

Joseph Smith's Letter from Liberty Jail as an Epistolary Rhetoric

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Joseph Smith may not have ever spoken the word “rhetoric,” but his participation in juvenile debating societies probably brought him some contact with rhetoric’s long tradition.¹ Regardless of his knowledge of this tradition, it is obvious that Smith knew how to persuade people through speech and writing. In addition, his writings instruct readers about how to persuade in a manner consistent with the restored gospel of Mormonism. Whether Smith intended to introduce a new theory of rhetoric, this article argues that his theology implies one. While it is probably true that one can be a good communicator without theorizing about what he or she is doing, this paper is on the lookout for a Restoration theory of persuasion.²

The first section of this article compares the communication theories of three prominent LDS intellectuals with a focus on central disagreements within communication theory and thereby on finding a way into the writings of Joseph Smith. The second section, divided into sub-sections, analyzes Smith’s “Letter to the Church at Quincy, 20 March 1839” as an epistolary rhetoric, a letter that instructs its reader in the art of persuasion. Smith’s letter instructs readers in their communion with God, their ordinary conversations with one another and with those “that are not of our faith,” the persuasions appropriate to leaders of the Church, and the Church’s interactions with the world’s political powers, particularly when the Church is in deep distress. The unifying thread between these seemingly disparate topics is Joseph’s desire

for a heavenly city that requires labor in the here and now, an effort of persuasion to realize a change of heart. The centrality of rhetoric to city-building justifies the pursuit of a Restoration theory of persuasion.

Although the “Letter to the Church” never uses the word “rhetoric,” it refers repeatedly to corresponding communicative terms like “commune,” “conversation[s],” “voice,” “persuasion,” “influence,” “flattery,” “fanciful and flowery,” and “frank and open.” It even urges that “every thing should be discussed with a great deal of care and propriety.”³ The letter, like the history of rhetoric, describes speech in all its redeeming and not-so-redeeming qualities. Reading Smith’s “Letter to the Church” as an epistolary rhetoric illuminates the teaching of communication within the letter and promotes a sketch of a Restoration theory of rhetoric.

A Restoration theory of rhetoric could trace the influence of Mormon culture on the communication theories of Mormon scholars as David Frank traced the influence of Judaism on the twentieth-century rhetorician Chaïm Perelman, but it would eventually need to account for Smith’s writings about communication and the Zion-building quest.⁴ To achieve that end, I devote the core of this article to a close reading of Smith’s “Letter to the Church” by way of exploring the relationship between rhetoric and revelation. I thus arrive at a theory that connects our communication with each another to the possibilities of our communication with God and asserts that “love unfeigned” characterizes saintly cities.

Epistolary Rhetoric

Like the ancient Christians, Latter-day Saints know well the power of letters. Just as the Bible preserved and canonized epistles, LDS scripture contains no fewer than fifteen letters, including portions of Smith’s letter from Liberty Jail. These scriptural epistles comprise several chapters of the Book of Mormon and at least five sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁵ In addition to canonizing letters, priesthood leaders communicate frequently by letter, which, on occasion, are read aloud to the congregation. Some of these communications are generic, or only slightly modified from previous iterations, like the First Presidency letter that

the Church is neutral on political questions. Others are more individualistic, ranging from the bureaucratic missive to the deeply touching personal note. Inspired by C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell even tried his hand at an epistolary novel, *The Enoch Letters*, a fictional series of letters from Mahijah, one of the inhabitants of Enoch's city, urging his friend Omner to embrace the faith and move within the walls of the city of Zion.⁶ Together, these examples suggest the power and prevalence of the epistle as a rhetorical form for Mormon audiences.

What LDS audiences understand perhaps less well is the theory and practice of rhetoric.⁷ Indeed, the very word "rhetoric" poses problems. The earliest recorded use of the Greek term occurs in Plato's *Gorgias*, when Socrates presses Gorgias to declare who he is and what he teaches. "Gorgias responds initially, and perhaps glibly, that he instructs in rhetoric (Greek: *rhetorike*), an art concerned 'with words.'"⁸ This answer does not satisfy Socrates, who goes on to point out many disadvantages in the haphazard use of words. Meanwhile, Gorgias declares rhetoric to be the art of speaking in the courts, legislatures, or any public gathering, but he fails to convince Socrates that such speech has moral or political value. Socrates holds instead that rhetoric is like cookery, a way to make ideas tasty without regard to their nutritional value. Instead of empty, sophistic talk that merely mimics justice, Socrates argues for a philosophic rhetoric that is "always aiming at what is just."⁹

This ambiguous beginning bequeathed a mixed inheritance to rhetoric. On the one hand, it has long been easy to separate style from substance, to think of style as frivolous embellishment, or to think of truth independent of its persuasive power. On the other hand, rhetoric has always been closely associated with discovering and passing thoughts to others through political and didactic speech. Aristotle conceptualized rhetoric as an art of politics and a companion to ethics. Isocrates, Cicero, Quintilian, and others elevated rhetoric to "the whole range of speech and culture," including moral, historical, and political theory.¹⁰ Isocrates thought of rhetoric as the study of the constitution of a city (*politeia*), meaning a city's way of life, understood not by a written code, but by studying the achievement of custom, habit, and mores.¹¹ Pursuing the art of making and understanding a city's con-

stitution placed Isocrates “in a no man’s land . . . too philosophic for the politician, and too aware of the immediate and the changing for the philosopher.”¹²

Instruction in rhetoric encapsulates what is referred to as public affairs, including the study of ethics, law, public administration, political economy, and society. From ancient to modern times, misunderstanding has arisen over whether such rhetorical instruction is theoretical or practical. Rhetoric is at once a way of seeing the world and a way of acting in it. For just this reason, the history of rhetoric is alive in ways the history of other disciplines is not. Rhetoricians study their history to learn both theory and practice, rendering their approach to history conjectural, if not rhetorical.¹³ Willie Henderson, a pioneer in the application of rhetoric to economics, describes conjectural approaches to history as “less interested in ‘before’ and ‘after’ (i.e.,] start point and end point) and more interested in illustrating the process of change.”¹⁴ Thus, the history of rhetoric is not seen as interesting solely for its own sake, but for an instrumental purpose that mixes theoretical constructs and historical explanations to compare “what ‘was’ and ‘is’ with what could have been and ought to have been.”¹⁵ The intermixture of theory and history is central to understanding rhetoric in ancient and contemporary times.

In recent times, rhetoric has enjoyed a revival as a tool for understanding the complex nature of public discourse, although it has not yet fully shaken off the specter of pseudo-philosophy. Rhetoric is speech intended to persuade; and according to the late Wayne Booth, an LDS professor of English at the University of Chicago, is “the entire range of our use of ‘signs’ for communicating, effectively or sloppily, ethically or immorally. At its worst, it is our most harmful miseducator—except for violence. But at its best—when we learn to listen to the ‘other,’ then listen to ourselves and thus manage to respond in a way that produces genuine dialogue—it is our primary resource for *avoiding* violence and building community.”¹⁶ One may study rhetoric to gain advantage, but one may also study rhetoric to build a better community. Indeed, a strong defense of rhetoric has emerged in recent decades to fill the space vacated by the weakened epistemological foundations of the Enlightenment. This strong defense “reorders the relationship between theory and practice, giving priority to practice.

From this perspective, ethical and political knowledge is not based in *a priori*, abstract truth but is formed through rhetorical engagement in concrete situations. . . . Rhetoric, on the strong view, emerges not as ornamentation, nor as an instrument for disseminating truths gained through other means, but as the very medium in which social knowledge is generated.”¹⁷ This strong defense of rhetoric asserts that most, if not all, of human knowledge, at least in practice, is argument and persuasion in various forms.

Whether we accept rhetoric as the foundation of knowledge, communication problems are, in the words of John Durham Peters, a Mormon linguist, “a permanent kink in the human condition.”¹⁸ As Booth reminds us, not all problems are communication problems. Not all communication problems can be solved, as Peters notes, just as solutions offered by better communication are not always desirable. We are destined to muddle through interpretation, conflict, description, and possibility in our interactions with one another. The process of communication invites us to explore not only the truth proposed by interlocutors, but also to explore the possibility that together we can construct a new reality.¹⁹ “Instead of being an unbearable problem of lonely minds and ghostly apparitions,” Peters writes, “communication should be measured by the successful coordination of behaviors.” Certainly we can and should be concerned about communicating truths, but for Peters “the representation of supposedly unvarnished truth can be just as reckless as outright deception.”²⁰

In contrast to the idea that communication is a difficult process of give and take at the foundation of human knowledge, the problems of communication are often oversimplified. Hugh Nibley’s classic article, “*Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else*,” exemplifies this latter view. Nibley presents a history of rhetoric, brilliant in its sweep, which pegs rhetoric’s rise to the Christian apostasy and the decline of Western civilization. He argues that an addiction to rhetoric was the chief culprit in the collapse of moral and professional standards and of the Church’s appetite for revelation. Rhetoric is presented as a mere stylistic device or slippery means of promoting obscurity rather than as disciplined thought. Nibley acknowledges that the Old Sophistic, of which Isocrates was a part, “en-

abled its key figures to match wits and words with a Socrates, a Plato, or an Anaxagoras in a brilliant tussle of ideas,” but that such figures soon faded to be replaced by “a shrewd and studious striving to please.”²¹ Before long, “the first and foremost qualification for the office of a bishop . . . was *eloquentia*.”²²

While Nibley’s argument is learned, forceful, and succinct in its attack on the rhetorical tradition, it has limitations. Nibley’s analysis does not speak to the desire we have to be with other people, the desire we have to be understood by other people, or the desire we have to understand others. He glosses over the fact that our attempts to communicate with one another are often frustrating and that some of the advice given by the rhetoricians is offered in good faith to address these frustrations. Nibley’s work on rhetoric seems to adopt a theory of persuasion in which truth is copied from one mind and pasted to another without the difficulties that arise from intention, perception, and language. In this model, truth stands independent of the human mind and tongue, characterized by a Platonic purity that at times seems at odds with Joseph Smith’s explanation of the relation between God’s word and our language and understanding (D&C 1:24). What Nibley’s work does not speak to, in other words, is the line separating our own efforts as witnesses, preachers, ministers, and persuaders to think and speak the word of God and the power of God to draw the elect toward Him through these various channels of communication. Indeed, this is one of the motives behind Augustine’s realization in *On Christian Teaching* that a Christian rhetoric is both impossible and necessary:²³ impossible because God is truth (the source and convincing power of truth) and we cannot know him well enough, and necessary because of the command to preach, exhort, and prophesy.

By turning from a theoretical description to a practical example, we may better approach this rhetorical puzzle. Consider the following account from the *History of the Church*, in which Joseph describes his and Oliver Cowdery’s earliest attempts to preach the restored gospel. They felt duty-bound to

reason out of the Scriptures with . . . acquaintances and friends. About this time my brother Samuel H. Smith came to visit us. We informed him of what the Lord was about to do for the children of men, and began to reason with him out of the Bible. We also showed

him that part of the work which we had translated, and labored to persuade him concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was now about to be revealed in its fullness. He was not, however, very easily persuaded of these things, but after much inquiry and explanation he retired to the woods, in order that by secret and fervent prayer he might obtain of a merciful God, wisdom to enable him to judge for himself. The result was that he obtained revelation for himself sufficient to convince him of the truth of our assertions to him; and on the twenty-fifth day of that same month in which we had been baptized and ordained, Oliver Cowdery baptized him; and he returned to his father's house, greatly glorifying and praising God, being filled with the Holy Spirit.²⁴

In this account, persuasion depended on Samuel's willingness to ask God and to obtain a revelation for himself, but the narrative makes it clear that this event was unlikely to happen without Joseph and Oliver's energy and exertion in persuading him of "assertions" and the necessity for revelation. Because human influence is not sufficient to bring about conversion, some consider it to be base. What is clear, however, is that Joseph and Oliver were not passive participants. Rather they were active and engaged. They informed, reasoned, labored, persuaded, and explained but were also careful not to interfere with Samuel's pursuit of revelation, respecting his agency, his mind, and the process of obtaining spiritual understanding.

This example underscores the importance of conceptualizing and practicing a rhetoric attuned to process, to the space between minds. Where Nibley conceives of the relations between speakers and audiences only in binary terms of communicating pure truths or pandering, Booth and Peters acknowledge how important it is for individuals to respond to what they have heard. For Nibley, the rhetorical tradition primarily concerns self-gratification and increasing one's power through the use of ornament, while for Booth, at times, rhetorology becomes the highest plausible means to harmony.²⁵ Somewhere between these two views, however, is the possibility that attending to our rhetoric helps establish and maintain communities, whether political or religious, and that all messages convey relational elements as well as content. Unlike Booth and Peters, Nibley casts himself as an apologist defending what he considered to be unvarnished truth. Peters and Booth, we may suspect, believe in truth, but their aim is to explain communication in

a world where truth is often compromised by dualisms of subjectivity and objectivity and further complicated by processes of interpretation and mechanistic reproduction. The change in perspective highlights the centrality of audience-receptiveness to the process of meaning-making and community-building.

In a brilliant reading of the parable of the sower, Peters intuites a synoptic Gospels theory of persuasion. The parable of the sower, Peters says, is a parable about parables, and “the meaning of the parable is quite literally the audience’s problem.” The Platonic desire to avoid pandering at all costs meets its match in a rhetoric that gives each member of the audience something to work on, a problem to solve, if he or she will. Where Plato yearns for oneness through knowledge, the parable of the sower illustrates “compassion for otherness,” enjoining “a descent into the pains and wounds of the other. . . . Should we think of communication as perfect contact or as patience amid the imperfections?”²⁶ Peters holds for the latter—for patience amid imperfection that enables the better coordination of compassion and public affairs. The harvest yielded from this model is considerably more complex than one in which pure truths are exchanged for pure falsehoods, but it more closely approximates the puzzling aspects of human communication, including the changes required of preacher and convert alike as well as the challenge of understanding and implementing revelation. Dissemination, therefore, better than dialogue, captures “the weirdly diverse practices we signifying animals engage in and to our bumbling attempts to meet others with some fairness and kindness.”²⁷ Although these bumbling attempts are not synonymous with the tongue of angels, they nevertheless play a role in the processes of preaching the gospel, standing for something, and witnessing—processes that lie at the heart of accomplishing goals in common.

One of those goals, as already noted, is that of building a city. Richard Bushman draws attention to the fact that Joseph was a consummate city-builder: at Kirtland, at Far West, and at Nauvoo.²⁸ In addition, Joseph desired and believed he was building Zion, a city of the pure in heart. An examination of the Prophet’s teachings about persuasion is integral to understanding his city-building aspirations and achievements. He persuaded people. He

persuaded them of religious, political, and economic ideas relating to his vision of Zion. His letter from Liberty Jail exemplifies how the principles of the restored gospel integrate the idea of communicating with God with the practice of communicating with one another. One way to focus on this connection is viewing Smith's letter from Liberty Jail as an epistolary rhetoric.

One specialized way to teach the art of rhetoric is through epistles. Epistolary rhetorics were common in the ancient world but had undergone a significant transformation by the nineteenth century, according to David Randall, who traces the development of medieval and Renaissance epistolary rhetoric into the newspaper and the scientific journal as modern avenues by which private correspondents could influence public affairs.²⁹ My reliance on ancient epistolary rhetoric in this section is consistent with a conjectural approach to history that weaves together theoretical and historical issues relevant to the rhetorical tradition. Of note is the fact that the epistles of Paul, which sometimes resemble epistolary rhetoric, informed the letter-writing of other nineteenth-century Americans, including John and Abigail Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.³⁰ Although a comparison between Smith's letters and his contemporaries would be fruitful, I follow a different trajectory to highlight certain theoretical dimensions of the Liberty Jail letter.

Letters are a marginal literary form, and critical neglect has long been the genre's fate.³¹ But in the ancient world rhetorical form mattered as much as anything else and "decorum was more highly valued than originality."³² Christianity adapted the Hellenistic and Roman imperial letter formula early, and New Testament letters that follow this form most exactly are 2 and 3 John. The imperial formula included specific methods of address and greeting, health wishes, expressions of joy, arrangement of the body of the letter into specific parts including instructions and recommendations, and a formal conclusion that includes a prospective visit and closing greetings.³³ However, the form was not limited to imperial examples. "Indeed, the letter came to be regarded as a form of conversation. But once this conversational form was established in the private sphere, correspondents (by Hellenistic times at the latest) applied it to the public sphere, trying to use letters to persuade recipients to undertake particular

political actions.”³⁴ By late antiquity (third to eighth century A.D. rhetoricians began theorizing, mostly indifferently, about letters as a separate medium from speech, but the emphasis was on resemblance, especially to the plain style.³⁵

Ambiguity in the term “rhetoric” suggests that any letter intended to persuade may qualify as an epistolary rhetoric. However, a prevailing type in ancient times that Randall does not mention is the letter intended to instruct its reader in the art of persuasion. At least three kinds of this latter epistolary rhetoric were common in the ancient world by the first century AD:

1. A letter intended to serve as a model that the reader could imitate in a quest to find his or her own authentic voice or mode of communication. The epistolary form was useful for illustrating rhetoric in this way because it exemplified a method of direct address, a way to speak intimately and directly to another. Because letters in the ancient world were read aloud, often to a multitude, the connection between the epistle and oratory was more intuitive. The model was to instruct students in a way that enabled them to develop their capacity to address a multitude with the same familiarity that they used to address a dear and close correspondent.

2. A letter from an experienced adult, usually a parent or teacher, instructing the reader in the theory and practice of rhetoric. Examples from the classical world of this genre abound, including the work probably misattributed to Longinus, *On the Sublime*, and the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which was for many years misattributed to Cicero. These epistles function in a textbook fashion, but they maintain a personal concern for the student as well as the writer’s intimate voice.

3. Scriptural letters that connect communication theory with religious instruction, including 1 Corinthians 14 and James 3—sections of letters that instruct readers about effective persuasion and speech with the goal of influencing them to use these techniques.

Joseph’s “Letter to the Church at Quincy” is akin to all three of these ancient examples because portions of the letter model communion with God, while other portions exhort the reader to adopt some ways of communicating over others, and, at the same

time the epistle weaves together rhetorical advice with gospel ideas and is, by many audiences, considered scriptural.

Joseph's letter centered on his desire to reach beyond the strong walls that surround the prisoners. The urgency with which Joseph and his cellmates long to embrace and "lay claim" to the "fellowship and love" of their readers is heart rending. The epistle communicates his ache for a kind word from a friend, a tender embrace, and the refreshing air of freedom. The "Letter to the Church at Quincy" instructs Church members in their communications with God, with other members of the faith, with governments, and with those not of the Latter-day Saint faith. As an epistolary rhetoric that teaches a doctrine of Restoration rhetoric, the letter urges its readers to draw connections between what they say, how they say it, and how it contributes to the community's good.

"Letter to the Church at Quincy"

Incarcerated at Liberty Jail with five other men for nearly five months, Smith wrote or dictated eight surviving letters.³⁶ Some were tender letters to his wife, Emma Hale Smith, or to friends. Others were public letters to the Church. The letter of March 20, 1839, is twenty-nine pages long in the handwriting of Alexander McRae and Caleb Baldwin, with corrections by Joseph Smith.³⁷ During his early incarceration at Richmond and Liberty, Smith's letters expressed anger at those who had betrayed him to the Missouri militia and proclaimed his innocence.³⁸ By March 20, imprisoned now for nearly six months, Smith's anger had turned to boldness.

The letter exhorts readers to open the lines of communication with God, to avoid the power-flexing ways of the world, and to practice the art of rhetorical self-defense. Joseph exhorts the Latter-day Saints to communicate kindly with one another and to avoid vain and trifling speeches which diminish their power to appreciate the things of God. Together with commentary about meaningful speech, he discusses appropriate priesthood persuasion and urges his readers to adopt persuasive modes compatible with Christian action. At the same time, the epistle encourages the Saints to stand up for themselves by making a record of the falsehoods circulated about the Church and to publish their de-

fenses widely. This mixture of communication advice about heavenly revelation, good conversation, effective leadership, and rhetorical self-defense provides a meaningful foundation for understanding LDS attitudes toward persuasion as well as their public stance on controversy. Smith's letter, like the epistles of James and Paul regarding communication, weaves together the Church's public affairs with a way of persuading and communicating that is consistent with religion—in this case, Mormonism's claim that God has again spoken on the earth and the restoration of priesthood keys. The first sub-section addresses how Joseph's letter from Liberty Jail exemplifies what Terryl Givens has called "dialogic revelation."³⁹ The two following sub-sections address priesthood persuasion and public affairs, respectively.

Communion with God

The canonized version of the letter from Liberty Jail in Doctrine and Covenants 121–122 opens with a dialogue between Smith and God that appears on page 3 of the holograph letter.⁴⁰ These questions, joined in the Doctrine and Covenants with another portion from the letter about the love and support of friends, function as a dialogue. The dialogic element emerges from Smith's urgent questions, particularly how long God will make him suffer. Later, God replies that Joseph is not yet as Job. Givens describes prayers like this as "dialogic revelation" and states that they pervade Mormon scripture. Smith's inquiry from Liberty Jail fits the model. This distinctive kind of prayer, says Givens, "is an asking, rather than an asking for, and . . . anticipates a personal response, a discernible moment of dialogue or communicated content . . . that is impossible to mistake as anything other than an individualized, dialogic response to a highly particularized question."⁴¹ Smith inquires, with question following urgently upon question: "O God where art thou and where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants and thine ear be penetrated with their cries? Yea O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions before thine heart shall be softened towards them and thy bowels be moved with compassion towards them?" (431)

These earnest questions are followed by a declaration that the Saints' present calamity will hasten the coming of "the son of man . . . in the clouds of heaven" and that "our hearts do not shrink neither are our spirits altogether broken at the grievous yoke which is put upon us" (432). The tone following the questions in the letter is more confident than in the canonized portion, but the eagerness to inquire of God remains the same. "When the heart is sufficiently contrite," Joseph says, "then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers, my son, peace be unto thy soul" (434).

Joseph does not merely tell Church members to ask God for guidance but uses the letter to ask his own questions of God and to demonstrate that God answers. In this respect, the letter serves as a model for Church members to follow in their pursuit of revelation. At the same time that he encourages readers to pursue their desire for knowledge, he gives them advice about how to prepare their minds for such insight:

Thy mind O Man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search in to and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and Expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal Expanse. He must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart? None but fools will trifle with the souls of men. How vain and trifling, have been our spirits, our Conferences, our Councils, our Meetings, our private as well as public Conversations? Too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending, for the dignified Characters of the Called and Chosen of God, according to the purposes of his will from before the foundation of the world. (436)

The communication with God described in this passage requires not so much an open mind as a flexible and expansive one. Stretching and searching, contemplating and expanding are the operative verbs to describe the mental exercise required to prepare for communication with God. The mind must not shrink from learning hard truths, the kind that might come from six months of unjust imprisonment. The dark abyss and the broad expanse of heaven may represent contrasting modes of human experience and thus contrasting modes and means of instruction. *On the Sublime* (Gr., *Peri Hypsous*, lit., On Height) attuned rhetoricians to the transfixing power of heights and depths, natural or rhetori-

cal, including the realization that thoughts and feelings arising from chasms and heights are neither strictly artistic nor strictly in-artistic.⁴² It is well to remember the Sacred Grove, but we must not forget the underground dungeon of Liberty Jail. At times, by turns, life is miserable beyond description or glorious beyond comprehension. Too often our communications fail to acknowledge the inevitable swings and vicissitudes of life or how abysmal experiences can prepare us for universal insights. Sublime revelation does not always come on a mountaintop, and our triumphs are rarely the path to the insights that matter most.

The move from divine communication to rhetorical advice in the passage just quoted is striking, and underscores the relationship between divine revelation and human interaction. The letter contrasts examples of bad communication, on the one hand, with the communication befitting aspiring Saints, on the other. Low, mean, vulgar, and condescending conversation is opposed to honesty, sobriety, candor, solemnity, virtue, pureness, meekness, and simplicity (436–37). The letter insists that the role of private contemplation and public conversation in readying the soul to receive God must not be ignored. The faithful are promised that God “shall give unto you knowledge by His Holy Spirit, yea by the unspeakable gift of the Holy-Ghost that has not been revealed since the world was until now, which our fathers have waited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times which their minds were pointed to by the Angels as held in reserve for the fullness of their glory” (437).

By coupling the promise of revelation to ancestral anxieties, Joseph instantiates a uniquely Mormon way of seeing the world. This approach broadens the concept of audience, establishing a connection to God by way of a connection to family and Church members, past, present, and future. The “anxious expectation” of ancestors characterizes the understanding, application, and communication of truth. The accent is on avoiding those communications that distance us from one another and on embracing those that bring us together. The collapse of interpersonal distance by way of honesty and simplicity appears as a key component of the collapse of distance between God and humankind. The city of Zion cannot be built without a foundation of charitable communication.

Ignorance, superstition, and bigotry are “often times in the way of the prosperity of this church,” Joseph warns (437). A people unwilling to inquire, disposed to credulity, or unduly protective of what they know will find themselves unable to embrace the knowledge of God. The quest for knowledge from heaven is not a competition in which we race one another to the first discovery. Instead, it requires an unlikely cooperation in which we pursue truth collectively in a spirit of mutual tolerance and love. Candor and simplicity of speech, the plain style common to nineteenth-century American discourse and the epistolary form, is at the center of Smith’s way of seeing persuasion. The Mormon rhetor should establish a link of communication to God that depends on his communication with those in his family, congregation, and city.

Priesthood Persuasion

Just as communicating with God is often an interactive process, requiring dialogue and willing response, communication among members of the Church is also a delicate dance in which we coordinate desires, love, and knowledge. Leaders of the Church are, from time to time, required to congratulate or reprove members of the congregation, to counsel or inspire them, or warn them. Their capacity to do so rests on many preparatory messages that make frank and open speech possible and which ensure that members appropriately receive the correction.

The following passage from the letter, familiar to readers of the Doctrine and Covenants, speaks of the difference between those who have been called and those who have been chosen, including, in a roundabout way, the communicative requirements of the chosen:

Behold there are many called but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world and aspire to the honors of men that they do not learn this one lesson. That the rights of priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us it is true, but when we undertake to cover our sins or to gratify our pride or vain ambition or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men in any degree of unrighteousness behold the heav-

ens withdraw themselves, the spirit of the Lord is grieved, and when it has withdrawn amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold ere he is aware, he is left unto himself to kick against the pricks to persecute the saints and to fight against God. (440–41)

Control or compulsion move beyond persuasion; and the interpersonal distance created by pride, ambition, dominion, or self-gratification is a clear misuse of ecclesial office. It creates distance between the official and God.

The curious phrase, “kicking against the pricks,” echoes the New Testament description of Saul’s calling to the Christian ministry and stresses the interplay between interpersonal and divine relations. On the road to Damascus, Saul hears a voice asking why he persecutes Christ. Saul asks, “Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:4–5). The phrase is repeated in Acts 26:14 where Paul recounts his vision and “almost” persuades King Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 26:28). The phrase probably refers to a driver goading an ox with a sharp instrument to make it move a certain direction and the resistant ox kicking back at the driver. Kicking against the pricks invokes a mental image of the thing pricked kicking back. The scriptural phrase may additionally refer to the influence of the Holy Ghost. When Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost, his audience is “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37) and desires to do whatever is required. Here, kicking against the pricks connotes one who, out of frustration, fear, or self-doubt “kicks” by resisting communications from God via the Holy Ghost. If this broader connotation is accepted, “kicking against the pricks” describes a particular response or resistance to the influence of revelation. The influence of God is withdrawn when we use our influence for un-Christian self-aggrandizement.

Leadership is highly rhetorical, and leaders are bound to influence others in the best ways possible. But human nature itself contains a warning message for those who hold power and authority:

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men as soon as they get a little authority as they suppose they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only

by persuasion by long suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned, by kindness, by pure knowledge which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy and without guile. Reproving betimes with sharpness when moved upon by the Holy Ghost and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd lest he esteem thee to be his enemy that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death. (440–41)

The natural human tendency is to use power and station for self-aggrandizement, whether one is the new dean, boss, or bishop. Offices and their associated duties often create distance between leaders and followers. Sometimes this is their express purpose; but within the Church, this distance must be characterized by charity. Like the flexible and expansive mind required for revelation, priesthood persuasion should “greatly enlarge the soul.” Magnanimity or largeness of soul, which Aristotle characterized as the “crown of the virtues,” requires bearing oneself “with moderation towards wealth and power.”⁴³ In the *Rhetoric*, he added, “Magnanimity is the virtue that disposes us to do good to others on a large scale.”⁴⁴ Joseph’s effort to build cities seems to extend from great confidence that good can and should be done on a large scale.

Yet however large the scale of our service, it still requires many judgments about people. Here again, rhetoric is a useful way to gain insight. “Outward appearance is not always a criterion for us to Judge our fellow man but the lips betray the haughty and overbearing imaginations of the heart. By his words and his deeds let him be scanned; Flattery also is a deadly poison. A frank and open Rebuke provoketh a good man to Emulation and in the hour of trouble he will be your best friend, but on the other hand it will draw out all the corruption of a corrupt heart. And lying and the poison of asps shall be under their tongues and they do cause the pure in heart to be cast in to prison because they want them out of their way” (436).

The last sentence no doubt refers to his imprisonment and the anger that naturally accompanies betrayal. Joseph apparently considered his imprisonment part of a challenge to his leadership. The more relevant rhetorical point is that “lips” and “words,” as well as our response to sharp correction, reveal our true self to others.

Joseph calls upon Church leaders to have their “bowels . . . full of charity toward all men and to the household of faith and let virtue garnish [your] thoughts unceasingly.” Charity and virtuous thoughts increase confidence. The dominion thus derived is everlasting and “without compulsory means it shall flow . . . for ever and ever” (441). Good will is the reward of good leadership. At the same time, Church leaders must not be overcome by a fear of speaking their mind or of clearly pointing out the wrongs of others. While the entire edifice of public discourse rests on arguments disconnected from love, the persuasions available within the Church must be different because they are to be grounded in charity. The leadership rules of the rhetorical tradition are often at odds with charity, which is Nibley’s implicit complaint that the practice of rhetoric fails to improve Christian living—a natural extension of his definition of rhetoric as a sham art. The origins of rhetoric are indeed found in the strained, agonistic culture of ancient Athens where one had to fight for victory or submit to the opposition. This contest for opinion and leadership is anathema to the gospel of Jesus Christ and challenges the claim that rhetoric should play a serious role in Restoration life. However, it is true that we are duty bound to persuade and reason with each other and also that the scriptures—including Restoration scriptures—are full of advice about how to do it. Moreover, the Saints were not (and still are not) immune to agonistic struggle, just as the insights of the rhetorical tradition are not limited to secular application.

Perhaps some insight can be gleaned from the epistolary form on this point. The public letter is a paradox because of its mimicking of the intimate voice, but the private letter is also problematic because even authentic, personal encounters sometimes end in miscommunication or misunderstanding. Most of the time we hold that, the more intimate the communion, the more we have succeeded in overcoming the limitations of Babel, but the truth is that such transcendence, whether public or private, is rare and fleeting. Joseph’s Restoration rhetoric suggests that, in all our communications with one another, our speech either contributes to or detracts from the hopeful possibilities of soul-to-soul contact. Our own efforts play a significant part in but can never determine the outcomes of our interactions. Public letters, like those of the First Presidency, often mimic the confidential and dialogic

tone of both private letters and conversations. There is, of course, no way to answer a letter in the moment it reaches you, which is true of both private and public letters, but public letters are an especially deft form of authority because they enable one to constitute power and influence across great distances with a personal, autographic touch.⁴⁵ Indeed, public epistles both bridge and prove the distance between leader and follower, and between impersonality and the personal touch—as, in most ecclesiastical instances, they are read aloud by one near to us. In this sense, they function as a metaphor for understanding the complexities of relations between Latter-day Saints and Church leaders. The paradox is that leaders of a worldwide church are both near and far away in more than one way. Their public letters are near when read by a bishop or his counselor, yet far away in composition and bureaucratic distance.

Consider a second example. When I asked a former bishop what one thing he would save if his house was on fire and all his family were safe, without hesitation, he said it would be the personal note that Elder Richard G. Scott had sent him years before. This answer suggests that, despite the robust notion of authority that prevails in Mormon culture, the letter perpetuates paradoxes concerning the constitution of authority. Even a diluted, public nearness is still nearness, even as a personal note is nearer still. Paradoxes notwithstanding, both private and public letters are in keeping with Joseph's argument about the need for Church leaders to diminish the distance between themselves and the flock in order to bridge the distance between the Church and God.

Posture toward the World

Joseph's letters from Liberty Jail are deeply personal and express a desire for love to prevail within the Church. When it came to the Church's interactions with the world, however, Liberty Jail was a turning point.⁴⁶ No longer would Church records focus only on internal happenings. From now on, the Church would practice an active public affairs campaign. At the same time that Joseph's epistolary rhetoric encouraged seeking wisdom from God, discipline in ordinary conversation, and the exercise of righteous leadership within the Church, the letter argued that the Church should consider well its interactions with the world—meaning in-

teractions with governments and “all others that are not of our faith” (445). The posture Smith recommends toward these “others” is simultaneously conciliatory and defensive.

The Mormon War of 1838 in Missouri culminated in intense persecution and forced exile. By the time Smith dictated the letter, that intensity had not subsided. Indeed, the letter grows out of his anger and hurt at the unjust imprisonment. Not faintheartedness, but a commitment to publicizing the Latter-day Saint side of the story characterizes Smith’s attitude in these recommendations:

And again we would suggest for your consideration the propriety of all the saints gathering up a knowledge of all the facts and sufferings and abuses put upon them by the people of this state and also of all the property and amount of damages which they have sustained both of character & personal injuries as well as real property and also the names of all persons that have had a hand in their oppressions as far as they can get hold of them and find them out. And perhaps a committee can be appointed to find out these things and to take statements and affidavits and also to gather up the libelous publications that are afloat and all that are in the magazines and in the Encyclopedias and all the libelous histories that are published and that are writing and by whom and present the whole concatenation of diabolical rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions that have been practiced upon this people that we may not only publish to all the world but present them to the heads of the government in all their dark and hellish hue as the last effort which is enjoined on us by our heavenly father before we can fully and completely claim that promise which shall call him forth from his hiding place and also that the whole nation may be left without excuse before he can send forth the power of his mighty arm. (443)

This passage builds to the fiery rhetoric of an Old Testament prophet and verbally calls the whole nation to account. He confidently enlists Almighty God as the champion of his people. There is no clear defendant to receive these charges, but the Saints should leave no stone unturned in documenting the slander and libel, not, apparently, for self-aggrandizement, but for the defense of the Church and the good of the nation. Through the practice of gathering and collecting words, Joseph seems to be gathering fuel for a radical defense of “the political roots of society, its fundamental laws, its foundational principles, its most sacred covenants.”⁴⁷ Joseph’s radicalism opposes his own “society using its own most noble expressions and aspirations.”⁴⁸

His turn to words as a legal force, including the assertion of libel and a call for affidavits, suggests Joseph's awareness that some forms of speech are specifically interdicted by law. The preparation to employ the law against certain rhetorical forms underscores his awareness that communication with those outside the faith is regulated differently than communication within the Church. Yet Joseph importantly frames these duties as part of the cause of opposing evil "that we owe to God, to angels with whom we shall be brought to stand, and also to ourselves, to our wives, and our children who have been made to bow down with grief and sorrow and care under the most damning hand of murder, tyranny, and oppression" (443). While the persecution against the Saints may be a cosmic conspiracy which has been "growing stronger and stronger" over time and is "now the very mainspring of all corruption," the best means of countering it may be the law of the land. The battle is not merely against the Missouri mob but against the "iron yoke," "hand cuffs," "chains," "shackles," and "fetters of hell" (443). Although Joseph advises legal remedies, the Church obviously need not feel obliged to sacrifice prophetic fire or a narrative of cosmic consequence to foster good relations with the outside world.

Respecting the rights of others does not require downplaying their own rights or cherished beliefs. A Mormon right is responding to persecution, rhetorical or physical. Joseph vows that he and the other Church leaders "will not hold their peace as in times past when they see iniquity beginning to rear its head for fear of traitors or the consequences that shall flow by reproofing those who creep in unawares that they may get something to destroy the flock" (444). If caught up in a war of words, the process of collecting evidence—in the form of the enemy's rhetoric—to defend themselves and their friends is crucial to a defense of the faith.

Legal options notwithstanding, the Church should not allow bias or the faults of human nature to color relations with those of other faiths:

And we ought always to be aware of those prejudices which sometimes so strongly presented themselves and are so congenial to human nature against our neighbors, friends, and brethren of the world who choose to differ with us in opinion and matters of faith. Our religion is between us and our God; their religion is between

them and their God. There is a tie from God that should be exercised towards those of our faith who walk uprightly which is peculiar to itself, but it is without prejudice but gives scope to the mind which enables us to conduct ourselves with greater liberality toward all others that are not of our faith than what they exercise towards one another. These principles approximate nearer to the mind of God because it is like God or God like. (444-45)

The tie binding Mormons to each other does not mean that religious bigotry is justified toward those of different faiths. A year later when Joseph laid the legal foundations of the city of Nauvoo, he remembered his own counsel. "Having lived with diversity of belief all his life," Bushman observes, "he had always opened his doors to visitors and shown tolerance for other beliefs. Now with a city of his own, he opened wide the gates."⁴⁹ This was done by extending religious liberty to all sects, inviting "Catholics," "Quakers," "Universalists," "Unitarians," "Mohammedans," and many others, to share "as citizens and friends."⁵⁰

The principle guaranteeing respectful relations between parties and sects derived from Joseph's understanding of the U.S. Constitution. In the Liberty Jail letter, he calls the Constitution a "heavenly banner" intended to protect liberty for all and compares it to "the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and a weary land" (445). When the law properly regulates relations among those of different faiths, protecting all alike, it redeems the nation from its own worst propensities. The rights of the Mormons to live their faith are just as important as the rights of any other faith, Joseph claims. That assertion includes support for the right to differ in matters of belief. If the Saints want their rights to be protected, they must defend them with rhetoric, but they should also maintain an open rhetorical posture toward those with whom they disagree.

Although Joseph's body was in prison, his mind was active in formulating a defense of his people and his dictation articulated the results of his thought. He claimed due process and equality before the law, urged his people to make a record of the abuses and persecutions inflicted on them, and authorized the publication of that record. He asserted his right to live his faith as identical to the right of all other Americans to believe as they chose. He claimed that governments, laws, and regulations exist to guaran-

tee “to all parties, sects, and denominations, and classes of religion equal coherent and indefeasible rights” (445). The posture he recommends is not supine, but liberal and generous, asserting his people’s rights and defending the rights of others. He does not reject the Constitution as provincial but rather as filled with inspirational and universal claims best realized through active and assertive speech.

Both the law of the land and religious law are constituted to a considerable degree by rhetoric. Without persuasive speech, both our political and religious communities would atrophy and eventually die. Whether for self-defense, internal relations, or revelation, Smith offers the Church rhetorical advice that, although perhaps not comprehensive, he locates as an essential characteristic of the restored gospel. This theory advocates both genuine and personal kindness coupled with bold self-assertion and self-defense. It was liberal enough to protect as sacrosanct the right of individuals to choose and to open the gates of the city as one would open his arms to a friend, while asserting that relations with one another are a key to understanding relations with God.

Conclusion

Smith’s “Letter to the Church at Quincy” is an important vehicle for understanding Smith’s thoughts on rhetoric. The epistle teaches its readers how to seek knowledge from heaven through communication with God, reiterating that such revelation rests on good conversation. The letter teaches the Church how to employ influence with both co-believers and those of different faiths. It also establishes the stance that the Church should take in public affairs.

Specifically, the epistle teaches its readers to seek and how to seek knowledge from heaven. Smith enjoined his followers to prepare their minds to receive God’s word. At the same time, Smith uses the letter to stretch his own mind and to seek heavenly insight about the persecution inflicted on him and the Church. By opening a dialogue with those around us, we better prepare ourselves to interact with God. Smith recommends a system of public affairs in which mutual respect and tolerance pave the way for a deeper appreciation and a deeper application of revelation.

Moreover, Church leaders must ensure that the context of their persuasion is love and a desire to enlarge others. The effec-

tiveness of reproof and warning depend on righteous and virtuous character—for both speakers and listeners; otherwise, rebuke may elicit only anger and a disregard of the warning. Messages frequently carry a relational element in addition to their intended content. Popular understandings of rhetoric often underscore only the importance of the content rather than also recognizing the importance of form and style as elements of relationship. Correction as well as praise must be framed within relationships of love. When it is otherwise, ill-will develops, leading to further distrust, animosity, and hatred.

Smith's epistle, read as a rhetorical work, reinforces the Americanness of the cities he built. The liberal principles of the U.S. Constitution, including freedom of religion and speech, are at the center of his project. Liberty should characterize the relations within and among sects, parties, and denominations. At the same time, the Constitution allows parties to defend themselves through a free press, cataloguing and registering abuses and abatements of liberty. Individual liberty and the right to defend it are what make America great in Smith's eyes, and he recognized that the defense of these rights requires rhetorical action. While Smith interpreted the government's failure to defend his rights as spiritual opposition to his work, he simultaneously urged his people to do all in their power to protect and enlarge themselves. He forthrightly declared that the rights to speak with God and for God were constitutionally protected. His reaction to the government's failure to secure his rights recognized that, at the heart of the American constitutional experiment and his own radical interpretation of the same, lies the right to persuade others *and* a right not to be persuaded.

The frames of Restoration rhetoric, revelation, and love are to some extent the frames of religious rhetoric. What Smith shows is how the frames of revelation and love can be interwoven with rhetorical ideas and practices to lay the foundation of new cities. The possibility of communication with God does not mean that our understanding always proceeds linearly from flawed to perfect comprehension. Instead, like our communications with one another, God may enlighten our understanding piecemeal because of our imperfections, lack of desire, bigotry, or superstition. Communication with God and with one another must proceed in love,

suggesting that our imperfect understanding and our imperfect actions, including symbolic, communicative action, must not deter us from pursuing charity. These contexts or frames are not drastically different from other religious contexts for persuasion except that Smith's vision comes with an assertion of radical agency and at a historic moment in which capacities were tested while real cities were being constituted.

The letter from Liberty Jail models the dialogic revelation necessary to know truth personally, but also demands of its readers that they live according to what they learn in real communities. Dialogues between human beings and God do not take place in a rhetorical vacuum but extend from the larger context of our relationships with others, both within and outside of the Church. In all of this we are to make meaning with others, not in a contest over who is right, but in a context of wanting to know what is right and how we might pursue righteousness together. The truth that emerges from these interactions is pure precisely because we must purify our hearts in its pursuit. Anything less demanding is insufficient to produce the commitment and adherence that should characterize people of God.

Notes

1. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005): 37–38, 72.

2. “Theory” in the context of rhetoric means both a way of seeing the world and acting in it, as explained below. To talk about talking, to communicate about communicating is to do something about what we do, and the relationship is simply more direct than to talk about cooking or chemistry. See also Doctrine and Covenants 88:78–80.

3. “[Letter] To the Church at Quincy, Illinois, 20 March 1839,” in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 440. All quotations of the letter are Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 37–38, 72.

4. David A. Frank, “The New Rhetoric, Judaism, and Post-Enlightenment Thought: The Cultural Origins of Perelmanian Philosophy,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, no. 3 (August 1997): 332–50.

5. Alma 54:4, 11, 14–15, 24; Alma 55:1–3; Alma 56–58, a letter from Helaman to Captain Moroni; Alma 59–61, two letters from Captain Moroni to Pahoran and one from Pahoran to Moroni; 3 Nephi 3, letters from Giddianhi to Lachoneus; Mormon 3:4 and 6:2, declarations of war

exchanged between Mormon and a Lamanite king; Ether 15, a series of exchanges between Coriantumr and Shiz; Moroni 8, Mormon's epistle to Moroni; Doctrine and Covenants 121–123, 127–128, and Official Declaration–2. In the Doctrine and Covenants, only the last three are identified by the editors of the LDS scriptures as epistles. See also Alma 31:4–5.

6. Neal A. Maxwell, *The Enoch Letters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2006).

7. For introductions to the tradition of rhetoric in the West, see George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2d ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 2d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001).

8. Quoted in Herrick, *History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 55.

9. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 128.

10. Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001): 27.

11. Allan Bloom, *The Political Philosophy of Isocrates* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955). This book is the publication of his Ph.D. dissertation.

12. *Ibid.*, 3.

13. Pat J. Gehrke, *The Ethics and Politics of Speech* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 8.

14. Willie Henderson, *Evaluating Adam Smith: Creating the Wealth of Nations* (London: Routledge, 2006), 132. For more on how these problems are handled in historical accounts of the rhetorical tradition, see Herrick, *History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 1–30.

15. Henderson, *Evaluating Adam Smith*, 133.

16. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), xi–xii; emphasis his.

17. Michael Leff, "Cicero's *Pro Murena* and the Strong Case for Rhetoric," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 63.

18. John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 29.

19. Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 339–49.

20. Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 268.

21. Hugh Nibley, "Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else," *Western Speech* 20 (Spring 1956): 59.
22. Hugh Nibley, "Rhetoric and Revelation," in Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 102.
23. Herrick, *History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 126.
24. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980 printing), 1:44.
25. Wayne C. Booth, *My Many Selves: The Quest for a Plausible Harmony* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006).
26. Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 61.
27. *Ibid.*, 62.
28. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 331–32, 342–46, 384–85, 403–4, 413–14.
29. David Randall, "Epistolary Rhetoric, the Newspaper, and the Public Sphere," *Past and Present* 198, no. 1 (February 2008): 3–32.
30. William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 13–15.
31. Decker, *Epistolary Practices*, 20. For more on letters and letter-writing, see Anthony W. Thorold, *On Letter Writing* (London: Isbister and Company, 1896); Jim Villani, *The Epistolary Form and the Letter as Artifact* (Youngstown, Ohio: Pig Iron Press, 1991); David Barton and Nigel Hall, eds., *Letter Writing as Social Practice* (Herndon, Va.: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000); Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell, eds., *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007). See esp., Carol Poster, "A Conversation Halved: Epistolary Theory in Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, 22. For a contemporary epistolary novel that makes use of epistolary rhetoric for plot structure and argument, see Peter Dimock, *A Short Rhetoric for Leaving the Family* (Normal, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998).
32. Poster, "A Conversation Halved," 22.
33. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Content and Exegesis*, translated by Daniel P. Bailey (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006), 28–39.
34. Randall, "Epistolary Rhetoric," 5–6.
35. *Ibid.*, 6.
36. The five jailed at Liberty with Smith were Sidney Rigdon, Smith's counselor in the First Presidency of the Church; Lyman Wight; Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother; Alexander McRae, a large, thirty-one-

year-old captain of the Missouri militia who had been active in the defense of the Saints; and Caleb Baldwin, a veteran of the War of 1812, who at forty-seven was the oldest of the prisoners. Sidney Rigdon was released in January 1839. Leonard J. Arrington, "Church Leaders in Liberty Jail," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 1 (1973): 1. For the letters written from Liberty Jail, see Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*: to Emma Smith, December 1, 1838; to the Church in Caldwell County, December 16, 1838; to Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young, January 16, 1839; to Presendia Huntington Buell, March 15, 1839; to the Church at Quincy, Illinois, with sections addressed to Emma and Bishop Partridge, March 20, 1839; to Emma March 21, 1839; to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839; and to Emma April 4, 1839.

37. "To the Church at Quincy, Illinois 20 March 1839," in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 429. All subsequent references to this letter are cited parenthetically in the text from this source.

38. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 369–70.

39. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 217.

40. Segments of this two-part letter were included in the Doctrine and Covenants for the first time in 1876. The criteria used by Orson Pratt and others to determine what should be included or excluded are not known. See Dean C. Jessee and John W. Welch, "Revelations in Context: Joseph Smith's Letter from Liberty Jail, March 20, 1839," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 130.

41. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 217.

42. Ned O'Gorman, "Longinus's Sublime Rhetoric, or How Rhetoric Came into Its Own," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 78.

43. Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 992. This statement appears in his *Ethics*.

44. *Ibid.*, 1354.

45. See also D&C 44:1, 20:84. In light of the second reference, it appears that the temple recommend functions as a truncated epistle.

46. See Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 376–90, on the prison experience as turning point.

47. James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 9.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 415–16.

50. *Ibid.*, 416.