MORMONISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A MATERIALIST APOSTASY

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The notion of apostasy is central to the identity of the Mormon people.[1] One might even say it is the *raison d'être* of Mormonism. It is the thing that explains why there needed to be a restoration in the first place and in some ways establishes the contours of that Restoration. At least since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Mormon narrative of the Great Apostasy has incorporated the idea that Christianity went horribly wrong sometime after the death of Jesus when Christian thinkers began to incorporate pagan philosophy into Christian doctrine. That view, which I refer to as the "traditional" Apostasy narrative, was influenced by historical conclusions drawn by nineteenth-century Protestant historians, conclusions that in retrospect look increasingly problematic to modern historians. In this article, I want to explore the possibility that apostasy is better understood as a modern development that coincides with the emergence of "philosophical materialism," that is to say, the idea that all of life can be explained through a scientific reductionist lens as nothing more than indifferent particles and forces.

This view of the Apostasy points to a different understanding of the Restoration than the one with which most Mormons are familiar. Instead of a re-creation of an ancient way of life through imitation, the Restoration under a materialist apostasy is an attempt to translate an ancient way of life into a new, modern context. Among other things,

1. For helpful comments on an earlier version of this article, I thank Sam Brown, Emily Clyde Curtis, Natalie Gubler, Sarah Gubler, Rhett Larson, Nate Oman, Taylor Petrey, Steve Smith, and Gerrit Steenblik. All errors are mine.

this understanding of the Apostasy and the Restoration has the effect of opening up to Mormonism the canonical works of a rich, continuous Christian tradition, including those that were influenced by Greek philosophy. The benefits of such an expanded canon are potentially significant and include an enlarged ethical and theological horizon for Mormonism, one which might, among other things, help address some of the anxieties that can lead to modern-day Mormon faith crises.

I. Why Apostasy Theories Gravitate Toward "Loss of Truth" Narratives

Beginning with Joseph Smith, the notion of apostasy in Mormonism has always had to do in large part with the loss of priesthood authority.[2] According to the First Vision account, this is what God himself identified as the problem with the churches of the day: "They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."[3] In other words, the problem was not exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, the content of what was taught (after all, it had a form of godliness) but rather the lack of authority to act in the name of God. However, B. H. Roberts later expanded that predominantly authority-based view of apostasy, in reliance on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Protestant historians,[4] to include the

2. See Christopher C. Jones and Stephen J. Fleming, "'Except among that Portion of Mankind': Early Mormon Conceptions of the 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), 58–67.

3. Joseph Smith—History 1:19.

4. See B. H. Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History: A Textbook* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1893), 181–83 (citing approvingly the Lutheran historian Johann Lorenz von Mosheim's critique of early Christianity's syncretism with Greek philosophy).

notion that the Apostasy is associated with the corrupting influence of pagan (mostly Greek) philosophy on the early and medieval church.[5] Thus, the Mormon view of apostasy came to be associated not only with a lack of authority but also with the identification of certain corrupt ideas.

It didn't have to be this way, of course. One can easily imagine a world where Mormonism refuses to recognize the authority of other churches but nevertheless maintains that truth can be found anywhere and therefore borrows liberally from other traditions. One reason why it's so easy to imagine such a world is that that's basically the theological universe that Mormonism occupies. Commenting on the question of where to find truth, Smith said, "Presbyteri[a]n or any truth. emb[ra] ce that. Baptist. Methodist. &c—get all the good in the world. come out a pure mormon."[6] Nevertheless, Mormonism began to view Greek philosophy as containing untruth, at least when mixed with Christian doctrine. Why might this be the case?[7] Clearly it cannot be because

5. See Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History*, 229–30; B. H. Roberts, *The Falling Away, or The World's Loss of the Christian Religion and the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1931), 146–47.

6. Joseph Smith, "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844," 14, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843-29-february-1844/20.

7. One answer to this question is that which I alluded to earlier—early Mormon intellectuals like Roberts and others were influenced by the view held by Protestant historians, like Mosheim, that early Christianity was corrupted through a syncretism with Greek philosophy. See note 5. But this answer doesn't explain why Roberts and others went looking for these historical arguments in the first place, let alone why they ultimately found them persuasive, a fact that is particularly puzzling in light of early Mormonism's cosmopolitan approach to truth. That's the question I'm asking here: what were the preconditions within Mormon thought, other than a possibly greater enthusiasm for Protestant rather than Catholic sources, that made those Protestant historical arguments appealing?

Mormonism assumes that any religious teaching by someone who lacks priesthood authority is inevitably distorted. That's inconsistent with the statement just quoted (since Smith would have viewed the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists as all lacking priesthood authority). More generally, it is inconsistent with the Mormon notion of the light of Christ that inspires holy figures who, although lacking priesthood authority, nevertheless are able to obtain some portion of truth.[8]

In my view, the best explanation for why Mormonism began to view apostasy as something more than the loss of priesthood authority is because the Mormon view of the Restoration appears to involve something more than just a restoration of lost authority—it also involves a recovery of lost truth. And in explaining how and when that truth might have been lost, Roberts and others were heavily influenced by a particular view of medieval history, that the Middle Ages constituted the "midnight period of our world," both spiritually and intellectually, and only ceased with the revival of learning that took place with the flowering of the Renaissance and the arrival of the Protestant Reformation.[9] This historical view provided Roberts and others, including James E. Talmage and Bruce R. McConkie,[10] with exactly what they

8. See Daniel K. Judd, "The Spirit of Christ: A Light Amidst the Darkness" in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 442–56.

9. See Roberts, *Outlines*, 229–30; Roberts, *Falling Away*, 146–47.

10. See Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History*, 229–30; Roberts, *Falling Away*, 1246–57; James E. Talmage, *The Great Apostasy Considered in the Light of Scriptural and Secular History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 150 (referring to the Middle Ages as the "dark ages—characterized by stagnation in the progress of the useful arts and sciences as well as of fine arts and letters"); James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), 749 (describing the Renaissance as "a development predetermined in the Mind of

were looking for: an explanation of how the truth was lost and when precisely it happened.

But that view is increasingly difficult to sustain, as other have pointed out. Historians simply no longer regard the Middle Ages as a dark, brutish time with little to recommend it, but rather as a period of extraordinary human intellectual and artistic achievements comparable to, if not surpassing, those of the Renaissance.[11] Additionally, Roberts's view of apostasy effectively eliminates from the Mormon canon some of the greatest works of natural and philosophical theology,[12] including Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, as well as earlier Greek-influenced devotional works, like Augustine's *Confessions*. The notion that *these* works of all things, works that have served as the basis for countless conversions

God to illumine the benighted of men in preparation for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ"); Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness For the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 669–70 (describing the period from Late Antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages as "such a decadent age that man, made in the image of God, was more like an animal than a divine being. Morality, culture, literacy, learning in general, even theological inquiry—all these were at a low ebb.").

11. See Eric Dursteler, "Inheriting the 'Great Apostasy': The Evolution of Mormon Views on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," *Journal of Mormon History* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 52–57.

12. "Natural theology . . . is the attempt to understand the metaphysical foundations of reality by the use of reason alone, without the use as evidence of anything contained in texts considered to be divinely revealed or in the religious tradition of reflection on those texts. . . . By contrast, philosophical theology is the attempt to use such philosophical tools to investigate theological claims made by a particular religion, especially those claims put forward by that religion as revealed by the deity." Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

and formed the intellectual framework for humanistic ideals,[13] would be the linchpin of the Great Apostasy is a difficult pill to swallow.

Thus, we are left with the observation that the Mormon notion of apostasy must explain some loss of truth. And yet at the same time, the traditional narrative—that that loss of truth has to do with the assimilation of Greek philosophy into Christian thinking sometime in the Middle Ages—is increasingly difficult to sustain. What do we do with this?[14]

II. Materialism as Apostasy

Although Roberts might have missed the mark in identifying how the Apostasy threatens Christian truth, he was nevertheless correct that there exists a definition of apostasy that does precisely that. Rather than identifying some corruption that took place during the pre-modern period, the Apostasy is in my view better understood as a modern phenomenon. Specifically, I'd like to explore the possibility that the Apostasy has to do with a particularly widespread idea closely associated with modernity that I'll refer to as "philosophical materialism," that is to say, the idea that since science can only measure physical matter and forces, physical matter and forces must be all that exist.[15]

13. What I mean by "humanism" here is not the philosophy of Petrarch and Erasmus that was in some ways a reaction against Scholasticism, but the more general commitment to equality, human dignity, and universal benevolence familiar to western-style liberalism. See Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 95–97.

14. To be sure, just because historians look askance at such history doesn't mean that the Mormon faithful do. The traditional Apostasy narrative is no doubt deeply entrenched in Mormon thinking. However, even long-held ideas are susceptible of seismic shifts, particularly when their foundations are shaky and there is a more appealing intellectual edifice to erect in their place.

15. See, for example, Ronald E. Osborn, *Humanism and the Death of God: Searching for the Good After Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8.

Notice that as an argument, philosophical materialism is obviously problematic, if not unsound, on its face.[16] A methodology designed only to measure X can't prove that X is all that exists. Nevertheless, it's a very influential view, particularly when coupled with a certain ethical narrative that materialism is "the view of courageous adults, who are ready to resist the comforting illusions of earlier metaphysical and religious beliefs, in order to grasp the reality of an indifferent universe."[17] How we got to the point where such a view can be believed by so many people is a complicated story that I won't try to recount here, although it suffices to say that Nietzsche, Darwin, and Marx all played an important role, as did earlier sources like William of Ockham and his view of nominalism (that is to say, the rejection of the existence of universals like "triangularity" or "human nature").[18] The point is that it is this modern philosophical idea that makes it possible to entertain the notion of an entirely closed world structure,[19] where one is cut off from notions of transcendence and the Christian God more

16. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 574.

17. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 567.

18. See Gillespie, *Theological Origins*, 21. William of Ockham, in contrast to his near contemporary Aquinas, rejected the idea that things have essential natures—for example, that it is in the nature of fire to generate heat or that it is in the nature of human beings that adultery is bad for us. He was concerned that Aquinas's contrary view would undermine God's freedom and omnipotence. The consequence of these positions was to place the will above the intellect in the order of importance, meaning that under an Ockhamist view of things, faith becomes more important than reason in the area of belief, and divine command becomes more important in the area of ethics.

19. See Taylor, *Secular Age*, 567.

generally.[20] For this reason, it is arguably the greatest threat to belief in thousands of years and therefore seems like a good candidate for what Mormonism refers to as the Great Apostasy.

Not only does a commitment to materialism cut one off from the possibility of transcendence, it also calls into question the humanistic values that most modern societies subscribe to, things like equality, a respect for human dignity, and universal benevolence.[21] One might be surprised by this claim in light of the writings of popular atheists like Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker, who insist that these humanist values follow inexorably from the view that humans are nothing but indifferent particles and forces. Nevertheless, I strongly suspect that the

20. A clarification is probably in order regarding the term "transcendence." Here, I am referring to the relationship of a religion's deity to the world. In the pagan religions, the deity or deities are located very much in this world whereas in Christianity (and Judaism), the sacred is located outside of time and space, to speak nothing of this world. See Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2018), 111–13. Whereas the pagan religion "seeks to make its votaries at home in the world," Christianity and Judaism create a desanctification of nature. Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, translated by Robert Savage (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1955), 91. For this reason, one can say that Christianity and Judaism are religions "of distantiation, in contrast to religions of complete immersion in the world." Assmann, *Price of Monotheism*, 43. These differences in orientations regarding the location of the sacred result in very different ideas about a whole host of issues, including nature, the ordering of goods, and sexual ethics. See Smith, *Pagans and Christians*, 116–29. Most importantly for our purposes, however, philosophical materialism closes one off from the transcendent orientation, which strikes at the heart of what it means to be Christian.

21. See, for example, Osborn, *Humanism and the Death of God*, 20 ("In a post-Darwinian, post-Marxian, post-Nietzschean age, the assumption that all persons should be treated as the bearers of a profound dignity in virtue of their humanity alone can no longer be taken for granted theoretically, and it is an open question what this might practically mean over time").

humanism associated with this modern genre of atheism is actually the beneficiary of a rich Christian inheritance and essentially survives on borrowed time.[22] For, philosophical materialism is essentially linked to ethical nihilism. Indeed, a truly serious atheist like Nietzsche seemed to understand this all too well, spelling it out in detail to truly startling effect.[23] This idea is also assumed in the post–World War II project of moral reconstruction undertaken by various Christian humanists, like C. S. Lewis and Simone Weil, who worked to rebuild the humanistic framework in recognition of the damage that philosophical materialism could do.[24] The fact that their project was largely unsuccessful demonstrates the hold that such a philosophy can have on society.[25]

But perhaps to truly appreciate the threat the materialist worldview poses to notions of transcendence, it might be necessary to take a closer look at the effect of this philosophy not just on society as a whole but on individuals and households in particular. On the one hand, such a worldview can cause people to act in rather eccentric ways. For example, consider the famous materialist philosophers Paul and Patricia Churchland, who in informal, everyday conversations will replace a perfectly reasonable, commonsense phrase like "I'm frustrated" (with all of it non-materialist connotations)[26] with something like "my serotonin levels have hit bottom, my brain is awash in glucocorticoids, my

22. See Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019) (arguing that all of our political debates in Europe, the United Kingdom and the Americas, even the notion of atheism itself, are rooted in Christian assumptions).

23. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

24. See Alan Jacobs, *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

25. See Jacobs, *Year of Our Lord*, 206.

26. What I mean here is that materialism can't account for the experience of frustration, even though it might account for the physical correlates of such an emotion.

blood vessels are full of adrenaline, and if it weren't for my endogenous opiates I'd have driven the car into a tree on the way home."[27] This might seem harmless enough—a slightly humorous anecdote about how one's favored discipline colors one's way of seeing, like a family of lawyers bickering over whether the Coase theorem applies to the question of who should take out the trash.[28]

However, this way of seeing the world is not so obviously benign, even putting aside the ethical nihilism it portends. Indeed, the contemporary French novelist Michel Houellebecq has made a very successful career out of exploring the effects of philosophical materialism on the individual, and the result is not for the faint of heart: Houellebecq's characters seem to sleepwalk their way through a life devoid of meaning, punctuated by loveless, emotionless sexual encounters, at least for those lucky few who find themselves winners in the market for such distractions—for in the Houellebecqian universe, everything is commodified through a type of market capitalism run amok, and youth and beauty are the only things standing in the way of suicide.[29] As John Updike put it, "the sensations Houellebecq gives us are not nutritive."[30] True enough, although they might nevertheless be instructive.

27. Larissa MacFarquhar, "Two Heads," *New Yorker*, July 21, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/02/12/two-heads.

28. The Coase theorem says that in the absence of transaction costs, legal entitlements don't matter. Thus, one might argue that there doesn't need to be a household rule about who takes out the trash because whichever spouse most values avoiding the trash building up will take it out. To be clear, Coase's examples always included farmer neighbors, not people who have to sleep in the same bed at night.

29. See Louis Betty, *Without God: Michel Houellebecq and Materialist Horror* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016).

30. Betty, *Without God*, 13.

III. Implications

There are several important implications that come from identifying the Great Apostasy with philosophical materialism. Let me focus on just two. First, this view of apostasy helps explain the nature of the Restoration—that it is not a discrete attempt at imitation but rather an ongoing effort at translation. Second, this view of apostasy allows us to view the Christian tradition without interruption, allowing Mormonism to engage with the best in Christian thinking through the ages.

1. The Restoration as Translation

In Mormon thought, the notion of apostasy is closely linked to that of restoration. As explained previously, it makes sense for B. H. Roberts to have viewed the Apostasy as being about something more than simply a loss of priesthood authority, creating space for Protestant criticism of the syncretism of early Christianity and Greek thought, since the Restoration is clearly about something more than just the loss of priesthood authority. Similarly, it should come as little surprise that this new narrative of apostasy I am outlining here alters in some respects the traditional way we think about the Restoration. However, I think that this new narrative of apostasy is actually more consistent than the traditional one in explaining how the Restoration actually works in practice.

If the Apostasy has to do with philosophical materialism, then it is a very different narrative than the one that Mormons are used to. That traditional narrative, handed down from Roberts, Talmage, and McConkie, views the Apostasy for the most part as a discrete historical event that is now over and done with. Relatedly, the view of restoration that accompanies this traditional view of apostasy is one where the Restoration is a re-creation through imitation of the way Christ's church was prior to the discrete event of the Apostasy. As the hymn goes, "Angels of glory shout the refrain: Truth is restored again."[31] The idea is that there

31. "Hark, All Ye Nations!," *Hymns*, no. 264.

was an apostasy that happened a long time ago, the Restoration fixed it, and now we can get on with our lives.

The narrative of a materialist apostasy that I am urging here instead views the Apostasy as a continuous event, one that we deal with and will presumably continue to deal with for the foreseeable future because of its deep embeddedness in what the philosopher Charles Taylor has called the "social imaginary," a phrase that is meant to convey something "broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they *think* about social reality in a disengaged mode."[32] The fact of the materialist Apostasy's embeddedness in the social imaginary then also changes what the Restoration itself is all about. Given how deeply embedded philosophical materialism is in the way we moderns think about our society, it seems unlikely that we can deal with the Apostasy by simply restoring the way Christ's church was at some earlier point in history. There simply is no going back. The best one can hope for is not a restoration through imitation but a restoration through translation. It's not a return to the (perhaps idealized) past but rather an attempt to take the essence of some truth (like an ancient way of life) and resurrect it without falling into certain archaisms that might get in the way of the translation. The idea is similar to the way certain modern literary figures, like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, relied on modern literary structures to communicate themes from the Christian (in the case of Eliot) and classical traditions (in the case of Pound). According to Hugh Kenner, a preeminent critic of literary modernism, the aesthetic of Eliot and Pound (and other less well-known figures like Wyndham Lewis) was aimed at getting at a truth that was timeless, unencumbered by artifice.[33] It is perhaps for this same reason that otherwise traditionalist Catholic philosophers like Jacques Maritain and

32. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 171.

33. See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

Étienne Gilson favored abstract expressionism in painting, because it disposed of artifice and allowed the viewer a clearer view of truth.[34]

Thus, when we view the Apostasy as having to do with philosophical materialism, rather than the mingling of Greek philosophy with scripture, one is led to view the Restoration as a continuous rather than discrete event and one focused on translating an ancient way of life rather than recreating that way of life through a sort of imitative primitivism. This might sound like it requires a radical change in Mormon thinking. However, I'm not sure that it does. In fact, it is increasingly common to think of the Restoration as something that continues to unfold.[35] For example, when, in 2015, women were for the first time invited to participate in three important administrative committees in the church, Sister Sheri Dew, a former counselor in the General Relief Society Presidency of the Church, said, "This is yet another important step forward in the restoration of the gospel,"[36] implying that the Restoration continues to unfold. Not long before Sister Dew made this comment, Elder Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve said in general conference, "Sometimes we think of the Restoration of the gospel as something that is complete, already behind us—Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, he

34. See Gregory Wolfe, *Beauty Will Save the World: Recovering the Human in An Ideological Age* (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2011), 72–73 ("The common belief is that art should be an imitation of reality, rendered with a faithfulness that approaches that of the camera. But Maritain and Gilson countered that the end of art is not the mere repetition of reality through imitation, but the creation of beautiful objects that enable us to see through nature to deeper meaning").

35. As some Mormon scholars have pointed out, such a view of the Restoration might be dated to Smith himself. See Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37.

36. Tad Walch, "In a Significant Move, Women to Join Key, Leading LDS Church Councils," *Deseret News*, Aug. 19, 2015, https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865634860/In-a-significant-move-women-to-join-key-leading-LDS-Church-councils.html.

received priesthood keys, the Church was organized. In reality, the Restoration is an ongoing process; we are living in it right now. It includes 'all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal,' and the 'many great and important things' that 'He will yet reveal.'"[37] If the Restoration is an ongoing process, then it makes sense to view the Apostasy in this way as well, which is the case under the narrative of apostasy as philosophical materialism I am elaborating on here.

Not only is this view of the Restoration as translation consistent with modern-day sermonizing, but it also helps make sense of certain aspects of Mormonism that might otherwise seem out of place under the traditional view that the Restoration is a type of re-creation through imitation. In particular, the Restoration as translation helps explain certain features of Mormonism that might look strangely modern; it also explains other features that, although not modern, at least lack a clear historical precedent in the early Christian church.

a. How "Restoration as Translation" Explains Mormonism's Modern Flourishes

In some respects, Mormon thought assumes a peculiarly modern shape. Take, for example, Mormonism's response to the question of the relationship between transcendence and human flourishing. The question has been put this way: "[H]ow [do we] define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn't crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity?"[38] One can map ideologies with respect to how they answer this question, with secular humanists[39]

37. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Are You Sleeping Through the Restoration?," Apr. 2014, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/04/are-you-sleeping-through-the-restoration?lang=eng.

38. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 639–40.

39. Secular humanists are non-theists who nevertheless affirm the humanist values of Christianity and theism more generally, including, for example, universal benevolence, equality, justice, and human dignity.

and neo-Nietzscheans[40] occupying the ordinary flourishing end of the spectrum and theists occupying the transcendence end.[41] But if we were to map where Mormons fall on this continuum, it would probably be pretty close to the secular humanist side of things. This is because Mormonism makes a surprisingly modern move in talking about transcendence: it "immanentizes the eschaton" to use the phrase coined by William F. Buckley in his paraphrasing of the political philosopher Eric Voegelin.[42] After all, Mormons believe that "that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there."[43] Granted, that same verse goes on to say that that sociality will be coupled with eternal glory.[44] In other words, in Mormon thought, heaven is not exactly a place on earth,[45] but it's pretty close. And the fact that heaven is a sort of continuation of earthly life implies that we should focus more on this life and the rediscovery of "ordinary human satisfactions."[46] This idea, embedded in the Mormon view of transcendence is, in Taylor's view, one of the "recurring insights of modernity."[47] And thus for the modern person, it is a very attractive view of heaven. Perhaps this is what accounts for statements like this one made by a very sophisticated

40. Neo-Nietzscheans are non-humanists, those who reject humanist values as those of the weak-minded or gullible.

41. See Taylor, *Secular Age*, 636–39.

42. The phrase refers to any attempt to take the "eschaton" (that is to say, the transcendent, heaven-bound destiny of humanity) and make it an earthly reality. Buckley and conservatives like him used the phrase to criticize any liberal opponents who were in their view engaged in progressive utopian thinking.

43. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.

44. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.

45. The allusion here to Belinda Carlisle's 1980s oeuvre should be obvious to sensitive Gen-Xers everywhere. Listen to Belinda Carlisle, "Heaven is a Place on Earth," *Heaven on Earth* (MCA Records, 1987).

46. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 627.

47. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 628.

and very modern non-Mormon: "Of all religions that I know, the one that most vehemently and persuasively defies and denies the reality of death is the original Mormonism of the prophet, seer, and revelator Joseph Smith."[48]

Related to this question of transcendence in Mormon thought is the question of ontology—what types of things exist in the Mormon worldview? For Mormons, God is not simply personal in the sense of what is sometimes referred to as "theistic personalism," the notion that, in contrast to the God of natural theology, God is a person, only without our corporeal and other limitations.[49] The classical theists, typically associated with Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, reject theistic personalism for viewing God as a person rather than personality itself. And yet, Mormonism seems to go even further in immanentizing God than even theistic personalism to say that God is not only a person but is literally of the same species as us, and we of him.[50] The idea would be considered a heresy among orthodox Christianity and an unusual one—in fact, one probably has to, ironically, go back to the Greeks to find something close to it. But for the modern mind, the idea that we are a type of god with all of the freedom that that implies is enormously attractive. Indeed, it dovetails well with modern paeans to a new sort of

48. Harold Bloom, comments from *The Mormons*, PBS, https://www.pbs.org/mormons/etc/script2.html.

49. See Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 11–14.

50. See Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1884), 46 (quoting the famous Lorenzo Snow couplet, "As man now is, God once was. As God now is, man may be."). Although little is said about the process by which the first part of the couplet—God's own exaltation—came about, the second part of the couplet—that man can become a perfected being as well—is a core doctrine of LDS belief. See, for example, "Becoming Like God," *Gospel Topics Essays*, available at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/becoming-like-god?lang=eng.

paganism.[51] Thus, Mormonism in some respects seems to reflect certain modern ideas. While this might be difficult to explain under the view of the Restoration as an imitation of the past, it is exactly what one would expect of the Restoration as a translation of the past to a modern time.

b. How "Restoration as Translation" Sheds Light on Features of Mormonism Disconnected from the Early Christian Church

Not only does this notion of the Restoration as translation help us explain certain features of Mormonism that look unquestionably modern, but it also helps us appreciate other features of Mormonism that, while not necessarily modern, also don't appear to have a historical antecedent in the early Christian church. Let me give just two brief examples.

First, consider ministering and genealogical work. There is no indication that these important features of modern Mormonism were features of the early Christian church. Yet, they might be an example of restoration through translation. The restoration in question might be the translation of the ancient idea of theosis or deification, an idea that is certainly familiar to Mormons. Eastern Orthodox theologians in particular view theosis as the point of the Atonement, creating a way for sinful, fallen human beings to become like God. This deification process might proceed through the hard work of developing certain divine attributes. But it also might come about through "the mutuality of indwelling among persons,"[52] something along the lines of hearts being knitted together that one finds in the book of Mosiah in the Book

51. See Anthony T. Kronman, *Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York: Free Press, 2011).

52. See Stump, *Atonement*, 167.

of Mormon.[53] Ultimately, the question is one of union with the divine nature,[54] an idea that requires something more than a relationship among friendly neighbors but rather a certain closeness and shared attention, the type of openness that allows for authentic empathy and understanding. It is the type of relationship that gives rise to a rejoicing with those who rejoice and a mourning with those who mourn,[55] not just as a show of solidarity but because one actually feels the joy and sorrow of others as a result of this closeness. And the reason this type of union with others might be a form of deification or theosis is that God himself exhibits this interpersonal nature in the fact that he consists of more than one divine person.[56] "The life of the one God is communal," as Robert Louis Wilken, the greater scholar of early Christianity says, paraphrasing Hilary of Poitiers in the fourth century.[57] So must be the life of a people on the path of deification.

But there's a problem here. One can understand how such a process of deification through union with others might work in a society like those depicted in the Book of Mormon or the New Testament, where people live their lives within tight-knit groups. How, though, does one translate that process to a society like ours, which is characterized often by movement rather than stability, alienation instead of solidarity, isolation rather than community? Genealogy and ministering might be viewed as an attempt at doing precisely that. Through genealogy, we begin to develop empathy toward our ancestors, which draws us nearer

53. Mosiah 18:21.

54. See David Bentley Hart, "The Anti-Theology of the Body," *The New Atlantis*, no. 9 (Summer 2005): 65–73, available at https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-anti-theology-of-the-body.

55. Romans 12:15.

56. I think this is true both on the classical trinitarian view of God as well as the sort of social trinitarianism of Mormonism.

57. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 93.

to our own family. Through ministering, we experience something similar with our ward family. In this sense, there is something very true about not being able to be saved on our own, not just because salvation requires grace, but because it requires others.

Another example of restoration through translation has to do with the temple. Much has been written about modernity's "affirmation of ordinary life,"[58] the idea that the modern world redefined the "good life" away from aristocratic activities of contemplation and citizenship to focus on more pedestrian, though nevertheless important, things like ordinary goodness, economic productivity, and family life. Indeed, this societal development probably followed from the Reformers' view of the ascetic or monastic life as a form of elitism masquerading as spirituality and their renewed focus on the holiness of ordinary life itself.[59]

However, there is undoubtedly something lost in this defining of moral aspirations downward and casting off Christian ascetic practices dating back to John the Baptist. Yet, how does one recover an element of these "higher" forms of spirituality in an age that looks skeptically at anything that appears to violate egalitarian ideals? Mormon temple liturgy might be one such way. On the one hand, Mormonism, with its lay clergy, follows the Reformation's leveling effect on what counts as an authentic spiritual life. For Mormons, the leadership doesn't live differently from the rest of us. They are us, and we them.[60] However, the temple, with all the requirements to enter it—including paying a full tithe, wearing garments, and obeying the Word of Wisdom—is held out as a higher form of spirituality, albeit one that everyone can aspire

58. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), chap. 13.

59. See Taylor, *Secular Age*, 370.

60. By leadership, I don't mean the same thing as priesthood. Relief Society and Young Women presidents are leadership in this sense. To be sure, the gendered nature of the Mormon conception of priesthood falls short of these Reformation-era egalitarian ideals.

to and has the potential to achieve, thereby satisfying the democratic expectations of the age. There's no indication that early Christians had anything resembling Mormon temple worship. Yet, the Restoration here is not a re-creation through imitation. It's a translation, an attempt in a democratic age to translate this interaction between higher and lower spiritual vocations to a new context.

Thus, the Restoration as translation helps us explain some otherwise puzzling features of Mormonism. It also, I might add, fits well in a religion for which the concept of translation already occupies an important place. After all, the concept of translation resides at the heart of the Mormon origin story with the translation of the Book of Mormon and later the book of Abraham. As is common knowledge nowadays, what Smith meant by translation is very different from the translation that a multi-linguist might engage in when converting a text from one language into another.[61] Rather, it was a sort of revelation.[62] But it was revelation that was tied to some ancient source, a modern revelation with modern features[63] containing an ancient core. That is precisely the type of translation I'm talking about when I invoke this view of the Restoration. If the scripture at the heart of the Restoration was an exercise in this type of translation, then why not the Restoration itself?

2. A Continuous Christian Tradition

This view of a materialist apostasy also has the benefit of making available to Mormon thought a continuous Christian intellectual tradition, including those works that might be influenced by Greek philosophy.

61. See Kathleen Flake, "Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith's Narrative Canon," *Journal of Religion* 87, no. 4 (2007): 497–527.

62. See Flake, "Translating Time," 497–501.

63. See, for example, Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 66–123.

This would perhaps be the most significant change resulting from substituting this new narrative of apostasy for the old (i.e., the "mingling of Greek philosophy with scripture"). There are potentially significant benefits associated with such a move. To get a sense for some of the ideas that might be at stake here, consider just two: natural theology and natural law.

a. Natural Theology

Natural theology consists of reasoning about God based on observations regarding the natural world.[64] The primary thinkers in this tradition are a veritable who's who of Western philosophy, including Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Plotinus, among others. Although their arguments differ, they all follow a similar structure: They begin with an observation about the world, for example: the nature of change—that it happens when a potentiality inherent in something is actualized; or the composite nature of existence—that everything seems to be made up of parts; or the reality of universals—that concepts like redness or humanness or triangularity are real; or the distinction between essence (what a thing is) and existence (that a thing is). Then, they argue that to explain the observation in question, there must be a God—that is to say, there must be a being of pure actuality to give rise to change or a purely simple being to cause compositeness or a divine intellect in which to ground universals or pure existence that can impart existence without having to receive it. The resulting being, the God of classical theism, is eternal in the sense of existing outside of time (since time-dependent beings change), immaterial and incorporeal. It is not just a perfected version of a human being but something entirely different, "wholly other" as Karl Barth put it.[65]

64. See, generally, Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).

65. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 37.

To be sure, there might be any number of objections to the God of classical theism. This view of God might seem more like a thought experiment than anything else, a cold, distant abstraction rather than a personal being who can relate to us and we to him.[66] Or it might seem inconsistent with various biblical passages that describe God in personal terms—God sitting on a throne, getting mad, creating us in his image, forgiving, having compassion, and so on.[67] More problematic still, this view of God might seem so different from the Mormon view as to be incompatible.[68]

But classical theism has its virtues too. For Christian classical theists, Jesus plays an extraordinarily important role, because Jesus is literally the same God of natural theology, that wholly other, but in human form. Thus, the Incarnation assumes an elevated poignancy within classical theism. It gives new meaning to the Apostle Paul's view that "Christ made himself of no reputation"[69] and what Nephi describes as

66. Classical theists typically respond by pointing out that if one follows the same logic that leads to God as pure being, actuality, or existence, one must also conclude that God must possess something analogous to what we call intellect and will as well as justice, mercy, and love. See Feser, *Five Proofs*, 169–248. Moreover, these personal attributes of God must be even superior to the analogous attributes that we possess. See Feser, *Five Proofs*, 246–48.

67. But there's no reason why these passages have to be read literally, especially considering that there are other biblical passages that depict God in terms consistent with natural theology. Indeed, the early Patristic Fathers seem to have adopted a metaphorical interpretation with respect to those scriptural passage that were not in accord with the nature of the God of natural theology, viewing them as examples of divine condescension and accommodation to men and women—God talking to his creation in a way that it might understand even if such talk doesn't accurately reflect ultimate reality. See Mark Sheridan, *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

68. However, some find space within Mormonism for classical theism. See Samuel M. Brown, "Mormons Probably Aren't Materialists," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 39–72.

69. Philippians 2:7.

the "condescension"[70] of Christ, since it implies that the decision to take on human form was made not simply by a more perfect human but by a non-human, a being that is being itself, that is wholly other. Additionally, under classical theism, God doesn't need any further explanation. He is "metaphysically ultimate."[71] In other words, this view of God doesn't just explain human existence but existence itself. More generally, this conception of God is largely immune to the sophomoric brand of atheism that is so fashionable these days, which conceives of God as a being rather than being itself.[72] Additionally, there is something beautiful about the idea of God as pure actuality or being or existence sustaining creation at all times, our every breath of every minute of every day.[73]

For Mormonism, natural theology might yield pastoral benefits as well. In particular, it might be valuable to those who question God's existence and nature after seeing their testimony of, for example, the First Vision challenged by the historical record. I think it's fair to say that Mormons in the twenty-first century might make the First Vision support more weight than it was ever intended to bear. For nineteenth-century Mormon converts, the First Vision was almost assuredly not a basis for believing in God but for believing that God had called a prophet. Yet, I think many modern Mormons view the First Vision as

70. 1 Nephi 11:16.

71. Edward Feser, "Classical Theism," *Edward Feser* (blog), Sept. 30, 2010, http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/09/classical-theism.html.

72. See David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press: 2014). The atheism I'm referring to is embodied in works by people like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Jerry Coyne, and Christopher Hitchens. Better atheist arguments (although still unconvincing at least to this reader) are presented by philosophers like Walter Kaufmann, J. L. Mackie, and William L. Rowe.

73. Granted, such a view of God sustaining creation at all times also problematizes the question of how evil can exist, although not without intelligent responses. See, for example, Davies, *Reality of God*.

evidence that God exists, and so when their testimony of that vision, which of course was only the first of many visions, becomes destabilized, their entire belief structure, including belief in God and Jesus, teeters as well. Natural theology might provide a separate, independent basis for believing in God, which, once in place, might better support the First Vision's miraculous story of God calling a boy prophet.

To be clear, the point is not to persuade anyone to adopt these positions here and now but rather simply to suggest that there is something within the tradition of natural theology worth exploring, engaging with, and perhaps even embracing.

b. Natural Law

The same could be said of the natural law tradition, another area of classical Christian philosophy with which Mormonism has historically failed to engage.[74] In this context, natural law refers to the idea that there are objective answers to what is good and bad, right and wrong, and that those answers can be reached by reasoning from a thing's nature.[75] Just as it is in the nature of an acorn to grow into an oak or

74. The idea of the natural law as a moral theory is old—in fact, it really is just a variation on the biblical insight that observation of creation ought to reveal aspects of God's will. The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who saw natural law as rooted in the Hebrew Bible, harmonized the concept with Greek philosophy, which influenced some of the early church fathers like Clement of Alexandria. However, it was Aquinas more than anyone else who, drawing on Aristotle, developed a robust natural law theory within the Christian context. See Richard A. Horsley, "The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero," *Harvard Theological Review* 71, nos. 1–2 (Apr. 1978): 35–59.

75. See, for example, Ralph McInerny, "The Principles of Natural Law," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 25, no. 1 (1980): 1–15; Russell Hittinger, *The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World* (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2003); David S. Oderberg, *Moral Theory: A Non-Consequentialist Approach* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 174–92.

a squirrel to escape predators,[76] it is in the nature of human beings to realize certain ends that define what it means to flourish as the type of beings we are. Human actions that further those natural ends are said to be morally good; otherwise, not. Thus, natural law theory requires a careful analysis of the purpose underlying our various faculties and capacities—reason, speech, labor, sex, and so on.[77]

Like natural theology, this natural law tradition might also be useful for certain types of faith crises, particularly those that are motivated by a certain moral anxiety, including concerns about the moral prescriptions of those who are held out as God's mouthpieces on earth. More often than not, in Mormonism, these moral pronouncements aren't accompanied by reasons but presented almost as divine commands that must be followed, "thus saith the Lord." I sense this is frustrating for some, maybe many, Mormons. Part of this frustration might be because, regardless of political affiliation, Mormons tend to be for the most part small "l" liberals—I personally don't know many Mormon monarchists, although maybe they exist—and the liberal tradition tends to balk at commands divorced from the practice of reason-giving.

76. These examples come from Edward Feser. See "Whose Nature? Which Law?," *Edward Feser* (blog), Oct. 12, 2012, http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2012/10/whose-nature-which-law.html.

77. There is a debate among natural lawyers about the degree to which natural law–type reasoning must be predicated on Aristotelian metaphysics and in particular the notion of teleology in nature, or in other words, that natural substances, powers, and processes are inherently directed toward certain ends. Classical natural lawyers say that such teleological assumptions are required. See note 73. New Natural lawyers disagree. See John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert P. George, *In Defense of Natural Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

But I suspect there's more to it than that. Mormonism doesn't present itself as a faith rooted in "theological voluntarism"[78]—there's a lot in the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, about intelligence and reason and working it out in one's mind.[79] So for Mormons, unlike many evangelical Protestants, although revelation is necessary, a lot can be known through the exercise of reason, including the nature of morality. At the same time, Mormonism doesn't have a tradition of reasoning about morality. And when Mormons look to moral sources, my impression is they tend not to look very far back in the past. This is no doubt due in part to the fact that people are products of their time. But it probably also has something to do with the traditional Apostasy narrative, which casts a pall on generations of thinking about Christian ethics through the lens of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. One doesn't have to believe in Elizabeth Anscombe's famous argument that modern moral philosophy (that is to say, "consequentialism") is hopelessly flawed[80] in order to believe that pre-modern philosophy contains rich sources and models for thinking about Christian ethics.[81]

78. This is the idea that God's will takes priority over his intelligence, and therefore is essentially unintelligible to his creation. To be sure, not everyone agrees that Mormonism is rationalist rather than voluntarist. See, for example, Eugene England, review of *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1999): 191–201 (drawing a contrast between his view that Mormonism is rationalist with the voluntarist take on Mormonism adopted by popular Mormon author Stephen Robinson).

79. See Doctrine and Covenants 8:2; 9:7–9.

80. Put me down as someone who agrees with her thesis.

81. Incidentally, Anscombe is a fascinating character whom I personally wish were talked about more in Mormon circles. An Oxbridge philosopher, Anscombe was simply one of the most brilliant thinkers of the twentieth century. Shunning the typical gender roles of the day, she preferred directness over politeness and pants over dresses and refused to spend her time on things she regarded as frivolous, like keeping a decorous home. At the same time, she was a devoted mother of seven children who led the life of a truly independent

How might natural law reasoning help address these types of faith crises rooted in moral anxiety? Consider a brief, highly simplified example.[82] Take the proverbial modern Mormon who might be tempted to view the Church's position on chastity before marriage as backward and harmful, leading to unhappy marriages and the like. Such a view is perhaps supported by various scientific studies showing that cohabitation before marriage is associated with "healthier" partnerships. The case is perhaps further strengthened by anecdotal evidence of non-Mormon friends who, as couples, have followed the popular prescriptions and seem all the better for it. Against this backdrop, Mormon general conference talks on the subject of chastity might sound not just out of step with the time but downright uninformed and unscientific.

But the natural law view paints a very different picture. Under that view, our individual experiencing such moral anxiety might come to appreciate that whether an act is good depends not on whether it produces good consequences but on the nature of the act itself. Furthermore, they might learn that moral goodness is a species of natural goodness. That is to say, there is a relationship between what we observe as goodness in nature—"a good dog" or a "good oak tree"—and what it means for a human to be good.[83] Specifically, whether an act is mor-

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thinker: she earned a progressive fan club when she publicly protested Oxford's awarding of Harry Truman an honorary doctorate because she viewed the United States president's decision to bomb Nagasaki and Hiroshima as acts of murder. But she confounded that same fan club when in her 70s she was arrested blocking access to an abortion clinic on the grounds that the activity performed in the clinic was of the same type as Truman's.

82. For a more elaborate explanation, see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, translated by Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 437–56.

83. Note that this notion of natural goodness is not solely the province of Christian thinkers. No less than Philippa Foot, one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century and a committed atheist, adopted it toward the end of her life. See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

ally good is determined by the ends to which it is ordered and whether those ends are consistent with what it means for a human to flourish. One might also learn that chastity is related not just to the good of the private individual but to the common good through the virtue of justice and that a breakdown in chastity is therefore related to serious societal injustices like sexual harassment and abuse. All of a sudden, one's view of traditional Mormon teachings on chastity might look very different, and the pronouncements of Mormon leaders less like the prejudices of a backward generation and more like something akin to deep wisdom.

To be clear, I'm not saying that a natural law view of morality compels one to view things in this way any more than I am saying that natural theology compels one to adopt a form of classical theism. Moreover, even if Mormon thinkers were inclined to engage with the natural theology or natural law tradition, it is entirely possible they would reach different conclusions than the traditional ones sketched above. Intriguingly, perhaps there is a Mormon-inflected version of natural theology and natural law that relies on unique insights from Mormon metaphysics. Regardless, the point I am trying to make here is that that these are deep resources that have not in my view been sufficiently plumbed by Mormon thinkers and that hold out potentially significant pastoral benefits for those whose faith may waiver.

IV. Conclusion

In this article, I've tried to explore the possibility that the Apostasy has to do with a much more modern phenomenon than traditionally thought. In fact, one might say that under the traditional narrative, the Apostasy has to do with Christianity's Platonist turn whereas under the theory I've outlined here, it has to do with precisely the opposite development.[84] Besides being, in my view, more consistent with what

84. By Platonism, I don't mean Plato's theory of the forms, the notion that the physical world is a mere imitation of a higher realm of non-physical essences.

the Apostasy actually is trying to identify—an intellectual development that undermines belief in Christianity—this view has the advantage of making accessible a rich vein of philosophical resources that are largely foreclosed by the traditional Apostasy narrative. These resources could be useful in battling the faith crises of today and tomorrow. It's also arguably more consistent with the highly liberal approach to the location of truth at the origins of Mormonism. Joseph Smith said that "the first fundamental principle of our religion" is to be free "to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another."[85] It is not clear that Mormonism has fully lived up to Smith's aspiration, but maybe reconsidering the traditional understanding of the Apostasy would be one step in the right direction.

Rather, I'm referring to the sort of "big-tent" Platonism under which a number of seemingly disparate and diverse thinkers would be categorized, including Plato but also Aristotle, Plotinus, Boethius, Maimonides, Augustine, and Aquinas. What these thinkers have in common within this big tent is what might be considered the perennial philosophy, a commitment to the rejection of certain philosophical ideas, including materialism, nominalism, mechanism, skepticism, and so on. See Lloyd P. Gerson, *From Plato to Platonism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2017).

85. Joseph Smith, "Letter to Isaac Galland, circa 22 March 1839," 53–54, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 14, 2020, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-isaac-galland-22-march-1839/4#full-transcript.

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