, 1851), 82–85.

36. Wisner, *Life of a Pastor*, 312.

37. For his description of the revivals as such, see Wisner, *Life of a Pastor*, esp. 271–83.

38. Albert Henry Smyth, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, Collected and Edited with a Life and Introduction* (1907; New York: Haskell House, 1970), 9:520–22.

39. “Don’t Unchain the Tiger,” *Free Enquirer* (New York) 1 no. 44 (Nov. 2, 1834): 352; “Don’t Unchain the Tiger,” *Western Examiner* (St. Louis, Miss.) 1 no. 23 (Dec. 1, 1834): 182; Calvin Blanchard, *The Life of Thomas Paine . . .* (New York: C. Blanchard, 1860), 73–74; Joseph N. Moreau, *Testimonials to the Merits of Thomas Paine . . .* (Boston: J. P. Mendum, 1874), 53–56.

But this was likely inconsequential to most. It was too alluring to have Franklin, the very person who sponsored Paine's emigration to America, also repudiate his writing and call for the burning of the *Age of Reason*. Joseph Smith Jr. did one much better by having an ancient prophet and the resurrected Jesus respond to him nearly two millennia ago.⁴⁰

The Book of Mormon qua Rejoinder to Paine

In 1827, the year after Franklin's letter "to Thomas Payne" was printed in the *Wayne Sentinel*, Smith acquired or fabricated the golden plates, if they ever existed other than as visionary objects, and he began to translate them.⁴¹ One of the ancient Amerindian prophets and apostles within their cast of characters is Samuel the Lamanite. In Smith's text, the Lamanites, named for Laman, the disobedient son of Lehi and brother of Nephi, are said to be the iniquitous branch of the Native

40. About fictive stories, it is worth noting that in a response to Paine's *Examination of the Passages*, one apologist, John B. Colvin, defended the New Testament and Christianity as a noble lie: if all scripture were phony, that would not invalidate the religion "because the 'faith' of a christian [*sic*] rests not so much on the genuineness of the books that contain his creed, as upon the correctness of the doctrines which they teach." Colvin, *An Essay Towards an Exposition of the Futility of Thomas Paine's Objections to the Christian Religion . . .* (Baltimore: Fryer and Rider, 1807), 5.

41. Acquired: If while scrying and treasure hunting Smith did discover something buried in the ground, as he said, it was not what he thought it was. Fabricated: For the both/and position that without being a fraud Smith himself 'materialized' the plates in an act akin to the ritual of transubstantiation, see Ann Taves, "History and the Claims of Revelation: Joseph Smith and the Materialization of the Gold Plates," *Numen* 61, no. 2/3 (2014): 182–207; and Taves, *Revelatory Events*, 50–65. For other purported discoveries and translations of ancient texts within the genre of "pseudobiblicism" in the US, see Shalev, *American Zion*, 108–10; and Shalev, "An American Book of Chronicles: Pseudo-Biblicism and the Cultural Origins of *The Book of Mormon*," in Fenton and Hickman, *Americanist Approaches*, 145–46.

Americans “cursed” by God with “black” or “dark” skin, whereas the other branch, the righteous Nephites, the scriptural record keepers, are “white,” “fair,” and “delightful,” except for interludes when the racist trope is inverted to an extent (see 1 Nephi 12:23, 13:15; 2 Nephi 5:21, 30:6–7; Jacob 3:5–9; Enos 1:20; Words of Mormon 1:8; Alma 3:5–12; 3 Nephi 2:15–16; 4 Nephi 1:10; Mormon 5:15–24; Moroni 9:12). At the close of the first century BCE, Samuel preaches to the backsliding Nephites. His Lamanite standing and that of other dark-skinned proselytes serves to underscore the hardheartedness and disbelief of the paler visages.⁴²

Samuel prophesies of their doom if they do not repent, and he predicts several signs that will punctuate the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus—whose ministry the dwindling ranks of faithful Amerindians have been awaiting with conspicuous detail since their Nephite and Lamanite ancestors vacated Jerusalem and sailed to the Americas. Samuel declares that at the incarnation there will be a day with no night: “And behold, there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld” (Helaman 14:5; cf. Matthew 2:1–12).⁴³ Then he pronounces that at the crucifixion there will be the opposite, the

42. For sustained assessments of the racial dynamics in Smith’s text, which can be quite sympathetic in a number of passages, see, for example, Jared Hickman, “*The Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse*,” *American Literature* 86, no. 3 (2014): 429–61; Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 31–59; and Kimberly M. Berkey and Joseph M. Spencer, “‘Great Cause to Mourn’: The Complexity of *The Book of Mormon’s* Presentation of Gender and Race,” in Fenton and Hickman, *Americanist Approaches*, 298–320.

43. The New World equivalent of the Matthean star was featured in Elias Boudinot’s writing about the Indians as Israelites; in Smith’s text it becomes literal, but there it had been metaphoric. Boudinot, *A Star in the West; Or, A Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Ten Tribes of Israel . . .* (Trenton, N.J.: D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson, and J. Dunham, 1816), i–ii; see also Shalev, *American Zion*, 127.

darkness that Paine doubted.⁴⁴ The Lamanite prophet ups the ante from three hours in the synoptic gospels (e.g., Matthew 27:45) to three days, saying that the light will vanish when Jesus expires on the cross and will only be seen again at his resurrection (Helaman 14:20).⁴⁵ Samuel also predicts the Matthean earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints, the final components of the retro-prophecy that Paine had unwittingly called for:

And the earth shall shake and tremble. And the rocks which is [*sic*] upon the face of the earth, which is both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time is solid—or the more part of it is one solid mass—shall be broken up. Yea, they shall be rent in twain and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath. And behold, there shall be great tempests. And there shall be many

44. A generation prior to Paine, the three hours of darkness at the crucifixion had been challenged by Edward Gibbon, historian of the later Roman Empire. Watson wrote the most successful reply to Gibbon, in which the bishop met the historian half-way, rationalizing but still defending scripture. By the early 1800s, Watson's responses to Gibbon and Paine were reprinted together; see, for example, Richard Watson, *Two Apologies: One for Christianity, in a Series of Letters Addressed to Edward Gibbon, Esq.; the Other for the Bible, in Answer to Thomas Paine . . .* (London: Scatcherd and Letterman, 1820), 95–102. Smith, in contradistinction to the rationalizing Watson, doubled down on the darkness.

45. In Smith's text, Jesus is the Johannine "light and life of the world" (3 Nephi 9:18; cf. John 1:4–5, 3:19, 6:33, 8:12, 9:5), so there is darkness while he is dead and entombed. In the synoptic gospels, however, the three hours of darkness occur as Jesus is on the cross, before his death. For a variety of Johannine elements within the gold bible and Smith's revelations, see Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judeo-Christian Parallels*, edited by Truman G. Madsen (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 139–54; Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Maddison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016); and Nicholas J. Frederick and Joseph M. Spencer, "John 11 in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 5, no. 1 (2018): 44–87.

mountains laid low like unto a valley. And there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains whose height thereof is great. And many highways shall be broken up; and many cities shall become desolate. And many graves shall be opened and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many. (Helaman 14:21–25)

To bolster his prognostication, Samuel informs the Nephites that he has received it from one of God's heavenly messengers: "And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater signs than these, to the intent that they might believe—that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there shall be no cause for unbelief among the children of men—and this," Samuel cautions, "to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgement might come upon them; and also if they are condemned, they bring upon themselves their own condemnation" (Helaman 14:26–29). When Samuel concludes his sermon, the Lamanite prophet is rejected by most of the Nephites, who are violently apostate, so he runs away to "his own country" where he teaches "his own people" (Helaman 16:1–7).

At the turn of the era, as the messianic passages in Nephite scripture are finally being fulfilled, and as Samuel's prophecy of the sign of the incarnation is about to be accomplished, some believe; others do not. The skeptical Nephites plan to murder the faithful if the day with no night does not happen. It does, and the Matthean birth star shines forth, but that is not enough to convince everyone (3 Nephi 1:4–23). Thirty years later, once more there are "great doubtings and disputations" about the prophesied signs of the crucifixion and resurrection (3 Nephi 8:4). In a reversal of the past episode, God/Jesus sends catastrophes to slay the wicked for their unbelief. The lethal quaking of the earth and rending of the rocks lasts three hours, the darkness three days, as witnessed by myriad survivors. Cities are destroyed. With more than a touch of revenge fantasy, the earthquake and other wrathfully

providential natural disasters serve to punish the evil doubters and disputants (3 Nephi 8:5–10:14).

Regarding the opened graves and the appearance of the resurrected saints in the Americas, the fulfillment of that key aspect of Samuel's prophecy is not narrated, but it does receive the highest certification from the risen Jesus himself when the light returns and he appears to the survivors of the earthquake. Like so many semi-doubting Thomases, he invites them to examine the wounds in his side, hands, and feet (3 Nephi 11:12–15).⁴⁶ He stays with them a while, and during his post-resurrection ministry to the Amerindians, he picks twelve disciples and checks the Nephite scriptures for completeness.⁴⁷ Looking at their records, Jesus says to his New World apostles: "I commanded my servant Samuel the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints which should arise from the dead and should appear unto many and should minister unto them." Perturbed, he asks: "Were [*sic*]

46. Paine had discussed the New Testament witnesses of the resurrection, the reluctant and doubting Thomas among them (*Theological Works*, 34–35, 136–137). As stated in the first and second parts of the *Age of Reason*, the quantity was low and the evidence insufficient, being restricted to one corner of the world. Smith's text spans both sides of the globe and multiplies the witnesses exponentially to some 2,500 people (3 Nephi 17:25). See also Hullinger (*Smith's Response*, 49, 145–46), Holland (*Sacred Borders*, 146–47), and Brown (*Smith's Translation*, 142–44) on the Book of Mormon and the regionalism of the Bible.

47. Paine had discussed the foundation of Christianity too (*Theological Works*, 43–44). As stated in the first part of the *Age of Reason*, Jesus was Jewish and did not found "a new religion" or "new system," unlike Moses and Muhammed, who did: Christianity was devised by the authors of the New Testament and other "mythologists" who palmed it off on Jesus. But in Smith's text, after Jesus calls the twelve, he teaches them to baptize, to bless the bread and wine of communion, and he gives them other ecclesiological instructions, even informing them what the name of the church should be (3 Nephi 11:18–41, 18:1–16, 27:1–12). See also Brown (*Smith's Translation*, 158–60) on the Book of Mormon, Protestant factions, and the hitch of "Getting from Bible to Church."

it not so?" The disciples attest: "Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled." Jesus goes on to reproach them: "How be it that ye have not written this thing?—that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them." Then Smith's narrator editorializes: one of the disciples "remembered that this thing had not been written. And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written. Therefore it was written according as he commanded" (3 Nephi 23:9–13).

Jesus is not checking for the completeness of the Nephite scriptures but rather the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John. He already knows the fulfillment of the key aspect of Samuel's prophecy is missing from the Amerindian bible before he commands his disciples to record it. Without having seen the Nephite records, he says to them: "Behold, other scriptures I would that ye should write that ye have not" (3 Nephi 23:6). Obviously, Jesus' omniscience covers the contents of the New Testament gospels as well, where Matthew's is the sole account of the earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints. From the list of items in Samuel's prophecy of Matthew 27:51b–53, it is striking that Jesus isolates the appearance of the awakened dead. "An earthquake is always possible, and natural, and proves nothing," as Paine stated; "but this opening of the graves is supernatural. . . . Had it been true, it would have filled up whole chapters of those books, and been the chosen theme, and general chorus of all the writers; but instead . . . this most important of all . . . is passed off in a slovenly manner, by a single dash of the pen, and that by one writer only, and not so much as hinted at by the rest."⁴⁸ In the Book of Mormon, when Jesus reprimands

48. *Theological Works*, 133. It is also striking that in 3 Nephi 24, Smith's Jesus then pivots from Matthew 27 to Malachi 3. Paine had attacked them both consecutively in that order (*Theological Works*, 241–42), in his *Examination of the Passages*, as he made his way through the quotations of the Old Testament in the gospels, from Matthew 27:51b–53, where no prophecy is quoted, to Mark 1:1–3, where the preaching of John the Baptist is supposed to be a fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. This Matthew-Malachi order, shared between Paine and Smith,

his New World disciples for not recording the fulfillment of the key aspect of Samuel's prophesy, he obliquely reprimands Mark, Luke, and John for not supporting Matthew, the first evangelist. After Jesus gets them to attest to the fulfillment of Samuel's words about the awakened dead, thus corroborating the verses in Matthew—they were there and saw the appearance of the saints but forgot to write it down—Jesus censures the disciples themselves for abandoning Matthew to Paine's derisive challenge.⁴⁹

is perhaps the strongest suggestion, such as it is, that Smith may have had a copy of Paine at hand.

49. Granted that one of Smith's main goals behind composing the prophecy and fulfillment was to protect Matthew all along, a bit of a puzzle persists, namely why he did not go on to compose an account of the appearance and ministry of the awakened dead in the New World. In my estimation, only a couple of scenarios are plausible. Either Smith decided the task was too hard: biblical commentators had reached a similar verdict in their efforts to explicate Matthew 27:52–53, and Paine's satire rendered the interpretive issues much more difficult. Or he apprehended that whatever he composed in the Book of Mormon, he could never rewrite the actual gospel manuscripts, which was ultimately Paine's demand. Hickman ("Amerindian Apocalypse," 452, 457n4) thinks Smith has the Christian savior unmask Nephite racism against Lamanites and by extension the white supremacy of British-American churches; the fact that there is no account of the appearance and ministry of the awakened dead after Jesus' reminder and command is due to perpetual Nephite prejudice. Analyzing the scene for race as well, Mueller (*Mormon People*, 49–50, 242n82) diverges from Hickman in that he thinks Jesus commands the disciples to record the prophecy of the saints' appearance, not its fulfillment in 3 Nephi, and they do, which is why the prophecy can be read in the book of Helaman. See also D. Lynn Johnson, "The Missing Scripture," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2 (1994): 84–93. It seems indisputable to me, however, that Smith's Jesus is focused on the recording of prophecy fulfilled. He asks the disciples why they failed to write that the saints "did arise and appear" and "did minister" (3 Nephi 23:11), not merely that the saints would. Be that as it may, an implication of my argument is that this dominical care has more to do with defending and supporting the first canonical gospel than it does with integrating the subaltern into the canon, though Smith certainly made a deliberate choice of a Lamanite to utter the retro-prophecy Paine called for, just as the Bible's particularism was another deist critique.

Placed in the context of biblical commentaries as well as other apologetic responses to the *Age of Reason*, Smith and his text stick out as intrepidly creative, albeit fantastical. Whereas Henry's method for dealing with rationalist critiques was to denounce them as curiosity and covetous wisdom, and whereas Bishop Watson told Paine he was afraid that conjecture alone would be tantamount to steadying the ark of God's sacred word, Smith had no qualms creating another entire bible in the process of rescuing Matthew 27:51b-53—among his text's pluriform drives. As with the darkness at the crucifixion, he embellished the natural phenomenon of the earthquake to the degree of the blatantly preordained.⁵⁰ He also brought the evidence to the skeptics. While Doddridge and Boudinot could point to Matthew's rent rocks visible in far-off Jerusalem, Smith could gesture toward any one of the taller mountains in the western hemisphere as proof that God/Jesus directed nature, that Jesus was the Son of God, and that prophecy had been fulfilled. So deists in the US did not need to travel to the holy land; they only needed to consult the Book of Mormon and a topographical map. If they persisted in their faithlessness—and Smith may have grasped that he could not persuade most of them—as some consolation believers might feel assured that infidels would be destroyed at the second coming of Christ, on the model of apostate Nephites' ruin. Like Boudinot, Smith summoned skeptics to repent and believe the scriptural warrants of Jesus' messiahship. But for Smith, unlike Boudinot, extra-canonical post-resurrection appearances of the Christian savior across the globe were not hypothetical (3 Nephi 15:11-16:3; see also 2 Nephi 29:12-13).

When it came to Matthew's opened graves and resurrected saints absent from the rest of the gospels, Smith broke with exegetes and other apologists. He conceded to the arch-infidel that the omitted material

50. Sans context, Roberts (*Studies of the Book of Mormon*, 238) aptly perceived the embellishment already in the 1920s.

did constitute a discrepancy in scripture, and employing some commonsense rationalism, he blamed the disciples for their forgetfulness. He was willing to portray the second, third, and fourth evangelists as fallible in order to guard the essence of biblical infallibility—in this case, the trustworthiness of singular truths in the first gospel, which had to be vouchsafed at all costs if any of the evangelists were to retain eyewitness and apostolic authority.

This solution in 3 Nephi—to the problem of Matthew 27:51b–53, exacerbated by Paine—brought with it an unresolved tension. If the risen Jesus could remind and command the disciples in the New World to write, he could have done the same in the Old. Where, then, were the Markan, Lukan, and Johannine accounts of the appearance of the awakened dead? Perhaps Smith resolved the tension as he dictated the remainder of the Book of Mormon. In the final segment of the text, which he dictated last but which comprises the start of the narrative, Smith had the sixth-century-BCE prophet Nephi, son of Lehi, report a sweeping apocalyptic and anti-Catholic vision of Europe/Britain and colonial America. In Nephi’s vision, the Bible is transferred from the Jews to the Christian Gentiles, and from them to a remnant of Israel living in the Americas: the once Christian Indians. But en route, the Bible is corrupted by a “great and abominable church” that is said to have “taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26). Nephi sees that “other books” would be revealed in order to prove to the Christian Gentiles, the Amerindians, and the balance of the scattered Jewish population “that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true,” and in order to “make known the plain and precious things which have been take away from them” (1 Nephi 13:39–40; *nota bene* the synecdoche of traditional authorship: the Old Testament is subsumed under “the records of the prophets,” and the New Testament under “the records of the apostles”). One of those “other books” is the Book of Mormon itself. And one of those “plain and precious parts”

that were “taken away” from the Bible is arguably the passage corresponding to Matthew 27:51b-53 that seemed to be missing from Mark, Luke, and John.⁵¹ Smith certainly had these unique verses in Matthew on the brain while dictating 1–2 Nephi.⁵² As back-up to Samuel’s prophecy from the first century BCE, Smith also produced a shorter one for the Matthean earthquake and rent rocks, as well as the darkness, and attributed it to an Old World prophet named Zenos, whose words are supposed to have been on the brass plates, a fuller, Christianized version of Jewish scripture that Lehi and company possessed when they sailed to the Americas. Smith had Nephi echo the words of Zenos and Samuel during the report of his apocalyptic vision (1 Nephi 12:4; cf. Helaman 14:20–27), and he quotes and/or echoes them twice more in the opening of the gold bible (1 Nephi 19:10–12; 2 Nephi 26:3), thereby

51. Even while the text speaks of distorted biblical manuscripts and situates itself as more scripture, it aims to “establish the truth” of the Old and New Testaments (1 Nephi 13:40). This bears some resemblance to the Qur’an. See Räsänen, “Creative Interpreter,” 69; Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, edited by Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 140. The similarities may not only be structural. Besides anti-Catholic polemic from Protestants and criticism from deists about the corruption of the Bible, Smith could have picked up knowledge of Muslim belief from such best sellers as Charles Buck’s *Theological Dictionary*. Buck had entries on the “Koran” and “Mahometanism,” including overviews of Muslim belief in lost books of Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Abraham; belief in the corruption of Jewish and Christian scripture; and belief in the restoration of that scripture through God’s angel and prophet. Buck, *A Theological Dictionary: Containing Definitions of All Religious Terms . . .* (repr., Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1815), 248–53, 279–88. For some usage of Buck in Smith’s other more collaborative writings, see, for example, John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith, an American Prophet* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 95–96.

52. Davis (*Visions in a Seer Stone*, 155–57) hypothesizes that Helaman 13–15, 1 Nephi 12, and 2 Nephi 26 incorporate Smith’s summaries of the narrative, committed to memory.

pushing the prediction many hundreds of years further into the past, from Samuel to Nephi to Zenos.⁵³

Smith's finished picture was somewhat incomplete. As he dictated the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite and its fulfillment, he blamed the apostles for the missing verses. As he continued to dictate, he also alleged that the Catholics had subtracted things from the Bible, things that his text would restore. Thus altogether: the disciples forget; Jesus reminds and commands them to write, and they do (in the New World); but then a "great and abominable church" deletes their record/s (in the Old World, along with the writings of Zenos on the plates of brass), which is why there is no Markan or Lukan or Johannine account of the Matthean earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints. Smith's fellow Protestants could read a kind of parallel account in his text, although the fulfillment of the key aspect of Samuel's prophecy was not narrated there either. For that, readers would need to flip to Matthew 27 in their Bibles. They would need to go back to the KJV.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon had and continues to have many functions. In the early 1800s, one of them was to defend the Bible against threats such as deism in general and Thomas Paine in particular. Paine's attack ranged broadly, including assaults on the traditional authorship of the books of Moses and Isaiah, the framework of christological interpretation of the Old Testament, and the existence of a historical Jesus. In this article, I've spotlighted what I consider to be the most blatant response to Paine within Smith's text, but let me rehearse a caveat from before: how Smith was exposed to Paine is unknown. No copy of the *Age of Reason* can be definitively put into his hands, since he did not

53. See also Hullinger (*Smith's Response*, 143–51) and Brown (*Smith's Translation*, 140, 152–54) on the Book of Mormon and the in-house production of prophecy fulfilled.

mention or quote Paine in any of his translations, revelations, teachings, or other papers.⁵⁴ Then again, neither would that be a prerequisite for contextualization. Samuel the Lamanite's prophecy and its fulfillment are clearly of a piece with Anglophone discussion and debate surrounding the Matthean earthquake, rent rocks, opened graves, and resurrected saints. Paine was not the only participant in this, not even the only challenger, but it was Paine who drew the most attention to the problematic passage, and it was Paine who said that there ought to be a prophecy of the events.⁵⁵ If Smith had no familiarity with Paine, and if his text just happened to supply that prophecy, the coincidence would be astounding. A connection must be made.

Nothing, however, could be more banal than making connections in literature from the same cultural and linguistic milieu. Comparisons and contrasts have been my central interest. Apart from his literary creativity, his claims to be a revelator, and his ignorance of ancient tongues, what distinguished the youthful Joseph Smith within exegetical and

54. In Minute Book 1 of the Joseph Smith Papers is a complaint and request for scrutiny that Smith filed with the Kirtland High Council in 1835 about the conduct of one of his followers, Almon Babbitt. Smith's brother William had hosted a debate club or school, inter alia, on the question of whether divine revelation was indispensable to happiness. Smith attended, helping with the positive case, but he became uncomfortable after the negative was presented too well, so he wanted the school to halt. The brothers clashed badly over this and other grievances. On William's side, Babbitt said Smith was a sore loser in debate, and that there was no cause for disbandment of the club since there was no harm in playing devil's advocate. To illustrate, Babbitt boasted "he could read Tho. Paine or any other work without being swerved," insinuating Smith's constitution was frail, all of which must have hit a sensitive spot for Smith to launch formal proceedings. See Minutes, 28 Dec. 1835, 132, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-28-december-1835/2>.

55. For another challenge to Matthew 27:51b-53 after the fashion of the second part of the *Age of Reason* but lacking the third part's call for a retro-prophecy, see the anonymous *Critical Remarks on the Truth and Harmony of the Four Gospels . . . by a Free-Thinker* (1827, 82-84).

apologetic ranks was his concession to skeptics of the Bible that the Christian scriptures were at variance and that they had been corrupted. The disciples forgot to record some things, plus some things had been “taken away from,” not added to, “the gospel of the Lamb” in the post-apostolic phase of manuscript copying. As Protestant as his beliefs were in diverse areas, Smith’s model of corruption by omission was not. Out of necessity, he made a move that few if any others ventured to make in order to save God’s word from the onslaught of skeptics: he admitted the gospels were inconsistent, while chalking it up to the humanness of the evangelists and providing a parallel scriptural account as well as prophetic utterances to compensate. Precisely because Smith was uncredentialed, he could disregard apologetic dogma—from the Anglican archdeacon William Paley (1743–1805) to the Baptist restorationist Alexander Campbell (1788–1866)—that gospel omissions were not discrepancies or contradictions no matter how many infidels came forward.⁵⁶ The scribe did not respond to Paine in the learned discourse of qualified exegetes and apologists. But with his folk-magic peep stone, he did defend the Bible, taking Paine more seriously than many trained clergy and academics.⁵⁷

In fact, by having an Israelite-Amerindian prophet forecast the events in Matthew 27:51b–53, and by having Christ descend from the clouds to guarantee that the prediction’s realization be written down,

56. William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* . . . (repr., Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1803), 271–74; Alexander Campbell, “Letters to Humphrey Marshall, Esq. Letter V,” *Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, Va.) 2 no. 4 (Apr. 4, 1831): 150–56. In the midst of his debate with Humphrey Marshall that spun off from his larger debate with Robert Owen, Alexander Campbell critiqued the Book of Mormon. He noticed the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite and the recording of its fulfillment, but he could not or would not appreciate what Smith was doing as a co-defender of the Bible. Campbell, “Delusions,” *Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, Va.) 2 no. 2 (Feb. 7, 1831): 89.

57. On learned versus popular discourse in British-American biblical interpretation, see Mihalyfy, “Heterodoxies and the Historical Jesus,” 14–23.

Smith composed what is probably the longest and most elaborate answer to Paine's challenge ever imagined. This has not been recognized before in scholarship maybe because the Book of Mormon is often studied in terms of revelation and an open canon of scripture. No either/or approach to the text is required, and I do not deny it had that extracanonical function and many others already in the beginnings of Mormonism.⁵⁸ It was also meant to defend the Old and New Testaments at a time when Matthew was still assumed to be the first gospel and hence the frontline for Bible-believing Christians to hold against freethinkers, deists, infidels, and skeptics.⁵⁹ The overall biblical

58. For recent studies of how Smith's text undermines the fixity of holy and secular writ and how it mimics print copies of the Bible so as to position itself with biblical weight and substance, see, respectively, Elizabeth Fenton, "Open Canons: Sacred History and American History in *The Book of Mormon*," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanist* 1, no. 2 (2013): 339–61; and Seth Perry, "The Many Bibles of Joseph Smith: Textual, Prophetic, and Scholarly Authority in Early-National Bible Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 3 (2016): 750–775; Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 110–28. I do not deny, but I do wonder whether that may be ancillary.

59. Matthew 27:51b–53 is one of several passages from the first gospel supported in the Book of Mormon. Before the Common Era, Nephi's apocalyptic vision encompasses the virgin birth (1 Nephi 11:13–21; see also 2 Nephi 17:14; Alma 7:10; cf. Matthew 1:18–25; and Luke 1:26–38). The same Nephi preaches a proleptic homily on why Jesus would be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (2 Nephi 31:4–13; cf. Matthew 3:14–15 KJV). Then over a half millennium later, when the resurrected Christ appears to the Amerindians after the light of the star at his nativity (Helaman 14:5; 3 Nephi 1:21; cf. Matthew 2:1–12), and after the darkness and the earthquake at his death, he delivers the Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 12–14; cf. Matthew 5–7). Unique to Matthew (and Luke), any of these passages would have been an easy critical target, and Paine assailed the virgin birth with as much choler as the resurrection (*Theological Works*, 33–34, 112–14, 120, 127–28, 145, 215–19, 221–24). There are, as well, many subtler examples of Matthean phraseology from the KJV used creatively in Smith's text having nothing to do with defense of the Bible. For some within the words of Samuel the Lamanite, see Fenton, "Nephites and Israelites," 290; and Berkey and Spencer, "Complexity," 301–5.

apologetic thrust of Smith's text deserves more consideration, which will be of significance not only for understanding the impulses of his movement in the early 1800s but also for sussing out what type of bonds the assorted Latter-day Saints are to have to the Bible, and whatever tenuous ties to biblical criticism, in our information age—as faith is yet again in crisis.



"Sacrament of the Fourth Endowment,"
by Frank McEntire

CUNNING AND DISORDERLY: EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY WITCH TRIALS OF JOSEPH SMITH

Manuel W. Padro

Joseph Smith Jr. found himself in court many times throughout his life. Historians argue that his problematic relationship with the law began in 1826 when he faced disorderly person charges in Bainbridge, New York. According to the pretrial sources, some of Josiah Stowell's family members charged that Joseph Smith claimed to have supernatural powers: Horace Stowell and Arad Stowell claimed that he used seer stones to see lost, stolen, and hidden things and to seek treasure.¹ An additional disorderly person hearing followed in 1829 in Lyons, New York. In 1830, a disorderly person charge brought Joseph Smith back to court in Bainbridge, New York. In the same year, a final disorderly person charge

1. Appendix: Reminiscence of William D. Purple, 28 Apr. 1877 [*State of New York v. JS-A*],” 3, The Joseph Smith Papers (hereafter JSP), <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-remembrance-of-william-d-purple-28-april-1877-state-of-new-york-v-js-a/1>; Appendix: Docket Entry, 20 Mar. 1826 [*State of New York v. JS-A*], 1, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-docket-entry-20-march-1826-people-v-js/1>.

took him to court in Colesville, New York.² Since these events, there has been a vigorous discussion over whether Smith's implication in these practices should disqualify his prophetic claims. This framing of the charges has sometimes overshadowed the legal debates.³

Previous attempts to understand these legal events have assumed that these cases were built upon early examples of anti-fraud legislation.⁴ The basis of this interpretation is the use of the word "pretended" and allegations of "juggling," or sleight-of-hand, which appear in both New York's 1813 disorderly person statute and the accounts of Joseph Smith's court proceedings. However, reading these cases in terms of fraud may result from a cultural misunderstanding between modern researchers and their nineteenth-century subjects. For instance, Dan

2. History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], 42–48, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/48>; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk. 8, 5–7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/97>; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk. 9, 12–13, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/116>; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk 10, 1, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/117>; Joseph Knight, "Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, Circa 1835–1847," in *Early Mormon Documents* (hereafter *EMD*), 5 vols., edited by Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 4:22–24; Newel Knight, "Newel Knight Journal, Circa 1846," in *EMD*, 4:30–35; Hamilton Child, "Hamilton Child Account," in *EMD*, 4:220–21.

3. See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed (1945; New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 16–33; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 48–52; Jan Shippo, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading to a More Comprehensive interpretation of Joseph Smith," in *The New Mormon History*, edited by D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2009), 53–74; Gordon A. Madsen, "Being Acquitted of a 'Disorderly Person' Charge in 1826," in *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith's Legal Encounters*, edited by Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker, and John Welch, (Provo: BYU Studies, 2014), 71–92.

4. Madsen, "Being Acquitted," 71–92.

Vogel noted that Justice Neeley, who oversaw the 1826 case, was interested in allegedly pretended powers not economic deception.⁵

This article proposes that Joseph Smith's early trials were about "pretended witchcraft and magic"⁶ and the related thoughtcrime of "pretended religion," categories of crime generated during the Enlightenment to categorize unorthodox religious traditions as witchcraft while negating their claims to miraculous or supernatural powers. Smith's defense that he really was a seer was irrelevant because the legal system categorized the spiritual practice of treasure seeking as pretended witchcraft and magic.

To understand Joseph Smith's interactions with New York's 1813 disorderly person statute, historians must evaluate the historical and cultural trends associated with the legislative precedent that contributed to the 1813 statute. This comparative method has been a standard in witchcraft studies for decades.⁷ Throughout the analysis of these laws and charges, I use evidence from Joseph Smith's life outside the courtroom to demonstrate that fear of witchcraft motivated these charges while expressions of that fear were suppressed in the later narratives of these legal persecutions. Evidence outside the courtroom demonstrates that the conspiracies and persecutions endured by Joseph Smith were echoes of the witchcraft belief exemplified more than a century earlier in Salem, Massachusetts.

5. Dan Vogel, "Editorial Note: Bainbridge (NY) Court Record 20 March 1826," *EMD* 4:244.

6. Owen Davies and Willem De Blecourt, ed., *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004) 6–7.

7. Thomas Waters, "'They Seem to Have All Died Out': Witches and Witchcraft in *Lark Rise to Candleford* and the English Countryside, c. 1830–1930," *Historical Research* 87 no. 235 (Feb. 2014), 136–37.

Believers' Demonology and Diabolical Witchcraft Legislation

The New York disorderly persons statute belongs to a specific legislative history aimed at magic and witchcraft. Legislation aimed at policing treasure seeking, the use of seer stones, and finding lost and stolen items through a gift from God or other supernatural means was meant to curb the influence of “the cunning-folk.”⁸ Cunning-folk were folk-Christian healers whom religious authorities conflated with “diabolical witches” in early modern Europe, an imaginary category of people who were alleged to renounce their baptism and swear loyalty to the devil and his war on Christendom.⁹ Folk-Christian beliefs covered a range of magical practices. The King Henry Witchcraft Act of 1542 marked the earliest Anglophone legislation aimed at curbing treasure seeking. Queen Elizabeth’s Witchcraft Act of 1563 repealed and replaced King Henry’s Act and was subsequently superseded by the King James Witchcraft Act of 1604.¹⁰ All three intended to control the diabolical witch,

8. Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 10–11, 20, 59, 73, 93–96, 120, 126, 174–77, 180.

9. Davies, *Popular Magic*, 61–62, 63, 185–96; Patrick J. Donmoyer, *Powwowing in Pennsylvania: Healing Rituals of the Dutch Country* (Kutztown: Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center of Kutztown University, 2017), 15–41; David W. Kriebel, *Powwowing Among the Pennsylvania Dutch: A Traditional Medical Practice in the Modern World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 13–62, 261–62. See also Laura Stokes, *Demons of Urban Reform: Early European Witch Trials and Criminal Justice, 1430–1530* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 3. For the witch as an imagined category of people, see Juliette Wood, “The Reality of Witch Cults Reasserted: Fertility and Satanism,” in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, edited by Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (Houndsmill, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

10. Barbara Rosen, “Laws and Punishments,” in *Witchcraft in England 1558–1618*, edited by Barbara Rosen (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 51–58.

but their language reveals their intent to penalize the cunning-folks' spiritual practices. This was also true of other acts passed throughout the British Isles.¹¹ In 1692, the Massachusetts colony passed a witchcraft act based on the King James Act of 1604, explicitly targeted cunning-folk practices, including treasure seeking.¹² This was the cornerstone upon which all Anglophone witchcraft legislation was founded, including the pretended witchcraft legislation of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

The cultural conversation around demonology informed this legislation's development. Early modern demonologies began in a Roman Catholic environment obsessed with controlling heresy.¹³ These works fused ideas from the Bible, Patristic writings of the early church, the Lives of Saints, Greco-Roman literature, and classical poetry to construct a historical foundation of the "witch" stereotype. This stereotype combined with diabolized depictions of popular fairy belief, folk-Christianity deemed superstitious by religious authorities, heresy, and popular concerns about *maleficium*. Continental believers' demonologies targeted the folk-Christian observances of the cunning-folk as

11. Davies, *Popular Magic*, 4–9. Julian Goodare, *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 12; Julian Goodare, "The Scottish Witchcraft Act," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 74 no. 1 (Mar. 2005): 39–67; Andrew Sneddon, *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland*, (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 27. For more information on the relationship between Scottish, English and Irish legislation, see Sneddon, "Witchcraft Legislation and Legal Administration," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland*, 25–33.

12. Manuel Padro, "Redemption: The Treasure Quest and the Wandering Soul," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 40 no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2020): 57.

13. Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (State Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003).

examples of superstition and a living tradition of witchcraft.¹⁴ This tool could be abused against a wide variety of people regardless of the content of their beliefs and practices. For example, demonologist Nicholas Rémy claimed that a woman whose practices were completely orthodox could still be guilty of witchcraft, that witches were guilty of imitating Elijah and Elisha, and that witches were guilty of using religion to mask their alleged diabolism.¹⁵ Thus folk-Christian practices were easily distorted into diabolical witchcraft by religious and legal authorities.

English demonologies appeared in the decades after the English Reformation when religious leaders led “a Henrician assault on popular religion.”¹⁶ Fear of cunning-folk carried over to North America, where Cotton Mather attributed the rise of witchcraft in New England to the arrival of Quakers, cunning-folk, and Native American shamans.¹⁷ When Richard Boulton wrote one of the last significant

14. Fae Honeybell, “Cunning Folk and Wizards in Early Modern England” (master’s thesis, University of Warwick, 2010), 67–69; Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, translated by Randy A. Scott (Toronto, ON: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies Victoria University in the University of Toronto, 1995); Martin Del Rio, *Investigations into Magic*, translated by P. G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000).

15. Nicholas Remy, *Demonaltry Libri Tres*, edited by Montague Summers, translated by E. A. Ashwin, (1595; Secaucus, N.J.: University Books, n.d.), 32, 146, 156.

16. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (1992; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 415; William Perkins, *A Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, UK: Centrell Ledge, 1618); George Gifford, *A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles by Witches and Sorcerers* (London: Toby Cooke, 1587); George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft* (London: Printed by R.F. and F.K., 1603); Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witch-Craft* (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1617); Richard Bernard, *A Guide to Grand-Jury Men divided into Two Books*, (London: Printed by Felix Kingston for Ed. Blackmore, 1627.)

17. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana Books I and II*, edited by Kenneth B. Murdock and Elizabeth W. Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

believers' demonologies in England, paraphrasing Exodus 22:18, he asserted, "wise Women are not fit to live," without elaboration.¹⁸ He fully expected his eighteenth-century audience to understand that the cunning-folk were the witches targeted in English demonology and anti-witchcraft law. At the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, Ezra Stiles would preach a sermon conflating cunning-folk activities and Native American spiritual practices with witchcraft. He did so to "lay this whole Iniquity open, that all the remains of it might be rooted out."¹⁹ Concerns over the diabolical witch and the cunning-folk would continue in the Anglophone world into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁰

Skeptical Demonology and Pretended Witchcraft Legislation

Belief in the "diabolical witch" was the orthodox position between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, but there were also detractors. The Dutch physician Johann Weyer argued that the devil took advantage of imbalances in the humor of black bile to produce a mental illness (melancholy). He argued that the devil did so to generate illusions that deceived people into believing that witches were real and that magic was

University Press, 1977), 321–341. See also Daniel Defoe, *A System of Magick, or, A History of the Black Art*, (London: Andrew Miller, 1728).

18. Richard Boulton, *The Possibility and Reality of Magick, Sorcery, and Witchcraft, Demonstrated, or a Vindication of a Compleat History of Magick* (London: Printed for J Roberts, 1722), 134

19. Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, edited by Friederich Bowditch Dexter (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901), 385–86.

20. Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999); Owen Davies, *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and Magic in Nineteenth-century Somerset* (Trowbridge, UK: David & Charles, 2012); Owen Davies, *America Bewitched: The Story of Witchcraft After Salem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

efficacious.²¹ Weyer still targeted cunning-folk practices and conflated them with necromancy, but he denied their efficacy. English skeptic Reginald Scott argued that the sorcerers of the Bible, the religious authorities of the pagan world, Catholic priests, and cunning-folk—whom he called “cozening witches”—all utilized sleight of hand and deception, not actual demonic powers, to lead people into idolatry or to deceive them.²² These skeptical demonologists described the beliefs and practices of pagan religions, Catholicism, Christian enthusiasts, and the cunning-folk as false prophecy, legerdemain, juggling, and pretended powers. They remained a vocal but marginalized position within demonology throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

By the eighteenth century, skeptical demonology replaced believing demonology as the dominant view, and unorthodox spiritual practices came to be defined as pretended by those in power. In the Anglophone world, this included the practices of cunning-folk, gypsies, Catholics, and Indigenous peoples. However, it also included the beliefs and practices of charismatic Christians pejoratively labeled “enthusiasts.” For example, Reverend Francis Hutchinson cited the beliefs and practices of radical Protestants known as the French Prophets as pretended. In his book on this religious minority, he consistently defined charismatic Christian claims to spiritual power as enthusiasm, pretended, legerdemain, and juggling.²³ The King George Witchcraft Act of 1735 ended

21. Johann Weyer, “De Praestigiis Daemonum,” in *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance*, edited by George Mora (Binghamton: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991).

22. Reginald Scott, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, Eliot Stock, 1886). This position was taken up by Thomas Ady in *A Perfect Discovery of Witchcraft* (London: Printed for R.I., 1661). It was also the paradigm of John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London: Printed by J.M., 1677), 32–34. See also Robert Filmer, *An Advertisement to the Jury-Men, of England*, (London: Printed by I.G. for Richard Royston, 1653); John Wagstaffe, *The Question of Witchcraft Debated*, 2nd ed. (London: Edw. Millington, 1671).

23. Francis Hutchinson, *A Short View of the Pretended Spirit of Prophecy* (London: Printed for John Morphew, 1708).

diabolical witchcraft as a legal category in England and Scotland and made “pretended” the legal standard in Enlightenment England.²⁴

The King George Witchcraft Act of 1735 developed within a broader legal environment that had produced similar statutes throughout Europe.²⁵ The first of these was the French Edict of 1692, which reclassified witchcraft into crimes like poisoning, sacrilege, and pretended powers. Notably, a similar law produced in the same environment defined Protestantism as a pretended religion and penalized Protestant leaders for advocating pretended religion.²⁶ In colonial America, the state used anti-vagrancy legislation to control religious deviants like Jesuits, Quakers, and Enthusiasts by labeling them vagabonds and disorderly persons, then penalizing them for breaking vagrancy law.²⁷

Skeptical witchcraft legislation continued to be developed in the American colonies and then the United States into the nineteenth century.²⁸ When New York drafted the 1813 disorderly person statute, it continued this trend by utilizing the language of early European

24. Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations: c.1650-c.1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 141–42.

25. Brian P. Levack, “The End of Prosecutions,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 75–76; Roy Porter, “Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic and Liberal Thought,” in Ankarloo and Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 211; Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9–27, 114–46.

26. King Louis XIV, *AN EDICT OF THE French King, Prohibiting all Publick Exercise of the Pretended Reformed Religion in his Kingdom* (N.P: G.M., 1686).

27. Massachusetts, *The book of the general lawues and libertyes concerning the inhabitants of the Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Printed by Matthew Day according to order of the General Court, 1648). For statutes targeting Anabaptists, see pages 1–2; Heresy, see page 24; and Jesuits see page 26; and Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (1967; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 186.

28. Davies, *America Bewitched*, 45–47, 51–55.

witchcraft legislation. The relevant portion of the law addresses vagrancy and defines a disorderly person as “all jugglers [those who cheat or deceive by sleight of hand or tricks of extraordinary dexterity], and . . . all persons pretending to have skill in physiognomy, palmistry, or like crafty science, or pretending to tell fortunes, or to discover where lost goods may be found.”²⁹ This statute had much in common with the anti-vagrancy and pretended witchcraft legislation of the Anglophone world of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, a product of a larger legal environment that employed the King George Witchcraft Act of 1735 as a model.³⁰ This model preemptively defined religious and spiritual unorthodoxy as pretended witchcraft, magic, or religion. By categorizing people’s beliefs and practices as pretended this legislation allowed the state to discriminate against unorthodox spiritual traditions by deliberately conflating them with criminal deception.

Legislation based on skeptical demonology continued in nineteenth-century England with the 1824 Act for the Punishment of Idle and Disorderly Persons, and Rogues and Vagabonds, in that Part of Great Britain called England.³¹ This act criminalized “every person pretending or professing to tell fortunes, or using any subtle Craft, Means,

29. Madsen, “Being Acquitted,” 74.

30. Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby, *Enacting Power: The Criminalization of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1760–2011* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2013); Government of Canada, “Criminal Code: Version of Section 365 from 2003-01-01 to 2018-12-12,” Justice Laws Website, accessed Mar. 19, 2020, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-365-20030101.html>; Cortenay Ilbert, “Legislation of the Empire, 1895,” *Journal of the Society of Comparative Religion* 1 (1896–1897): 90–98; The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development of South Africa, “Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957,” accessed on Nov. 13, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/1957-003.pdf>; Malcom Voyce, “Maori Healers in New Zealand: The Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907,” *Oceania* 60, no. 2 (Dec. 1989), 102–10.

31. “1824: 5 George 4 c.83: Vagrancy Act,” The Statutes Project (website), accessed August 27, 2021, <https://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/nineteenth-century/5-geo-iv-c-83-vagrancy-act-1824/>.

or Device, by Palmistry or otherwise, to deceive and impose.”³² According to Owen Davies, the clause was “widely used in prosecuting rural cunning-folk.”³³ Throughout the British Empire and its former colonies, the government used anti-vagrancy legislation and skeptical witchcraft legislation to categorize people’s genuine beliefs and religious practices as “pretended” as late as the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³⁴

Besides Joseph Smith, only one other well-known example of disorderly person prosecution for treasure seeking in early America employs the word “pretended” to describe alleged supernatural gifts—the disorderly person charges against Dr. Luman Walters.³⁵ Walters’s case is only known due to newspaper articles discussing a documented case in New Hampshire.³⁶ Because the notes from Luman Walters’s trial are not available, it is impossible to explore how the court used “pretended” in disorderly person trials in the nineteenth century. But through Walters’s alleged conviction in New York we can see how this legislation was used to penalize Walters for cunning-folk practices.³⁷ Later allegations that Walters was a necromancer reveal the underlying religious bias which conflated cunning-folk with witches.³⁸

32. “1824: 5 George 4 c.83: Vagrancy Act,” § 4.

33. Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 54.

34. Davies, *Popular Magic*, 20–28; Davies, *America Bewitched*, 52, 54–60, 62, 65; Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 61–78; Sneddon, *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland*, 124–48.

35. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 118–19.

36. James Giddings, “Escape from Justice,” *Concord (N.H.) Gazette*, Sept. 1, 1818; D. Michael Quinn also points out that there is an allegation of a second disorderly person conviction in New York against Luman Walters. This allegation has not yet been substantiated. Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 118–19.

37. Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 118–19; Abner Cole, “Gold Bible, No. 05,” in *EMD*, 2:246.

38. Abner Cole, “Book of Pukei—chap. 1,” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, N.Y.), June 12, 1830, 36–37; Abner Cole, “Book of Pukei—chap. 2,” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, N.Y.), July 7, 1830, 60.

Although it is tempting to read “pretended” as fraud, there is reason to be cautious. According to Lynne Hume, in Anglophone witchcraft legislation “pretends to exercise’ means something else. The presumption is that people are not able to do these things and therefore whoever says they can is acting in a fraudulent manner.”³⁹ In previous generations, legal authorities and religious authorities superseded the cunning-folks’ beliefs and practices by presuming that the cunning-folk were diabolical witches. After the Enlightenment, the same psychological process allowed Anglophone legal authorities to recategorize genuine belief and practices as pretended witchcraft. In both cases the legal system deliberately conflated unorthodox spiritual traditions with another crime to enable the policing of unorthodox spirituality. This tells us more about the beliefs of those in power than it does about the traditions these legal categories were designed to punish.

The Coexistence of Pretended Witchcraft and Diabolical Witchcraft Paradigms

Despite legal skepticism, belief in diabolical witchcraft continued into Joseph Smith’s lifetime and beyond.⁴⁰ The nineteenth-century repeal of Ireland’s 1586 witchcraft statute inspired the publication of the anonymous pamphlet *Antipas*, which conflated Catholicism and Dissenters with witchcraft and urged Parliament to restrict both groups’ religious activities. The pamphlet would have had a broad audience. As Andrew Sneddon has explained, “for the vast majority of those placed lower down the social ladder, especially those living in small, close-knit rural areas, the existence of the malefic witch continued to be regarded as a

39. Hume, “Witchcraft and the Law in Australia,” 146. See also Introduction to *State of New York v. JS-A*, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-people-v-js/1>.

40. Thomas Waters, ““They Seem to Have All Died Out,”” 134–53.

threat to their property and persons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The same holds true for North America.”⁴¹

The diabolical witch doctrine still had its believers in Joseph Smith’s early nineteenth-century environment, although the law no longer recognized diabolical witchcraft as a reality. Smith’s critic Alexander Campbell argued for a synthesized demonology that allowed for pretended necromancy and diabolical necromancy to coexist as two different kinds of witchcraft.⁴² Campbell’s use of necromancy charges in witchcraft allegations was a standard pattern within the Second Great Awakening.⁴³ Likewise, treasure seeking became a primary target of witchcraft fear and belief during this period.⁴⁴ People who feared cunning-folk, alleged false-prophets, Catholics, Atheists, non-white spiritual practices, and religious movements like the Quakers, the Shakers, and the Wilkensonians saw the practices they feared most as both pretended and diabolical, often describing these groups as practicing necromancy.⁴⁵ In the early nineteenth-century environment of legal skepticism and the common suppressed belief that diabolical witches existed, one would expect to find the categories of pretended witchcraft and diabolical witchcraft used to label Joseph Smith’s folk-Christian practices of treasure seeking in 1826 as well as charismatic expressions of Christian belief in 1830.

41. Sneddon, *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland*, 98.

42. See Alexander Campbell, “An Address Delivered to the Popular Lecture Club, Nashville, Tennessee, March 10, 1841,” *Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, Va.) Oct. 1841, 457–80.

43. Adam Jortner, “‘Some Little Necromancy’: Politics, Religion, and the Mormons, 1829–1838,” in *Contingent Citizens: Shifting Perceptions of Latter-day Saints in American Political Culture*, edited by Spencer W. McBride, Brent M. Rogers, and Keith A. Erikson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2020), 17–28.

44. Padro, “Redemption,” 40–80.

45. Jortner, “Some Little Necromancy,” 17–28.

Context of Joseph Smith's 1826 Pretrial

When Joseph Smith, a young treasure seeker, had his first visionary experience, local religious leaders reacted negatively in ways that Smith family members considered surprising.⁴⁶ At the age of fourteen, an unnamed assailant fired a bullet at Joseph Smith as he returned home.⁴⁷ In 1823, Joseph Smith experienced an envisioned visitation of an angel, who declared that Smith would be a prophet and uncover a buried scripture. Within a year of this experience, rumors began to circulate that someone had disinterred and dissected his older brother Alvin's body.⁴⁸ Dan Vogel and Michael Quinn believe that these were allegations of utilizing part of Alvin's body to acquire the golden plates. These rumors portrayed the act of acquiring the golden plates as a form of necromancy.⁴⁹ These allegations may have been an initial, failed, attempt to charge Joseph Smith with a crime. As William Morain points out, "violating a grave" was "a felony offense for which, in 1824, he could have been incarcerated in the New York state prison for five years."⁵⁰ A year later, in 1825, Josiah Stowell heard about Joseph Smith's gift for using his seer stone, perhaps tied to rumors of Joseph's 1823 vision of an angel who led him to the gold plates. Josiah Stowell requested that Joseph reside at his home as a farmworker who would aid Stowell in his

46. *Times and Seasons*, 1 Apr. 1842, 748, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-april-1842/14>; William Smith, "William Smith Interview with E. C. Briggs, 1893," *EMD*, 1:512.

47. Lucy Mack Smith, *History, 1844–1845*, bk. 5, 4, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/58>.

48. Joseph Smith Sr., "To the Public," copy of *Wayne (N.Y.) Sentinel*, Sept. 29, 1824, in *EMD*, 2:217–18.

49. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 56–58; Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 160–61.

50. William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998), 147. Morain cites *Laws of New York, Forty-Second Session*, chap. 117, 1819, p. 279.

treasure seeking. Joseph's parents agreed, perhaps to remove him from a dangerous environment. However, trouble followed Joseph Smith Jr. to Bainbridge, New York. In 1826, Stowell's nephew took Joseph Smith to court as a disorderly person.⁵¹

Allegations of witchcraft continued after the trials as well, with some ascribed to Joseph's life in the 1820s. In 1834, testimonies ascribed to Smith's neighbors appeared in the anti-Mormon book *Mormonism Unveiled*.⁵² The affidavits in this book describe Smith's activities through the paradigms of pretended and diabolical witchcraft. In one of these affidavits, discussing a period between the 1826 and 1830 hearings, Sophia Lewis, who also served as Emma Smith's midwife, reported that Joseph and Emma's child died horribly deformed at birth. Her affidavit is notable because the diabolical witch's doctrine and folklore viewed deformed births and stillbirth as evidence of witchcraft.⁵³ Shortly after Alvin's death, Emma Smith returned to her parents' Methodist church in Harmony. When Joseph Smith attempted to attend, it sparked a controversy that included church members' allegations of necromancy and other witchcraft practices. In the 1879 remembrances of these events, Emma's relatives made it clear that those involved in this controversy believed Joseph Smith "was a conjurer" and "a sorcerer," clarifying that these were forms of "witchcraft."⁵⁴ This same Methodist congregation later threatened violence against Joseph Smith, which forced him to move to the home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette, New York.⁵⁵

51. Introduction to *State of New York v. JS-A*, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-people-v-js/1>.

52. E. D. Howe, ed., *Mormonism Unveiled*, edited by Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2015), 231–53.

53. Carol F. Karlson, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 14–19.

54. Heil Lewis, "Heil Lewis Rejoinder, 4 June 1879," in *EMD*, 4:308.

55. RoseAnn Benson, *Alexander Campbell and Joseph Smith: Nineteenth-Century Restorationists*, (Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2017), 120.

Beginning in 1830, Joseph Smith's restorationism utilized the example of the Christian curses used by Old Testament Prophets, as well as Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament. Joseph instructed his missionaries and followers to employ ritualized dusting of feet and clothing as a testament against those who persecuted them and rejected their message. This practice continued into the 1890s and would have provided ample material for those who believed that Joseph Smith and his followers were witches.⁵⁶ Allegations of witchcraft continued in February 1831 with Alexander Campbell's publication of "Delusions," an anti-Mormon article in his periodical the *Millennial Harbinger*.⁵⁷ In this article, Campbell uses familiar skeptical tropes and employs demonology to compare Joseph Smith and Mormonism with false prophecy, enthusiasm, and witchcraft. He directly compared Joseph Smith to Simon Magus and Elymas, the sorcerers of the Bible.⁵⁸ Campbell leaves no room for equivocation: "I have never felt myself so fully authorized to address mortal man in the style in which Paul addressed Elymas the sorcerer as I feel towards this Atheist Smith."⁵⁹ During the same year, mobs pursued Joseph Smith's followers as they left New York for Ohio.⁶⁰ In 1832, Campbell's "Delusions" was reprinted as a pamphlet.⁶¹ In Kirtland, potential anti-witchcraft violence can be seen in the mob that attacked Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in 1832. While remembering

56. Samuel R. Weber, "'Shake Off the Dust of Thy Feet': The Rise and Fall of Mormon Ritual Cursing," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 108–39.

57. Alexander Campbell, "Delusions," *Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, Va.), Feb. 1831, 85–96.

58. Campbell, "Delusions," 95, 96, 122.

59. Campbell, "Delusions," 96.

60. Joseph Knight, "Joseph Knight, Sr., Reminiscence, Circa 1835–1847," in *EMD*, 4:24.

61. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of its Pretenses to Divine Authority* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832).

this event, Joseph Smith recalled that these attackers cried out “Simond! Simond!” which he interpreted as a reference to their Campbellite leader Simond Riders. As a victim of a tumultuous mobbing by Campbellites, Smith may have misheard shouts of “Simon! Simon!” comparing Joseph Smith to Simon Magus. While they assaulted Joseph Smith, the mob attempted to destroy his ability to speak (and therefore prophesy, curse, or bewitch). Joseph remembered the mob shouting, “God dam it . . . Let us tar up his mouth!”⁶² They simultaneously attempted to force a “phial” of liquid into his mouth. Joseph claimed that the mob decided not to kill him, but instead they would “scratch me well. . . . All my clothes were torn off me except my shirt collar; and one man fell on me and scratched my body with his nails like a mad cat.”⁶³ Afterward, Smith had to scrub the tar from his lips to “breath more easily.”⁶⁴ The easily overlooked use of scratching has tragic gravity. In the nineteenth century, “scratching above the breath,” was widely believed to be a means of deactivating a witch’s powers and was consequently a common aspect of extrajudicial anti-witchcraft violence.⁶⁵

Echoes of witchcraft belief continued later into Joseph Smith’s life. In 1834, the Campbellite E. D. Howe would publish the Hurlbut affidavits in his work *Mormonism Unveiled*. This work reads like a

62. History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 Dec. 1805–30 Aug. 1834],” 206–7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/212>.

63. History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 Dec. 1805–30 Aug. 1834],” 206–7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/212>.

64. History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 Dec. 1805–30 Aug. 1834],” 207, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/213>.

65. Stephen A. Mitchell, “Witchcraft Persecutions in the Post-Craze Era: The Case of Ann Izzard of Great Paxton, 1808, *Western Folklore* 59, no. 3/4 (2000): 308, 314; Mike Slater, *The Old Woman and the Conjurors: A Journey from Witch Scratching to the Conjurors, and the Southcottian Millenarian Movement of the Early 19th Century*, (Woodbury, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2020), 1–45.

combination of skeptical and believers' demonologies, describing Smith's alleged folk-Christian activities through the pretended and diabolical witchcraft paradigms. As late as 1835, Smith complained of Campbell's continued witchcraft allegations.⁶⁶ The following year, Joseph Smith's last recorded treasure quest ended with a revelation that encouraged his companions to "inquire diligently concerning the more ancient inhabitants and founders of this city; For there are more treasures than one for you in this city" (D&C 111:9–10). This treasure quest took place in Salem, Massachusetts, suggesting that the troubles that had followed Smith to this point in 1836 could be explained through a knowledge of early American witchcraft belief and violence. In 1837, Smith's enemy Grandison Newell accused Joseph of attempting to murder him. He claimed that Smith, the "high priest of satan," had bewitched two assassins who stopped short of murdering Newell when they "broke the spell of the false prophet" and "were restored to their right minds, and are now rejoicing that they were not left to the power of the devil and co-adjutor Smith, to stain their souls with a crime so horrible."⁶⁷ It would appear that many of Smith's enemies accused him of witchcraft and magic throughout his early life and career.

According to the standards established by Alan Charles and Edward Peters, there are three sources of materials in witchcraft studies.⁶⁸ The

66. Letter to the Elders of the Church, Nov. 30–Dec.1, 1835, 227, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-elders-of-the-church-30-november-1-december-1835/3>.

67. Grandison Newell, "To Sidney Rigdon-Letter No 02," *Painesville Telegraph*, Painesville, Ohio, Vol. III, No. 21.

68. In the case of pamphlets, extreme caution must be applied "because often pamphlet writers were often perfectly willing to distort official records in the interests of a more dramatic story or particular point of view." See Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe 400–1700: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 22–23. The Joseph Smith Papers have provided an analysis of the primary sources of

first and most reliable archival documents consist of court records and verified reproductions of contemporary pamphlets.⁶⁹ The second type is literary sources. These documents require caution, recognizing that the authors' biases shaped these accounts, often overshadowing the beliefs and actions of the accused. Nevertheless, historians of witchcraft utilize these documents by controlling for allegations of diabolism injected into these accounts by their authors. The third category are pictorial sources.⁷⁰ In Joseph Smith's 1826, 1829, and 1830 disorderly person proceedings, only the court bills fall into the category of archival records.⁷¹ We do not have the original trial notes or pictorial sources, only literary sources.

Two of the literary records used to reconstruct the 1826 pretrial are known as the Pearsall narrative and the Purple narrative. The Pearsall narrative exists only in articles claiming to recreate the original pretrial notes. The first of these articles appeared in 1872 with subsequent version printed in 1883 and 1886.⁷² The Purple narrative is purportedly authored by William Purple as a memoir of his alleged role as notetaker at the 1826 pretrial. It was published in 1877.⁷³ Additionally, for the 1830 cases, there are accounts written by Joseph Smith, his mother, and other friendly observers, a rarity in witchcraft records. An additional narrative account related to the 1830 disorderly person cases is a letter ascribed to Justice of the Peace George H. Noble, who oversaw the

the 1826 hearing. See Introduction to *State of New York v. JS-A*, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-people-v-js/1>.

69. Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe*, 22–23.

70. Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe*, 23–24.

71. Dan Vogel ed., *EMD*, 4:257–71.

72. Introduction to *State of New York v. JS-A*, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-people-v-js/1>.

73. Introduction to *State of New York v. JS-A*, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-people-v-js/1>.

Colesville disorderly person proceedings of 1830.⁷⁴ As with all sources, these narrative accounts should be read cautiously—the events they describe may not accurately reflect what took place in court. They may also include deliberate or unintentional distortions of these events. As in all narrative accounts of witch trials, we must account for the injection of demonological stereotypes in descriptions of Joseph Smith's alleged behaviors.

The 1826 Pretrial: Folk-Christian Belief

The narrative accounts of the 1826 disorderly person pretrial feature evidence that they fall into the larger pattern of religiously persecuting cunning-folk. In the Purple narrative, there is strong evidence about Joseph Smith's, his followers', and his father's folk-Christian beliefs. The Purple narrative describes Joseph Smith as a "Seer," a term for cunning-folk who compared themselves to Old Testament prophets.⁷⁵ The Purple narrative addresses the cunning-folk practice of utilizing seer stones. It also affirms that these were genuinely held beliefs: "Deacon Stowell and others as firmly believed it." As an afterthought, the Purple narrative claims that Josiah Stowell's "ward and two hired men . . . were, or professed to be, believers."⁷⁶

The Purple narrative's description of Joseph Smith's acquisition of his seer stones includes folk-Christian practices. It claims that after seeing a vision of a particular stone, Joseph Smith set off to find his seer

74. Wesley P. Walters, "From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 133–37.

75. For biblical justification, see Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007), 22, 51, 58.

76. Appendix: Reminiscence of William D. Purple, 28 Apr. 1877 [*State of New York v. JS-A*], 3. JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-reminiscence-of-william-d-purple-28-april-1877-state-of-new-york-v-js-a/1> (hereafter Reminiscence of William D. Purple).

stone, and the narrative provides significant detail about how he washed the stone after he found it. This detail is less perplexing when one reads the writings of Karl Herr, a modern Pennsylvania Dutch cunning man. In his book on his folk-Christian practices, Herr provided a theological justification for the washing of miraculous stones before praying to God and asking for God's blessing upon the stone.⁷⁷ This fits a larger pattern of Joseph Smith consecrating his other seer stones, as observed by Mark Ashurst-McGee.⁷⁸ This may be a description of Joseph consecrating his first seer stone. The Purple narrative also portrays the stone's powers within a folk-Christian paradigm, claiming that when Joseph had the stone, "he possessed one of the attributes of Deity, an All-Seeing-Eye," repeating an earlier description of Joseph Smith's alleged gifts as a seer as an "omniscient attribute."⁷⁹ According to this account, Joseph Smith Sr. defended his son's alleged gift and "described very many instances of his finding hidden and stolen goods" and that he "swore that both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power that God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre, or its equivalent in earthly treasures, and with a long-faced, "sanctimonious seeming," he said his constant prayer to his Heavenly Father was to manifest His will concerning this marvelous power. He trusted that the Son of Righteousness would some day illumine the heart of the boy, and enable him to see His will concerning him."⁸⁰

77. Karl Herr, *Hex and Spell Work: The Magical Practices of the Pennsylvania Dutch*. (Boston: Weiser Books, 2002), 118–21.

78. Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, And Judeo-Christian Prophet" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000), table 2, 318.

79. These seem to reference the same all-seeing-eye of God that was sometimes a feature of New English churches even as late as the nineteenth century. See Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1891), 16.

80. Reminiscence of William D. Purple.

These testimonies of Smith's divine powers were a recurring theme in the Purple narrative. The next witness was Deacon Josiah Stowell, who affirmed the testimonies of Joseph Sr. and Joseph Jr., giving several examples of the junior Joseph Smith's abilities. Stowell "delineated many other circumstances not necessary to record," affirmed that Smith possessed the abilities he claimed, and "described very many circumstances to confirm his words." The Purple narrative then reports that Justice Neely questioned Stowell's belief in Joseph Smith's alleged abilities as a treasure seer, "Do I *believe* it?" says Deacon Stowell, "do I believe it? no, it is not a matter of belief: I positively know it to be true."⁸¹

The Purple narrative claims Joseph Smith told his fellow treasure seekers that the treasure "could not be obtained except by faith, accompanied by certain talismanic influences. So, after arming themselves with fasting and prayer, they sallied forth to the spot designated by Smith."⁸² These talismanic influences are likely a description of the folk-Christian amulets utilized by treasure seekers, four of which Joseph Smith Sr. is believed to have owned.⁸³ According to both the Purple and Pearsall narratives, these talismanic influences were necessary to break a protective spell placed on the treasure by the person who buried it. When their attempts to acquire the treasure proved unsuccessful, the Purple narrative hints at the folk-Christian motivation for the treasure quest: a struggle against the devil over the souls of sinners seeking redemption from purgatory.⁸⁴ "After some five feet in depth had been attained without success, a council of war against this spirit of darkness was called, and they resolved that the lack of faith, or of some untoward mental emotions, was the cause of their failure."⁸⁵

81. Reminiscence of William D. Purple.

82. Reminiscence of William D. Purple.

83. Padro, "Redemption," 48.

84. Padro, "Redemption," 48.

85. Reminiscence of William D. Purple.

The Purple narrative alternates between folk-Christian descriptions and justifications for Joseph Smith's behavior and alternating depictions of these practices as diabolical.⁸⁶ When demonologists argue against public perception of cunning-folk beliefs and practices, they systematically described the common perception that practices were powered by the Christian God. Demonologists would then attempt to refute commonly held opinions by arguing that folk-Christian practices were blasphemous forms of false Christianity disguising an implicit pact with the devil. For those who believed demonologists rather than folk-Christians, evidence of folk-Christian activity was evidence of witchcraft.

Notably, the Pearsall narrative is relatively circumspect on this aspect of the 1826 pretrial. While it discusses Joseph Smith's seer stone use and treasure seeking, it does not give a detailed account of what power he ascribed these abilities to nor details that would allow us to compare his alleged practices to the ethnographic record. In place of these details, it systematically describes Joseph Smith's motives and activities as pretended. In the Pearsall narrative, Joseph Smith does not confess to deception; instead, his accusers describe Joseph's practices and beliefs as "pretended." Despite this insistence on pretension, the Pearsall narrative claims that Josiah Stowell "positively knew that the Prisoner could tell and possessed the art of seeing those valuable treasures through the medium of said stone." It describes this belief as an "implicit faith in Prisoners skill." Outside of these two comments, the Pearsall narrative does not contain the kind of detail that allows us to see folk-Christian practices and beliefs found in the Purple narrative.

86. An 1877 account of the pretrial discussed the treasure quest as a "faith (and practice)," reinforcing the practice's religious nature. "*Bainbridge (NY) Republican*, 23 August 1877," in *EMD*, 4:138.

The 1826 Pretrial Allegations of Diabolical Witchcraft

The Purple narrative about the 1826 pretrial demonstrate that Smith's accusers viewed Smith's folk-Christian activities as witchcraft. This is not surprising, considering early New English law and New York literature defined treasure seeking as witchcraft.⁸⁷ Rather than describing Smith's activities as pretended, the Purple narrative describes Smith's activities in terms of diabolical witchcraft. The Purple narrative claims that Joseph Smith had "unlimited control over the illusions of their sire," hinting at witches' alleged ability to magically control the minds and behaviors of their victims. Consequently, Josiah Stowell's relatives came to see Smith as an "incubus . . . eating up their substance, and depriving them of their anticipated patrimony," alluding to the witches' ability to use magic to funnel off wealth from their victims through a demon familiar. The Purple narrative describes Josiah Stowell's drive to engage in treasure seeking as a "monomaniacal impression to seek for hidden treasures," hinting at the early modern conflation between mental illness, bewitchment, and possession. Stowell allegedly "camped out on the black hills of that region for weeks at a time." The document's author referred to treasure quests as "nocturnal depredations on the face of Mother Earth," hinting at the nocturnal assembly of the Witches' Sabbath.⁸⁸

The Purple narrative hints at *maleficium* through its use of "the fabled shirt of Nessus," the poisoned shirt that killed Hercules, as a metaphor for Joseph Smith's impact on Josiah Stowell's spiritual welfare. Stowell's neighbors, church members, and family tried to "dissuade" him from engaging in treasure seeking, suggesting concerns about religious boundary maintenance. The Purple narrative describes Joseph Smith's seer stone as a "magic stone," overlooking the Christian identity

87. Padro, "Redemption," 55–58, 73–78.

88. Reminiscence of William D. Purple.

ascribed to it by Joseph Smith Sr., who defined his son's abilities as a gift from God. It also describes Joseph Smith as an incubus, one of the demons strongly associated with witchcraft among believers in the diabolical witch doctrine. Johnathon Thompson's testimony once again describes the treasure quest as "nocturnal labors." It claims that those who buried the treasure had placed a protective charm upon it through an animal sacrifice. Thus, along with faith, acquiring the treasure required "certain talismanic influences."

The Purple narrative demonizes Joseph Smith's treasure seeking through claiming that he and his fellow seekers utilized an animal sacrifice to an evil spirit to dismantle the charm. Notably, this point contradicts the document's earlier claim that the treasure quest was "a council of war against this spirit of darkness." The Purple narrative claims that Josiah Stowell "went to his flock and selected a fine vigorous lamb, and resolved to sacrifice it to the demon spirit who guarded the coveted treasure. Shortly after the venerable Deacon might be seen on his knees at prayer near the pit, while Smith, with a lantern in one hand to dispel the midnight darkness, might be seen making a circuit around the pit, sprinkling the flowing blood from the lamb upon the ground, as a propitiation to the spirit that thwarted them."

It then describes the allegation of animal sacrifice as "a picture for the pencil of a Hogarth!" and claims that it came from a diseased mind inspired by the *Arabian Nights*. These are explicit references to "the Four Stages of Animal Cruelty" by William Hogarth and the *Arabian Nights* story "The Tale of the Old Man and the Hind." In both stories, animal cruelty leads to similar cruelty toward human beings, with the *Arabian Nights* story culminating in the sacrifice of a human being enchanted to look like livestock. These allusions suggest that Purple was well aware that Joseph Smith was accused of human sacrifice in the same region.⁸⁹ Allegations that Joseph Smith and treasure seekers sacrificed animals

89. Dan Vogel disproved allegations of human sacrifice in the Susquehanna River Region. See Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 73.

built upon demonological stereotypes that witches performed animal sacrifices at their Sabbaths.⁹⁰ The Purple narrative's allusion to a "diseased mind" may be a reference to skeptical demonology's etiology of witchcraft as a product of diabolical illusions experienced by the mentally ill or perhaps believers' demonology, which argued that witches could cause mental illness.

The penultimate paragraph of the document also builds upon demonological stereotypes about demons and witches causing mental illness. The author of the narrative claims that the 1826 courtroom in Bainbridge enabled the "evincing" (revealing the presence) of "the spirit of delusion that characterized those who originated that prince of humbugs, Mormonism." This would appear to be a memory colored by William Purple's later knowledge of Mormonism, as it demonizes the Book of Mormon's claim that the Holy Spirit will confirm the book's truth after sincere and inquisitive prayer through a voice or feeling experienced as a burning in the bosom. Quakers made similar claims about the Holy Spirit speaking to believers through the inner-light. New English Calvinists like Increase Mather characterized these claims as a form of demonic possession.⁹¹ The Purple narrative's allegations of diabolism reflect New English witchcraft belief and the author's awareness of local gossip about Joseph Smith's alleged necromantic and pretended activities, as well as what he claims to have witnessed in the courtroom.⁹²

Just as the Pearsall narrative glosses over the 1826 pretrial's folk-Christian elements. It is also reserved regarding Smith's alleged diabolism. Nonetheless, the Pearsall narrative does contain a possible hint of diabolical witchcraft belief. Its depiction of Johnathon

90. Padro, "Redemption," 61–64.

91. Increase Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Green for Joseph Browning, 1684), 341–44.

92. This gossip can be found in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 231–53; Heil Lewis, "Heil Lewis Rejoinder, 4 June 1879," in *EMD*, 4:303–5.

Thompson's testimony contains a reference to the protective charm that treasure buriers allegedly placed on their treasures.⁹³ The Pearsall narrative's lack of allegations of diabolism reinforces what is already known about authors who wrote for nineteenth-century Anglophone audiences: when writing for educated audiences, they downplayed common people's belief in witches.⁹⁴ However, this lack clashes starkly with the Purple account's emphasis on diabolical witchcraft over pretended witchcraft as well as the anti-witchcraft violence and belief that can be found in other descriptions of Joseph Smith's early adulthood.

Allegations of Delusion and Pretended Practices

As noted earlier, the first skeptical demonologist, Johann Weyer, argued that witches were deceived by the devil, who utilized an imbalance of black bile. This imbalance was believed to cause "melancholy" or depression. It was used to explain a wide variety of visionary experiences, and Weyer used this paradigm to argue that alleged witches were deceived and delusional but not guilty of actual witchcraft. The Purple narrative provides some examples of this paradigm. It employs a skeptical demonological argument that Joseph Smith's visions of treasures were a "cherished hallucination" and that the treasure quest was a product of "the hallucination of diseased minds." It reveals Mr. Stowell's sons "caused the arrest of Smith as a vagrant, without visible means of livelihood," a potential reference to the trope of the begging witch. The document goes on to describe Mormonism as a "mighty delusion of the present century." Purple claimed that witness Johnathon Thompson

93. This was an element of treasure lore common to the German settlers of Pennsylvania and New York. See Padro, "Redemption," 48.

94. Waters, "They Seem to Have All Died Out," 149–53; Owen Davies, "Witchcraft Accusations in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe," in *The Routledge History of Witchcraft*, edited by Johannes Dillinger (London: Routledge, 2020), 289–98.

“could not assert that anything of value was ever obtained by them.”⁹⁵ The Purple narrative portrays Joseph Smith’s treasure quest as genuinely held folk-beliefs treated as delusion or diabolized as the influence of evil spiritual powers through witchcraft. However, the Purple narrative does not describe “pretended” practices or beliefs, nor does it claim that Smith was deceiving Stowell and the other treasure seekers.

Among skeptical demonologists who wrote after Weyer, the use of the word “pretended” to describe supernatural claims of miraculous power is not a clear-cut statement about fraud. It is a recategorization of disparaged religious beliefs and practices to better police and penalize them. This is most commonly seen in skeptical English demonologists’ descriptions of non-Calvinist religious traditions from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. This understanding of the word “pretended” also appears in the Pearsall narrative’s depiction of the 1826 pre-trial.

The Pearsall narrative follows this tradition. It relies almost entirely upon “pretended” powers, claiming that Joseph Smith “had pretended to tell by looking at this stone, where coined money was buried in Pennsylvania, and while at Palmyra he had frequently ascertained in that way where lost property was of various kinds.” Oddly, it depicts Josiah Stowell as claiming that Joseph Smith Jr. “pretended to have skill of telling where hidden treasures in the earth were by means of looking through a certain stone.” When compared to statements in both narratives that assert Stowell’s belief in Smith’s abilities, this statement seems to be an insertion or a scribal distortion. In the Pearsall narrative, Johnathon Thompson testified that Joseph Smith Jr. “pretended to know” where the treasure was buried and “pretending that he was alarmed” when they thought their shovels had hit a chest. The Pearsall narrative then claims that Johnathon Thompson believed “in the prisoners professed skill, that the board he struck his spade upon was probably the chest but on account of an enchantment, the trunk kept settling away from under them while digging.” This should be compared to the Purple

95. Reminiscence of William D. Purple.”

narrative's version of Johnathon Thompson's testimony. There, Thompson never presents these alleged practices or beliefs as pretended. On the contrary, the Purple document's version of the Johnathon Thompson testimony portrays Smith's folk-Christian beliefs as genuine even if it later repackages them as delusional beliefs leading to unprofitable diabolical witchcraft. Thus, potential scribal distortion also appears in the Johnathon Thompson testimony. The Pearsall narrative's consistent depiction of Smith's activities as "pretended" also occurs in its presentation of the Horace Stowell and McMaster⁹⁶ testimonies.

The two literary sources for the 1826 pretrial diverge strongly on their description of Smith's activities as pretended witchcraft and diabolical witchcraft. Of these two accounts, the Purple narrative matches the allegations of diabolism that Smith's neighbors claimed to have of his activities after 1824. However, the Pearsall account contains the justice's itemized fee bill, which matches Justice Neeley's and Constable De Zing's bill of costs.⁹⁷ This conundrum would suggest that the Pearsall account is not a faithful reproduction of the original trial notes. It would appear that working with the original notes, Emily Pearsall may have fabricated an account of the trial by removing elements of folk-Christian belief frequently associated with witchcraft and the allegations of diabolical witchcraft. For example, Joseph Smith Sr.'s and Joseph Smith Jr.'s testimonies, which explicitly characterize treasure seeking as a Christian act in the Purple narrative, are both completely omitted in the Pearsall narrative. These elements of Joseph Smith's early life would have triggered the skepticism of a late nineteenth-century audience. Their absence in the Pearsall narrative reflects a later reframing of the events. By the last quarter of the century, Salem had been cemented as

96. This may have been Cyrus McMaster, who was later involved in the 1830 disorderly hearings See Vogel ed., *EMD*, 4:10, 63, 63n40, 260. David McMaster is another possibility; see Vogel ed., *EMD*, 4:248, 259.

97. Introduction to *State of New York v. JS-A*, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-people-v-js/1>.

a symbol of national embarrassment. As Gretchen A. Adams notes, by “the 1860s and well beyond,” the shameful memory of Salem, “more often described the excesses and passion of the persecuting ‘hunter’ than the beliefs and practices that created the ‘hunted.’”⁹⁸ If the original trial notes included Smith’s confessions’ folk-Christian belief conflated with witchcraft or if it contained allegations of diabolical witchcraft, the recreation of these elements in the Pearsall articles from later in the century would have triggered skepticism among people from Emily Pearsall’s generation of Americans. William Purple, on the other hand, was from an ante-bellum generation of nineteenth-century Americans who had not internalized this understanding of Salem or skepticism about diabolical witchcraft. Hence, Purple’s account included the folk-Christian confessions from both Joseph Smiths. For William Purple and other believers in diabolical witchcraft, the conflation of folk-Christianity with witchcraft meant that the Smiths’ confessions of folk-Christian activity would have been seen as blasphemous confessions of implicit pacts, which believers imagined to be witchcraft. On the other hand, Emily Pearsall would have been motivated to modify an account of the 1826 pretrial by stripping the actual trial notes of inconvenient and embarrassing material, focusing instead on post-Enlightenment concerns with pretended witchcraft, painting it as fraud. In order to do so, the Pearsall narrative had to eliminate allegations of animal sacrifice and insinuations of human sacrifice as well as allusions to magical thought control and magical theft that were later reported in the Purple narrative. Additionally, the Pearsall narrative evades the first name of one of the witnesses, who is simply described as McMaster. The Pearsall narrative’s scribal insertion portraying Josiah Stowell as describing Joseph Smith’s practices as pretended suggest that Emily Pearsall may have added and embellished material in her account. This is suggested by alleged accounts of deliberate deception in the Horace

98. Gretchen A. Adams, *The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 120.

Stowell, Arad Stowell, and McMaster testimonies. These accounts of deliberate deception do not appear in the Purple narrative. Further evidence for selective distortion in the Pearsall account can be found in the Pearsall narrative's guilty verdict, which strongly contradicts William Purple's claims that the prisoner was discharged on Josiah Stowell's testimony. The motive and the ways the Pearsall account do not match the larger body of evidence would strongly suggest that such a chain of events shaped the final document used to generate this account. The divergences in these narratives suggest that the allegations in the pre-trial as remembered by William Purple focused on diabolical witchcraft while Emily Pearsall heavily edited her account to create a narrative that focused on post-Enlightenment concerns with pretended powers.

The 1829 Charges in Lyons

Charges of witchcraft continued to follow Joseph Smith. In March 1829, Lucy Harris gathered a larger number of Joseph Smith's enemies from Palmyra to bring him to court in Lyons for "pretending" to have the gold plates.⁹⁹ Lucy Mack Smith's account of these events focuses on testimonies of pretended belief. However, considering that this legal dispute appears to have mostly involved Manchester and Palmyra residents, these affidavits' contents may have been similar to the allegations of diabolism in Joseph Smith's early life found in the Manchester affidavits of E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*.¹⁰⁰ For example, William Stafford describes the sacrifice of a black sheep, a component of the myth of the diabolical Witches' Sabbath.¹⁰¹ Willard Chase's report of angel Moroni appearing as a witch's familiar spirit in the form of a black toad at the

99. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844–1845, bk. 9, 12–13, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/116>.

100. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 231–53.

101. Padro, "Redemption," 58; Remy, *Demonolatreiae Libri Tres*, 40–41.

gold plates' alleged burial site is combined with depictions of Joseph and Emma allegedly acquiring the plates while dressed for a black mass.¹⁰²

The presence of outright allegations of diabolical witchcraft in the abortive 1829 proceedings may explain why the justice of the peace in Lyons subsequently tore up the affidavits and requested that the accusers “go home about their [*sic*] business, and trouble him no more with such ridiculous folly.”¹⁰³ The witchcraft belief of the populace and conservative religious authorities met a firm wall of judicial skepticism in the courtroom. Lucy Mack Smith's suppression of witchcraft belief in her account of these proceedings reflects larger trends in the nineteenth century of underreporting witchcraft belief. As victims of these allegations who lived in the public eye, the Smiths would have been wise to downplay allegations of diabolism as a means of preserving their safety from anti-witchcraft violence as well as their reputations.

The 1830 Charges in Bainbridge and Colesville

As Smith's reputation increased, so did the accusations of witchcraft. In 1830, Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon. Soon afterward, newspapers insinuated witchcraft in their depictions of this event. The *Rochester Daily Advertiser* referred to Martin Harris as “blindly enthusiastic.”¹⁰⁴ In neighboring Vermont, the *Horn of the Green Mountains* claimed that Smith's influence over Martin Harris was due to Smith's “hocus pocus.”¹⁰⁵ In New York, the *Gem* compared Smith and his fol-

102. “The relation of witches to toads (or frogs) is notorious . . . toad-familiars are as commonplace as cats.” See George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 181–82.

103. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 387; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk. 8, 7, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/88>.

104. Reprinted in Francis Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, 1848) 31.

105. Kirkham, *New Witness*, 40.

lowers to “Salem Witchcraft-ism and Jemima Wilkinsonian-ism” before discussing treasure seeking in terms reminiscent of witchcraft.¹⁰⁶ Other sources show further allegations against both pretended and diabolical witchcraft. Abner Cole made witchcraft allegations against Joseph Smith in *The Reflector* by defining treasure seekers like the cunningman Luman Walters and Joseph Smith as both pretended and diabolical “witches and wizards.”¹⁰⁷ After the publication of Abner Cole’s witchcraft allegations, Joseph Smith exorcised the devil out of Newell Knight, who then saw visions of heaven. A mob gathered to destroy the dam used for baptism and to threaten Joseph and his followers at the Knight home. He was then charged with being a disorderly person in Bainbridge. The constable who arrested Joseph told him that the trial had been a ruse, with the mob intending to capture Joseph before the trial. In this proceeding, Joseph Smith successfully appealed to the statute of limitations. Though, he was promptly rearrested and taken to Colesville, where he faced prosecution for treasure seeking and performing what his Presbyterian prosecutors presented as a charismatic exorcism.¹⁰⁸

In the 1830 cases, Smith’s prosecutors also leveled charges of pretended religion. In the narrative accounts of these proceedings, Joseph Smith’s treasure seeking and seer stone use are described by his opponents as pretended. However, Smith’s opponents also described the explicitly Christian exorcism of Newell Knight as pretended in spite of the genuine belief of those involved. Like Francis Hutchinson’s writings on the French Prophets, and the French Edict against

106. Kirkham, *New Witness*, 47–48. Jemima Wilkinson was associated with a woman who was accused of witchcraft and executed for poisoning.

107. Cole, “Book of Pukei—chap. 1,” 36–37; Cole, “Book of Pukei—chap. 2,” 60; Abner Cole, “Gold Bible No. 3,” in *EMD*, 2:243.

108. History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2],” 42–45, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/48>.

the “Pretended Reformed Religion,”¹⁰⁹ Smith’s opponents defined the early Latter-day Saints’ beliefs as pretended. Thus, interest in Smith’s earlier practice of allegedly pretended treasure seeking is not necessarily indicative of a concern for fraudulent economic activities. It is demonstrative of how the post-Enlightenment legal system categorized unorthodox beliefs and practices as false, bypassing the genuine belief of those involved.

Not all of the allegations in these proceedings were of allegedly pretended powers. Some of the first witnesses testified to what Joseph Smith euphemistically calls “the most palpable falsehoods.”¹¹⁰ The falsehoods are potentially found in a letter attributed to Justice of the Peace Noble, “Jo. and others were Diging for a Chest of money in night could not obtainit- [*sic*] It they procured one thing and an other together with [a] *black Bitch* the Bitch was offered a sacrificise [blo]od sprinkled prayer made at the time (no money obtained) the above Sworn to on trial – Sir a Small Volume at least might filed Similar to the above.”¹¹¹ It is likely that the justice of the peace initially recognized these as diabolical witchcraft allegations in a legal system that did not recognize diabolical witchcraft as a reality, much less a crime. Ultimately, this court case turned in Joseph Smith’s favor and he was released. However, just as a mob of anti-witchcraft Methodists had harassed Joseph Smith in Harmony, Pennsylvania, he and his followers were likewise harassed by mobs leading up to and during the 1830 proceedings. At the end of the Colesville case, the sheriff who had arrested Joseph had to provide a diversion to ensure that Smith could safely escape the mob awaiting

109. King Louis XIV, *AN EDICT OF THE French King, Prohibiting all Publick Exercise of the Pretended Reformed Religion in his Kingdom* (N.P.: G.M., 1686).

110. History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], 46, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/52>.

111. Walters, “From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.,” 135.

him outside the courthouse.¹¹² These anti-witchcraft mobs would have seen their persecution as a fulfillment of God's law (Exodus 22:18). After the trials, the mobs in Pennsylvania and New York would regather in their attempts to punish and potentially kill Joseph Smith.¹¹³ The intensity of the extrajudicial violence that hounds Joseph during this part of his life is disproportionate to the alleged crime of fraud. However, when we recognize that these trials were about witchcraft, the inner demonologies motivating the persecution of Joseph Smith are obvious.

Conclusion

An analysis of the English legislation that informed nineteenth-century New York cases against Joseph Smith between 1826 and 1830 demonstrates that treasure seeking and the cunning-folk use of seer stones had a long association in Anglophone law and theology as a form of witchcraft. This represented an effort to impose the demonologists' religious doctrine onto the treasure seekers' beliefs and practices, which was part of a larger effort to police nonorthodox religious and spiritual practices through the legal system. Religious leaders and legislators classified treasure seeking as witchcraft during the era of the witch-hunts. After the Enlightenment, the legal system adopted skeptical demonology's classification of cunning-folk activities as "pretended witchcraft and magic." The beliefs of competing forms of Christian and non-Christian religions were also defined and penalized as being "pretended." Outside of the legal system, people classified treasure seeking as diabolical witchcraft, pretended witchcraft, or both, depending on their personal beliefs about witchcraft.

112. History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], 42–48, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/48>.

113. History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], 53, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/59>.

Those who practiced treasure seeking saw it as an expression of their Christian faith. Thus, competing ascriptions and beliefs about treasure seeking and seer stone use meant that the courtroom was a battleground between beliefs about treasure seeking. The government could impose its own definition of pretended witchcraft and magic onto the beliefs of folk-Christians while negating the diabolical witchcraft beliefs of accusers who maintained early modern belief in the diabolical witch.

When we assess Joseph Smith's early trials as if the word "pretended" indicated deliberate deception on Joseph's part, we miss the larger picture. Joseph's enemies were primarily concerned with witchcraft. They chose to prosecute him for "pretended witchcraft and magic" under the 1813 disorderly person statute because it was the only legal resource available for penalizing activities which Joseph's enemies conflated with witchcraft. Their only alternative was extralegal anti-witchcraft violence in the form of mobbing. The fact that they utilized both judicial and extrajudicial means while accusing Joseph Smith of diabolical witchcraft would indicate that pretended witchcraft, magic, and religion were only a superficial concern, if they were truly a concern at all. While Joseph Smith, his father, and Josiah Stowell define their treasure seeking in terms of folk-Christianity, others saw something more nefarious. Rather than mere fraud, these early legal charges indicate that diabolical witchcraft was an important paradigm motivating those who persecuted Joseph Smith's early treasure seeking and claims to the gift of prophecy. The testimonies of Joseph, his father and Josiah Stowell indicate that Joseph's treasure-seeking was a folk-Christian activity motivated by genuine belief in the religious value of these activities.

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GETTING THE COSMOLOGY RIGHT

Roger Terry

Sporadically over the past few years I have been writing a personal document titled “What I Believe.” The reason for this is twofold. First, as I have learned more, my beliefs have shifted. This is unavoidable. As you receive more or better information, your beliefs will inevitably change. Second, I wanted to see if I could actually spell out in words a coherent belief system that made sense to me. So far, the results are not promising.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a messy religion. Because we do not have a systematic theology, and because many of our doctrines are either unsettled or have morphed over time, it is probable that there are as many Latter-day Saint theologies as there are Latter-day Saints. Since I am not an expert in the theologies of other religions, I can’t make any meaningful comparison between LDS beliefs and the beliefs of others, but that is not my project here. I am interested in exploring the LDS theological universe in an attempt to see if I can reconcile various apparent inconsistencies and bridge a few disconcerting gaps.

In many instances, we are left to our own devices to make sense of the official and unofficial doctrinal statements of Joseph Smith and his successors. Because Joseph’s theology expanded as he grew older, some of his early statements are impossible to reconcile with his later statements. He wasn’t always building line upon line. Sometimes he reversed course. And sometimes his successors revised his teachings in significant ways. Doctrinal harmonizers such as Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie have tried to create order out of the chaos of this ongoing theological project, but the results are usually unsatisfactory because

they fail to account for the chronological unfolding of certain doctrines as well as the disagreements between certain authoritative voices.

As I have approached my own theological venture, however, one thing has become clear to me. If we do not start at the beginning, we are hopelessly lost in our efforts to create a sensible belief system. And when I say “beginning,” I mean the fundamental question (or questions) upon which all others rest. I am not the deepest philosophical thinker, so what I am producing is certainly an amateur effort, but I suspect that my musings may be of value to others who are asking similar questions.

So, what is *the* fundamental question? Perhaps there are several, and I’ll bring up several questions in the course of this examination, but here I want to focus on the one that seems more basic than all the others. For some this question might be “Is there a God?” But I have had enough personal experience to feel comfortable answering that one in the affirmative.¹ So, given that foundation, what is the idea that either determines or shapes all others? In my mind, it is the ethical query “Which came first, God or the moral law?” This is another way of asking what the nature of eternity is. In other words, it is a question about cosmology. And as Latter-day Saints, we certainly do not have a firm grasp on the answer to this question. We sometimes think we do, but the fact that our leaders and our scriptures often declare ideas that conflict with Joseph Smith’s later teachings suggests that we need to return to this fundamental question and settle on an answer. Otherwise, we’re in danger of getting the cart before the horse and perpetuating a doctrinal free-for-all that produces more smoke than light. So, if we are to have a cohesive and coherent theology, we first need to get the cosmology right. Now, I am not claiming to have the answer to this conundrum. I’ve already admitted that my own attempt to express a coherent belief system has not produced the desired result.

1. See Roger Terry, “Frau Rüster and the Cure for Cognitive Dissonance,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40, no. 3 (2007): 201–10.

My project here is more to ask questions that we need answers to, and those answers may be available only by revelation, not by reasoning.

Which Came First?

So which did come first, God or the moral law? Russ Shafer-Landau, paraphrasing Socrates through Plato, asks: “Does God command us to do actions because they are morally right, or are actions morally right because God commands them?”² The first option suggests that the moral law is independent of God. God is God because he perfectly follows an eternal moral law. The second option is known as Divine Command Theory, in which God is the source and creator of everything. Therefore, he invented morality. Most religious philosophers, however, reject the Divine Command Theory, and so, apparently, did Joseph Smith, at least most of the time. Shafer-Landau points out the central flaw in this theory:

Imagine the point at which God is choosing a morality for us. God contemplates the nature of rape, torture, and treachery. What does He see? Being omniscient (all-knowing), God sees such actions for what they are. Crucially, He sees nothing wrong with them. They are, at this point, morally neutral. Nothing, as yet, is right or wrong.

But God did, at some point, make a decision. He forbade rape, theft, and most kinds of killing. If the Divine Command Theory is correct, then He didn’t forbid them because they were immoral. So why *did* God forbid them?

It may be presumptuous of us to try to answer that question. But we can ask a slightly different question: did God have reasons for His decisions, or not?

If the Divine Command Theory is true, then there is trouble either way. If God lacks reasons for His commands—if there is no solid basis supporting His decisions to prohibit certain things, and require others—then God’s decisions are arbitrary. It would be as if God were

2. Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65.

creating morality by a coin toss. But that is surely implausible. That sort of God would be arbitrary, and thus imperfect. . . . If God lacks reasons for His commands, then God's commands are arbitrary—and that renders God imperfect, undermining His moral authority.³

Some theologians have attempted to explain Divine Command Theory in a way that removes this fundamental conundrum.⁴ But in my opinion, they all ultimately fail to account for the notion that God must have some sort of rationale for declaring some actions good and others evil, otherwise his law is arbitrary.

The inevitable fruit of this arbitrary option turns up here and there in LDS scripture and thinking—for instance, in God's command for Nephi to kill Laban and in Joseph Smith's purported letter to Nancy Rigdon, attempting to persuade her that polygamy was right by insisting that some actions can be right in one circumstance but wrong in another⁵—but it is invariably problematic. So, if God must have reasons

3. Shafer-Landau, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 66–67.

4. For a good summary of both Divine Command Theory and the arguments for and against it, see *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Divine Command Theory,” <https://www.iep.utm.edu/divine-c/#SH4d>.

5. “That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. . . . Everything that God gives us is lawful and right, and it is proper that we should enjoy His gifts and blessings.” Quoted in Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 295–96, 307. The letter is somewhat suspect, because of its provenance. Joseph dictated it a day or two after he had proposed marriage to Nancy Rigdon, who rebuffed his proposition. She purportedly gave the letter to her suitor, Francis Higbee, who passed it on to his superior in the Nauvoo Legion, John C. Bennett. Bennett published it in his exposé on Mormonism, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842), 241. When the *History of the Church* was being prepared in 1855, Historian's Office clerk Thomas Bullock included a copy of the letter in the history. This copy was taken from Bennett's book. An original copy of the letter no longer exists. This copy of the letter was thus published in *History of the Church*, 5:134–36, but with a disclaimer stating that the circumstance of its writing was not known.

for declaring some things right and others wrong, then some kind of moral law must precede God, and he merely recognizes its validity and commands accordingly. If this is true, are we to worship God or venerate instead the eternal law that controls or at least guides his choices? According to human logic, then, the principles of good and evil, moral and immoral, precede the existence of God, or are at least independent of him. If this is true, what need have we of God, if we do not need him to be the author of an eternal moral law?

Joseph Smith gave an answer to this question. Joseph's view of eternity, at least as it unfolded primarily in his Nauvoo sermons, is that God could not possibly be the source of everything, moral law included, because he was once as we are now, a mortal human being living on a planet somewhere in the already existing universe. He therefore had a God who guided him in his progress, and that God likewise had a God, and so on, *ad infinitum*. This may not have been spelled out explicitly by Joseph, but it is inevitable in the description of God he has given us. In Joseph's theology, then, God's "job" was to help us along a path to perfection, which must mean complete conformance to an eternal moral law. But this idea may not answer the chicken-and-egg question asked above. It's a bit more complicated than we might suppose at first glance.

What Is the Origin of the Moral Law?

Joseph's view of eternity is compelling in that it seemingly circumvents the problems inherent in the Divine Command Theory. But his explanations also seem to come up short. If God did not create the moral law, who did? His Father? His Father's Father? A distant God ten billion times removed? No, because each of them would have faced the same dilemma our God would have encountered in producing an arbitrary law. So where did it all start? Joseph's answer appears to be that it simply didn't. Eternity is, well, eternal. It has been going on forever. There was always a previous God who perfectly understood and

applied the eternal moral law and is bound by such notions as love and justice and mercy. The problem here is that the human mind cannot comprehend such a state of affairs. From our perspective, it had to start somewhere. Scientific evidence suggests a beginning, the so-called Big Bang, but cosmologists are always exploring other possibilities, including some that posit no beginning and no end. Of course, the Big Bang theory does not explain why the universe came into existence or what came before. But if there was a beginning, a point at which all things began, was the moral law created in that instant, along with the spirit intelligences who would evolve into a race of gods? Or did the law in some way precede whatever beginning there may have been? If so, then where did it come from? Is it the foundation of all eternity? Does it somehow determine the shape of our universe and how it expands and evolves?

If the moral law has existed forever—if it preceded even the existence of the first divine being—then what is it exactly? Is it a set of principles carved without hands into the bedrock of eternity, into the atoms and photons and quarks that produce light and matter? Do good and evil exist independently of any class of conscious beings? If so, how did the first conscious being ever come to recognize this eternal law and interpret it? Law is generally, well, quite general. It can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Take the commandment “thou shalt not steal.” What does this mean in millions of circumstances? It must be interpreted to define what is permitted and what is forbidden. Certainly, the millions of permutations of this law are not spelled out somewhere in an eternal criminal code book. So, how did the eternal notions of *moral* and *immoral* first get interpreted and applied? And by whom? Or are there principles that are one layer deeper than the moral law, principles that guide divine beings in interpreting the law? If so, what are these principles, and why have they not been revealed to us? Certainly, they constitute the fabric of morality.

We might ask what the difference is between moral law and the physical laws we observe in the universe (the repetition of observable

patterns in matter and energy). Are physical laws simply an inevitable part of our material universe, or are they implemented in some way and in certain spheres by intelligent beings? What about moral law? Is it also somehow a feature of our physical universe, or was it implemented by intelligent beings? Further, what is the consequence of breaking a physical law? There is always a natural physical consequence. But what is the consequence of breaking the moral law? We can break the moral law without breaking any physical laws, so there is no inevitable physical consequence. What then are the consequences of breaking the moral law? Often these consequences take the form of a disruption in the connections that bind us together as social beings. We often also impose punishments on each other for breaking the moral law, and sometimes these punishments produce physical pain. But that is not because these physical punishments are necessary. Or are they? We'll explore that question later. But for now, let's return to the issue of the moral law's origin.

Just for the sake of argument, let's assume for a moment that Joseph's view of eternity is correct. There was no beginning. There have always been divine beings and lesser intelligences, and there has always been a moral law. If so, then we are actually in the same boat as we would be in if the moral law preceded God. In essence, what we are saying is that the moral law was not created. It would then be either independent of or interdependent with the species of divine beings we recognize as gods. Either way, it is not dependent on God and did not originate with any divine being. If Joseph is right, then we can be certain that God did not create the moral law. Either it preceded the race of gods or both have always existed. We can be certain of this because the Divine Command Theory is virtually impossible to credibly defend. Morality cannot be arbitrary. If it is, then morality means nothing. It is only whatever God determined it to be, regardless of any preconceived notions of right and wrong, good and evil. So, if morality has always existed, what does that tell us about the nature of the universe we inhabit? Well, based on both Mormonism's and the broader Christianity's doctrine of punishment for sin, the universe is apparently a harsh taskmaster.

Punishment—A Violent Universe

For my purposes here, an important question is whether the moral law requires a punishment if it is violated. Lehi, in the Book of Mormon, answers in the affirmative (2 Nephi 2:10). So does Amulek (Alma 34:14–16). But does this make sense? Doctrine and Covenants 19 suggests that sin (the conscious violation of moral law) requires an excruciating physical and spiritual punishment—in other words, violence (D&C 19:16–18). But why? If no one created the moral law, does the law itself require violence if it is violated? Apparently, the scriptural answer is yes. This is a significant reason behind the proclaimed need for an infinite atonement. But why is such a drastic measure required apparently indiscriminately, regardless of the severity of the infraction?

In this life, we have myriad examples of how people can reform and improve and become more perfect without horrific punishment and without even the threat of violence. If someone steals from me, feels remorse, and returns the stolen item, I do not need to require that person to be beaten with a cudgel as a payment for the misdeed. Neither do I need someone like Jesus to be beaten with a cudgel for that person's wrong. And the person does not need to be beaten to motivate him to not steal again. I can simply forgive the person and encourage him to live a moral life. And if he does, end of story, at least as far as I'm concerned. For reform and improvement to take place, there is often no actual need for a severe punishment, inflicted either directly or vicariously. This being true, why would an eternal moral law demand violence for every sin? This I find hard to understand. But if it is God who demands the punishment, the violence, rather than the law itself, we must still ask why. What reason would he have for exacting a painful punishment even when the sinner experiences remorse and desires to reform? Why must the sinner, or his vicarious substitute, experience a painful punishment for performing an immoral act (see D&C 19:16)? What would be the purpose of such violence?

We read in the Book of Mormon that God has to be just. If he is not just, he is not God (Alma 42:13, 15, 22, 25). Note that God's need to be just is not dependent on his own arbitrary declaration that justice is a moral attribute. No, justice appears to be an independent standard that God must adhere to, otherwise he ceases to be God. He becomes something else if he is not just. Mercy is a similar attribute. "God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also" (Alma 42:15). But does being just involve always meting out a horrible punishment for every sin, either to the sinner or to some innocent substitute? Alma insists this is so: "Repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment" (Alma 42:16). Why is it impossible to repent without a punishment? What sort of eternal law requires this?

Some Latter-day Saint thinkers have interpreted this notion of punishment as merely a disruption in the relationship between God and any of his sinning children. God suffers pain from this broken relationship, and the sinner suffers also. But D&C 19 does not frame the punishment in this way. It's much more than just the feelings of separation, of a broken relationship. Let's look carefully at the Lord's words to Martin Harris: "Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I" (D&C 19:15–17). The Lord is not telling Martin Harris that he will simply feel the sorrow of a broken link between him and God. He is telling Martin that he will "smite" him in his "wrath," in his "anger." This is an inflicted punishment. Other scriptural passages indicate that God is required by his inherent justice to inflict this punishment, but D&C 19 suggests it may also be personal. The Lord is displeased, is angry, and will therefore cause Martin Harris to experience exquisite pain.

An additional problem with the notion of severe and painful punishment for sin is that there are endless gradations of sin. And the idea that a person who tells a white lie that harms no one deserves the same awful punishment as a serial rapist simply does not make sense. In our mortal legal codes, we recognize the need for the punishment to fit the crime, and also for the punishment to vary—or even be expunged—according to all sorts of extenuating circumstances. Indeed, for some minor infractions of the law, particularly when much time has passed and the violator has since lived a law-abiding life, no punishment is exacted. That eternal law would not do likewise is unthinkable to me. But section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants presents just such a scenario.

The circumstances that led to the revelation recorded now as section 19 are instructive. Martin Harris did not murder anyone. He did not rape anyone. He did not accuse Joseph Smith of being a false prophet. This was all about the printing of the Book of Mormon. Martin had agreed to mortgage his farm to pay Grandin, the printer, but he was apparently having second thoughts. This was, after all, a huge sacrifice on his part. According to Grandin's brother-in-law, "Harris became for a time in some degree staggered in his confidence; but nothing could be done in the way of printing without his aid."⁶ Yes, there was a lot riding on Martin's agreement to pay the printer, but his hesitation is easy to understand. How many of us would not have similar second thoughts? Yet for this he was threatened with an unbearable punishment. If this revelation is a recitation of the Lord's words and not a text influenced by Joseph's frustration with Martin, it indicates that each of us will be subject to that same punishment for any and all sins we do not repent of. Is this the sort of cosmos we inhabit? One that demands excruciating pain for every single sin, no matter how severe? Why? And the only way

6. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism. Biography of Its Founders and History of Its Church. Personal Remembrances and Historical Collections Hitherto Unwritten* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 51.

we can avoid this pain is for someone else to suffer it for us? Again, what sort of universe would require such an arrangement? Who divined this intent in the eternal moral law? This argument relies, of course, upon a certain theory of atonement. I will address this presently, but for now we must acknowledge that LDS doctrine teaches excruciating punishment for sins, unless the sinner repents. But even then, Jesus had to endure this punishment in our stead.

Some might argue that without the threat of a punishment, there is no incentive to change or reform or improve. I do not accept this argument, not in all cases, perhaps not even in most. Many people have shown that they will improve and change because they want to become better people. There is in many people an attraction to moral behavior and a revulsion regarding what we define as immoral behavior. Whether this attraction is a product of the Spirit or is somehow inherent in the eternal spirits of God's children is unknown. But this attraction to morality is common enough that when we encounter a completely amoral person, we are troubled. We assume something is fundamentally wrong with that person. Much of this may be attributed to culture and education, but where did this compulsion for moral education come from? Certainly not from the threat of violence. Many people are also motivated to improve because of the love of others. Indeed, love often seems a far better motivator than fear. So, this is one problem I see with the LDS doctrine of sin and the law.

Another significant problem I see is Joseph's inconsistent insistence that an act in some circumstances is sinful, while that same act, in different circumstances, is not sinful. The most obvious example is Nephi's killing of Laban. But in Joseph's purported letter to Nancy Rigdon, an attempt to convince her of the appropriateness of plural marriage, he explained that whatever God commands is moral, regardless of how it might offend our moral sensibilities. But this sounds a great deal like moral relativism. It also returns us to Divine Command Theory, making the moral law arbitrary. Whatever God commands is good, no

matter how repulsive, even according to blanket commandments God has given.

So what is the correct cosmology regarding the nature and origin of moral law? We must choose among several eternal possibilities. Is there a moral law that precedes God? Or is there a moral law that God created? Or do both exist eternally with no beginning and no source? Or is the moral law just a human construct that God has nothing to do with? Or is the moral law somehow synonymous with God—God is who he is, and morality is simply doing what God would do? Whatever the case, logic strongly suggests that God is not the author of the moral law. But each of the other alternatives presents difficulties. Perhaps because of these philosophical difficulties Joseph Smith was not consistent in his teachings related to this principle. We also find modern prophets and apostles teaching doctrines that derive from inconsistent cosmologies. Let's explore some implications of these inconsistencies.

Consequences of Competing Cosmologies

In the LDS Bible Dictionary, God is referred to as “the supreme Governor of the universe.”⁷ President Gordon B. Hinckley referred to him as “the great God of the universe.”⁸ A search on churchofjesuschrist.org for the term “Creator of the universe” yields several general conference talks and Church magazine articles by members of the First Presidency, apostles, and other General Authorities in which they refer to either God the Father or Jesus Christ as the Creator of the universe. This statement assumes a particular cosmology, one in which God is separate from the universe, predates it, and brought it into existence. The obvious question regarding this cosmology (and one that has been asked throughout the ages) is, of course, where was God when he created the

7. LDS Bible Dictionary, 681, s.v. “God.”

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “We Bear Witness of Him,” *Ensign* 28, no. 5 (May 1990): 71.

universe? A related but less frequently asked question is, where were we? Did God just create us out of himself, or out of nothing?

This particular manifestation of LDS theology is quite in line with a mainstream Christian view of God. But it is in direct conflict with the later teachings of Joseph Smith and some of his early followers. The most concise presentation of this uniquely LDS concept of God is Lorenzo Snow's famous 1840 couplet: "As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be."⁹ Although it is inconsistent with certain statements made by more recent prophets and apostles,¹⁰ this couplet found its way into the 2013 Melchizedek Priesthood/Relief Society manual *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow*.¹¹ The distinctive doctrine it propounds also appeared prominently in previous manuals containing the teachings of Brigham Young and Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith is reported to have taught: "God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!

9. In Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow: One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Desert News, 1884), 46; see also "The Grand Destiny of Man," *Deseret Evening News*, July 20, 1901, 22.

10. See, for instance, M. Russell Ballard, "Face the Future with Faith and Hope" (commencement address given at BYU-Idaho, Apr. 6, 2012), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2014/01/face-the-future-with-faith-and-hope?lang=eng> ("Always remember that Jesus Christ—the Creator of the universe, the architect of our salvation, and the head of this Church—is in control."); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "A Matter of a Few Degrees," Apr. 5, 2008, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/04/a-matter-of-a-few-degrees?lang=eng> ("Of course, your greatest friend [Jesus Christ] is the all-powerful Creator of the universe."); Neal A. Maxwell, "Answer Me," Oct. 1, 1988, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1988/10/answer-me?lang=eng> ("Besides, we are all beggars anyway [see Mosiah 4:19], beggars rescued by the Creator of the universe who lived humbly as a person 'of no reputation.'").

11. See *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 83.

That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make Himself visible,—I say, if you were to see Him today, you would see Him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man.”¹²

Brigham Young was even more explicit: “The great architect, manager and superintendent, controller and dictator who guides this work is out of sight to our natural eyes. He lives on another world; he is in another state of existence; he has passed the ordeals we are now passing through; he has received an experience, has suffered and enjoyed and knows all that we know regarding the toils, sufferings, life and death of this mortality, for he has passed through the whole of it, and has received his crown and exaltation and holds the keys and the power of this Kingdom.”¹³

In this particular take on cosmology, God did not create the universe. And he certainly does not control the whole universe. Indeed, he was once as we are now, living on a mortal world, gaining experience, working out his own salvation, with, presumably, a God of his own to guide him and a savior to redeem him. I suppose if we espouse a multiverse cosmology, then it may be possible to reconcile all these ideas, but neither Joseph Smith nor any of his followers have given any credence to such a cosmology. And a multiverse cosmology would not solve the problem of where the moral law came from. It would only multiply the problem.

Both of these views of God and his place in the universe have many implications. As I have discussed in a previous article,¹⁴ if God did not

12. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 40.

13. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 30.

14. Roger Terry, “The Source of God’s Authority: One Argument for an Unambiguous Doctrine of Preexistence,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 49, no. 3 (2016): 109–44.

create everything, especially us, then how does he have any authority over us? If, as Joseph Smith suggested several times, God is not capable of creating our spirits (or minds or intelligence or whatever Joseph meant by *spirit*), then he likely has authority over us only because we granted it to him. This places us in an entirely different relationship to him than we would experience if he had created us either from nothing or from himself or even from preexistent but insentient matter.

These possibilities still all flow from the initial question I asked: Which came first, God or the moral law? Or, asked another way, did God create the moral law, or does it exist independent of him? A positive answer to either question creates difficulties. If God created the moral law without basing it on anything, then morality must be arbitrary, which is problematic. How could we possibly worship an arbitrary God? What sort of faith could we possibly have in such a being? But if the law was independent of God, then why does it seemingly require violence for its violation? How can the law require God to punish either us or some substitute who is willing to suffer torment for our mistakes? What sort of cosmos does this imply? The notion of an atonement for sin flows naturally from a universe in which the violation of an eternal law somehow requires a violent punishment.

The LDS Concept of Atonement

The LDS concept of atonement comes largely from the Book of Mormon, but this presents some unique problems, partially because atonement theology in the Book of Mormon is somewhat inconsistent, but also because the predominant doctrine suggests a cosmology we may not be entirely comfortable with. Historian Matthew Bowman made the following observation: “The atonement theory of the Book of Mormon is . . . complicated; it frequently describes the atonement in terms of ransom theory (2 Nephi 2:27; [2] Nephi 9:10), for example, and contains verses consistent with a subjective, moral influence theory (Alma 7:11). The most extended Book of Mormon discussions of the atonement, however, describe it in legalistic terminology, meeting the

inexorable demands of natural law. See Alma 34 and 42.”¹⁵ If you look at the verses Bowman references for ransom and moral influence theories, however, the evidence is not very strong. For instance, 2 Nephi 2:27 does speak of “the captivity and power of the devil” and of “the great Mediator,” but there is no mention of a ransom being paid, although if there were a ransom, we must assume it would be paid to the devil, since he apparently holds us captive in some way. The preceding verse speaks of people being “redeemed from the fall” and becoming “free forever, knowing good from evil,” but again, there is no mention of a ransom. Likewise, 2 Nephi 9:10, which Bowman misidentifies as 1 Nephi 9:10, speaks of God preparing “a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell.” And the preceding verse speaks of our spirits becoming “angels to a devil” without the atonement. But there is no mention of our deliverance being made possible by God or of Christ paying a ransom to the devil for our release. The means by which we gain freedom from death and hell is not specified. Much can be read into these verses and others, but the Book of Mormon in general does not speak of the atonement as a ransom.

Bowman’s single reference to the Book of Mormon’s support for the moral influence theory of atonement is even less convincing. Alma 7:11 states, “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.” In the next verse, Alma declares that Christ “will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” According to Brigham Young University professor John Young, proponents of the moral influence theory “suggested that Christ’s ability to save mankind, to make them one with God, came chiefly through his ability to inspire moral change. . . . Through emulation, humans achieve a

15. Matthew Bowman, “The Crisis of Mormon Christology: History, Progress, and Protestantism, 1880–1930,” *Fides et Historia* 40, no. 2 (2008): 4n10.

moral character pure enough to warrant inclusion in heaven.”¹⁶ Alma 7:11 and the verses preceding and following it do not speak in these terms. Alma is claiming instead that Christ somehow took upon him our infirmities, our pains and sicknesses, so that he can know how to succor us. Nowhere in this chapter does Alma claim that Jesus saves us by the example of his moral character.

Others, particularly Eugene England, Blake Ostler, and Terryl Givens, have expounded theories of atonement based on Book of Mormon teachings that strip it of its more legalistic aspects,¹⁷ but if we look carefully at the two chapters that specifically address atonement theology, Alma 34 and 42 (both mentioned by Bowman), we must acknowledge that the Book of Mormon’s position on atonement is predominantly in harmony with satisfaction theory and, especially, penal substitution theory, which has been strongly proclaimed by modern-day apostles such as Boyd K. Packer.¹⁸

Amulek, in his sermon recorded in Alma 34, speaks of a “great and last sacrifice” that must be made and that must be “infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:10). This harks back to the notion that sin requires a violent punishment in order to be erased. Amulek relies strongly on the idea that there is a law that requires some sort of satisfaction. “The law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can

16. John D. Young, “Long Narratives: Toward a New Mormon Understanding of Apostasy,” in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, edited by Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 319.

17. Eugene England, “That They Might Not Suffer: The Gift of Atonement,” http://eugeneengland.org/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/1966_e_002.pdf; Blake Ostler, “Atonement in Mormon Thought,” <http://blakeostler.com/docs/AtonementInMormonThought.pdf>; Fiona Givens and Terryl Givens, “How We’ve Been Misunderstanding God’s Title of ‘Savior,’” *LDS Living*, Nov. 6, 2017, <https://www.ldsliving.com/How-We-ve-Been-Misunderstanding-God-s-Title-of-Savior/s/86849>.

18. Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *Ensign* 7, no. 5 (May 1977): 54–56.

be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (Alma 34:12). He also emphasizes Jesus’s ability to “satisfy the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Christ stands “betwixt [the children of men] and justice; . . . having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice” (Mosiah 15:9). An earlier prophet, Jacob, also teaches that “the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them” (2 Nephi 9:26).

The law is crucially important in the Book of Mormon—in Lehi’s teachings to Jacob (2 Nephi 2:5, 7, 13, 26), in Jacob’s words to the people of Nephi (2 Nephi 9: 25–27), in King Benjamin’s great sermon at the temple (Mosiah 2:33), and especially in Alma’s masterful discourse to his son Corianton (Alma 42). Alma is specifically answering his son’s question regarding “the justice of God in punishing the sinner” (Alma 42:1). Justice, of course, has everything to do with the law, and “all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice” (Alma 42:14). The redemption of humankind could be effected only through “the plan of mercy . . . ; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15). Alma emphasizes the necessity of repentance and of punishment for breaking the law. “Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be” (Alma 42:16). Alma then asks what he considers a logical sequence of questions. “Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?” (Alma 42:17). He then attempts to explain to Corianton the necessity of the law. “If there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin. . . . But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:20, 22).

Alma seems to hold two contradictory ideas regarding the cosmology behind the law. He speaks as if God has given the law to us and established a punishment for violating it. But he also speaks as if God is bound by a higher moral law. He must be both just and merciful. These appear to be moral concepts that God did not invent but that he must obey in order to be God. Perhaps God abides by an eternal moral law that governs his ability to be considered deity. Based on this moral law, he then gives us various moral laws that we must follow. If we don't, we will be punished, or else we must find a substitute to suffer for us. The punishment is fixed and eternal, and someone must pay the penalty. The higher principle of justice must be satisfied. So either the sinners themselves or some acceptable substitute must suffer. Because the moral law requires God to be merciful, he suffers the penalty himself, in the person of Jesus, "to appease the demands of justice" (Alma 42:15). "What," Alma asks Corianton, "do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:25)

This assumption about God's relationship to a higher moral law is consistent with Joseph Smith's later teachings, but it also raises questions about the nature of the eternity we inhabit. And what if God were to cease being merciful or just? Would he be punished? By whom or what? What sort of violent punishment would he face? And who established this requirement? Does some society of Gods establish rules by which they police each other?

The Requirements for Resurrection

We have briefly discussed one half of the atonement: the Savior's suffering for our sins. The other half is the idea that Jesus rose from the dead and broke the bands of death, thus opening the door for all of us to pass from death to life again. According to Abinadi, Jesus was "led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, . . . and thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory

over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men. . . . But behold, the bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead” (Mosiah 15:7–8, 20). Amulek likewise taught that “Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death. The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; . . . and we shall be brought to stand before God” (Alma 11:42–43).

Paul also teaches this idea: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:20–22). This is fairly straightforward doctrine: Because of Adam’s fall, we die; our spirits and bodies separate at death. We cannot resurrect ourselves. Somehow Christ’s death and resurrection break the bands of death for us all, and through his power our spirits and bodies reunite eternally.

So, placing this doctrine in the context of the primary question explored in this article, we must ask why. If there is some eternal law that dictates the particulars of how men and women become gods and goddesses, why must we die? And why must a deity also die, in an excruciating manner, and then take up his body again? How does this make it possible for everyone else to be resurrected? Why can’t God just exercise his power over life and death and raise us all from the dead? What eternal law makes it necessary for a sacrificial lamb to die and then rise again in order for the rest of us to do likewise? Or why can’t God simply allow us all to live eternally? What is it about death that is necessary for our progression?

In Jacob’s great sermon to the Nephites in 2 Nephi 9, he refers to death almost as if it were a creature that must be conquered: “They are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell” (2 Nephi 9:26). So, what is death? Is it an enemy that holds us captive? Certainly not. It is simply the condition of having the body and spirit separate. But why

must Christ allow his spirit and body to separate, then bring them back together for the same process to occur for the rest of God's children? Where did this requirement come from? From God? Doesn't he have power over life and death? It appears that he is bound by some eternal requirement that insists one flawless individual must suffer an excruciating death and then rise under his own power from death in order to make it possible for all others to experience the same reunion of body and spirit. Where did this requirement originate?

I'm assuming that if God had the choice, he wouldn't require his best-loved Son to experience crucifixion. If he could grant us the gift of resurrection without this horrendous price, wouldn't he certainly do so? If the conditions are arbitrary, God certainly wouldn't invent something as gruesome and horrific as death by crucifixion as the price that must be paid to open the gates of resurrection. But according to LDS doctrine, that is the price. If so, who determined it? Who said that the only way to reunite billions of bodies and spirits is for someone like Jesus to be crucified and then raise himself from death? Again, the apparent answer to this difficult question is that nobody determined this. It is required by some eternal law. It is the only way. This is apparently part of the cosmology we accept. But does it make sense?

In LDS theology, the end and the beginning are inseparably connected. We cannot understand the resurrection and our eventual assignment to a kingdom of glory or perdition without first understanding where we come from and what our relationship to God is. This, of course, lies at the heart of any cosmology. God's relationship to the cosmos and to eternal law is central. But so is our relationship to him and to eternal law. How do we fit into this picture? What is the truth about our place in the eternal scheme of things?

The Nature of Our Premortal Existence

If we are to settle upon a workable cosmology, we must deal with at least one more secondary question. Did God create our spirits? In a footnote

to my article “The Source of God’s Authority: One Argument for an Unambiguous Doctrine of Preexistence,” I present evidence of how Joseph Smith’s teachings about this question changed over the course of his prophetic career.¹⁹ The Book of Mormon has no definite doctrine of the premortality of spirits, so it does not weigh in on the question of whether God created those spirits or not. All we get are vague statements such as King Benjamin’s counsel, “Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth” (Mosiah 4:9). This statement is consistent with Christian theology of Joseph Smith’s day. Soon Joseph was expanding his cosmology, however, and in 1830 he recorded a document supposedly written by Moses in which the premortal spirits of men and women were said to be created by God (Moses 3:5; 6:36). Starting in 1839, however, Joseph Smith began teaching that God could not create our spirits. What Joseph meant, exactly, by the term *spirit* is not always clear, but from the King Follett

19. Terry, “Source of God’s Authority,” 112–113n15, reads, in part:

“It should be noted that Joseph Smith’s understanding of the premortal existence of the human race and related concepts evolved and expanded over time. To try to harmonize all of his statements and even his revelations on the subject is probably impossible. Consequently, his later statements deserve more attention than his earlier statements. For example, Moses 6:36, revealed in June 1830, speaks of ‘spirits that God had created.’ Likewise, Moses 3:5 refers to ‘the children of men’ and that ‘in heaven I created them.’ But in 1839, Joseph began teaching the doctrine of uncreated spirits: ‘The Spirit of Man is not a created being; it existed from Eternity & will exist to eternity. Anything created cannot be Eternal’ (Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* [Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991], 9, quoting the Aug. 8, 1839, entry in Willard Richards Pocket Companion). In February 1840, he taught, ‘I believe that the *soul* is eternal; and had no beginning’ (Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 33, quoting Matthew Livingston Davis, a journalist who reported a speech Joseph gave on Feb. 5, 1840). It is difficult to reconcile these [early and late] statements.”

Discourse and other incomplete records, it is fairly evident that at the end of his life Joseph believed in a cosmology in which the intelligence or mind of human beings has always existed and was not created by God. In other words, the sentient part of us, our identity, was not and could not be created. Whether that identity was always connected to a spirit body is unclear.

This later cosmology places us in a far different relationship to God the Father than Joseph's earlier teachings. Rather than God being the source of everything, including our existence, we are, in a sense, equal with him in certain ways. We are, for instance, as eternal as he is. If this is true, then we are also independent in certain important ways. As I put it in my previous article, "If, as Joseph boldly declared, we are eternal beings whose minds or intelligence could not be created, and if, as the account of Abraham suggests, God came down in the beginning among a group of already existing beings, then we were, in a very real sense, self-existent and independent, and God, no matter how much more intelligent or perfect he was, would have had no right to dictate to us how we were to exist. To put it in modern capitalist terms, he did not conduct a hostile takeover of our eternal spirits or intelligences."²⁰ Instead, he offered to become our Father, a proposition we must have accepted, probably by covenant, which granted God certain authority over us, including the right to implement laws to enable our progress.

And this brings up another question. If we existed independent of God and covenanted with him at some point to become his children, to allow him to assist us along the path to the sort of life he enjoys, what was our status before we came into our Heavenly Father's family? And how did the eternal moral law that, according to LDS scripture, requires a violent punishment for anyone who violates it affect us? Who was there to enforce this law?

20. Terry, "Source of God's Authority,"135.

This is a question that a true cosmology must answer. What, indeed, is the nature of our universe? What are the parameters it imposes on us, and on God? Or did God create the universe? If he did, why did he create it the way it is? Why did he impose conditions that require physical torment—violence—for every sin, no matter how small? Why is there, according to LDS scripture, no accommodation for growth and reform without punishment, either personal or vicarious? These questions, I submit, are not idle musings. And they are not attempts to be difficult or contrarian. They strike at the heart of our theology and affect our ability to exercise faith; they also appeal to the yearnings of souls who are searching for truth.

Other Questions

This essay is already rather wide-ranging, but it is in danger of roaming even farther afield, so far, in fact, that I likely wouldn't be able rein it in and draw any sort of sensible conclusion at whatever end it might reach. Such is the nature of the questions cosmology raises, because cosmology affects everything, *everything* we believe. So, instead of pursuing other lines of inquiry that have already come to mind and threaten to lead to even more lines of inquiry, I have opted instead to merely list a number of questions. These questions (or sets of questions) will illustrate, I hope, how important it is to arrive at a correct cosmology, but they may also open the door for other inquisitive minds to explore their suggested theological implications and contradictions. So, here goes:

1. Assuming that the human spirit is in the general form of our mortal body (see Ether 3:16), how did this particular form ever come to be, especially if Joseph Smith's later teachings are correct and God did not (and could not) create them?
2. Are the expansion physicists correct? Did everything start with a Big Bang and slowly evolve into the universe as we know it. How would God (or many gods) fit into this scenario? How would we fit into

such a universe? What would be our origin story and our eventual destiny?

3. Even if the Big Bang describes, more or less, how the universe as we know it began, what preceded the Big Bang? Where did the physical material come from? What about the relatively empty space that physical material is now filling? What are its features and parameters? According to modern physics, “Experiments continue to show that there is no ‘space’ that stands apart from space-time itself, . . . no arena in which matter, energy and gravity operate which is not affected by matter, energy and gravity. General relativity tells us that what we call space is just another feature of the gravitational field of the universe, so space and space-time can and do not exist apart from the matter and energy that creates the gravitational field.”²¹ Where, then, did matter and energy come from?
4. If everything has always existed, in a raw or unrefined state, why and how does God have authority to manipulate it (create worlds and such)? Particularly if he was once as we are now? Who granted him permission to manipulate matter and energy in at least a corner of the universe?
5. Is the universe (physical matter and dark matter and energy) moral? Does it somehow respond to an authority figure who is able to shape it to some sort of moral end?
6. In what sense is gender eternal? If spirits cannot be created, are they eternally male or female? The current popular LDS belief is that spirits were born, much as we are in mortality, to heavenly parents, but that their native intelligence cannot be created. If so, where did gender begin? Is it eternal, or did our Heavenly Parents determine what gender our spirits would be, perhaps based on certain characteristics of our native intelligence? Also, if gender is eternal, is same-sex attraction also eternal?
7. What about Mother in Heaven? If she exists, why do her children have no contact with her? Why has nothing about her ever been revealed? As one woman put it, what is the postmortal destiny of women? To disappear? So it seems. Or are there simply too many of her to receive

21. Sten Odenwald, “Can Space Exist by Itself without Matter or Energy Around?” Gravity B Probe: Testing Einstein’s Universe (website), accessed Aug. 27, 2021, <https://einstein.stanford.edu/content/relativity/a11332.html>.

a place of honor in the pantheon of deity? Is polygamy on a galactic scale the order of eternity?²²

8. “The doctrine of personal eternalism,” claims Blake Ostler, “raises problems for Mormon thought. If the number of intelligences is infinite, then an infinite number of intelligences will remain without the chance to progress by further organization. If, on the other hand, the number of intelligences is finite, the eternal progression of gods resulting from begetting spirits must one day cease. Either way, the dilemma remains.”²³ If, as Joseph Smith taught toward the end of his life, the spirits of men and women cannot be created, then is there an infinite quantity of them? If so, then some, simple math tells us, will never experience even the beginning of eternal progression. They will remain forever in an unimproved and stagnant state. If there is not an infinite quantity, then at some point the work of God (and all gods) will, by definition, abruptly end. What happens then? Do they become as *Star Trek’s* Q Continuum, members of an omniscient, omnipotent, but useless race, sitting on the porch in their rocking chairs, bored to tears?
9. What does it mean to be saved? Saved not only from what, but to what? If there is an eternal law, what does it have in store for us? If God produced the moral law he apparently follows (and expects us to), what does he have in store for us, specifically?

22. Brigham Young and other early Church leaders apparently believed in eternal polygamy: “You who wish that there were no such thing in existence [as polygamy], if you have in your hearts to say: ‘We will pass along in the Church without obeying or submitting to it in our faith or believing this order, because, for aught that we know, this community may be broken up yet, and we may have lucrative offices offered to us; we will not, therefore, be polygamists lest we should fail in obtaining some earthly honor, character and office, etc.’—the man that has that in his heart, and will continue to persist in pursuing that policy, will come short of dwelling in the presence of the Father and the Son, in celestial glory. The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.” Brigham Young, Aug. 19, 1866, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:269.

23. Blake T. Ostler, “The Idea of Pre-Existence in the Development of Mormon Thought,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 1 (1982): 74.

10. What is the Spirit? We really have no idea. But it appears to be the key to everything. It is the medium, apparently, through which God works. It somehow connects him to all of his creations, including us, with no regard to such parameters as the speed of light, and yet, according to Joseph Smith, God did not create our spirits. Did the Spirit always exist? It is apparently not a personage. What, then, is it, and how is it connected to the eternal moral law? Is it perhaps that law? If so, what is God's relationship to the Spirit? Does it precede him? Does it proceed from him? Or does he operate within its established parameters?

Conclusion

Without a correct cosmology, we cannot have correct doctrines, because our doctrines flow from our understanding of the universe we inhabit and our place in it. Current LDS doctrines are inconsistent in certain ways because we accept at least two (and perhaps many more) cosmologies. Joseph Smith was very interested in the nature of eternity, God's place in it, and our relationship to him. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to settle all the questions that naturally arise from his sometimes-conflicting doctrines. But we need those questions answered. Otherwise, we cannot answer some very basic questions about the plan of salvation.

As you can readily see, coming up with a correct and complete cosmology is far above my pay grade. My entire purpose here is not to explicate a perfect cosmology. It is merely to raise problematic questions to illustrate the need for such a cosmology, so that those who do find themselves in positions of theological authority can perhaps see the need to get this one thing right, this foundation of all theology.

This, it seems, should be a high priority for a Church that believes in continuing revelation and claims to teach true doctrine (even if some of it is inconsistent). It is my belief that a correct cosmology can be arrived at only through revelation. But our revelations today are almost

exclusively institutional in nature. They affect programs and curricula but do not address unresolved theological matters. Until we receive a correct understanding of cosmology, however, we will have gaps and inconsistencies in our doctrines, which reduce the appeal and effectiveness of our religion.

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QUEER BODIES, QUEER TECHNOLOGIES, AND QUEER POLICIES

Blaire Ostler

Though there is a well-established conversation on how reproductive technologies and policies influence cisgender, heterosexual women's bodies within Mormonism, there is a less established conversation on how reproductive technologies and policies are affecting LGBTQ+ Saints.¹ Granted, the majority of the Church's attention has focused on non-queer women's reproductivity and not on the LGBTQ+ community. However, within the last handful of decades the Church has expanded its attention to include specific policies directed at the LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saint community.²

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints explicitly states its position in the *General Handbook* concerning how and when reproductive technologies are to be used. The morality of a technology is less a matter of the technology itself, but rather of matter of who is using it. Policies outlined in the handbook are directing reproductive technologies toward the creation of a fertile, cisgender, heterosexual, sex binary

1. Melissa Proctor, "Bodies, Babies, and Birth Control," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 159–75.

2. Tad Walch, "Church Releases Updates to Handbook for Latter-day Saint Leaders Worldwide," *Deseret News*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/7/31/21349687/church-handbook-changes-released-latter-day-saints-mormon-lds>.

under the guise of God's laws.³ In this brief article, I discuss the Church's current policies on reproductive technologies as outlined in the handbook and how they affect specifically the LGBTQ+ community.

Reproductive technology is already changing the landscape of gender and reproduction. For instance, such technology allows two cisgender women and one cisgender man to be the biological parents of their child who has the DNA of three biological parents.⁴ Uterine transplants allow barren bodies the ability to gestate their offspring.⁵ This is not science fiction. This is already happening. If these trends continue, technology could eventually enable trans women the ability to birth and nurse their own children.⁶ In time, two cisgender women could produce their own offspring without the need of a sperm donor, and children could have shared DNA with both their gay, cisgender fathers.⁷ Advancements in reproductive and medical technologies are not just changing the aesthetics and sociology of gender but also the biological utility and function of sex.

Biological sex classification is predicated on assumed reproductive function. According to Aristotelian essentialism, which is the basis

3. "38.6.9, Fertility Treatments," and "2.1.3, Parents and Children," *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook?lang=eng>.

4. Ian Sample, "Three-Parent Babies Explained: What Are the Concerns and Are They Justified?," *Guardian*, Feb. 2, 2015, <http://theguardian.com/science/2015/feb/02/three-parent-babies-explained>.

5. Bill Chappell, "A First: Uterus Transplant Gives Parents a Healthy Baby," *NPR International*, Oct. 4, 2014, <http://npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/10/04/353691555/a-first-uterus-transplant-gives-parents-a-healthy-baby>

6. B. P. Jones et al., "Uterine Transplantation in Transgender Women," *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 126, no. 2 (2019): 152–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.15438>.

7. Guy Ringer, "Get Ready for Embryos from Two Men or Two Women," *Time*, Mar. 18, 2015, <http://time.com/3748019/same-sex-couples-biological-children>.

of most gender essentialist claims, function is key to essentialism. As Aristotle explains in his biopsychology, an eye is only an eye if it fulfills the measure of its creation, to provide vision. If an eye cannot see, it is an eye in name only. In Aristotle's words, "The eye itself is the matter for vision; and if [vision] departs, there is no eye any longer, except equivocally, as in the case of an eye in a statue or a painting."⁸ According to essentialism, an eye must have the ability to see to be considered an eye in actuality. If not, it is only an eye in potentiality. However, if a blind eye has its vision restored, it is again an eye in actuality. To be considered an "actual eye" is a matter of function and utility in Aristotle's essentialist philosophy.

When function is at the center of gender, reproduction takes on a special role. Under gender essentialist philosophy, biological sex is a matter of reproductive utility, at least in potentiality. A woman must have the potential ability to reproduce to be considered a woman. A strict gender essentialist might even claim that she would have to actually reproduce to be a "actual woman." Her biological assignment is predicated on her reproductive ability, and an infertile woman is not an "actual woman" but only a woman in potential. If she cannot reproduce, an infertile woman is a woman in name only, like a statue or painting. She may look, talk, and sound like a woman, but if she doesn't serve the biological utility of a woman, she is not an "actual woman." Likewise, an infertile man or even childless man is not a man in function. To be a biologically "functioning" man or woman would require fertility and the fulfillment of that utility. In the stricter interpretation, a man would have to reproduce in actuality to be considered an "actual man." If not, he only has the potential to be a man, essentially speaking.

Reproductive gender essentialism claims exclude trans persons for their gender identity. However, these same arguments, when taken seriously, also exclude infertile and intersex women too. Such a strict

8. Hippocrates George Apostle, *Aristotle's On the Soul (De Anima)* (Grinnell, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1981), 20.

definition of “man” or “woman” does not simply exclude trans folks but also any body not fulfilling its biological utility. After all, biological potential and utility is the basis of a biological sex assignment.

There are many parallels with Aristotle’s essentialism, gender essentialism, and Mormon theology. In Mormon theology, doctrine, and policy, reproduction is of supreme importance.⁹ Brigham Young warned the Saints about “attempts to destroy and dry up the fountains of life.”¹⁰ He also stated, “There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty?—to prepare tabernacles for them.” He continues, “It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can.”¹¹ Brigham Young’s encouragement for Latter-day Saints to reproduce is echoed in temple ritual, covenants, culture, scripture, and yes, the *General Handbook*. We are commanded to multiply and replenish the earth.¹² Providing bodies for spirits is a critical part of Mormon theology and doctrine.

Infertile bodies then pose quite a problem in Mormon theology. They must be “fixed” or at least have the potential to be “fixed,” in the next life or with current reproductive technology, as a matter of both utility and redemption. If God commanded us to multiply and replenish, God must provide a way for all bodies to achieve the measure of their creation. According to scripture, God gives us no commandment unless there is a way prepared for us to accomplish said

9. Genesis 1:28; Genesis 9:1; Genesis 35:11; and The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World [Sept. 1995],” *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/11/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng>: “We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”

10. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:120–21.

11. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:56.

12. Genesis 1:28 KJV.

commandment.¹³ In Mormonism, everyone must have the potential to reproduce—even infertile bodies. If one of our earthly purposes is to birth and rear children, technology can and has assisted many faithful Latter-day Saints in that endeavor. As explained in the handbook, “When needed, reproductive technology can assist a married woman and man in their righteous desire to have children.”¹⁴ Technology is among the means Latter-day Saints use to fulfill the measure of their creation.

In a certain regard, infertile bodies have a shared “queerness” with the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁵ Both infertile and queer bodies are not performing according to their sex assignment and biological function, which in the Mormon imagination includes reproduction. Infertile bodies are queer bodies, both biologically and theologically. Many queer persons and bodies are not reproductive whether because they are single or in a nonreproductive relationship. If the purpose of a biological sex assignment is to reproduce via copulation, anything outside that narrow definition and gender essentialist view is somewhat “queer.”

Yet, despite infertile and LGBTQ+ Saints having a shared “queerness,” LGBTQ+ Saints carry the brunt of the queer prejudice. Many LGBTQ+ Saints that are not in cisgender, heterosexual relationships are excluded from reproductive technologies that would enable us to have families, while infertile, cisgender, heterosexual Latter-day Saints are not. Is the technology being used to reinforce cisgender, heterosexual,

13. 1 Nephi 3:7.

14. 38.6.9 “Fertility Treatments,” *General Handbook*.

15. For the purposes of this article, I will expand the definition of “queer” or “queerness” to include infertile bodies. Though “queer” has been used to reference the LGBTQIA+ community, I will use “queer” and “queerness” to denote all deviations from a binary, cisgender, heterosexual, fertile body. In the context of Mormon theology, infertility is its own sort of queerness when it deviates from the general pre-proscribed function of biological sex, which is to reproduce. If a man or woman cannot reproduce, their biological functioned is “queer.”

patriarchal gender assignments or reject or subvert said gender assignments? Prejudice against LGBTQ+ Saints creating celestial families of our own is codified in the handbook by prohibiting not just some kinds of relationships but also who can use specific reproductive technologies.

Though the handbook has made space for technological modifications for cis-male and cis-female bodies and couples, the Church has simultaneously demonstrated repeated resistance to technological modifications of many LGBTQ+ bodies and couples that don't include cis-male and cis-female couples. As stated in the handbook, "The pattern of a husband and wife providing bodies for God's spirit children is divinely appointed."¹⁶ In other words, vaginal-penile penetration is God's way to bring children into the world, and methods outside this "divine appointment" require patriarchal policing and approval. The collision of biology and technology is pushing against a fragile system which requires constant, meticulous, vigilant, and legalistic policymaking at the highest levels of authority in the Church, even from the First Presidency.¹⁷

Various reproductive technologies that would benefit queer reproduction are discussed in the handbook. Under the heading "Policies on Moral Issues," there is a list of "discouragements" that include surrogacy, sperm/egg donation, artificial insemination, and in vitro fertilization.¹⁸ Though these practices are discouraged, they are not entirely forbidden. These specific reproductive technologies are available to some but not all. For example, a cisgender, heterosexual man might require artificial insemination to impregnate his cisgender, heterosexual wife. Under the current handbook, this is permissible. As stated, "When needed, reproductive technology can assist a married woman and man in their righteous desire to have children. This technology includes artificial

16. "38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood," *General Handbook*.

17. "38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood," *General Handbook*.

18. "38.6.7, Donating or Selling Sperm or Eggs," and "38.6.9, Fertility Treatments," *General Handbook*.

insemination and in vitro fertilization.”¹⁹ Furthermore, their children are “born in the covenant” if the parents are already sealed.²⁰

However, the handbook does not simply open the door for artificial insemination, sperm/egg donation, surrogacy, and in vitro fertilization as sanctioned technologies for everyone. Sperm/egg donation and surrogacy are means frequently used by the LGBTQ+ community and therefore require more policing than artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization between a monogamous, cisgender, heterosexual couple. For example, a child born via surrogacy is not born in the covenant.²¹ This child requires a separate sealing with First Presidency approval.²² This ensures the First Presidency can exclude children parented by same-sex couples.²³

The handbook explicitly states, multiple times, that these technologies are for a cisgender “husband and wife”: “The Church discourages artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization using sperm from anyone but the husband or an egg from anyone but the wife.” This clarification reinforces a cis-male and cis-female application, which is especially potent when combined with other policies and prohibitions on LGBTQ+ participation in the Church and temple.²⁴ Thus, these reproductive technologies can be used as a corrective measure for infertile cis-male and cis-female married Saints but not used to assist LGBTQ+

19. “38.6.9, Fertility Treatments,” *General Handbook*.

20. “38.4.2.7, Children Conceived by Artificial Insemination or In Vitro Fertilization,” *General Handbook*.

21. Surrogacy is a complicated issue when it comes to women’s bodies, especially impoverished women of color. Though surrogacy is a technology to help people, including gay parents, bring children into the world, it is also ethically complicated due to economic stratification that exploits women of color. There are significant ethical dilemmas to address beyond the scope of this paper.

22. “38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood,” *General Handbook*.

23. “38.6.15, Same-Sex Attraction and Same-Sex Behavior” and “38.6.16, Same-Sex Marriage,” *General Handbook*.

24. “38.6.9, Fertility Treatments,” *General Handbook*.

Saints in creating celestial families. Quite explicitly, the handbook's current policies demonstrate that celestial families can be created via technology but only if you are cisgender, in a mixed-sex relationship and/or intersex.

There are many examples of the Church allowing technological transformations for cisgender persons, while disallowing the procedures for trans persons. A cisgender woman is allowed breast augmentation or even labiaplasty, but trans women are threatened and/or excommunicated for similar or even less invasive technological body modifications.²⁵ Likewise, some trans folks are threatened with ecclesiastical discipline for a mastectomy, while cancer patients are not taught to counsel with their bishop before undergoing a mastectomy.²⁶ The handbook makes no mention of a cisgender woman who requires hormone therapy for menopause but has an entire section dedicated to policing how trans bodies can use hormone therapy.²⁷ This fragile system of correcting, policing, and erasing queerness is shaken by the collision of technology, biology, and theology.

Intersex bodies specifically pose a threat to an imagined biological sex binary because intersex bodies are literally born non-binary.²⁸ According to the cisgender, heterosexual, fertile, patriarchal mandate, intersex bodies and infertile bodies must be "corrected" to fit the

25. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "After Leading LDS Congregations and Designing Mormon Temples, This Utah Dad is Building a New Life—as a Woman," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/mormon/2017/07/21/after-leading-lds-congregations-and-designing-mormon-temples-this-utah-dad-is-building-a-new-life-as-a-woman/>.

26. Courtney Tanner, "A Transgender BYU Student Could Be Expelled and Face Discipline in the Mormon Church for Having Breast-Removal Surgery," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 16, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2018/08/16/transgender-byu-student/>.

27. "38.6.22, Surrogate Motherhood," *General Handbook*.

28. Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

imagined biological sex binary of how a man or woman is supposed to function. The gender binary is not just socially constructed, it must be technologically and surgically constructed, medicated, corrected, performed, and strictly enforced. Intersex persons are often erased or ignored in Mormon discourse, or when we are addressed, intersex conditions are treated like a disability.²⁹ Queerness, in this case, is considered a “challenge of the flesh” that requires technological treatment.³⁰ From intersex bodies to conversion therapy to in vitro fertilization, the Church has a well-established history of using technology to eradicate queerness as if it is a disability.

Keep in mind that a disability is considered a “disability” precisely because a presumed function is not being fulfilled. If the Church assumes that the purpose of a cisgender woman is to bear children and she cannot, she is, according to essentialism, broken and in need of repair. Folk doctrines suggest that if she cannot be fixed now with technological means, her “condition” can be “fixed” in the afterlife. Infertile cisgender women should certainly be encouraged to use technological transformations to bear children according to their desires, but we should not assume that the purpose of all cisgender women is to bear and nurse children.³¹ The problem is not the desire to be

29. “Interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman: ‘Same-Gender Attraction,’” *Mormon Newsroom*, 2006, available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>.

30. David A. Bednar, “There Are No Homosexual Members of the Church [Feb. 23, 2016],” uploaded on Feb. 29, 2016, YouTube video, 11:37, https://youtu.be/BQ4_wTGv8Ao; Gregory Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 89–101, 112, 115; Taylor Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 97, 155–61, 184–85.

31. Blaire Ostler, “Heavenly Mother: The Mother of All Women,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51 no. 4 (2018): 171–81, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/V51N04_10.pdf.

fertile, regardless of whether the woman is transgender or cisgender, the problem is proscribing how her gender should function and perform. One woman may see her infertility as a “disability,” while another woman may welcome infertility as a convenient form of birth control. The “disability” should only be considered as disability if it hinders the fulfilment of her desires not because her disability is a product of an imposed proscription telling her how to perform her gender.

To make matters more intense for the Church, technology is not going anywhere. Technological developments are not slowing down. From uterine transplants to artificial embryo selection, reproductive technologies are only the beginning. CRISPR is being used to edit genes and will change our species irreversibly in ways we are not even imagining.³² Cisgender, vaginal-penile penetration could eventually be considered a reckless form of reproduction when technology allows us to alter a child’s genes even before gestation. Yesterday’s science fiction is tomorrow’s reality. Technology is radically and rapidly changing our world. The First Presidency, through the handbook that they approve of, have been trying to channel a small portion of that technology into the creation of an artificial cisgender, heterosexual, sex binary under the guise of God’s law, but their method of excluding queerness from Mormonism is slowly breaking down with the rise of queer Latter-day Saint visibility, activism, theology, and sympathy.³³

To be clear, the legitimization of queer bodies, relationships, and families is not simply a matter of embracing technological advancements. Theology, doctrine, and policy are in a symbiotic relationship

32. Heidi Ledford, “CRISPR: Gene Editing Is Just the Beginning,” *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science*, Mar. 7, 2016, <https://www.nature.com/news/crispr-gene-editing-is-just-the-beginning-1.19510>.

33. I should clarify it is not exclusively the First Presidency that are creating an artificial cisgender, heterosexual sex binary with technology. There are many other queer antagonists that are doing similar if not identical things. Though I am putting my own community under the microscope, I understand this is not exclusively a Latter-day Saint issue.

with one another. Doctrine feeds our theology, and theology feeds policy. The exclusion of LGBTQ+ Saints is more than simply denying us equal access to reproductive technology within our Mormon community. Excluding LGBTQ+ Saints on the grounds that we cannot reproduce is weakened when technology has clearly allowed both straight and queer couples the ability to reproduce and raise families. Prejudice toward LGBTQ+ Saints did not start with policies in the handbook. Exclusionary policies are reflections of our existing prejudices. The legitimization of queer bodies, relationships, and families within the Church will not happen until we can imagine a more inclusive theology by interpreting our doctrine more compassionately. Technology can hinder or aid us in that endeavor, but the decision ultimately lies within our willingness to include queer Latter-day Saints as worthy members of celestial glory, including glorified bodies.³⁴

I suspect that when technology becomes powerful enough to give “men” the reproductive function of “women” and “women” the reproductive function of “men,” not just in social performance or aesthetics but in reproductive function and biological utility, we will see an unprecedented cracking of our taxonomies that the Church is woefully underprepared for. Keeping queerness out of churches, temples, and celestial eternities with the handbook is not a sustainable model. When Church policies, rituals, privileges, theologies, orthopraxis, and even classrooms are segregated according to the false premise of a biological sex binary, the rumbling of queer bodies could shake the very foundation of the Church.

34. Doctrine and Covenants 76:69–70.

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"Ascension," assemblage,
by Frank McEntire

AFTER A POST-HETEROSEXUAL MORMON THEOLOGY: A TEN-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

Taylor G. Petrey

Ten years ago, my article “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology” was published in *Dialogue*.¹ I did not know what to expect when it made its way into the world, but it ended up being a widely discussed piece and has been accessed tens of thousands of times.² The public discussion about my ideas was both critical and appreciative. In the wake of the article, my own research and thinking have also developed. When I first approached this topic, I expected that my interest would be limited to a single contribution. However, in the ensuing decade I now count several articles, a book, and a substantial edited volume on Mormonism, sexuality, gender in my research portfolio. My fascination with this question has endured.

Other things are also different now than they were at the time I wrote the original article. Same-sex marriage is legal everywhere in the United States. The Church has engaged in multiple public campaigns related to LGBTQ issues, including pastoral outreach, updated

1. Taylor G. Petrey, “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 106–41.

2. The precise number is unknown because *Dialogue* has changed servers several times in this period. The article is now also available on JSTOR instead of just the *Dialogue* website. Finally, the article is a free PDF and may be sent electronically without any tracking analytics. However, in 2015, the *Dialogue* staff informed me that it had been downloaded more than 20,000 times.

policies, and a reframed political project on “religious freedom.” In the ensuing years, several other thinkers have approached this question of same-sex relationships and gender identity with theological and historical sophistication. Here, I want to discuss in retrospect the origins of “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology,” the reception of the article, and the trajectory that my own work has taken. Despite all of these developments, the place of same-sex relationships in LDS thought and practice remains vexed.

Origins and Main Ideas

I was just preparing to go on a mission when Gordon B. Hinckley presented “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” a guiding document on LDS teachings on marriage and public policy released just as the same-sex marriage issue had arisen in the United States. After I returned from my mission and to my university education in New York City, I became increasingly interested in feminist theory and the new approaches to sexuality and identity in the 1990s. While I was an undergraduate student, the Church had gotten involved in propositions to prohibit same-sex marriage in Hawaii, California, and Alaska. But being in New York City, it all seemed rather far away and I hadn’t really worked out how I wanted to approach this social question.

Heading to graduate school for a master’s degree in New Testament and Early Christianity in 2001, I was consumed with learning the languages and the history of scholarship in that field. When I was admitted into the doctoral program in that field, I began to take more coursework in gender and sexuality. My advisor, Karen L. King, was a leader in thinking about gender in early Christianity, and feminist icons like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza loomed large in my program and in my own thinking. When Amy Hollywood arrived at Harvard, it opened up to me a whole new set of theories and approaches to identity, bodies, and desire. As I started writing my dissertation on how early Christians imagined sexuality and desire in the resurrection body, I

turned to feminist theory, especially that of Judith Butler, to help me articulate the issues at stake in these debates.

Meanwhile, Latter-day Saints were engaged in a substantive and contentious exchange about same-sex relationships in the first decade of the 2000s. I closely followed the topic in Mormon blogging, which had attracted a number of rising intellectuals in their twenties and thirties. Of course, the Massachusetts Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2004, accelerating the issue in the United States. But the Church had done quite little to mobilize in Massachusetts. That helped to defer the question for me. However, when the Church formally announced that it would organize to oppose Prop 8 in California in 2008, I found myself deeply torn. By coincidence, I was scheduled to preach at Harvard Divinity School in an LDS-run service at the start of the new term in January 2009, after the election. Early protests had occurred against Latter-day Saints around the country, and I was feeling some dread about how to navigate the issue with my colleagues. I spoke from the heart about my conflicted feelings. The publications director for the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* was there and asked to publish my remarks, titled “An Uncomfortable Mormon.”³

My discomfort increasingly turned to a set of theoretical problems. I recall two pieces that had an impact on me in the year after the 2008 election. The first was by Valerie Hudson Cassler, at the time a well-respected political science professor at Brigham Young University, titled “‘Some Things That Should Not Have Been Forgotten Were Lost’: The Pro-Feminist, Pro-Democracy, Pro-Peace Case for State Privileging of Companionate Heterosexual Monogamous Marriage.”⁴ This was at the

3. Taylor G. Petrey, “An Uncomfortable Mormon,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 37, no. 2–3 (Spring/Summer 2009): 14–16.

4. V. H. Cassler, “‘Some Things That Should Not Have Been Forgotten Were Lost’: The Pro-Feminist, Pro-Democracy, Pro-Peace Case for State Privileging of Companionate Heterosexual Monogamous Marriage,” *SquareTwo* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2009), <http://squaretwo.org/Sq2ArticleCasslerMarriage.html>.

time hailed as the most significant, substantive LDS argument opposing same-sex marriage on putatively feminist grounds.⁵ I remember having a strong reaction to this piece and feeling deeply concerned about the oppositional framework between feminism and LGBTQ rights.

The second piece was Judith Butler's short book *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*.⁶ Based on a series of lectures she had given, Butler addressed the question of kinship in queer contexts. I distinctly remember this book hitting me like a lightning bolt, and I rushed to grab a piece of paper to sketch out the outline for an article that would see same-sex marriage as claim about kinship, suddenly an obvious argument that I had not yet understood in my focus on gender and sexuality. For me, this realization was a potent reframing of same-sex marriage that had been analyzed as a legal or sociological issue, or even a question about sexual ethics. Kinship, for me, unlocked a whole new framework for a new theological imaginary.

The sketch for the article that I put together was extremely compressed. It was just the stub of what would eventually become "Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology," but I contacted Kristine Haglund, then editor at *Dialogue*, to see if she thought it had any merit. She kindly sent it out for review, which came back confirming that it was underdeveloped. I'd written it rather half-heartedly, hoping someone else would flesh out my own idea to more productive ends. My reluctance to complete my thought was in part because I was getting ready to graduate from my doctoral program and in search of a job in biblical studies—an extreme rarity for Latter-day Saints. I didn't want to start establishing a Mormon studies publication record at that

5. Julie M. Smith praised it: "For the first time ever, I've read a defense of the anti-same-sex-marriage movement that didn't make me cringe." In "Thank you, Valerie Hudson," *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 15, 2009, <https://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2009/04/thank-you-valerie-hudson/>.

6. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

stage in my career. In any case, the reviewers and Haglund asked me to fill in the outline. Going on the job market, the birth of my second child, a move to start a new job, and other events delayed the revisions for about a year. The delay allowed me to do more reading, benefiting especially from new research on early Mormon kinship that further confirmed for me that this was a necessary starting point for a theological redescription.⁷

I recall feeling that I was breaking some new ground, though I was building on decades of previous work. While I think “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology” marks a distinctive theoretical turn, scholars and activists had been organizing, writing, blogging, and speaking about these issues for years. D. Michael Quinn and Connell O’Donovan had approached the issue from a historical perspective, chronicling episodes and changes to LDS teachings.⁸ Other scholars

7. Samuel M. Brown, “The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1–52; Samuel M. Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 3–52; Jonathan A. Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 53–117.

8. Connell “Rocky” O’Donovan, “‘The Abominable and Detestable Crime against Nature’: A Revised History of Homosexuality and Mormonism, 1840–1980,” Connell O’Donovan (website), last revised 2004, <http://www.connellodonovan.com/abom.html>. See the shorter version, O’Donovan, “‘The Abominable and Detestable Crime Against Nature’: A Brief History of Homosexuality and Mormonism, 1840–1980,” in *Multiply and Replenish: Mormon Essays on Sex and Family*, edited by Brett Corcoran (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 123–70; D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics in Nineteenth-Century America: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); D. Michael Quinn, “Male-Male Intimacy Among Nineteenth-Century Mormons: A Case Study,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 105–28; D. Michael Quinn, “Prelude to the National ‘Defense of Marriage’ Campaign: Civil Discrimination Against Feared or Despised Minorities,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 1–52. See also, Armand Mauss, “A Reply to Quinn,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 53–65.

were looking at the question of sexual ethics.⁹ The causes or etiology of homosexuality often took special prominence.¹⁰ Others had attempted to carve out some ecclesiastical space for affirming same-sex relationships.¹¹ Many of these texts and others focused on pastoral concerns about damage to LGBTQ members.¹² Some of the analysis focused on the reputational damage to straight Latter-day Saints by holding on to anti-homosexuality teachings.¹³ Others provided an analysis of the legal and social scientific debates.¹⁴

All of these made major contributions, but I still felt that the ground of the analysis needed to shift. Much of the discussion focused on homosexuality as a set of desires or analyzed the morality of certain

9. Wayne Schow, "Sexuality Morality Revisited," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 114–36; Eric Swedin, "'One Flesh': A Historical Overview of Latter-day Saint Sexuality and Psychology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 1–29.

10. R. Jan Stout "Sin and Sexuality: Psychobiology and the Development of Homosexuality," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 29–41; William S. Bradshaw, "Short Shrift to the Facts," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 171–91.

11. Gary M. Watts, "The Logical Next Step: Affirming Same-Sex Relationships," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 49–57.

12. Carol Lynn Pearson, *No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons around Our Gay Loved Ones* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Pivot Point Books, 2007); Fred Matis, Marilyn Matis, and Ty Mansfield, *In Quiet Desperation: Understanding the Challenge of Same-Gender Attraction* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, an imprint of Deseret Book, 2004). Ron Schow, Wayne Schow, and Marybeth Raynes, eds., *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991).

13. Armand Mauss, "Mormonism in the Twenty-First Century: Marketing for Miracles," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 236–49.

14. Randolph Muhlestein, "The Case Against Same-Sex Marriage," and Wayne Schow, "The Case for Same-Sex Marriage: Reply to Randolph Muhlestein," both in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 1–67.

sexual acts. I came to believe that the act/desires distinction was not especially useful. The framing of the question as a debate about desires and acts seems to concede the very terms that had been developed in anti-homosexuality culture—seeing “homosexuality” as primarily about “sexuality.” By contrast, male-female relationships occupied a larger conceptual footprint that had built into itself institutional acknowledgment of relationships that were fuller than their sexual dimension. In other words, I wanted to consider relationships and kinship as the potential theological desideratum and saving principle in a post-heterosexual theology, not the kind of sex that people were having.

Second, it seemed to me that there were deep, structural issues in Mormon theology as it had developed that made it difficult to accommodate same-sex relationships. Answering the “clobber texts” or other apologetic or historical engagements seemed wholly insufficient because they did not address the deep ways that heterosexual supremacy had been braided into the Mormon cosmos. The question of sexual morality, or the etiology of homosexuality, or respectability did not address head on the presumed heterosexual reproductivity of the Mormon heavens. Legal or social scientific analysis of the effects of same-sex marriage did little to address the theological questions about reproduction. I wanted to question the received wisdom that reproduction and Mormonism were inseparably intertwined by examining the theological foundations of the idea as it had emerged in recent decades. The first part of my article then interrogated “celestial reproduction” as a supposedly essential feature of Mormon theology. I argued that the evidence for it was quite weak, that there were alternative modes of reproduction not rooted in heterosexuality in the tradition, and that adoption was a well-established theological and social practice in Mormonism that replaced biological kinship.

The next major idea of the paper was a brief history of LDS teachings on kinship and the sealing ordinance. Both historically and today, sealing was not rooted in reproduction but was instead a way of ritually

marking kinship as opposed to the biological, nuclear family. Here too I attempted to displace “sexuality” as the defining feature of sealing and instead pointed to care, commitment, and covenant as a potential route for including non-heterosexual relationships. I further suggested that centering heterosexuality in LDS kinship practices was bound to conflict with a wide variety of global and historical kinship practices. Kinship rather than sexuality would accommodate a wider array of historical and contemporary relationships.

Finally, it seemed to me that some critical analysis of LDS ideas of “eternal gender” was a necessary part of this question, for the ways that it was used against both same-sex relationships and transgender identity. I came to see the link between sex and gender, and sexuality and gender identity, as an inevitable part of a post-heterosexual theology. LDS concepts of heterosexuality were intimately rooted in theories of sexual difference. They not only affirmed the existence of two separate sex/genders but also were based on complementarian notions of their interdependence. Such views upheld male-female relationships as superior to others because they were somehow more balanced or complete. I wanted to examine how Latter-day Saints defined “eternal gender” by contrasting it with the dominant view that had emerged in contemporary feminist and queer theory that the sex/gender distinction and the concept of gender itself was historically contingent, not an expression of a timeless ideal. This problem of decontextualizing sexual difference as an immutable feature needed greater theological reflection. Gender essentialism did not hold much philosophical credibility, at least not in ways that matched with Mormon theologizing. Further, I wanted to question whether the privileging of gender as a distinctive feature of human identity was necessary for a post-heterosexual theology.

My arguments were a thought experiment to lay out problems that needed to be solved no matter the answers, and to propose possible solutions to those problems. I wanted to be clear that I was not advocating that my solutions were correct, nor that church leaders or members should follow my arguments. Rather, I wanted to raise critical questions

about the best arguments that stood in the way of affirming same-sex sealing and explore their strengths and weaknesses.

Reception

The finished article appeared in December 2011 on the *dialoguejournal.com* website. I wasn't sure that anyone would read it. The article made perfect sense to me as a someone who had been working closely in poststructuralist thought, psychoanalysis, and feminist and queer theory. Yet I knew that the arguments were a still somewhat dense for most casual readers. The editors at *Dialogue* gently nudged me to tone down some of the jargon, but it meant something to me to say what I wanted to say in the idiom in which I had been immersed. Their advice was probably right, but I am pleased that the barrier to entry into the article was not so high that no one could make heads or tails of it. The misunderstandings that have emerged in the reception of the article seem to be more strategic misrepresentation than my miscommunication, though there are things that I might say differently now.

My recollection is that there was still some anxiety on my part and the part of *Dialogue* about the article going live. Kristine Haglund was not only editing *Dialogue* but also blogging at *ByCommonConsent.com* and worked out the idea to announce it there. The entry received the innocuous title "Guest Post From Dialogue" and went live on December 9, 2011. In the entry, I wrote a brief introduction explaining that the significance of my article was to offer a model for future LDS theology, to connect mainstream Mormon theology with feminist theology, and finally, to "suggest that we think less about the types of sex that people are having and more about the types of relationships that people are building."¹⁵ Between the blog title and my tepid post, we all seemed to be burying the lede. Still, the post received nearly two hundred (mostly)

15. Taylor Petrey, "Guest Post From Dialogue," *By Common Consent* (blog), Dec. 11, 2011, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2011/12/09/guest-post-from-dialogue/>.

substantive comments and was the early place for generating attention about the article.

Over the following days, weeks, and months, there were a number of blog posts responding to me. The article received mentions *Slate*, the *Daily Beast*, and the *New York Times*. Facebook was another hub for conversation as the article was being shared and praised widely. Kaimi Wegner wrote, “Holy cow. Have you seen Taylor Petrey’s new article? It is a must-read.” Richard Livingston wrote on a listserv:

It seems to me that the single most impressive aspect of Taylor’s article isn’t so much the many insightful possibilities that it suggests—which it does very admirably—but rather the questions it raises, or perhaps better, the way in which it raises those questions. . . . Sometimes just clarifying the significance of a single question can be every bit as illuminating as the discovery of a potential solution to some long-standing dilemma, and yet Taylor illuminates the true depth and breadth and scope of multiple questions in this essay. Thus, he isn’t just asking the right question, but he’s asking multiple thought-provoking questions in all the right ways.

I was deeply appreciative of the positive feedback from many LDS readers.

I learned over the next few years that the article was not only being read in Latter-day Saint contexts but was being assigned in courses throughout North America on theology, sex, and religion. One of my former advisors at Harvard mentioned that she assigned it in her undergraduate classes and that “it was the first article I read all the way through in years.” Since then I have received possibly hundreds of expressions of gratitude from friends, family, and total strangers for voicing their own concerns, giving them new frameworks and questions, and for creating space for further conversation.

Not all of the feedback was positive. Several people challenged my ideas, some with greater sophistication than others. I want to point out three responses that I think were particularly important because of their substantive merit or influence on later events. The first came

out of the small, but capable Mormon theological community that had been growing for much of the first decade of the 2000s. Joseph Spencer, then a graduate student, had a related expertise to many of the post-structuralist theories that informed my own work. He wrote a letter to the editor to *Dialogue*, first posted on the website and then in the next issue of the journal, responding to “Taylor Petrey’s carefully executed, unmistakably informed, rightly concerned, and entirely productive essay.” Yet Spencer criticized me for not doing “any actual work on constructing a Mormon queer theory in this essay.”¹⁶ That is, Spencer suggested that my project went too far in abandoning the Mormon elements of a theology by questioning whether “eternal gender” was an essential church teaching. Spencer then took a different tack on this issue, briefly laying out a view of gender essentialism that is both critical and coherent. I remain unpersuaded that a reformed theory of gender essentialism is either a necessary starting point for a Mormon theology, or that it would not also be just as revisionist as my own. Still, Spencer’s idea holds promise about how a coherent version of essentialism might be brought into conversation with LDS thought.

The second piece of feedback arrived in the form of an organized protest. Far-right activist Stephen Graham, founder of the Standard of Liberty, an anti-gay group, planned a protest against me during a conference at which I was slated to speak at Brigham Young University. The conference was on the theme of “The Apostasy,” the proceedings of which were later published in an edited volume with Oxford University Press titled *Standing Apart*. At the 2012 conference, I was invited to deliver a paper on the concept of the Apostasy in early Christianity.¹⁷

16. Joseph Spencer, “Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2012): xxv.

17. Published as, Taylor G. Petrey, “Purity and Parallels: Constructing the Apostasy Narrative of Early Christianity,” in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, edited by Melissa Wilcox and John Young (New York: Oxford University Press), 174–95.

The day before the event, Graham sent an email about me to a list of at least one organization he runs, called UtahsRepublic.org, which advocates for radical changes to public education.

Graham was a known provocateur on same-sex relationships when I came on his radar. His Standard of Liberty organization protested BYU events on homosexuality multiple times. He objected to the BYU Honor Code change in 2007 and warned that BYU professors were teaching “homosexuality” as well as “socialism” and “anti-Americanism.”¹⁸ His email about me suggested that I was “an apostate” who had “written in opposition of male-female marriage and gender as an eternal characteristic” and “called for homosexual sealings in LDS temples.” Graham then instructed individuals to call BYU president Cecil Samuelson on this “urgent” issue and included a copy of the email that he and his wife Janice Graham had sent to Samuelson seeking to de-platform me. Their letter warned:

We represent an organization of like-minded people with a subscription list of nearly 8000. Petrey must not be allowed to speak, as he stands in active opposition to Church doctrine, and as such is apostate, the very topic he is to speak on.

Please respond and let us know how you intend to address this matter.

We will be sending out an email newsletter addressing this issue, and we would like to say that BYU did the right thing when it was brought to their attention that a speaker at one of their conferences was in direct opposition to the Church and its doctrines.¹⁹

18. Ryan Konnen, “BYU Too Liberal on Gay Issues According to Standard of Liberty Founders Stephen and Janice Graham,” *unambiguous* (blog), Nov. 28, 2011, <https://ryambiguous.wordpress.com/2011/11/28/byu-too-liberal-on-gay-issues-according-to-standard-of-liberty-founders-stephen-and-janice-graham/>.

19. Oak Norton forwarding Stephen Graham, “[Utah’s Republic] BYU Speaker today- ALERT for LDS,” email to author, Mar. 1, 2012.

I learned of this specific content of the email later on, but I learned of its effects immediately as the conference was getting started. I arrived in Provo the night before the conference and heard that multiple complaints had been made against my presence at BYU that day. I was distraught at the accusation, frustrated by the misrepresentation of my argument, and bothered by their labeling me as something that I was not.

BYU was scrambling to respond to this protest that had be foisted on them at the last minute. On the day of the conference, the dean of humanities, who had been tasked by President Samuelson to address the matter, scheduled a meeting with me to assess whether I would be a problem for them. The dean expressed concerns about the content of “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology” and wanted to be reassured that nothing that I said that day in my talk would cover those topics, among other things. I also learned that undercover officers would be stationed in the audience for my protection in case the protest led to a disruption of the event. I delivered my talk and afterward was approached by Stephen Graham and another man, who I was not able to identify. They grilled me on my views on homosexuality and gave me their perspective that homosexuality was something that someone could change with help. Later that year, Graham would protest other speakers and events at BYU on homosexuality.²⁰

The final early response that I mention came in the form of an essay by Valerie Hudson Cassler. As noted above, she entered into debates about same-sex marriage by making a conservative feminist argument against the practice. Since that time, she continued to lay out her views

20. Peg Mcentee, “BYU Does the Right Thing as Anti-gay Website Howls,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 31, 2012, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=53826059&itype=CMSID>; Rosemary Winters and Brian Maffly, “Gay and Mormon: BYU Students Speak on Panel,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Mar. 30, 2012, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=53810073&itype=CMSID>.

in a series of popular presentations and essays.²¹ I had drawn on some of her scholarship and responded to some of it in “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology.” But I was stunned by her post in the online blog/journal that she ran called *SquareTwo.org*. The Summer 2012 issue (published in September 2012) included a piece titled “Plato’s Son, Augustine’s Heir: ‘A Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology?’”²² While she called my article “thoughtful and thought-provoking,” her argument was that (male) same-sex relationships were misogynistic and that I was engaged in “occult misogyny.” I was and remain hurt by the personal attacks.

Here is the logic of the argument. Celestial reproduction is an essential doctrine that cannot be changed because it is the thing that makes women necessary partners in the plan of salvation. If women do not reproduce then they have no value. Since one option that I put forward—in a variety of post-heterosexual options—does not rely on women’s eternal reproductive role, then I have made women themselves obsolete. “Women are no longer necessary for the work of the gods in the eternities, or for there to be brought forth spirit children: indeed, there need not be a Heavenly Mother, or, for that matter, earthly mothers,” she wrote.²³

Her criticism was based on a selective misreading. In my article, I laid out theological and scriptural precedents for male-female, male-male, and female-female creative relationships that included both reproduction and nonreproductive generation. I called into question the theological necessity of heterosexuality and heterosexual reproduction based on the existence of male-male creative relationships already

21. Valerie Hudson, “The Two Trees,” *FAIR*, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2010/the-two-trees>.

22. V. H. Cassler, “Plato’s Son, Augustine’s Heir: ‘A Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology?’” *SquareTwo* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2012), <http://squaretwo.org/Sq2ArticleCasslerPlatosSon.html>.

23. Cassler, “Plato’s Son, Augustine’s Heir.”

in LDS theology. I did not question the necessary existence of women whose existence and importance is both affirmed and self-evident. I pointed to scholars who were examining nonreproductive kinship in Mormon thought and even her own scholarship that had equivocated on celestial reproduction.²⁴ I question Cassler's argument that reduces women's worth to reproductive output as a feminist argument.

Cassler's perspective relied on feminists who believe in social "parity" between the sexes and a complementarian notion of essential gender differences. Such parity, rather than equality, socially balanced men and women in egalitarian societies. I don't object to these goals, but I do question enforced heterosexuality as the means of achieving them and the binary ontology that Cassler uses to sustain them. This is one of the other areas of misrepresenting my argument in her response. Cassler suggested that I was putting forward a unitary ontology of gender that erased the differences between male and female. Rather, I explicitly said that I was using a pluralist ontology of gender that did not reduce sexual difference to two options: "To admit the social basis of gender does not entail the elimination of gender, nor does it require a leveling of difference toward some androgynous ideal. Quite the opposite. Instead, we may see more of a proliferation of 'genders,' released from the constraints of fantasies about a neat gender binary."²⁵ Hardly an heir to Augustinian ontology.

I submitted a reply to Hudson privately. In my email I laid out the areas where we agreed and where there was further area for disagreement, but I also wrote:

I think that you mischaracterize my argument about women's reproduction when you put quotes around the word "absurd" following a quotation of mine as if it is a continuation of what I have actually said. Of course, I never say such a thing, nor do I think it, and my argument about divine reproduction explicitly mentions both male and female

24. Petrey, "Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology," 108–9.

25. Petrey, "Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology," 129.

reproductive processes, even in the quote you offer. Further, I spend over a page discussing the problems of women being excluded from creation in our ritual and textual accounts, as well as the dependency of women on male actors in those accounts. I do not single out women's bodies as messy, dirty, disgusting, contemptible, polluting, let alone does anything I say suggest a "profound contempt for all things female," as you accuse me of doing. I find this accusation unfair and having no basis in anything I have said.

The essay was quietly updated to correct a few errors, but her response to my email was dismissive. A week later I submitted a brief response in the public comments section of the article. My comment was held "under review" for two weeks and then appeared with her response.

Cassler became the source for a particular misreading of my project. I've been frustrated that this argument has been considered a serious response and cited as such. The idea that expanding the heavens to allow for same-sex relationships and non-binary gender identity was somehow anti-women or anti-mixed-sex relationships remains unconvincing. An expansion does not eliminate what is already allowed but draws a bigger circle around what could be allowed. Yet this kind of argument that sees egalitarianism for others as diminishment for oneself has become a familiar form of grievance. Feminists should recognize the pattern of these arguments used against them as well.

New Directions

These responses, among many others, pushed me to think through some of the problems they raised, even when I fiercely disagreed with them. When I first wrote "Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology," I expected two things. First, it would not receive much readership or interest outside of a small group of scholars. Second, the ideas in the piece were the only real contribution that I had about the subject and I would soon return to other research projects. Both turned out to be false assumptions. Processing its reception, I found myself back on the

topic again and again. Just what was the place of essential difference in Mormon theology, how does one account for reparative therapy, and what role would Heavenly Mother play in a post-heterosexual Mormon theology? On these questions, I wanted to engage broader feminist philosophy of religion to help me.

In 2013 or so, I began writing in earnest what would become “Rethinking Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother,” published in *Harvard Theological Review* in 2016.²⁶ I hoped that one of the leading journals of the field would appreciate these questions and was grateful for their positive evaluation to publish it. In this essay, I tried to tease out the differences between women and heterosexuality that had taken hold in a variety of feminist theologies, including those in LDS circles. In “Rethinking,” I examined LDS feminist theology alongside broader feminist philosophies of religion that also insisted on the need for a divine Woman as the basis of women’s importance, especially in the thought of Luce Irigaray. I examined how the role of “mother” had taken on central importance in these kinds of theologies, how they were tied to particular understandings of gender essentialism, complementarianism, and a reproductive imperative for women. Here, I tried to connect the ontological assumptions about women shared between competing schools of Mormon feminist thought: apologetic feminists like Cassler and critical feminists like Janice Allred.

In this article, I also wanted to offer something constructive in the terms of a “generous orthodoxy.” That is, I hoped to find within the “orthodox” theologies of LDS thinkers some resources for solving the problems of gender essentialism and compulsory heterosexuality. This would extend the analysis of “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology” that looked for alternatives to heterosexual kinship and essential gender internal to Mormon thought. I won’t rehearse the arguments in detail here, but I thank Valerie Hudson Cassler’s work

26. Taylor G. Petrey, “Rethinking Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother,” *Harvard Theological Review* 109, no. 3 (2016): 315–41.

on the atonement as one among many instances that showed how divine characters are not defined by binary gender differences. I admit that my essay is still more pointing to a problem, namely, the singular Heavenly Mother who must represent all women, and who does so imperfectly, than clearly answering that problem, in part because of the constraints of orthodoxy I was working within. My solution was to alleviate this strain by weakening essential gender differences and therefore the processes of identification between devotees and divine figures. It was satisfactory to me, but some felt that it went too far.²⁷ In response to some criticism, I clarified: “My caution is not against a Heavenly Mother, but against using the Heavenly Mother figure to diffuse the homoerotic elements of that tradition, to intervene in a way that creates a heteronormative love as of a different order, character, and quality than the love between others, or to reify the essential difference between male and female bodies, characters, roles, and experiences. My critique is not with Heavenly Mother, but the way which she is put into discourse, the kind of work she is assigned to perform, and the

27. See the clarifying roundtable here: Taylor Petrey, “Heavenly Mother in the *Harvard Theological Review*,” *By Common Consent* (blog), Aug. 29, 2016, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/08/29/heavenly-mother-in-the-harvard-theological-review/>; Margaret Toscano, “How Bodies Matter: A Response to ‘Rethinking Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother’” *By Common Consent* (blog), Aug. 30, 2016, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/08/30/how-bodies-matter-a-response-to-rethinking-mormonisms-heavenly-mother/>; Caroline Kline, “A Multiplicity of Theological Groupings and Identities—Without Giving Up on Heavenly Mother,” *By Common Consent* (blog), Sept. 2, 2016, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/09/02/a-multiplicity-of-theological-groupings-and-identities-without-giving-up-on-heavenly-mother/>; Kristine Haglund, “Leapfrogging the Waves: A Nakedly Unacademic Response to ‘Rethinking Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother,’” *By Common Consent* (blog), Sept. 7, 2016, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/09/07/leapfrogging-the-waves-a-nakedly-unacademic-response-to-rethinking-mormonisms-heavenly-mother/>; and Taylor Petrey, “The Stakes of Heavenly Mother,” *By Common Consent* (blog), Sept. 9, 2016, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2016/09/09/the-stakes-of-heavenly-mother/>

exclusionary rhetoric that creates a binary rather than undoes it.”²⁸ That still seems right to me.

This article on Heavenly Mother inspired another one that explored a different problem, one that I think may be more fundamental. In “Silence and Absence: Feminist Philosophical Implication of Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother,” published in *Sophia: International Journal in Philosophy and Traditions*, I continued to test my thesis that Mormon feminist philosophy had broader interests outside of Mormon studies.²⁹ In this article, I interrogate the philosophical question of how it is that speech about Heavenly Mother has a liberating impact on women and examine some of the limitations in this theory of language. While there are significant theological and cultural battles within and among LDS scholars and activists on this topic, the analysis of the mechanics of power in Heavenly Mother discourse remains ripe for significant revision, including the reliance upon theological discourse itself.

I note one other important development on spirit birth that runs adjacent to my own project on post-heterosexual theology. As noted above, some argue that the teaching is an essential doctrine to contemporary Mormonism. As I said in the original 2011 article, I am actually ambivalent on the teaching, neither for nor against it as such. I argued that there are post-heterosexual ways of thinking about celestial reproduction and pointed to ritual and scriptural “models of reproduction and creation that might suggest their possibility for same-sex partners.”³⁰ There, I also surfaced past and present LDS teachings about adoption to suggest that kinship and reproduction are distinct practices in LDS doctrine, and I warned against reducing women’s value to reproductive function.

28. Petrey, “Stakes of Heavenly Mother.”

29. Taylor G. Petrey, “Silence and Absence: Feminist Philosophical Implications of Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother,” *Sophia: International Journal in Philosophy and Traditions* 59, no.1 (2020): 57–68.

30. Petrey, “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology,” 112.

In early 2011, Samuel Brown and Jonathan Stapley had published important articles examining early Mormon practices of adoption that helped me think through post-heterosexual kinship in my article.³¹ These ideas also complicated doctrines of spirit birth. An 1833 revelation to Smith first expressed the idea of an uncreated human essence: “Man was also in the begining with God, inteligence or the Light of truth was not created or made neith[er] indeed can be,” canonized in Doctrine and Covenants 93.³² The implications are extreme, rejecting creation *ex nihilo* and denying that God is ontologically distinct from humans, who are co-eternal with the divine. This teaching was repeated in many of Joseph Smith’s speeches, translations, and revelations—perhaps in explicit disagreement with the doctrine of spirit birth as it was developing among some of his disciples in 1843–44.³³ Smith’s famous “King Follet Discourse,” a key text distilling his radical theological developments explained, “God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all.”³⁴

In the 2010s, there was a significant debate among historians and theologians on the doctrine of spirit birth. Much of this did not engage the implications of such a challenge for same-sex kinship directly, but their work remains deeply relevant to the topic. In 2012 and 2013, Brown published more on the issue of adoption, including an extensive theological treatment of it in *BYU Studies*.³⁵ He called Smith’s adop-

31. Brown, “Early Mormon Chain of Belonging”; Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology”; Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual.”

32. Revelation, 6 May 1833 [D&C 93], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-6-may-1833-dc-93/8>.

33. Van Hale, “The Origin of the Human Spirit in Early Mormon Thought,” in *Line Upon Line*, edited by Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 122.

34. Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton, 16, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-william-clayton/6>.

35. Samuel M. Brown, “The ‘Lineage of My Priesthood’ and the Chain of Belonging,” in *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 203–47; Samuel

tion project an “attack on proto-Victorian culture,”³⁶ and expanded on what he and Stapley had hinted at in their 2011 articles, that “the notion of biological reproduction between divine beings as the origin of human spirits was not the only idea that prevailed in early Mormonism. Understanding this aspect of early Mormonism on its own terms may be useful to our era’s engagement of questions of human relationships and identity.”³⁷ The limitations of the normative biological, heterosexual model of family and kinship poses the opportunity to explore alternative models, and early Mormon adoption theology might beneficially inform such conversations.

Some accepted this overall historical narrative that the doctrines of spirit birth did not originate with Smith. Terryl Givens, for instance, describes the shift to a literalistic notion of spirit birth as a “decisive” shift in the post-Smith period.³⁸ Others, however, pushed back against Brown and Stapley, arguing that spirit birth traced back to Smith himself. Brian Hales became a prominent defender of a historical link between Smith and spirit birth. Such a notion, he argued, may be tied to the promise of eternal increase, “a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19) in the revelation given on plural marriage.³⁹ However, Stapley convincingly shows that the evidence that Joseph Smith favored spirit birth is incredibly circumstantial and weak. There is no reason to read spirit birth into Joseph Smith’s teaching when other

M. Brown, “Believing Adoption,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2013): 45–65; Brown, “Early Mormon Chain of Belonging”; Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology”; Samuel M. Brown and Jonathan A. Stapley, “Mormonism’s Adoption Theology: An Introductory Statement,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (2011): 1–2.

36. Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology,” 23.

37. Brown and Stapley, “Mormonism’s Adoption Theology,” 2.

38. Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 158.

39. Brian C. Hales, “‘A Continuation of the Seeds’: Joseph Smith and Spirit Birth,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 4 (2012): 105–30.

more plausible options exist. In this case, the “continuation of seeds” seems to indicate the bonds that connect one to one’s descendants in perpetuity, not a process of celestial sexual reproduction.⁴⁰

The historical questions are distinct, I think, from the theological issues. Whether Smith is or is not the source for the doctrine of spirit birth does not resolve the question of whether it is a good theological view. While the value of “motherhood” has been a driving feature for a variety of different feminists who promote a robust Heavenly Mother teaching, the version of motherhood imagined there is incredibly restrictive. For instance, it continues to link the title of “mother” to reproductive kinship alone. Medical technology today provides an obvious place to disrupt the notions of motherhood and sexual reproduction, including in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, and more.⁴¹ Others have examined “kinning,” the practices of adoption and other kinship relations that establish motherhood in same-sex families, for single women, and in other adoptive contexts.⁴²

The emphasis on biological motherhood as the primary role for Heavenly Mother not only reduces her role and function to a conduit but obscures the practices of motherhood as cultural and symbolic actions that define the postnatal relationship. Setting aside older models of “fictive” versus “real” kinship, all kinship practices involve

40. Jonathan Stapley, “A Response to Hales on ‘Spirit Birth,’” *By Common Consent* (blog), Dec. 11, 2019, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2019/12/11/a-response-to-hales-on-spirit-birth/>; Brown, “Believing Adoption,” 45–65.

41. Petra Nordqvist, “Bringing Kinship into Being: Connectedness, Donor Conception and Lesbian Parenthood,” *Sociology* 48, no. 2 (2014): 268–83.

42. S. Howell, “Kinning: The Creation Of Life Trajectories In Transnational Adoptive Families,” *Journal Of The Royal Anthropological Institute* 9 (2003): 465–68; Eirini Papadaki, “Becoming Mothers: Narrating Adoption and Making Kinship in Greece,” *Social Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (February 2020): 153–67; Janette Logan, “Contemporary Adoptive Kinship: A Contribution to New Kinship Studies,” *Child and Family Social Work* 18, no. 1 (February 2013): 35–45; Stacy Lockerbie, “Infertility, Adoption and Metaphorical Pregnancies,” *Anthropologica* 56, no. 2 (2014): 463–71.

the sharing of material substance to produce enduring connections far beyond genetic links. The sharing of food, space, touch, and so on reveal the ways that kinship is irreducible to reproduction.⁴³

Again, while I am still not opposed to divine reproduction within a post-heterosexual Mormon theology, I remain convinced that adoption theology offers a crucial wedge in such a project. In his 2013 article, Brown argued that the notion of love and relationships is actually the ground of Mormon theology. “We all,” he argues, “through our acts of loving intensely as parents, become gods because the pure participation in *agape* is the definition of godhood.”⁴⁴ Brown sees in adoption theology an imputed communal responsibility by making humans interdependent. He explains, “Adoption theology holds out to me the possibility that what matters most are the sacred bonds we create with each other, the spiritual energies we invest in those we care for.”⁴⁵ Brown further argues that the adoption theology of Mormonism’s past offers a support for legal adoption today, as well as to “comfort Latter-day Saints facing infertility and support those who adopt or serve as foster parents as part of their personal devotions or life’s work.”⁴⁶ Though Brown does not say so explicitly, these same benefits may be provided to same-sex couples for one another and in their efforts to extend their love and care to others. There is no particularly important place for gender in such a theology of love and kinship, even if gender may have value in others dimensions.

In my own thinking over the past decade, I began to consider not just the theological ideas themselves but also the historical conditions that gave rise to them. In the conversations that were emerging from

43. Michael Sahllins, *What Kinship Is—And Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 62–86.

44. Samuel M. Brown, “Mormons Probably Aren’t Materialists,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 3 (2017): 66.

45. Brown, “Believing Adoption,” 62.

46. Brown, “Believing Adoption,” 64.

my article, and seeing how the larger conversations about same-sex relationships in LDS communities were going, I sensed a few developments. The first was that even if people could agree that my analysis in “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology” was theoretically possible, the weight of the historical tradition of heterosexuality excluded an adequate precedent for change. While my goal was never to argue for the need to change LDS teachings, I became increasingly interested in this historical apologetic for heterosexuality. Was heterosexuality a consistent teaching in LDS history? My theological approach to post-heterosexual kinship was shifting toward an interest in interrogating the historical landscape that had led people to believe that heterosexuality was a central feature in the LDS tradition. I was skeptical. I knew enough about LDS history and American history to be wary of claims about an unchanging “tradition” about gender and sexuality.

I have already expressed skepticism about a historical apologetic that attempts to resolve the authority of a position by tracing it back to Joseph Smith. In this approach to history, Smith or his early followers were the font of authentic Mormonism and we must give especially close attention to their teachings to make an authoritative argument about theology. I learned to be skeptical of the search for “origins” as a rhetorical and historical framework from my studies of early Christianity specifically and in religious studies more generally, where the concept of “origins” has come under significant scrutiny. Such a quest ignores that the “origins” are also embedded in their own historical contexts. I also wanted to disrupt the idea that contemporary Mormonism could (or should) be traced back to its nineteenth-century roots. As my thinking developed, I hoped that I could take on a project that would explain modern Mormonism in its own historical context of contemporary American culture rather than as an unmediated outgrowth of Smith or Brigham Young. The result was *Tabernacles of Clay: Gender and Sexuality in Modern Mormonism*.⁴⁷ I was honored when

47. Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Gender and Sexuality in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

the Mormon History Association gave it the Best Book Award for 2021.⁴⁸

I am pleased that others saw the need to tell a similar story, most importantly Gregory Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church*, which covers roughly the same time period but from a different theoretical and methodological angle.⁴⁹ My interest in the history of sexuality and gender studies helped guide my approach to this material and shape a narrative that spoke to some of my bigger questions. I have come to see that *Tabernacles* was working out, in part, a history about an idea that I first recognized in “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology”: “Church teachings assert two ideas about gender identity that are in significant tension: first, that gender is an eternal, immutable aspect of one’s existence; and second, that notions of gender identity and roles are so contingent that they must be constantly enforced and taught, especially to young children.”⁵⁰ This tension was not, I believed, insignificant but rather animated much of modernity in general and modern Mormonism specifically.

My sense was that the dominant approach to the topic by previous scholars had assumed three things. First, that the difference between male and female was a fixed and unchanging doctrine, essential to the LDS theological tradition itself and not a subject of historical inquiry. Second, the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality was also a fixed line that stood outside of history or historical change in the LDS theological tradition. That is, on these two points there was no history. These two points informed the third, namely, that LDS teachings derived from Joseph Smith and LDS scripture and therefore did not have a broader historical context. The history of sexuality, by contrast,

48. In 2021, the award was shared with Benjamin Park, *The Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

49. Gregory A. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church: Intended Actions, Unintended Consequences* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

50. Petrey, “Toward a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology,” 123–24.

pushed me to think about the changes in practices and conceptual frameworks on the nature of gender and sexuality. This also helped me approach the question intersectionally to understand the overlapping relationships between ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality.

I took a historical approach to another related project as well. Amy Hoyt and I were putting together the *Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*.⁵¹ I assigned myself a chapter on “Theology of Sexuality” that that would discuss LDS treatments of this topic. There, I wrote about three distinct phases of LDS theology of sexuality that, in my view, were radically different from one another. In the first, the era of plural marriage, I surveyed the approaches to sexuality that could be found there. In the early era of monogamy, a strict sexual morality took hold in LDS culture that saw sex and reproduction as inseparable. I then discussed the “Mormon sexual revolution” that emerged in the 1970s and increasingly challenged the relationship between sex and reproduction in a quest for greater sexual satisfaction as its own value. Historicizing Mormon approaches to sexuality, gender, and marriage hopefully offers an alternative to the historical apologetics that often dominate this subfield. Instead of internal histories that emphasize continuity, I invite scholars to situate these ideas in broader trends and contexts and to explore changes and discontinuity.

Over the past decade, a substantial and significant conversation about gender, sexuality, and kinship has continued to unfold in Mormon studies. I am encouraged by the conversations, even when there has been significant and sometimes sharp disagreement, for spurring further research and clarifying issues and arguments. In addition to the theological and historical approaches discussed above, other scholars have taken these issues in new directions.⁵² Blaire Ostler’s work

51. Amy K. Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

52. Bryce Cook, “What Do We Know of God’s Will for His LGBT Children? An Examination of the LDS Church’s Position on Homosexuality,” *Dialogue*:

has been particularly interested in advancing these conversations, culminating in her recent book *Queer Mormon Theology: An Introduction*.⁵³ The Queer Mormon Women project by Jenn Lee and Kerry Spencer is adding new perspectives and voices.⁵⁴ In addition, there are now more conversations about trans issues that further engage with crucial topics, especially in the work of Kelli Potter.⁵⁵ Further, the historical and theoretical work of Peter Coviello should have much to contribute to a reevaluation of bodies, sex, and power in Mormon theology.⁵⁶ I am grateful to have contributed something to this conversation and to have tracked some of the development that has taken this work in different directions. What is clear is that there is much more to say, including the coming Spring 2022 issue of *Dialogue*, which is dedicated to the theme of Heavenly Mother. What the next ten years hold remains to be seen.

A Journal of Mormon Thought 50, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 1–52; Robert A. Rees and William S. Bradshaw, “LGBTQ Latter-day Saint Theology,” *Dia Blogue* (blog) Aug. 20, 2020, <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/2020/08/lgbtq-latter-day-saint-theology/>.

53. Blaire Ostler, “Queer Polygamy,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 33–43.

54. Queer Mormon Women and Gender-Diverse Folx, <https://www.qmwproject.com>.

55. Kelli D. Potter, “A Transfeminist Critique of Mormon Theologies of Gender,” in *The Lost Sheep in Philosophies of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals*, edited by Blake Hereth and Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2019), 312–27; Kelli D. Potter, “Trans and Mutable Bodies,” in Hoyt and Petrey, *Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, 539–52.

56. Peter Coviello, *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

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"Flying in the Midst of Heaven," assemblage,
by Frank McEntire

FAITH, FEAR, AND OTHER F-WORDS

T Boyd

I'm sitting in the bishop's office. My dress is slightly damp, but I can't determine whether the moisture is a result of the snowstorm or sweat beading beneath the cotton. I haven't eaten since yesterday, so I can't vomit, but the churning in my stomach wants to prove otherwise.

The bishop has the questions memorized. He's looking me straight in the eye. "Do you keep the law of chastity?"

"Well." I take a breath. I speak fast, a quirk that's magnified when I'm nervous. "I think of the law of chastity as a way to respect others. And I've definitely had feelings for people that were unreciprocated and maybe made them uncomfortable. And I've seen photos of people I found attractive and objectified them instead of respecting them. And—"

"T, in the temple ceremony, the law of chastity is defined as not having sexual intercourse with anyone to whom you are not legally and lawfully married. Have you done that?"

"No." I shudder. "Absolutely not."

"Thank you." He moves down the list. "Do you understand and obey the Word of Wisdom?"

"I know that it's supposed to be a health code, and I don't take care of myself as well as I should. I don't get nearly enough sleep. I eat meat in the summer, sometimes, and don't really eat that many grains. And definitely too much sugar." I don't want to bother him by making him correct me, so I give him the answer I think he's looking for. "I don't drink coffee or tea or alcohol though."

He nods, then goes on. When he asks about organizations that oppose the Church, I outline my affiliation with any group or person

that has any disagreement with religious teachings—most of the people I know aren't members, so the list is extensive. The last question though, is the one I've been dreading the most. "Do you consider yourself worthy to enter the Lord's house and participate in temple ordinances?"

"Not really, no."

He raises his eyebrows. "Why not?"

It's a reasonable question—I'm here because I want to be. I'm neither mission- nor marriage-bound in the near future, and he knows that I'm approaching my endowment with a great deal of thought and prayer. I've spoken to RMs and currently serving friends, former Young Women presidents, leadership at two temples, sister missionaries, and his wife. This is probably my fourth meeting with him in the past few months regarding the issue.

"Just . . . nothing unclean can enter the presence of God. And I'm human—I'm inherently unclean. I'm afraid that I wouldn't be worthy enough. Maybe it wouldn't count."

"This final question is mostly a reiteration of the rest. You've answered all of these honestly. So let me ask you again. Do you feel like you're worthy?"

I bite my lip, glance at the painting of Christ on the wall, then look away. "Yes."

He smiles widely, signs the paper in front of him. "Congratulations. I feel that you are prepared to enter the House of the Lord. You'll have to make an appointment with a member of the stake presidency for your second interview, but I have confidence that it will go well." He hands me the recommend—unlike my previous one, it's not labeled "Limited-Use." It brings me momentary relief. According to the bishop and the discernment of his priesthood, I'm good enough for God.



Two mornings before I'm scheduled to go to the temple, I wake up with my scriptures open on my lap. I must have fallen asleep studying

them—I'd been up late preparing for an exam. I can't remember the last time I didn't read both a chapter of the Bible and Book of Mormon. It's been years. Maybe this means I'm not worthy if I can't properly honor the word of God. I consider calling to cancel the ceremony. I don't, but spend most of the night before my endowment in the bathroom, sick.

Nobody in my immediate family is active in the Church, so I drive to the temple on a Saturday morning with a handful of close friends from my ward. I take comfort in the blessings of the initiatory, but still worry—what if I'm doing this too early? What if I commit some big sin later in life and can't repent for it? My voice gets caught in the tightness of my throat during one of the covenants—does the fact that I whispered the words instead of said them aloud mean that they don't count? What if my feelings aren't kind enough towards others in the prayer circle? A friend hugs me after we pray—is that against the rules?

At the end, though, I am beaming. Crying tears of joy, I am received into the arms of friends who love and know me as well as anyone in the world. Halfway between two embraces in the celestial room I have one of the few thoughts of the day that is not ribboned with an undercurrent of fear.

This must be what Heaven feels like.



A few weeks later, I'm filling out pages of intake forms in the student counseling center of my university.

How often do you fear that harm will come to others because of your actions?

Every day.

How often do you have excessive concern about morality?

Every day.

How often do you worry excessively about performance in school, work, or other domains?

Every day.

How much time is occupied with these thoughts?

Very frequent/almost constant occurrence.

I don't realize the depth of my problem until it's on paper in front of me. None of this is normal. Faith isn't supposed to feel this way. People caring about you isn't supposed to feel this way. Love is supposed to cast out fear, is it not?

I must be broken.

The psychology graduate student doing her diagnostic training agrees with me that something is very wrong. Clinically severe, she explains, too much to treat at the student clinic that focuses mostly on short-term stress. She gives the phone number of a center specializing in anxiety and obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorders.



Obsessive-compulsive disorder is an illness that claws into what you value and twists it beyond recognition. Everyone has intrusive thoughts, I am told—random words, images, sensations that come into your head at odd times and have nothing to do with what is going on. Most people are able to disregard them. With OCD, though, they are much darker and attached to everything you care about. They cause overwhelming anxiety, so you respond with compulsions—mental and physical behaviors that you perform to try to neutralize the thoughts. It works, temporarily, but confirms your false beliefs, trapping you in a vicious cycle.

The illness comes in various subtypes including contamination, relationships, hoarding, existential, and maternal. My obsessions are primarily focused on harm coming to others, religious scrupulosity, and moral perfection. It's not uncommon for me to send a text to a friend and have graphic images of their corpse enter uninvited into my mind when they don't respond immediately, peppered with gory details from freshman anatomy lab.

Whenever I talk to someone in a marginalized community, slurs pop into my head, and I frequently go silent, find an excuse to leave, or become effusively apologetic out of fear that I may accidentally say words that I would never mean.

I replay conversations—even the most banal—over and over to remind myself that I didn't accidentally hurt someone with my words, my tone of voice, or my body language.

I sobbed for an hour when I was deferred from giving blood once due to menstruation-induced iron deficiency, convinced that if a pint could save lives, inability to donate was akin to murder. I research every problem a loved one has, spending hours reading about breakups, nut allergies, and rare immune disorders.

One of my favorite things about Mormonism is the expansiveness of salvation, the doctrine that we can't be exalted alone, so I become convinced that I am not only responsible for my own eternal destiny, but that of everyone I love as well. During the time I spend on my knees repenting every night, faces flash before my eyes—my younger brother, my purple-haired math major friend, the two roommates who gave me a priesthood blessing when everything seemed too much—all in eternal torment. I'm simply never able to attain the standards of perfection I think I need to keep everyone safe.

Combine that with generalized anxiety disorder, where I can't stop worrying, and much of my life is entangled in desperate knots of fear. As I try to avoid everything that scares me, and the world gets smaller and smaller, but no less scary.



I finally dial the number of the anxiety clinic I was referred to a few months before. They have an opening, so I show up on a Monday at 7:15 for my 8:00 a.m. appointment. I don't want to be late and inconvenience anyone, plus I have an absolutely awful sense of direction. And who

knows what traffic would be like in an unfamiliar part of town? The building's closed this early, so I sit in the parking lot. Across the street, directly above a busy highway, is a temple—not one that I've ever been inside, but still. I know that it should give me comfort, but it just adds another reminder that God is watching all I do.

The therapist I'm assigned to listens carefully as I explain my situation, not saying a word until I've gone through every awful scenario that plays out in my head on a regular basis. She's masked due to COVID safety requirements, and I can't read her expression.

She says, "T, that must be really hard. You're so afraid of being a bad person. It drives everything you do."

I nod. My eyes are starting to fill. I can barely see her behind my fogging glasses.

"The way we treat OCD is exposure and response prevention—you're going to have to risk hurting people, hurting God, making mistakes, over and over until you get used to the fears and they start to decrease."

My muscles clench. My right knee jackhammers the couch. I say, "That sounds awful. I know other people who have done this—they said it's torture."

I can leave. I know this. I don't want to be here. But I can't walk out—I've spent too many sacrament meetings in tears because I felt unworthy, so many conversations with friends trying to laugh behind a veil of panic, so much time lost to fear.

"I know. It will be," she says.

I swallow hard. "Let's plan the torture," I say.

We start to discuss the rules I've made for myself. Many of the idiosyncrasies of my personality, it seems, are rooted less in quirkiness and more in anxiety.

"You say you never curse?"

"Well, once. A friend said something bad about himself and used a swearword. I used the same phrase back to him to negate it." A pause. "I think I made my point."

“What did you do after that?”

“I repented. But I explained to God that it was for a good reason. I figured that loving our neighbor was a greater commandment.”

She nods. “That sounds neutralizing. What would happen if you said the words now?”

“I wouldn’t. It would be bad.”

“It would make an excellent exposure for you,” she says. “Just think about it.”



The next session, I say, “I’ll swear. But not yet.”

“Could you start by just writing it down? Songs? Didn’t you say that you liked Taylor Swift’s new album? It’s explicit.”

I manage half a smile. Like many young women I know, I memorized a good chunk of the tracks on *Folklore* within a week of its release. “I could maybe do that.”

In her office I start writing down all the lyrics that I skip when singing. *Red* came out when I was in middle school, and I would always say “passion innocent” instead of “passionate as sin.” Now I write “A damn thing, honey” and “I’m on some new shit.” Finally, the big one—the snark of this line makes me laugh, but I always wonder if I’m playing the chorus too loud: “Would you tell me to go fuck myself?”

I’m shaking. I’ve tried to stay slow and steady, but my handwriting has deteriorated down the page. I want to drive away from my therapist’s office and never return. She’s talking, but I don’t hear her.

“T? How are you doing? Where is your distress, one to ten?”

I take a breath—it’s not as bad as it was a few minutes ago. “Maybe six and a half? Seven?”

“That’s a good start. But what can we do to make this more threatening for you? Share it with people? Text your friends?”

More threatening? It’s already plenty bad.

“I could send the paper to my friends.”

She tips her head to the side. “What else?”

What’s worse?

I think of the temple looming over us, a few blocks west and up a hill.

“And I could go read this at the temple.”

She nods. “That’s a plan.”



I had expected the parking lot to be empty, but it’s close to full. I have trouble finding a spot in the front section. We’re under COVID restrictions, but in the second phase of opening, so people are inside.

I curl up in the driver’s seat. I don’t want to do this. I pull out the piece of paper, snap a photo of it, and send it to four of my close friends with this message: “I’m sending this to you, someone I consider to be a faithful Latter-day Saint and very good person, without comment (but you can ask questions if you want, haha).”

I linger a second over my lock screen—my friends and I, beaming on the day of my endowment.

I glance up. People are coming out of the temple doors, masked but joyful. I see a bride and a groom holding hands. Tears bite my eyes. There’s so much love there, so much connection.

Do I deserve that?

I hadn’t expected an immediate response to any of my texts—it’s late morning, and most of my friends are in class or at work, but messages are coming in. “T I love you.” A second later, “How are you holding up?”

That’s a loaded question. I ignore it but place the phone with love on the screen in my pocket. I get out of the car, curse-covered paper in my hand.

There are too many people in front of the building. I had hoped that they would all want to leave soon, but they seem to feel the need to keep talking. I walk around the back to where it’s empty. There’s a gate, but I don’t enter. I’m close enough as I am, and already weeping. I don’t know how much more I can handle.

I look up at the temple, then down at my paper. I start to speak. “You never did—you never did give a—a damn thing, honey.” I stammer.

I try again. “You never did give a damn thing, honey.”

Someone wouldn’t be able to hear this unless they were right next to me, and they still probably couldn’t understand under my sobs.

“Faster than the wind, passionate as sin,” I say. The tightness of my throat, in some dark twist, feels exactly the same as when I was making the covenants of my endowment, when I was afraid I wasn’t speaking clearly enough to be heard by God.

I know I can’t make it through this entire list, but I try one more.

“I’m on some—on some—I’m on some new shit!”

I lose myself in a burst of tears, then run to my car. I sit in the front seat for a few minutes until I’m calm enough to drive.



I haven’t been to church in months. The rising COVID case counts make me uneasy to be in a building with so many people, and our ward isn’t offering meetings via zoom. I miss religion. Mormonism’s absence lies in a dull ache beneath my ribcage. I consider texting one of my male friends to ask for a socially distant sacrament blessing but realize that I want to experience holiness without another as a conduit.

I drive to the temple nearest my house, the closest thing I have right now to a church service. There are people milling about the busy downtown, but I beeline straight for the grounds. I sit on a bench, bowed in prayer, tears streaming down my face.

God, I plead silently, please help me. I don’t know how much more I can take.



Amid all of this, my normal life goes on. I write papers for classes and knit through zoom lectures. My roommates and I make crepes

the morning of general conference, then all pile onto one bed to watch church leadership speak to an empty audience. I make plans with my boss in a research lab to start more investigations—there's a new drug he wants us to test, and I'll be in charge of injections and some experiments. I start listening to Christmas music in early October because it makes me happy. I have lunches with friends in parks. Ten feet apart, we can still see smiles and hear laughter. I pull boots and a coat over my pajamas to dance in the first snow.



And as I go further into treatment, doing more and more things that scare me, I start to heal. One morning I'm brushing my hair and realize I look pretty without being seized by an immediate feeling of guilt that I could be focusing on things more important than my appearance, that I'm setting a bad example for young girls. I talk to friends and don't spend the next three hours panicked that I've hurt them. I send fewer random apology texts. I begin to better understand grace, both as a gift from God and as something that I can extend to myself. My prayers become conversations rather than desperate recitals of names.

I make plans for a future that I genuinely look forward to.

I begin to live in it.



I haven't gone inside the temple again, although I long to. They're closed in my area to everything except living ordinances. I can't wait to immerse myself in the ceremonies without being convinced that a small mistake will condemn everyone I love for eternity.

I went back to the grounds a few weeks ago, again bowed in prayer.

Thank you. I've been waiting my whole life for this. It's beautiful.

I will never not have OCD—it's a chronic condition, but now it's managed. Some days are harder than others, and always will be, but

it's not the determining factor in my life anymore. I still struggle with small choices. I never had the chance to make mistakes when learning how life worked, so now I have to learn it all anew as an adult. I still fall, regularly, but find it easier to trust that there are arms to catch me.

And on the good days I'm able to add to the image in my head of what heaven looks like.

T BOYD is a recent college graduate living in the Intermountain West. She currently works in clinical research. She is an author of previously published flash fiction and neuroscience research.



"Tree Witnesses," assemblage,
by Frank McEntire

THE CASTING OUT OF SPIRITS

Jeanine Eyre Bee

I don't know why they've asked someone else to play the organ.

I've been playing the organ in this ward for forty-eight years. When I first learned to play, I had to pump the air through the pipes with my feet on bellows, up and down, one and then the other. My calves rippled through my stockings like an Olympian. I played when I was placed on modified bed rest during my pregnancy with Ellie, and George had to push me up to the rostrum in a wheelchair and help me onto the bench. I played at George's funeral, when my fingers creaked with the beginnings of arthritis and tears blurred the notes on the page. But I walk into church today with my book of music, feeling better than I have in years, and what do I see? Little Julie Nielson sitting at the organ, fumbling her notes left and right.

I'm not one to make a scene. So, after the initial shock, I decide to sit in the front row so I can lock eyes with the bishop every time the Neilson girl plays a wrong note. But when I reach the pew, the force of habit takes over and I keep walking. Up the steps. To the organ.

I stand behind Julie for a while, watching her play. She isn't using the foot pedals. Most people don't these days. But there's a little button on the right-hand side that says "BASS CUPL," and if you toggle it, it takes the voice programming from the bass line and plays it in the lower half of the keyboard. So I try to be discreet. I sit down on the bench next to her and whisper, "You need to enable the bass coupler."

Of course, she can't hear me—the organ is far too loud for prelude music. So I push the button myself. She looks a little confused at the change but keeps her eyes on the music. Then, since this is sacrament meeting and not a Beatles concert, I lower the volume myself with the foot pedal.

It seems like everything is under control, so I stand up to leave. But then Julie starts playing “Called to Serve.” As prelude music. Can you believe it? With that bass line thumping along. Bum bum bum bum. It’s atrocious. “Be Thou Humble” is a much better prelude hymn. And in the key of C, she’s not likely to miss many notes.

So I turn the page. Julie stops playing and whips her head around. “What are you—”

She looks confused. Maybe I should be more sympathetic. It’s not her fault that someone mistakenly asked her to play the organ. So I try to smile. “I’m not here to take over for you. I’m just giving you a few pointers.”

Julie turns back to the hymn book. But she must realize that my song choice is better, because she starts plodding through “Be Thou Humble.”

I’m starting to head down to the pews when Bishop Clements stands up to begin the meeting. Julie stops playing (right in the middle of the verse with no resolution to the musical phrase or anything), so rather than call any undue attention to myself, I sit down in the choir seats next to the organ.

The opening hymn is “The Spirit of God.” I’m quite familiar with the song. I know that it should be played on the ninth preset with the 4’ Clarion and 8’ Dulciana voices added to the Great manual to really give the melody that great ringing emphasis during “We’ll sing, and we’ll shout!” It should feel jubilant! Alive!

When Julie starts playing on the fifth preset—one I use for the quieter sacrament hymns—I audibly groan.

Changing voices in the middle of a verse is not recommended, but I can’t stand to sit through one more measure of this, so I lean over and toggle the ninth preset. The sound blasts from the pipes, and Julie jumps a bit at the change. But everything is fine until the tempo starts to drag. I tap on the bench next to her, hoping to encourage her to play a bit faster. She doesn’t. And I know she can hear me because even the bishop glances back at the sound.

Finally, after four verses (and eight-and-a-half minutes), the song finishes. After the opening prayer, I decide I'm going to take over for Julie. After all, I'm perfectly capable of fulfilling my calling. I slide onto the bench to excuse her, but before I can say anything, the bishop stands up again.

"We have just one item of ward business. We'd like to recognize our new ward organist, Julie Nielson."

At this I'm so shocked that I stand up right there, my feet on the pedals, sending a great cacophony of bass notes ringing out across the chapel. I gather my wits quickly and sit back down. Bishop looks over his shoulder at Julie, who shrugs. But of course, I'm shocked! I was never released from this calling. I still have a stewardship over this organ and this congregation—or their ears, at least.

Bishop turns back to the congregation and clears his throat. "And we'd like to make you aware of the passing of Sister Eugenia Gordon. Funeral services will be held Friday."

I should be playing at that funeral.

"Sister Gordon shared her musical talents with us for the past forty years—"

It was forty-eight.

"—and I know it's not customary, but I think it would be appropriate for us to offer a vote of release, to thank her for her service on the organ. All those who wish to do so, please show by the uplifted hand."

The hands are all held high, like the great wall of pipes in the tabernacle. And I feel a smile creep up on me.

Because now I know it's time for me to leave. Let Julie have a turn on the keys.

But enough about me. Tell me about this place.

Do you need an organist?

JEANINE EYRE BEE {jeanineeyrebee@gmail.com} is a writer, a ward organist, and a stay-at-home mom. Her work has been featured most recently by the Mormon Lit Blitz and *Irreantum*. She lives in Utah with her husband and four young kids.



"Winged Temple of the Golden Angel," assemblage,
by Frank McEntire

LUCKY WOUNDS

Theric Jepson

Old George sat on an upturned half-barrel cleaning his gun. It only ever shot blanks these days, but that didn't matter much. A fellow outlaw'd once told him the state of your gun's the state of your soul and George liked the sound of that religion as much as any other he'd come across. Least it had clarity; that much was sure.

Around the corner from the phony saloon he was up front of came the sounds of horses and yelling. The director was telling someone to fall bigger—bigger!—and for someone else to find the fiddle player for the next scene. They tended to shoot a feature a day on this lot, which was the best honest money Old George had ever made, even counting his time as a Pinkerton.

His gun cleaned, he leaned back on his barrel to the saloon wall and let his hat push over his eyes. How long he then slept who can say, but he woke to his name. "George! George, init?"

George opened one eye. Under the brim of his hat he could make out a famous pair of chartreuse cowboy boots. Happy Doug Green. Biggest cowboy picture star by gross of 1921, 1922, and now looking like 1923.

George nodded. "That's right. What's on your mind?"

"The boys tell me you're the real deal. Killed yourself an Indian or two back in the day."

"I reckon that's so."

"How many you killed, then?"

"Indians? Oh, 'bout the couple you say."

Happy Doug smiled. "Well, well. You suggesting you killed yourself a few white men as well? Why ain't you hanged then?"

“Well, sir, ain’t no answer for that but luck.”

“Luck? What kind of good luck let’s a murderer run free?”

“Ain’t no such thing as luck good or bad. Luck’s just the way things turn up.”

“Like the way you fall when I shoot you? That the way the men you killed fell?”

“No, sir. That’s the way they tell me it looks good for pictures.”

“Yeah. Yeah, yeah.”

Happy Doug paced back and forth a bit. “I’ll level with you, George. I’m not sure about these pictures I’m making. Kill a dozen men or so a picture, then they focus in on my smiling teeth and everybody Tecumseh to Washington claps and hoots and I start making another one. You ever smile after killing a man?”

George paused and considered this one. “No, I don’t figure I did.”

“How many you killed?”

“Can’t say for sure. Maybe the dozen you said.”

“How can a man not know a thing like that?”

“Well . . .” George thought a spell, looked out down the dusty “old West” avenue, saw a couple painted ladies practicing their dance. “I think I seen you with both them ladies.”

Happy Doug squinted, shrugged. “Could be. Can’t quite tell from here.”

“When you first make a woman?”

“Oh, when I’s sixteen, seventeen maybe.”

“You remember.”

“Sure I do.” He laughed. “Day afore my eighteenth. Same day I decided to come out to California, make it in pictures.”

“And now you leave with a different woman, every evening at wrap.” George pressed a thumb and finger into his eyes. “Same with killing. First time, I can tell you the time of day, the color of sky, dress of the woman what rushed to the body. . . . But after a while—

“You get used to anything.”

Happy Doug sat on the edge of the wooden walkway and leaned on his knees. "So . . . why ain't you hanged?"

"Well. We had what you call lucky bullets. Pass right through you, never hit nothing. Nothing important, that is. "I got scars on my belly and not a one couldn't I ride away from. But one time, three fresh holes in me, I passed out from the blood. I come to in a hospital outside Mesa with a lawman offering me a chance to deputize and live. I took that chance. Likely I killed more men as a deputy than before. That's how them Indians met their maker. It don't feel much different, no matter who you shooting—good man, bad man, red man, white. Nobody tell you that. Times I reckon I'd be happier they just hung me. Mighta been the right thing."

"And now here you are in your long white beard making movies."

"And the villain again."

"Money decent?"

"Seventy-five a day."

"I'll have'm make it a hundred."

"That's not—"

"Friend, you have any idea what they paying me? I see you do. It'll be a hundred."

Happy Doug stood and stretched, took a practice leap at his revolver, then tipped his hat and walked away. Old George watched him go, his movieman spurs a-jangling. From the rumble headed this way, sounded like Old George'd get to take his bullet and eat some dirt these next few minutes. Just a small role this picture, stealing some man's bride from the man what stole her first. Falling dead his first scene? That was just fine. He was hitting eighty this summer and the more times this old grizzly could get shot before quitting, the better.

And he would have to quit soon enough as, every time he fell, he made certain to hurt himself something good.

And bruises don't heal so quick on a man called Old.

A long time ago, when he was still a boy, one of his father's women told him some sins were unforgivable. She'd been referring to his disrespecting her, as he recalled—that bit was fuzzy—but then his own dear mother had said while that might be true of an old bird like Aunt Betty, God his holy self would hold out a hand till every George on earth had taken his whipping and was ready to come home.

That old West of George's childhood was so far gone it existed now only in fake towns for pictures. But perhaps for a man with luck, the God of this new West too might still be holding out his holy hand.

THERIC JEPSON {theric@thmazing.com} recently wrapped up his fourth year of teaching early-morning seminary, his eighteenth year of parenting children, and his forty-fifth year of avoiding guns. He edits *Irreantum* and has a novel coming out later this year from BCC Press. He has silent-film recommendations if you need them.

SISTER'S VISIONS

English Brooks

Her eyelids were closing. It must have been the stillness in the room that made her realize. The two young elders advanced their slides across the laptop screen and it felt late. She nodded slowly. Then more quickly, attentively, to show that, no, of course she wasn't dozing off. Surely, somewhere in the mission home there was drawer, and in it, a folder with her plane ticket home for the morrow. She was alert.

She looked out across the powder blue carpeting, recently vacuumed into long backgammon patterns. What even was carpet, anyway? What was Coca-Cola anymore? Chicken cordon bleu? Automatic ice? This fireside with no fire? Outside and beyond the chain link, in the concrete and cobble streets, someone was burning a small trash pile. Cool air from the river—now coursing along under mostly paved-over canals and culverts—settled over the neighborhood. It was evening and she could smell all this. A dog barked. A bell rang.

She thought back to that village on the coast where she had first been sent. A place whose name she would always remember like it had become her own. Washing her clothes in the concrete sink, then pinning them up in the courtyard; nothing brought a storm like hanging clean laundry to dry, a stillness in the air.

That's when she had heard them. At first she had thought it was thunder, or the hammer of falling fruits against the zinc roof. But it was the Howlers, moving across the canopy through *almendros*, *mamónes*, *marañones*, and *cecropias*. Looking up, first she saw just one of them, then all of them at once. An apparition, then a family. There was a mother with a baby on her back, gripping her nape by the fur. She scanned across backlit leaves and caught the mother looking on her, her downward gaze soft, dark, and unhurried. Then the rain.

That next morning she had awoken on her back, staring down across the length of her body. No blanket or sheet—it was already hot—just her own feet there at the end of the bed. What forces had sculpted these two duendes, two gifts that at once hold us up and down? Ten glassy faces, knuckles and whorls.

Here they were now in these worn grey flats, resting vaguely over the garish blue sea spanning the room. She listened for some sign in this last devotional—world without end—but could suddenly hear nothing. It was a horsehair worm, nightmarishly fine and black as vacuum, that had come writhing out from a vent on the other side of the room. She alone saw this.

ENGLISH BROOKS has creative and scholarly work that has appeared in *Aztlán*, *Dark Mountain*, *Green Letters*, *ISLE*, *MELUS*, *Pacific Coast Philology*, *Saltfront*, *Sunstone*, *Terrain.org*, and *Western American Literature*. In the summer, he directs Birch Creek Service Ranch, where teens come to the high desert to live in yurts, work local farms, hike slot canyons, play music, chase jackrabbits, eat grasshoppers, and howl at the moon! For the rest of the year, he teaches at Snow College in central Utah.

Q&A WITH JAMES GOLDBERG, CO-FOUNDER OF MORMON LIT BLITZ

The Mormon Lit Blitz contest has tapped into a rich reservoir of Mormon short-short fiction, reaching a milestone this year with the publication of its first anthology. With a 1000-word limit, final winners selected by a popular vote, and special rounds for translated and translingual work, the contest has yielded a panorama of diverse results during its first decade. Co-founder James Goldberg answers *Dialogue's* fiction editor Jennifer Quist's questions about this ongoing project to advance the reading and writing of Mormon literature.

DIALOGUE: Some of the Mormon Lit Blitz work has the feel of well-told folklore, as if the contest's structure, with the pithy word limit and the popular voting phase, encourages this kind of storytelling. Was this part of your original vision?

JG: No. When Nicole Wilkes Goldberg, Scott Hales, and I started the contest, our goal was just to get people to try reading Mormon Lit. We recognized that many potential readers are skeptical about Mormon literature and might not be willing to wade through a pile of novels long enough to find one they like. We hoped that a three-minute online read would feel low-risk enough that people would give it a shot.

What people have done aesthetically within the Mormon Lit Blitz's tight length limits has been a delightful surprise. Maybe because writing a very short story or essay is also lower risk for an author, we've had a lot of people experiment with form. Kathy Cowley's "The Five

Year Journal” and Luisa Perkins’ “Three Dogs in the Afterlife” immediately come to mind as pieces that have played with shape and style. Citlalli Xochitiotzin’s “Tiempo Una Particula” messes with chronology and narrative perspective in wild ways. And yeah, some people have responded to the length limit by using repetition in structure in ways that evoke folktales: Stephen Carter’s “Slippery” comes to mind. Merri-jane Rice’s recent poem “Low Tide” feels very oral to me, with a rhythm deeper than the literal meter of the words. Sarah Dunster’s “Remnant” also has a very grounded, oral feeling for me.

We can’t take too much credit for what people do, of course. If the Mormon Lit Blitz has shown anything, it’s that people can rise creatively to the occasion if there’s an occasion to rise to. It’s so important to give people space to experiment and grow.

DIALOGUE: You’ve written elsewhere about literature’s power to “enlarge the soul.” Have you seen signs of that happening through the Lit Blitz yet? What has it looked like?

JG: I can’t remember what I’ve said on the subject before, but I’m certainly a believer in the vital role of the imagination in religious life. God speaks to us, so often, through stories. We might as well try to answer once in a while in that same language.

Not every Lit Blitz piece is going to do that for every reader, but Nicole and I find pieces every year that remind us why we’ve kept this work going. Lee Allred’s “Beneath a Visiting Moon” really struck a chord with me: it’s a story I experienced in cascading layers of realizations after I finished. Annalisa Lemmon’s “Death, Disability, or Other Circumstance” was another one that mixed the fantastical, comic, and poignant in a way that’s stuck with me—I also love her story “The Gift of Tongues.” Wm Morris’s “Release” was sunk in for me and stayed. It’s one of those pieces that just tilted my whole worldview sideways for a minute. The cumulative effect of the whole Four Centuries of Mormon

Stories contest was really great: it was just so cool to see the sweep of past, present, and increasingly speculative future.

Does that mixture of ideas and feelings and angles count as enlarging the soul? I'm no master of the soul's geometry, but I think so. It's looked like, I suppose, just some marks on a screen but for me it's felt like seeing new worlds I could never have conceptualized all on my own.

DIALOGUE: Your comments on artistic genius and breaking down barriers between writers and readers seem to favor more connected ways of experiencing literature. I love that, but how have you addressed writers outside anglophone America, less connected to the Mormon literary heartland?

JG: Oh, yes. I am on record railing against the Western trope of the lone artistic genius. I came of artistic age doing theater and I was taught that theater doesn't exist on the page or even the stage: it's something you should think of as happening in the air between actors and audience as a viewer's memories mingle with the experiences of the characters.

I really value the Church and the role it plays in my life. I also love Mormonism, which I have come to think of not as a bounded religious system or a synonym for the restored gospel, but as a shared imaginationscape we are all still helping to expand. I believe that Mormonism, by which I mean that wild mix of theology and speculation and history and experience and jargon that our people has piled up over the years, is richer when everyone is able to contribute. I believe Mormon culture is better when we own, tend, and extend it.

When we finished the 7th Mormon Lit Blitz in 2018, we asked finalists to comment on what they'd like to see in Mormon Lit in the future. And one thing many of them said was that they were interested in more international voices—outside of a few Canadians and one English-speaking Finn, we'd had, to my knowledge, only American finalists in

the contest's first seven years. We launched a Patreon account that same year to help us expand our programming and asked patrons to help us set priorities. They, too, wanted to see a multilingual contest.

Katherine Cowley, a past Lit Blitz finalist who'd also served one year as a coeditor, was the key moving force in turning that aspiration into a reality. Katherine, working with some volunteer translators, developed a multilingual Facebook campaign to solicit submissions. We ended up receiving work in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Tagalog, and Estonian and publishing our top picks in both their original languages and an English translation. For logistical reasons, English is still centered in the contest—we didn't have bandwidth to translate the Estonian poems, for example, into every reader language—but it was an important step and we're proud we took it. Readers seemed enthusiastic as well: Cesar Medina Fortes, a gifted Mormon essayist writing about his life in Cape Verde, won the reader-selected Grand Prize in that contest.

We continue to think about ways to do more for writers working primarily in languages other than English. We hope our efforts will do well to complement those of other groups, such as the Confradia de Letres Mormonas, in increasing awareness and fostering the continued development of Mormon literary expression outside of English.

It's a big future. We're happy to be some small part of it.

Color

David K. Isom

Morning at home
listening to silence
and a solo cello,
caressing old books,
fog outside,
fire inside.

Trees
in crystal veils,
fog-doused sun,
Earth's palette replaced
by soot and chalk.

No color.
Only grays,
darker or lighter.
No real black.
No clean white.

Beth Cranston died
this morning, the only old-
timer still in my old
neighborhood,
except for Rod's mom
and my mom
and Mr. Humbert.

Beth, exhausted
from succoring her
blind brothers,
blind son, grandson,
great-grandson.

Blindness carried only by
women, worn only by
men. Each generation
deciding to have a baby
possibly blind.

Beth, exhausted by war
with cancer, still
nursed snapdragons
and hollyhocks,
still helped when my
blind mother fell.

Beth, exhausted,
buried two children
including blind Richard
and last week
praised God that
she would not live
to bury any more.

My bishop warned
me at sixteen
to stay away from
shades of gray
because truth is
black and white.

He did not mention
hot reds, shivering blues,
volcanic yellows.
And I did not ask.

I hear the low notes
of the cello in my
belly, the high notes
behind my eyes.

The duck pond is dark
because the spring
water melts the frost.
But the hills, the logs,
the deer, all
midrange grays,
subtle, soft, reluctant,
all feathered pale.

I squint through
lashes to darken
the dark grays,
lighten the light
grays, to try to
see the black
and white world
of my bishop.

I remember the
morning Beth left
her garden to calm
Richard raging, and
I vowed I would

not add another
blind person
to our neighborhood.

Vowed not to
blind myself to
forbidden grays
or burning flowers.

Vowed not to
pretend that
peacocks are penguins.

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Salt Lake City, 1957

Judy Darke Delogu

Sunday morning in Salt Lake City, when
faithful Mormons flock to worship
at neighborhood wards, my father's
secret psychiatric patients slip inside
the back door of 508 East South Temple,
for fifty-five-minute appointments.
A nurse impersonator, I greet them,
steer them into the doctor's office,
return to *Atlas Shrugged*. We might
argue in the car, but on arrival my father
and I team up. He exchanges his suit
jacket for a white coat, ducks out
for a smoke, while I pull patient charts
from the wall of alphabetized folders.
There's the homosexual bishop,
the alcoholic Relief Society president,
the man who pees on his wife. I align
the waiting room magazines, feed the fish,
flush a dead one, and replace the Kleenex.
Everybody knows the drill. No one arrives early,
no one stays late. Crossing paths with a friend,
neighbor, or relative, means questioning
why some problems require more
than prayer or a patriarchal blessing.

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Hymn to a Maple

Gerrit van Dyk

Your inverted slant is an acute note
west to east in the shaded sunrise
surrounded as you are by that moat
of rocks and weeds, dry as a chalk line.

One Goliath's push would likely do,
would end your wind quivering forever.
And still I pray to you. Pray for you
to suck the least dew from your dust.

Forget you. Never seem to find the soul
to water—had plans of course—a desert
snaking pipe, brown as your bole
shaking from the easterlies of winter.

You've made promises, too, long gone.
Once you might have burned for Moses
cursing the crossing, striking the stone,
hoisting the serpent, left unseen.

Yet your sap untapped returns to me
against all odds, yes, despite my neglect
your dark blood robe covers suddenly
while I watch still through crusted glass.

Acoustic

Gerrit van Dyk

My devotion never translates to my fingers.
There is something lost.
The scaly chaff of my heart opens my lungs.
I pinch my pic like a quill
what can I scrawl in the dusk?

The eighth notes scream as I harmonize
endless Ds without a u
A whittler stripping the block's clothes
keeping time at arm's length
desperate for a revelation.

Em Am7 G D6 D. The progression is eternal.
I believe in the delicate vice on the fret
calluses encroaching on my prints. Their throb,
waking me in the night after a two-hour vesper,
is the closest I will come to purity.

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"Last Dispensation," assemblage,
by Frank McEntire

Ceci n'est pas une Mormon Studies Book

Peter Coviello. *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. 324 pp. Index. Paper: \$29.00. ISBN: 9780226474335.

Reviewed by Joanna Brooks

When I first sidled up to *Make Yourself Gods*, I did so in the spirit of the Mormon Creed: “Mind your own business and let everybody else do likewise” (Trademark: 1842). Yes, I was suspicious. I knew Peter Coviello as a brilliant earlier Americanist, a well-regarded scholar of sexuality, masculinity, nationhood, and so on, the kind of person who gets invited places like the Institute for Advanced Study. But since when did he advancedly study Mormonism? And, more importantly to Mormon purposes, who did he know? (Nota bene for non-Mormon readers: “Do you know so-and-so?” constitutes the first six conversational turns when Mormons meet one another. See also: kinship.).

That’s why I turned straight to the acknowledgments. Where I didn’t see any Mormons I knew among the paragraphs of most-thanked persons, though somewhere six or seven paragraphs down he did acknowledge a few who knew “greatly more about Mormonism” than he did, and one of them was a Mormon! Who I knew! And very much like and trust! Though she really doesn’t hang out in the random Mormon studies places—that fractured constellation of mini-conferences, podcasts, and all-comers events—where we do as much fighting, gossiping, and managing of orthodoxies, institutions, relationships, and personalities as we do advanced studying. Though we *really*

are advanced in our own peculiar way. (See also: counterpublic; minor transnationalism.)

But flipping next through the endnotes I found that though Covello does not hang out with us, he does read us. Which is great! He reads lots of us! Even the women—at least the white ones. His all-time faves: Hickman, Givens, Reeve. But he also insists on calling us “the Mormons,” which for me conjures up something from the 1964–1965 New York World’s Fair—and more to the substance of the point insists that this book IS NOT A WORK OF MORMON STUDIES. Please see page 248, footnote 18: “It is worth saying frontally: to the degree that Mormon studies is engaged, however directly or obliquely, in a project of legitimation, [this book] situates itself apart from it. It is committed to bringing queer theory to the scene of postsecular critique, and to tracking the forces that took hold of early Mormonism and bent it—often violently—toward the disciplinary norm of secular belonging.” By which I think he means the sorry parts of our business are his business because they (we?) exemplify how the modern-nationalist-imperial fiction of secularization has killed the “queer affordances” of Mormonism. They (we?) are numbered among the body count. And you, non-Mormon reader, could be next!

Mind you, I’m not trying to appropriate “nothing about us without us” as the Mormon creed 2.0. The politics of representation matter to Mormons, but not in the same way that they matter to communities whose identities correspond with disparities in life, health, political, and economic outcomes. My Mormon identity has never prevented me from getting a mortgage or made it more likely for me to be pulled over by the cops, though it has elicited some truly bone-headed comments from well-meaning faculty in my doctoral program. In fact, because Mormons tend to be so entangled in our own business (see: boundary maintenance, complex post-traumatic stress) we don’t always see ourselves with perspective. Once in a while it’s really nice to be seen—really seen—in all our maddening splendor by someone who is not one of us. (Thank you, Jan Shipps!) We learn new things that way. Just as I learned

by reading Sir Richard Burton's *City of the Saints* that one of my Dorton ancestors (an early citizen of Lehi, Utah) drank beer while lounging in a haystack. Which I love.

So after I read the endnotes and acknowledgments and the first few pages, I put the book down for a while. I passed by it every few days. I picked it up and flipped at random to a page in the middle. That's another Mormon reading method—the scripture chase / random flip / proof text. I once had a friend who decided to marry a guy she didn't like all that much by turning to a page of scripture at random and doing what it said. And when I did this with *Make Ourselves Gods* (WHICH IS NOT MORMON STUDIES) I have to say I liked what Coviello saw. The prophetic enormity of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young's inner and intimate worlds and her anguish with Mormonism's "mono-maniacal" turn of territorial theocratic Brighamite Mormonism? *Been there*. The Book of Mormon and Benito Cereno? *Yes. Yes. Stunning*. Modern Mormonism as a "cautionary tale" about assimilation? *Amen, and amen*. The story checks out. I am so glad someone can see this in us.

And yet. As I was preparing to write this review, I spent a Sunday morning walking on the beach with a friend who is also the leader of Equality Utah—a gay Mormon man—an icon, really—who has lived the life and worked activist miracles making Utah more habitable for the gay kids who happen to be born there. We spent several minutes recounting the traumas—individual, collective, historical—that likely drove our ancestors to Mormonism and the traumas they (and we ourselves) accumulated in our Mormon lives. That's a standard feature of most conversations I have with progressive (and not at all secularized) Mormon people these days. And it constitutes for us a domain of tremendous power and intimacy, a shared domain of difference.

In some respects, our recounting of traumas proves Coviello's point about the body count of modernly assimilated Mormonism. But the distance between the domain of queer / Mormon conversation and the domain of the book is serious. The book betrays little sense of this

contemporary queer / Mormon conversation, its ongoing power and intimacy. Perhaps this is because it pretty much refuses intimacy with contemporary Mormons (“the Mormons”; them/ us?). And in so doing it proves that narratives (even professedly anti-secularist ones) secularize to their own purposes when they use lives as a cautionary tale. They miss entirely how weird we are still. They still do not see the marvelous shame I wear—to this day, quietly, but proudly—whenever I walk into the world of my profession.

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Got Wheat?

Christopher James Blythe. *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. 348 pp. Illustrations, index. Hardcover: \$74.00. ISBN: 9780190080280.

Reviewed by Amy Hoyt

Growing up in the LDS faith, my parents always dutifully had large quantities of wheat, rice, beans, and all other manner of food stored—food we never ate in our daily lives. While they rarely discussed end-time catastrophe, I was aware that our food storage was a temporal preparation for a series of events that would be forthcoming, including plagues, famine and all the dramatic events detailed in scripture. I appreciated the idea but didn’t quite understand how we would actually survive on the food they had stored. I grew up, went to college

and graduate school, and eventually began teaching religious studies. When Christopher Blythe's *Terrible Revolution* landed on my radar to be reviewed for *Dialogue* I assigned myself to the review.

Blythe begins his text with a reminder to the reader that the beginnings of Mormonism are steeped in apocalyptic notions—after all, Moroni specifically instructed Joseph Smith Jr. to prepare for the return of Christ, an event many believe is the culmination of end-times calamities. Blythe chronicles the history of apocalyptic beliefs in the early LDS Church and carefully traces how those views have shifted over time. The first part of Blythe's text examines the methodological commitments of both historians of religion who employ “lived religion” and folklorists who work with “ordinary folk” to examine vernacular religion. At the end of the day, both methods prioritize the experiences of the non-elite. Lived religion examines the ways in which laity practice religious creeds and live their religion in their everyday life, folklorists are interested in the stories that are told by the people as stories can be interpreted as a mirror of a group's culture. Blythe ultimately relies on the method of folklorists, including both the official and unofficial narratives surrounding apocalypticism to describe a wider and layered understanding of it. This allows him to trace the shifts in official narratives and changing boundaries of what constitutes legitimate apocalyptic belief.

During the nineteenth century, lay LDS Church members enjoyed a more open and reciprocal relationship with the leadership when it came to end-time spiritual premonitions (and many other things). However, as the LDS Church began to seek accommodation with the wider American public, church leaders began to minimize the apocalyptic predictions and spiritual experiences of the laity and create firmer boundaries around official narratives. This transition coincided with a reshaping of apocalyptic narratives from events that were thought to be imminent and linked to the martyrdom of the early Saints to narratives that more closely align with American evangelical notions of end-times. This latter iteration posits a global apocalypse and places American democracy and religious freedom in jeopardy.

Blythe's text is a bit dense in places and sometimes feels sluggish in the beginning. Nevertheless, it is worth the read. Bythe connects early apocalyptic beliefs to the Saints notions of martyrdom, with revenge and retaliation figuring largely among early Saints. This was particularly true after Joseph Smith Jr. was killed and as they moved west. Next, Blythe examines the ways in which end-times were understood in early Utah after the trek west inadvertently left them within the newly defined boundaries of the United States. Finally, Blythe examines how apocalypticism was ultimately reimagined by LDS leaders as less of an American event and more of a global phenomenon based upon preparing the world for the Second Coming.

The highlight for me was the last part of the book, where Blythe examines the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the stories that have come from unofficial channels, focusing on two types of groups that perpetuate them: Mormon fundamentalists and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The accounts range from terrifying to horrific and Blythe deftly observes that one of the byproducts of the minimization of official apocalyptic rhetoric since the nineteenth century by LDS Church leadership is that LDS Church members in the twentieth century began to feel increasing anxiety about end-times. This is not surprising since the basic arch of the unofficial contemporary apocalyptic experiences tend to include being shown future events that include war, American invasion, multiple plagues, famine, and unmitigated violence and depravity. The absence of official rhetoric in contemporary times has left a void which has been filled in by personal accounts, some of which are eerily similar. Blythe points out that some of the similarities between personal accounts such as the depiction of "tent cities" or "cities of light" where LDS Church members will be directed to gather together away from their homes in order to seek refuge during tumultuous times, as well as the destruction of both the East and West Coasts by some type of disaster and the subsequent "invasion" under the guise of aid by foreign soldiers. These

personal apocalyptic accounts are also different in that they embody different locals—one person’s experience focused mostly on events that are based in Utah while another person’s story focuses on events within American that will lead up to the Second Coming. There are enough similarities to give the reader pause; it certainly piqued my interest.

Blythe does a terrific job walking the reader through the shifts and nuances of the multiple apocalyptic themes that pepper the LDS imagination, both officially and unofficially. It is worth the investment. Perhaps I will also invest in a few extra cans of wheat as well.

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From the Garden of Eden to the Zen Rock Garden

Charles Shirō Inouye. *Zion Earth Zen Sky*. Provo: Brigham Young University Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2021. 271pp. Paper: \$19.95. ISBN: 9781950304110.

Reviewed by Ted Lee

The latest in the Living Faith series, Charles Inouye’s *Zion Earth Zen Sky* is an autobiographical memoir about growing up as a child to Japanese American immigrants who met in the internment camps during World War II. Born on a farm in rural southern Utah (“in order to be far from

the people who betrayed them” [3]), Inouye grows up within a tight-knit Latter-day Saint community (converting to the religion at an early age) while raised by devout Buddhist grandparents and secular parents. Inouye’s stories reflect this blend, deftly weaving between Buddhist literature, the haiku of Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō (1644–94), Latter-day Saint doctrine, and academic rumination on the consequences of modernism. Inouye’s own prose reflects Bashō’s poems—a plain, lyrical style that juxtaposes the lofty and the vulgar to bring about new holistic ways of seeing the world that is at times profound and other times cheeky and irreverent.

Zion Earth Zen Sky is not the typical memoir, perhaps even less so as a Latter-day Saint one. There is no grand narrative leading up to some culmination or epiphany. The memoir itself is composed as a series of vignettes; snapshots of his life strung along in chronological order. One story does not necessarily lead into the next. Scattered between stories, haiku act as poetic punctuation marks. Inouye’s autobiography feels less like a traditional memoir and more like a Buddhist sutra—stories full of colorful characters, multiple near-death experiences, and even some supernatural visitations. These stories are stitched together (the word *sutra* means “thread” and is the root word for English words such as *suture*) that, when unfurled, reveal a larger cosmic pattern or theme.

And there are clear themes in Inouye’s stories. One theme is a familiar Latter-day Saint trope—a young boy, wracked with guilt for his sins and despairing at the atrocities of this world turns to God. Another theme is familiar to Asian Americans—yes, growing up in a racist society differentiated by the color of one’s skin, but also the alienation from one’s parents and grandparents as the child of immigrants and how we try to bridge that gap and find ways to express our love for each other anyway, sometimes understanding too late. And throughout it all, Inouye discovers early on a personal flaw that he struggles with all his life—the tendency to withdraw from the world that Jesus explicitly commanded his disciples to live and work and move and love within. It

is this third theme where the young Inouye does not find lasting relief in the justice of God. As Inouye later remarks, “Justice is like food. We can’t do without it. But too much kills us” (212). Inouye, hesitantly at first, opens himself up to the world and all that it has to offer, trying to embrace both its beauty and ugliness.

Inouye’s engagement in the world revolves around raking, referring to the rake one uses to make the paths within the gravel of a Zen rock garden. Raking is a metaphor for the work of maintaining faith and life, individuals and societies. Raking does not lead to some final goal but is the goal itself. Joy is found in the raking, whether it is home teaching or the mundane chores of family life. “If anything,” Inouye writes, “raking is a surer way to the kind of knowledge that matters most. The truth is something to practice, not something to think about” (165). Raking is how God created the world, and raking is how the world is maintained (29). Raking is not a task but an invitation to enlightenment: “My relationship with my Heavenly Father is much the same. I am not supposed to be raking *for* him. Rather, I am supposed to be raking *with* him” (175).

In this way, Inouye draws deeply from both the well of Buddhism and the waters of Mormonism. He is comfortable with this syncretic terrain, which could possibly be disorienting for some Latter-day Saints unfamiliar with the Buddhist faith tradition. Inouye’s world is a literary and theological space where bodhisattvas, *kami*, and Christ mingle easily with each other. For example, Inouye refers to God—that familiar Christian patriarchal deity—while also recognizing the gods, and at times these two terms seem almost interchangeable. Is he talking about the Buddhist pantheon of different buddhas and bodhisattvas, the animistic spirits of things and places of Japanese Shinto, or the council of gods within revealed scripture? In the Zen spirit of Inouye’s world, does it make a difference?

Make no mistake; Inouye is firmly rooted in his Latter-day Saint faith. But the Mormonism he unfolds—a faith tradition animated

through continual raking, a tradition that recognizes the gods in all things and people, a tradition that recognizes that “many of us, myself included, see ourselves as peacemakers even when the stability we seek is making life miserable for many” (215)—feels simultaneously foreign and familiar to me. I suspect this may be the case for many readers who have thought deeply on matters of justice and mercy. As a Korean American Mormon with my own personal syncretic connections to Buddhism and Confucianism, I yearn for the kind of theological practice Inouye slowly expounds through stories of raking, and I mourn for the fact that this is often not the case. One can feel Inouye’s own yearning and mourning as a tension throughout the pages, and it is a tension that is never fully resolved by the end. This may be unsatisfying for some, but perhaps he never meant to resolve it. Perhaps, like raking, that tension—between Zion and the world, between the lofty ideals of the heavens in the sky and the sometimes cruel but also beautiful realities of the earth below—is the entire point.

Inouye’s book arrives during a particularly turmoil-filled period as a global pandemic ravages the most downtrodden, crumbling empires lash out in fear and fury, misery festers in cages along the borders of nations, and Black and Asian bodies are gunned down in the streets by police and citizens alike with little accountability. The American Church, in turn, struggles with prejudice, racism, sexism, violence, and hatred within its own pews. A membership and church culture that once prided itself on its political neutrality seems paralyzed and neutered as it is caught in a torrent of injustices. Inouye’s own struggles with feeling overwhelmed with the horrors of this world and his subsequent turn back to the world he once tried to escape—to turn back to the burning house, a popular Buddhist metaphor Inouye deploys—may bring some measure of comfort to others struggling to keep their head above the floodwaters. This struggle in difficult times is not a unique moment but a deep and time-honored tradition of faith spanning centuries and cultures. Perhaps the greatest praise I can give for *Zion Earth*

Zen Sky is this: as soon as I finished, I put my tablet down, went for a walk outside to view the last of the remaining cherry blossoms, and then washed the dishes. I picked up my rake.

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Gendering Mormon Studies—At Last!

Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*. London: Routledge, 2020. 646 pp. Illustrations, index. Hardcover: \$250.00. ISBN 9780815395218.

Reviewed by Christine Talbot

Women's and gender studies emerged out of the women's and sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, movements the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints vigorously opposed. The so-called New Mormon History flourished around the same time, opening the field to new approaches. While the New Mormon History resulted in a better understanding of women in Mormon history, the study of gender in Mormonism has largely remained captured by the kind of compensatory history that argues women were there, too, and they mattered. As Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey acknowledge, Mormon gender studies has remained relatively untouched by the methodological and paradigm shifts in the broader study of gender over the last few decades. Mormon studies has been late in applying to Mormonism

the more expansive approaches emerging in women's and gender studies—incorporating the study of men and masculinity and thinking more carefully about the complex processes by which people become gendered in the first place. Moreover, perhaps because of the pervasive whiteness of Mormon studies until recently, only a few scholars are just now beginning to think through how intersectional approaches matter to Mormon studies. Intersectional approaches consider how gender is inflected with race, class, sexuality, nationality, and other categories of identity and social structure. Even fewer scholars have engaged with the theoretical turns in sexuality and queer studies that make visible the complicity of heteronormativity in gender structure and inequality. Hoyt and Petrey's new edited collection, *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, tries to correct that lag, curating and assembling forty-one essays by as many scholars with diverse perspectives. Some of the chapters give readers an overview of Mormon gender studies, illustrating how far the field has come. Others “[chart] a future” to “address the many gaps” in Mormon gender studies, revealing just how far it hasn't (2). While Hoyt and Petrey's introduction is more optimistic than I am about how much Mormon gender studies has grown, the collection nonetheless moves the field significantly in valuable directions.

Following an introductory essay from the editors, the book is organized into four sections: methodological issues, historical approaches, social scientific approaches, and theological approaches. Essays in the methodological issues section explore the potentials of current standard methodologies in gender studies for thinking about gender in Mormon studies. These essays address the context in which Mormons become gendered and live gendered lives, using intersectionality as methodology and in practice at national and global levels.

The historical section, unsurprisingly the book's most robust, is comprised of essays giving an overview of gender over the course of LDS history, all but one focused primarily in the United States (the other examining LDS art in nineteenth-century Scandinavia). These chronological overviews are followed by topical essays: three on

elements of the Church's confrontation with emerging homosexual identities and social movements in the post-World War II era; one each on LDS artistic and literary production across its history; and two interrogating LDS (hetero)sexual culture, discussing modesty and sexual violence. Some of these essays break new ground, while others are state-of-the-field essays that expertly digest territory well-covered in LDS historiography.

Social scientific approaches flesh out these historical approaches in the collection's third section. Five of the essays in this section focus on the United States, giving readers an analysis of women's informal power, the home as ideology and as lived experience, and the gendered experiences of Mormons seeking mental health and pastoral counseling. Two additional essays provide large scale demographic analyses of non-traditional families and gendered belief structures. Six essays in this section discuss Mormon gender and family cultures in England, Ireland, Peru, Nicaragua, the Pacific Islands, and Nigeria, making it the most globally oriented of the four parts. Two of these essays examine how Mormons in modern, secular, more egalitarian cultures in the UK negotiate a theology and a culture rooted in traditional gender roles and family culture. The other essays look at how a religion and culture centered around white American gender roles and filial structures is negotiated in the Global South. Taken together, the pieces in this section look at how a faith and culture with distinctly American gender and family beliefs and norms gets negotiated by believers in very different cultural contexts with very different ways of organizing gender, family, and sexuality. These negotiations result in hybrid beliefs and practices that are a middle ground between American Mormon and local ideals, mosaics of more distinct features of each, or some of both. In this section especially, but elsewhere as well, Hoyt and Petrey have turned the weaknesses of Mormon studies into a strength of the collection. The editors include and amplify what little intersectional and international scholarship there is, simultaneously announcing the arrival of and calling for more of these important approaches.

As Hoyt and Petrey point out, “Theology is often a marginalized discourse in contemporary Mormonism” in part because Mormons are “suspicious of religious professionalism” and because of “the fear of suffering institutional consequences” (6). These essays explore some of the pitfalls and potentials of LDS theology in the twenty-first century. They explore issues as diverse as gendered theology in the Book of Mormon; theologies of the family, sexuality, queer and trans issues; the Heavenly Mother; gender and LDS priesthood; and women of color feminism. Many of these essays feel quite labored in their attempts to make Mormon theology “feminist.” Some authors throw caution to the wind, while in others’ essays the caution and sometimes self-censorship is palpable; taken together these essays rethink Mormonism’s theology in terms that attempt to make Mormon patriarchy more palatable for those voices most marginalized within the Church.

Intended primarily as a reference book, the *Handbook* is likely to be read cover to cover only by its most dedicated readers but is nonetheless worthy of such a read. Its essays are well-selected, well-written, engaging, and broadly accessible to readers in both gender studies and Mormon studies, providing both a strong overview and new approaches, ideas, and directions for further research. Topical essays occasionally lead to some repetition, most egregiously in the chapters covering LGBTQ+ topics, but overall, the book includes a wide variety of topics and perspectives.

The book is broadly illustrative of debates familiar in gender studies—the nature of gender, the relationship between prescriptive and lived gender roles and relations, and how gendered subjects negotiate formal and informal forms of cultural and institutional power. Distinctly Mormon flavors recur throughout as themes reappear in multiple essays: Mormonism’s material and embodied theology, changes over time and across cultures in the shape of LDS gender ideology and gendered life, and the difficulty of reconciling LDS belief and culture with twenty-first-century understandings of gender, feminism, LGBTQ+ issues, and intersectional thought. Notably, the book

as a whole and many of the essays within it illustrate tensions in the study of gender in Mormonism, an area of focus just beginning to grow beyond its initial impulse to search for a useable feminist past. The inclusion of many contributors facilitates recognition of new ways of celebrating the strength, agency, resilience, and creative influence of historical and contemporary LDS women and queer subjects. However, celebration sometimes comes at the expense of explicitly critiquing the heteropatriarchy that demands this of them. Despite the occasional prevarication of a few of its contributors, though, Hoyt and Petrey's collection does the study of gender in Mormonism a great service by bringing its frameworks, paradigms, and methodologies further into the twenty-first century.

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Connecting the Dots

Caitlin Myer. *Wiving: A Memoir of Loving and Then Leaving the Patriarchy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020. 283pp. Hardcover: \$14.99. Kindle: \$18.83. ISBN: 9781950691470.

Reviewed by Lisa Van Orman Hadley

When I was a kid, I loved doing dot-to-dot pictures. Do you know the ones I'm talking about? You began with a sheet of paper scattered with dots and tiny numbers, like a starry but constellation-less sky; any star

could have any relationship to any other star. Unlike the dot-to-dots my kids do nowadays, there were no solid lines already on the page back then—no faces or wings or puffs of smoke hinting at what the final image would be. The only way to figure it out was to start moving your pencil around the page, tracing a line from dot 1 to dot 2 to dot 3 until an image began to emerge.

Reading *Wiving* felt like doing a dot-to-dot. It is one of those memoirs that begins at the end, or close to the end, and then takes you on a circuitous journey, zigzagging between years—from 2020 to the aughts to 1974—before bringing you back around to the present. The joy of this book was in connecting those dots and seeing the surprising route the narrative took through the pages. With each new chapter, another dot revealed itself, and I traced a line from the dot that came before it to see what picture I would end up with.

The book begins in Portugal, close to the present day. Myer is fifty years old and has just moved to a coastal town. She says, after recounting an experience with a man leaning in for a cheek kiss and then suddenly turning his head and forcing his tongue into her mouth, “Being a woman is hazardous” (2). We don’t know how she has ended up here, living alone in a country where she hardly speaks the language. We only know that she wants to be alone and no one seems to want to let her.

In the next chapter, another dot appears when we find out that fourteen years before Portugal, there was a marriage and trying for a baby and bleeding—months and months of bleeding. There is so much blood that it doesn’t seem possible that one person could bleed so consistently and prolifically. Myer becomes weaker and weaker, eventually needing a transfusion. Her doctors can’t figure out why this is happening, but they offer a solution: a hysterectomy.

And then, the week she is scheduled for the hysterectomy, a new dot is revealed when there is a call from home. Myer’s mother has died. (These aren’t really spoilers, by the way. All of the events I just mentioned occur within the first ten pages of the book.) And so, it continues on like this. From the mother’s death, we trace a line back to Myer’s

childhood in Provo, Utah, where she grew up in a large LDS family, the youngest daughter of a BYU art professor father and a frequently sick poet mother. She leads us through her chaotic childhood, one in which she is constantly dancing around her mother's illnesses and the expectation that she will one day become a wife.

Growing up in the church, Myer is keenly aware that she is meant to be a wife. She seems to be an ancillary character in the story of her own life instead of the author. She writes, "Once upon a time, Eve was created to fill a man's need. She sprang from his rib but wasn't free, she was hooked to him, defined by him, her daughters' destiny written at the beginning of the world. The woman's reason for being centers on the man" (48). She recounts heartbreaking tale after heartbreaking tale of the hazards of being a woman. Myer's story is one of (slowly, achingly) untethering and undefining. The prose is lyrical, the narrative is fragmented, and Myer's voice is blisteringly honest.

A word of warning here: this narrative goes to some very dark places. It covers mental illness, multiple sexual assaults, and an attempted suicide in the seminary building. It is obvious that Myer has done a tremendous amount of healing, but she does not hold back, does not try to massage these events to make them more palatable for her reader. As a result, I often had the impulse to look away. But I decided to stay with it because I felt that I was bearing witness to Myer's trauma. This might not be the best call for all, though, so proceed with care.

These tough moments are cut with moments suffused with great tenderness. When Caitlin is in a psych ward after her suicide attempt, for example, her father comes to visit her with a piece of paper and a charcoal pencil in hand. He then goes on to lovingly teach her how to draw a face.

The eyes, he says, are halfway down the face.

No way, I say.

It's true. We're all forehead. Me especially, he says, laughing, rubbing his hand over his bald head. He leaves a streak of charcoal on his skull.

(104)

This is a memory Myer will return to again and again.

In the dot-to-dot pictures of my childhood, my pencil sometimes followed a predictable route. One dot led to the dot closest to it. But other times, the trajectory was unexpected. The next number suddenly had me zipping diagonally to the bottom corner of the page or back into a section of the picture my pencil had worked through much earlier. This kind of work can be, at times, disorienting. Looking at the closest dot, you think: Why isn't this the next move? But the thing is, even if it's the closest dot, going there won't necessarily lead to a final picture that makes sense. Going to the closest dot could mean you end up with a dog without a tail, for instance. Some might similarly find Myer's route to be baffling. But once I finished the book, all these points added up. While the picture of her life might not be the one you expected or the one you would choose for her, that, for me, is the point. She is aware that the life she has created might not lead to a pat ending, that she might not end up happy. Throughout the book, Myer compares herself to her mother, whose potential is never fully realized. Instead, her mother increasingly spends her days in bed. She says, "Mom suffocated her rage until it nailed her to the bed. I let mine pull me forward, carrying my bed on my back. I might land myself an emptiness as great as my mother's. An open question. Solitude is terror, and I am walking directly into its eye" (242). Myer has made bold decisions. I was happy to trace the points along her journey and to see the portrait that finally emerged—a portrait of her own making.

LISA VAN ORMAN HADLEY {lisavhadley@gmail.com} is the author of *Irreversible Things*, an autobiographical novel-in-stories about growing up in her quirky Mormon family. She received the Howling Bird Press Fiction Prize and an Association for Mormon Letters Special Award in Literature in 2019. Lisa's stories have most recently appeared in the *New England Review*, *Epoch*, and *The Collagist* and have been shortlisted in *Glimmer Train* and *Ploughshares*. She lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Mischief and Ethnography

Keith Norman. *BUC: A Boy among the Saints*. North Charleston, S.C.: Palmetto Publishing Group, 2020. Paper: \$12.99. 345 pp. ISBN: 9781649900333.

Reviewed by Linda Hoffman Kimball

BUC: A Boy among the Saints spans a “year in the life of an unregenerate 10 year old”—the endearing young rascal Wilford Bushman. Wilf, like most in his rural Utah community of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, is “BUC”—“born under the covenant.” Being “BUC” assures him of eternal life with his Latter-day Saint family. It also comes with an earthly inheritance of every (in)conceivable tenet and folk doctrine members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ever spawned.

Wilf himself (cough—Keith Norman—cough) in the clever introduction to this narrative insists this is not a “coming of age” story with an accompanying “loss of innocence” or any other literary structure as bold as a theme or deep meaning. He is apparently as puzzled as an adult (writing the preface) as he was as a ten-year-old about how righteousness works since he constantly feels either guilty or cunningly thrilled with his next devious exploit. He seems exhausted by trying to sort out all the “oughts” in his upbringing. The reader quickly discerns Wilf as a bright, inquisitive boy with a touch of testosterone poisoning but a good heart. Wilf ponders the inconsistencies, blessings, hypocrisies, and spiritual nurture he encounters as he navigates his life.

Keith Norman writes humorously and with a completely authentic juvenile voice, narrating the thoughts of the innocent, mischievous, and curious boy as he learns and wrestles with the consequences of his choices. While one can’t exactly say that Wilf grows “in favor with God and man” during his eleventh year, Keith Norman has created a very appealing—if not entirely compliant—character.

Because the book is a sketch of a community as well as one boy's story, we find well-drawn personalities with vicious streaks and jealousies as well as adorable citizens who—under a lesser author's hand—might be perceived as simply tropes. Norman's handling of scenes with Wilf's new "non-member" fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Sutton, is often hilarious, but also shines a light on the savagery of judgment, hypocrisy, and condemnation of others among the townspeople. This willingness to lay bare the destructive nature and impact that harmful ideas reap keep the book from being just a jaunty little wander down into a cute'n'quirky love nest of Zion. Like *Brigadoon*, *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* is out of touch with contemporary life and current social issues. The town is woefully "un-woke." And Wilf is waking up.

I had a slight worry about the pacing in the book. For a while it seemed to go from one episode of mischief to another, embroidered with vocabulary someone unfamiliar with the patois of the Saints might find hard to suss. The suspense picks up when baby Winona wanders off, when Wilf falls off a cliff, and when Mr. Sutton appears on the scene. And—oh my!—the outhouse scene! The pages were flying then.

I appreciate *BUC* not just for its assured tone and style. This book is also an ethnographic treasure. I am eager to know how well this book will fare among readers who are not familiar with the Intermountain West pioneer LDS culture that *Anti-Lehi-Nephi* still inhabits. With the Church expanding worldwide, how much of this culture Norman has captured will survive in an international Church? Perhaps copies could be sold with interpreters?

I am left with an awe of Keith Norman's skill at walking the tightrope that kept this book from being a catalog of LDS cliches or a presentation of endearing tropes. He sees. He hears. He wrestles with the logical fallacies of certain pseudo-doctrines and sees their dangerous fall out. He lays bare the bitter and the sweet, holds them up to the light as Wilf Bushman examines them with his (mostly) innocent eyes, and forces us to ponder the consequences. A bookshelf with books by Levi Peterson,

Maureen Whipple, and Mark Twain can make a little room for *BUC: A Boy among the Saints*.

LINDA HOFFMAN KIMBALL (LHKimball@pobox.com) An artist/author/poet/quilter, Linda was reared near Chicago and joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints while a student at Wellesley College in 1971. She earned her MFA from Boston University. She values her upbringing and city living for the diversity and perspective that continue to inform her life. She now resides in Wasatch County, Utah. She is a member of the Dialogue Foundation board.



"Yoke," assemblage, by Frank McEntire

ARTISTS

BRUCE HIXSON SMITH (1936–) is an emeritus professor of painting at Brigham Young University. Bruce is known for figure, still life, and religious iconography in his paintings and printmaking. His images represent the painstaking search to reconcile the physical medium of paint with the transcendent truths of Christ's story.

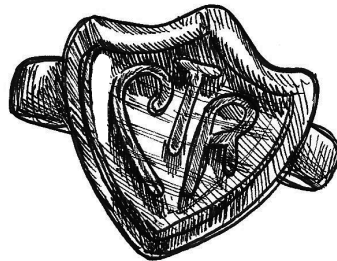
He currently lives in Utah with his wife, Mary, and continues to inspire many artists through his creative process and philosophy on the sacred nature of creating devotional art.

FRANK MCENTIRE (1946–), of Houston and Wichita Falls, Texas, resides in Salt Lake City, Utah. His sculptural, assemblage, and installation works are expressive of cultural, environmental, and political issues of our time. He was an art critic for *The Salt Lake Tribune* and *Salt Lake Magazine* and has published numerous essays for magazines and exhibition catalogs. McEntire's leadership as the former executive director of the Utah Arts Council and his service on boards, panels, and task forces, has enhanced the careers of many artists and the overall cultural life of Utah.

Mormon Studies Review

The *Mormon Studies Review* tracks the vibrant, varied, and international academic engagement with Mormon institutions, lives, ideas, texts, and stories. It chronicles and assesses the developing field of Mormon studies with review essays, book reviews, and roundtable discussions related to the academic study of Mormonism. The journal offers scholars and interested non-specialists a one-stop source for discussions of current scholarship on Mormonism, ranging across disciplines and gathering voices from a broad cross-section of the academy, both LDS and non-LDS.

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