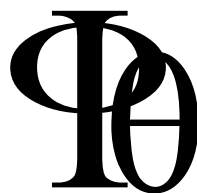




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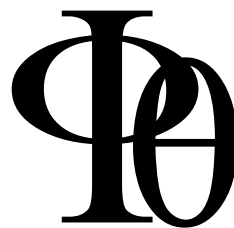


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SOCIETY FOR MORMON PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Element is the official publication of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology. The Society brings together scholars and others who share an interest in studying the teachings and texts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It facilitates the sharing and discussion of work by sponsoring an annual conference, and publishing this journal. Its statement of purpose reads as follows:

The purpose of the Society is to promote disciplined reflection on Latter-day Saint beliefs. Its aims include constructive engagement with the broader tradition of philosophy and theology. All its publications, conferences, and other forums for discussion will take seriously both the commitments of faith and the standards of scholarship.

More information on the Society can be found by at <http://www.smpt.org>.

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Editors' Introduction

Terryl Givens is certainly the most prolific, best known, and, perhaps, most important Mormon theologian writing today. His books with Oxford University Press, *The Viper on the Hearth*, *By the Hand of Mormon*, *People of Paradox*, Parley P. Pratt, *When Souls Had Wings*, *Wrestling the Angel*, and, most recently, *Feeding the Flock* have brought Mormon thought to an audience beyond “the Mormon Curtain.” His work, with Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt*, *The God Who Weeps*, and *The Christ Who Heals*, all published with the LDS Church’s Deseret Book, have attempted to deal with important theological questions for a Mormon audience.

The essays in this issue of *Element* stem from a session of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology held at the November 2015 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta. The panel included Adam Miller of Collins College, Benjamin Huff of Randolph Macon College, independent scholar Rosalynde Welch, and James McLachlan of Western Carolina University. The papers highlight the lively debates that can take place over the many possible interpretations of basic Mormon beliefs. For example, while it is usually accepted that Mormons are materialists, Miller challenges Givens’s notion of what materialism might mean. Rosalynde Welch challenges Givens’s essentially libertarian notion of freedom of choice in relation to belief. Is belief a choice? Ben Huff questions Givens’s interpretation of “being driven into the wilderness” and its relation to the meaning of the Great Apostasy in Mormon belief. This calls into question Givens’s essential idea that Smith gathered various ideas from a variety of

sources in his “restoration of all things.” McLachlan admires Givens’s notion of Mormonism theology as a two-tiered monism but questions a lingering Platonism in Givens’s theology. Givens’s responses to his interlocutors conclude this volume.

The editors would like to thank each of the participants.

Carrie McLachlan, James McLachlan, Editors
Loyd Isao Ericson, Associate Editors



The Wilderness, the Vineyard, and the Transformative Restoration

by Benjamin Huff

Mormonism understands itself as a restoration of original Christianity, not only as it was taught by Christ during his mortal ministry, but as it was revealed to Adam and Eve in the beginning and taught by prophets ever since. The history of humanity's relationship with God is a history of revelations, apostasies, and restorations. However, the general apostasy after the time of Christ is of special interest to us, both because even Christ's personal ministry did not produce a lasting community of correct faith, and because the most recent restoration, through Joseph Smith, was required to remedy this falling away.

When Joseph knelt in the grove and asked God which of the many churches to join, he was told that he “must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and . . . their creeds were an abomination in [God's] sight,” their “professors . . . corrupt,” teaching “for doctrines the commandments of men” (JS—H 1:19). These are strong words, and Joseph's story provoked a strong response of condemnation and persecution. Mormonism's message has been deeply divisive from the start, and this division was embodied and entrenched as the early Latter-day Saints were driven from place to place. Ultimately only a mountain fortress beyond the boundaries of the United States was sufficient to protect the early Church, until their growing numbers and resources, along with the cessation of polygamous marriage, allowed them to establish a *détente* with “the Gentiles” back east. Mormonism has remained something of an outcast movement within Christianity until as recently as the 2008 US

presidential nomination process, when Mitt Romney's religion was openly used against him by at least one other major candidate.

While we are called to preach the truth boldly, the antagonism between Mormons and non-Mormons has too often resembled the "war of words and tumult of opinions" (JS-H 1:10) that young Joseph Smith recognized as a failure of Christian love. Even if their creeds are an abomination, many who accept those creeds do so in sincere faith. As the Gentile Christians of 2 Nephi 29:4 owe gratitude to the Jews for the Bible, so Mormons owe gratitude to the Gentile Christians who have passed it down to our time, with portions of the truth.

Moreover, a growing number of religious folk are beginning to feel that the greatest threat to true religion in the Western world is not heretical religion, but rather the marginalization and rejection of religion in general—secularism. If religion is to continue to have a place in our society, religious people will need to work together to secure it.

In this context, a more positive way for Mormons to look at other faiths and other strands of Christianity is welcome. Terryl and Fiona Givens have crafted an account of the apostasy and restoration that is designed to provide a foundation for a much more positive relationship with our fellow Christians.¹ I firmly support this goal. It seems to me, though, that the specific account they have put forward is a difficult fit both with LDS scripture and with the actual history of the restoration, in the particular way in which Joseph Smith revealed the message.

I will offer an alternative account, based on the parable of the vineyard, that addresses the need for a positive approach to traditional Christianity while remaining faithful to the history and doctrine of the Restoration. It allows us to acknowledge the serious errors of traditional Christianity and the need for a radical restoration of both divine truth and authority. At the same time, my account acknowledges a crucial, positive role for traditional Christianity not only in the centuries before the Restoration but continuing alongside the restored church for the foreseeable future. My account emphasizes a different set of scriptural passages than the Givenses', but it in part develops suggestions implicit in some of their own comments.

1. Terryl L. Givens, "'We Have Only the Old Thing': Rethinking Mormon Restoration," in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, ed. Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 335–42. While Terryl is listed as the author of this epilogue, he credits Fiona with bringing the significance of this image to his attention.

THE GIVENSES' ACCOUNT OF RESTORATION

Doctrine and Covenants 5:14 describes the restoration as the coming forth of the church out of the wilderness, and the same metaphor appears again in Doctrine and Covenants 33:5 and 109:73. The image of the church in the wilderness appears in 88:3 as well. There are many powerful references to wilderness in earlier scripture that the Doctrine and Covenants might be recalling here. We might think of the wilderness of Sinai, where Israel wanders before entering Canaan; Stephen even refers to Israel in Sinai as the church in the wilderness (see Acts 7:38). We might think of the wilderness where Lehi and his family wander on their way to the New World (see D&C 33:8), or the dark and dreary wilderness of Lehi's dream, through which he passes on his way to the tree of life. We might think of the wilderness where John the Baptist raised up his voice to prepare the way of the Lord, the wilderness where Christ went to fast, or the wilderness of the American frontier where the church in fact took shape in the nineteenth century.

The Givenses read this as a reference to Revelation 12, which describes a woman who gives birth to a child and then flees from a dragon into the wilderness. In their reading, the woman represents the church, and the flight into the wilderness represents the apostasy. The restoration, then, is the coming forth of the church out of the wilderness. This metaphor implies that the church exists in some sense throughout the period of apostasy. Hence the work of restoration is not primarily an introduction of something new. Rather, it is the bringing forth of something that was already present but hidden.

The Givenses read this passage as indicating that the truth about God and his plan is still present in the Christian tradition before the restoration, although much of it is scattered and marginalized. Joseph's work with regard to truth is therefore a work of gathering, "salvaging, collecting, and assimilating of much that was mislaid, obscured, or neglected." The most fundamental thing that is missing is the authority to perform saving ordinances.²

This reading of Revelation 12 largely follows the reading of Alexander Fraser, picked up by others in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Doctrine and Covenants 5:14 and 109:73 combine the image of the church coming out of the wilderness with language from the Song of Solomon, describing the church as "clear as the moon, and fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (compare Song of Solomon 6:10). The fact that Fraser also links this language of the Song of Solomon with the coming forth of the church from the wilderness lends some support to the idea that Fraser's thought may have had an influence on Joseph's.³

2. Givens, "We Have Only the Old Thing," 335.

3. Givens, "We Have Only the Old Thing," 335.

The Givenses also interpret certain passages in the Doctrine and Covenants as supporting their interpretation by referring to the importance of divine ordinances in the restoration. By “ordinances” here, the Givenses specifically have in mind rites or ceremonies administered through the priesthood, such as baptism, the laying on of hands, the sacrament recalling the Lord’s Supper, and temple rituals. For instance, in *Wrestling the Angel* Terryl highlights statements indicating that a restoration is needed because “they have strayed from mine ordinances,” (D&C 1:15) that “in the ordinances [of the priesthood], the power of godliness is manifest” (84:20), and that a temple must be built “that I [God] may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people” (124:40). Terryl concludes, “So Smith clearly conceived of apostasy as primarily the corruption of ordinances, and the loss of the priesthood authority to perform them,” rather than a loss of truth.⁴

ASSESSING THE GIVENSES’ ACCOUNT

While Fraser’s account is an interesting connection to explore, the shared language alone is not a sufficient basis for concluding that Joseph adopted Fraser’s broader conception of the restoration. The power and beauty of the images he combines have a force of their own, and it would be natural enough for Joseph to use these metaphors, even to carry them over from the discourse of his contemporaries, whether or not he followed Fraser’s account in its particulars. They are, after all, taken from the Bible. Hence we must look more closely at what Joseph both said and did to see whether Fraser’s account, or the Givenses’ adaptation of it, is a good fit.

The Givenses’ minimalistic view of restoration has some appealing features. It treats the Christian tradition as a positive source of truth, to a great extent the source of the truths that Mormons affirm. Thus while Mormons may affirm the superiority of their perspective to that of most Christians, there is not a radical discontinuity between the two. When Mormons call traditional Christians to embrace the truth, in a sense we are calling them to embrace what is already their own, though in a new way. Much of the usual antagonism is dissolved. There presumably remains a possibility of conflict over the claim of authority, but conveniently many Christians these days do not seem very concerned with this question.

4. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 27–28. In Terryl L. Givens, *Feeding the Flock: Foundations of Mormon Thought: Church and Praxis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), he takes a somewhat different view of how ordinances figure in the restoration—one more compatible with the argument of this paper. Since it was published while this paper was in the late stages of editing prior to publication, I have not attempted to address *Feeding the Flock* in any detail here.

It is also fair to say that a careful study of the Christian tradition turns up many interesting precedents for distinctively Mormon teachings. Terryl's work *When Souls Had Wings*, for example, illustrates the rich history of the idea of preexistence in Western thought, going back to Babylonian mythology. He suggests, in fact, that the idea of preexistence is much more thoroughly explored and appreciated in some of these sources than in the Mormon community. In *The God Who Weeps*, similarly, the Givenses emphasize the continuity of Mormon thoughts and impulses with those expressed by others, particularly in poetry, casting these as in a way natural for any human being. *Wrestling With the Angel* situates Mormon belief within the larger history of religion and finds many continuities as well. There is much to gain by emphasizing Mormonism's commonalities and affinities with larger currents of human thought and aspiration.

To say that these ideas can be found in the prior tradition, however, is not enough to support the Givenses' minimalist account of the restoration. For one thing, to say that traditional Christianity includes "shattered remnants"⁵ of the true gospel is quite different from saying that the truth was already present and simply needed priesthood authority to be added to it. That many people had fragments of the true gospel does not imply that anyone had even a majority, let alone the whole of it. The Givenses have had to range rather widely to find the continuities and resonances they highlight. They also have often drawn on rather unorthodox sources to underscore how the main streams of traditional Christianity had rejected so many precious truths.

Moreover, many of the remnants are not merely scattered but shattered—bearing some traceable resemblance to their originals but having acquired a quite different shape and meaning. For shattered truths to be restored to their original significance and salvific value requires a transformative restoration—one that re-forges them into something well beyond what could be inferred from their prior dimensions.

Just as importantly, the fact that these fragments of truth are there to be found does not entail that the way Joseph Smith restored them was by gathering up the fragments. The Givenses may be doing this, but Joseph's methods were rather different. Young and uneducated, Joseph dictated the Book of Mormon in the course of a few weeks, while essentially hiding in a remote dwelling on the American frontier. He produced the Book of Moses only about one year later, whose theology is similarly revolutionary. Rather than searching through old books, Joseph revealed new ones.

I do not mean to suggest that Joseph did not borrow preexisting ideas and patterns in some cases. The temple ritual appears to be influenced by

5. Givens, "We Have Only the Old Thing," 340.

Masonic ritual, and countless other details of church operation, the format of meetings, and so on, were surely influenced by patterns already familiar to Joseph and others involved in the early church. Yet the primary mode of Joseph's access to restored truth was not research, but revelation.

From a scriptural standpoint as well, the Givenses' account is problematic. As interesting as it may be to find parallels with Joseph Smith's thought in the wider Christian world, this type of study is no substitute for a thorough exploration of his revelations themselves. I have mentioned the strong words that Christ uses to describe the other churches of Joseph's day; there is no suggestion there that they will be the source of the restored gospel. In *The Crucible of Doubt*, the Givenses attempt to explain the harsh language recorded in the Joseph Smith History as an artifact of the overwrought rhetoric of the era.⁶ However, they also observe that Christ uses similarly harsh language in the New Testament.⁷ When we recall that Christ is the one whose statements Joseph is retelling, the detour into contemporary rhetoric seems beside the point.

The Book of Mormon emphasizes both its own role and the role of Joseph Smith as a role of restoring truth and persuading to believe. The "plain and precious things" that Nephi sees are taken away from the pure gospel in 1 Nephi 13 are described as "plain unto the understanding," suggesting these are primarily points of truth and knowledge rather than authority. Later, in 2 Nephi 3, God describes Joseph's work as "the bringing forth my word" and also "the convincing [his hearers] of my word," while priesthood authority does not appear in these prophecies. When Mormon describes the error of baptizing infants, he is describing the majority practice among Christians in Joseph's time and the beliefs surrounding it as "awful wickedness" (Moro. 8:15), but again the issue of authority is not raised here. Rather, Mormon seems to locate the primary problem in a cluster of doctrinal errors regarding the nature of repentance, forgiveness, and God's justice (vv. 14–26).

It is worth pointing out that while it serves as a powerful sign of his prophetic calling, Joseph does not receive the priesthood from the Book of Mormon, but from angels; a book cannot hold the priesthood. If Joseph's goal were primarily to gather truths already present and provide true priesthood authority, the Book of Mormon would seem a tremendous detour, to little purpose.

6. Terryl L. Givens and Fiona Givens, *Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 85.

7. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, 86, referring to Matthew 12:39, Matthew 23:27, John 8:44, and elsewhere.

In *By the Hand of Mormon*, Terryl argues that the distinctive theology of the Book of Mormon has only begun to be explored.⁸ I maintain that this is still very much the case. While there have been some very good books published since, including Terryl's *The Book of Mormon: A Very Brief Introduction*, they do little more than whet our appetite for the feast that awaits a serious student of the Book of Mormon.⁹ The Givenses' suggestion that all the important messages of the restoration were already present in the Christian tradition, however, assumes that we already know the full message of the restoration, and seems to forget the well-supported thesis of *By the Hand of Mormon*. We will not know the full message of the Restoration so long as our study of the Book of Mormon remains patchy and incomplete, as it is now. To suggest that new doctrine is not a key dimension of the restoration without having thoroughly drawn out the Book of Mormon's message is to reach a verdict before fully hearing the evidence. For my part, I see many distinctive and powerful teachings in the Book of Mormon that have not to my knowledge been properly explored in scholarship. I hope to write more about these on another occasion.

Perhaps the most direct evidence the Givenses offer for their claim that the restoration is primarily a restoration of authority and ordinances is their appeals to passages about the restoration of ordinances in the Doctrine and Covenants. These appeals are problematic, however, for several reasons. One reason is that while these passages show that God's ordinances are critically important, none of them implies that the apostasy was "primarily" a matter of straying from God's ordinances, to the exclusion of something else, such as a loss of true doctrine. They imply that straying from God's ordinances is a problem, but they do not suggest that this is the entire problem that makes a restoration necessary; in fact, they indicate the opposite.

Doctrine and Covenants 1 mentions straying from God's ordinances as just one of a long list of problems: "For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant; They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god" (vv. 15–16). The passage then describes the restoration through Joseph Smith as involving a number of things, without using the word "ordinances" again to refer to any of them. It refers, rather, to "commandments," "faith," "knowledge," the "everlasting covenant," and the "fulness of [the] gospel," and it promises "that every man might speak in the

8. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), PAGE NUMBERS.

9. Terryl L. Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

name of God” (vv. 17–28). The section refers to Joseph’s “authority” to deliver God’s message to the world, but grounds this authority in the fact that “I the Lord have commanded” him, and “spake unto him from heaven,” as much as in the sealing power (vv. 5–10, 17).

The revelation mentions the sealing power, but it describes it as the power to “seal both on earth and in heaven, the unbelieving and rebellious . . . unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure” (D&C 1:8–9). Thus this power is presented primarily as a power to condemn. There is no mention of baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, or any of the other specific rites and ceremonies of salvation. Rather, the section highlights rebelliousness and unbelief (v. 3), wickedness (v. 9), lack of faith in the true God, and sin (v. 31) as the obstacles to salvation. I don’t mean to suggest that this section negates the need for priesthood ordinances in the narrow sense, but it certainly does not put them forward as the primary content of the restoration as the Givenses suggest. The focus of this passage is simply elsewhere. Given the context, to read the one mention of “ordinances” here as referring narrowly to rites and ceremonies such as baptism is incongruous. I will return to this point in a moment.

Doctrine and Covenants 84 affirms that the power of godliness is manifested through the priesthood, and indeed, that “*without* the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is *not* manifest unto men in the flesh” (v. 21; emphasis added). Here the word “ordinances” can be naturally read as referring mainly to salvific rites and ceremonies, and authority is given critical importance. However, just before this, the passage states, “this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God” (v. 19). Thus knowledge of God is a key factor in the importance of the priesthood, alongside the performance of its rites, and evidently this knowledge cannot be sustained without it. The implication is that without the inspired guidance of divinely ordained prophets and priests, spiritual understanding becomes corrupted, and some degree of true understanding is essential to salvation. Again, rather than supporting the Givenses’ contention, this passage actually indicates that there is more to the restoration than authority and ordinances, as important as those are.

The section goes on to mention the importance of “the new covenant” (D&C 84:57). This language may prompt us to think of the rites of salvation, since in them we make and renew covenants. However, the passage fills out its content in a very different way, calling us to “repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written” (v. 57). Here, then, the new covenant is presented primarily as a mat-

ter of commandments that we are to obey, and which is largely expressed in the Book of Mormon. The priesthood and its rites have a very important role, but there is much more to the content of the restoration than these. Indeed, many of what Latter-day Saints now think of as saving ordinances, particularly the temple ordinances, are not described in the Book of Mormon, but Doctrine and Covenants 1 lists this book as describing the new covenant.

Doctrine and Covenants 124 affirms the need for a temple, so that certain important “ordinances” can be revealed, the temple rites central among them. The passage specifically refers to “anointings,” “washings,” and “baptisms,” and the need for a temple in which to perform these things (vv. 33–39). Yet it also refers to other, quite different things. Verse 39, after mentioning these rites, also lists alongside them “oracles . . . statutes and judgments” and “revelations” as among the reasons why the temple is needed. Again, there is no suggestion that the rites such as washings and anointings are the primary content of the restoration; rather, they are presented as part of a much more expansive list. Further, this revelation comes in 1841, many years after the founding of the restored church and the publication of the Book of Mormon. A great deal has already been revealed, and so this passage can only refer to a part of the total restoration. Thus none of these three passages states the message the Givenses mean to draw from them.

Doctrine and Covenants 124:39 also does something that may seem a bit more surprising. It presents this long list of items that the temple is needed to support, and then refers to *all* of them as “ordinances”—not just the rites, but also the oracles, revelations, statues, and judgments it says are all “ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name.” In the usage of this passage, then, the word “ordinances” simply refers to far more than rites and ceremonies.

Terryl acknowledges briefly that the word “ordinance” has traditionally referred to much more than rites and sacraments such as baptism, and that Joseph “originally used the term *ordinance* in a generic way to denote God’s laws and statutes as well as divinely prescribed rites and ceremonies.” He affirms, however, that in time Joseph came to use it much more narrowly to refer specifically to these rites and ceremonies. The only support Terryl offers for this claim in *Wrestling the Angel*, however, is a theological dictionary of the time, which offers baptism and the Lord’s supper as paradigmatic ordinances.¹⁰ While this is worth remarking, its relevance must be checked against the actual usage in Joseph’s revelations.

What we find there, however, is clearly a much broader usage of the term, similar to its use in the Bible, whose language the Doctrine and Covenants

10. Givens, *Wrestling*, 27–8.

continually draws upon. In the Bible, the word “ordinance” is used quite broadly to refer to any established order or rule. It can refer to the manner of sacrificing (Num. 18–19), the manner of celebrating festivals (Ex. 12–13), laws of behavior (Lev. 18:26–30), methods of signaling (Num. 10:1–10), rules for handling spoils of war (Num. 31:21), methods of mourning (2 Chr. 35:25), the movements of the sun, moon, and stars (Job 38:33, Jer. 31:35–6, 33:25), or even styles of music (Ezra 3:10). It is frequently used as a straightforward synonym for “statute,” “law,” “commandment,” or “judgment.” To ordain is to institute an order, or to assign someone to an ordered role, and the ordinance is to institute or apply the order, or to carry the order out.

The Doctrine and Covenants continues to use these words in very much the same way, in reference not only to the order of God but also to that of man (D&C 132:13). Along with “commandment,” “judgment,” or “statute,” we see “ordinance” used as a synonym for “charter” (D&C 124:46) or “mission” (D&C 77:14). That an ordinance is an order that has been instituted or ordained is illustrated in D&C 128:5, which uses all three words: “You may think this *order* of things to be very particular; but let me tell you that it is only to answer the will of God, by conforming to the *ordinance* and preparation that the Lord *ordained* and prepared before the foundation of the world” (emphasis added). The ordinance in this case is the method of keeping record books in connection with rites performed for the dead.

As we see in Doctrine and Covenants 124:39, the ordinances of baptism, washing, and anointing are themselves “ordained” as part of the more expansive “ordinance of my holy house,” which includes statutes, judgments, and revelations. The Lord ordains prophets, missionaries, priesthood holders, and other church officers but also ordains counsel (124:84) and blessings (109:21), and ordains animals and plants to be used “for food and for raiment” (49:19; see also 89:10–14). Indeed, what God ordains includes his Only Begotten Son’s role in creation, Christ’s earthly ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and the judgment and resurrection of the dead (76:13–48, 128:22), including who will be saved and who condemned (76:48).

The word “ordinance” thus has a far broader meaning than the one the Givenses assign to it in their readings of the Doctrine and Covenants. While colloquial usage in the church today has become rather narrow, the broad biblical meaning shows plainly in the usage of the Doctrine and Covenants, in early revelations and late. It is true that the restoration is a restoration of God’s ordinances, but these ordinances include not just rites such as baptism or the temple ceremonies, but also his commandments, the structure of his church, revelations, and indeed the entire plan of salvation.

Understanding the restoration as one of truth as much as one of authority does not require us to believe that “other churches and traditions have

nothing of value to contribute” or that “the centuries between the death of the apostles and the events of 1820 were utterly blighted” as in the Givenses’ stark characterization.¹¹ It is reasonable to read the woman in the wilderness as a representation of the church in some sense, present throughout the time from Christ’s ministry to the restoration. Revelation 12:17 describes “her seed” as those “which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Surely there were many people of sincere Christian faith during the period of general apostasy, and to have a testimony of Jesus Christ is to have at least a portion of the truth about him.

Yet personal faith is very different from doctrinal understanding. The Givenses themselves at times refer to the church in the wilderness as a collection of faithful people, consistent with this passage, rather than in terms of doctrine.¹² Doctrine and Covenants 49:8 refers to “holy men that ye know not of,” and the Givenses reasonably associate these with the church of the Lamb of God described in 1 Nephi 14.¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 33, after invoking the image of the church being “called forth out of the wilderness,” restates the point in terms of gathering not truth but believers: “And even so I will gather mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, even as many as will believe in me.” I suggest that we should think of the church in the wilderness from Revelation 12 primarily in terms of faithful people, who can call on the power of redemption even though they do not have a fulness of truth, and are ready to receive it when it arrives.

For these reasons the Givenses’ model of restoration as a restoration of authority, while truth is merely gathered, is not sustainable. Their efforts to minimize the condemnation of error and insincerity in traditional Christianity reflect an admirable generosity, but rely too much on a selective reading of scripture. The connections they draw with other Christian thinkers and ideas are interesting, but the essential story of the restoration is one of rapid and radical revelation of both knowledge and ordinances, accompanied by a restoration of authority. The restoration involves a gathering, but this is primarily a gathering of those faithful people who embrace Christ’s message. A positive perspective on traditional Christianity is worth seeking, but the Givenses’ approach is not the only way to achieve this.

11. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, 87.

12. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, 88–89; Givens, “We Have Only the Old Thing,” 337.

13. I present a similar interpretation of the church of the Lamb of God in Benjamin I Huff, “Of Course Mormonism is Christian,” *FARMS Review of Books* 14 (2002): 120–21.

RESTORATION IN THE ALLEGORY OF THE VINEYARD

Let me suggest another approach, then, that addresses all of these factors, based on a different metaphor from the scriptures. As it happens, in Doctrine and Covenants 33:4, just before the Lord describes calling forth his church out of the wilderness, he alludes to another metaphor: “And my vineyard has become corrupted every whit; and there is none which doeth good save it be a few; and they err in many instances because of priestcrafts, all having corrupt minds.”

The reference here is to the metaphor of the vineyard, which is developed in great depth in Jacob 5, comparing Israel to an olive tree whose branches are pruned, grafted throughout the vineyard, and finally gathered again to lay up fruit for the Lord. In my view, this is the most nuanced metaphor for the apostasy and restoration. In Jacob 6:2, Jacob states that this is a description of the last dispensation: “and after that the end soon cometh.”

This vineyard metaphor is also invoked repeatedly in the Doctrine and Covenants to describe the restoration, the strongest of which appears in 29:14, where God is exhorting Joseph to focus on his ministry: “For thou art called to prune my vineyard with a mighty pruning, yea, even for the last time.” In addition to many simpler references to laboring in or pruning the vineyard, the motif of pruning or laboring “for the last time” also appears in Doctrine and Covenants 39:13–17, 43:28, and 95:4. Thus while the metaphor of a vineyard for the church or the House of Israel appears in many places in the scriptures, and in more than one form, the connection to the version of the parable in Jacob, culminating when the Lord prunes his vineyard “for the last time” (Jacob 5:62, 64, 76; 6:2) is clearly the strongest. This allegory deserves quite a bit more exploration than I can provide here, but I will present an interpretation in broad strokes, applying the allegory to the apostasy and restoration. In the interest of brevity I will not argue extensively for my reading here, but I trust that it is a plausible one.

The Lord has a tame olive tree whose fruit is of the most precious kind, but it is beginning to decay (Jacob 5:3). In other words, Israel has strayed from the truth. While Israel in one sense refers to the larger community of believers, I take the tree as a reference to the Hebrew people, more narrowly understood, at least at the start of the narrative, and also to the tradition of the Hebrew prophets that they have carried down. To renew his people spiritually, the Lord prunes and digs about the tree. He then takes the new branches it puts forth and grafts them into wild trees all over his vineyard (vv. 6–8). This movement of both people and ideas includes the Nephites’ move to the new world, escaping the great apostasy of the Jews and establishing a community of faith far away from the land of Canaan.

Then, to preserve the roots, the Lord grafts in wild branches where he has cut off the original branches of the tree (Jacob 5:9). The wild branches here especially include the Gentiles after the time of Christ who are spiritually nourished by the gospel, which comes to them from the Jews. Initially, these branches draw on the roots to produce a great deal of good fruit (vv. 17–18), as do the natural branches placed elsewhere in the vineyard (vv. 20–24). Christ's message produces a great spiritual flowering among the Gentiles, in the first decades and perhaps centuries after his death. There are also many true disciples among the Nephites in the New World both before and after the coming of Christ, who have been able to sustain a branch of the true church because of their relocation.

Yet some time later, all the fruit has gone bad—the Christian community has fallen into apostasy. Indeed, over time there are even many different ways the message has become corrupted; Jacob 5:30–32 refers to “all sorts of fruit . . . and there is none of it which is good.” The wild branches continue to nourish the roots, preserving the Bible and an altered version of Christ's message, but for producing fruit they have become worthless. This is the condition of the Christian church at the time of Joseph Smith. There is a great proliferation of various sects, particularly after the Reformation, and all of them are seriously mistaken. At the same time, where the branches were planted in a good spot of ground, the bad fruit has overcome the good, as the Lamanites destroyed the Nephites at the end of the Book of Mormon (v. 45).

Hence a restoration is necessary. The Lord plucks natural branches from throughout the vineyard and grafts them back into the original roots. He burns some of the most bitter branches encumbering the natural tree, but takes others and grafts them back into their original wild roots (Jacob 5:52–6). The Book of Mormon, a record of Israelites, comes forth both to the scattered descendants of Israel and to the Christian Gentiles and allows them to be reconnected to the original gospel truths or roots, both through its own words and through giving a corrected understanding of the Bible. We might see the gathering in of the branches from the wild trees as the return of the church out of the wilderness.

The existing branches of the original tree are not cleared away all at once, however, but little by little. The Lord says: “ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, that the root and the top may be equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad . . . [T]his is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard” (Jacob 5:66, 71). The restored church is small at first, and must grow in strength gradually. Other churches continue to serve the great majority of the Christian world, as well as the Jewish people, functioning alongside the restored church as it gradually gathers more and more converts.

The ongoing nature of the work of restoration is reinforced by Doctrine and Covenants 86:1–3, which uses the parable of the wheat and the tares, familiar from the New Testament, but ties it explicitly to the period from Christ’s personal ministry until the restoration through Joseph Smith: “the apostles were the sowers of the seed; And after they have fallen asleep . . . Satan . . . soweth the tares; wherefore the tares choke the wheat and drive the church into the wilderness.” Then, “in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word . . . the angels are crying unto the Lord . . . to reap down the fields; But the the Lord saith unto them . . . let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest is fully ripe” (D&C 86:5–7).

The wheat here seems to represent people of sincere faith who are nonetheless oppressed by the errors of the apostasy, until strengthened by the restoration. Yet the tares continue to be allowed to grow alongside the wheat even after the restoration begins, because the restored church and its membership are still “tender” and “weak” (D&C 86:6). Like the parable of the vineyard, references to the parable of the wheat and the tares are plentiful in the Doctrine and Covenants. However, it is important to note that whereas the tares are presented as a purely negative presence, to be merely tolerated for a time, the parable of the vineyard presents the wild olive trees and their branches as making a vital contribution to the eventual success of the Lord’s plan.

ASSESSING THE ALLEGORY OF THE VINEYARD

How does this account based on the allegory of the vineyard fare for our goals, then? On the one hand, we need to present a realistic picture of the apostasy and restoration, while on the other hand, we hope to provide support for a positive relationship with our fellow Christians today. I think it works rather well on both points.

First, this account does not conceal the fact that a great deal of what has gone on in the name of Christianity over the centuries has been seriously mistaken and sometimes seriously corrupt. On this many Christians today would agree. The crusades come to mind, the excesses of some of the Popes, and many unsavory collaborations of priests with unsavory governments, in addition to various erroneous doctrines and mistaken religious practices. At the same time, the value of the Christian tradition in preserving the Bible and some version of Christianity across the centuries is affirmed, keeping the roots alive to support a new flowering when the Lord returns to prune his vineyard.

Perhaps even more important than its framing of the past is the role this allegory gives the broader Christian community going forward. In these early stages of the restoration, there are simply not enough natural branches to sustain the roots, or to serve all the world’s people. Hence there continues to be much vital work for which the service of non-Mormon groups is needed.

There are too many people in need of service, and the church is still too small, and will be for many decades to come.

The intent is that the natural branches grow and come to represent more and more of the whole. Yet at earlier stages of the narrative they were hardly the only ones bringing forth good fruit, and in the most productive periods it was in fact the synergy between various roots and branches that brought forth so much good fruit. A similar synergy may be showing itself today as Latter-day Saints collaborate with other Christian groups to do charitable work and to influence social and political trends. At the same time, in some aspects of theology we have seen mainstream Christians drifting closer to the LDS view, such as in affirming God's passibility.¹⁴ There are countless ways in which Latter-day Saints and our fellow Christians can strengthen and refine one another as our friendship develops.

This allegory invites us to see our fellow Christians as fellow laborers in God's vineyard. We Mormons need them to succeed in their task for us to succeed in our own. At the same time the restored church has a special role to play in setting the standard of good fruit, clarifying the truth, and enabling the other branches to fulfill their potential, where they were largely falling before. Hence we can and should celebrate the work and faith of other Christians, even as we endeavor to persuade them to more closely approach our understanding of the gospel.

The revelations given through Joseph Smith launch a new phase of God's work, and provide the framework for what comes after. A work of gathering truth remains to be done, however. In 2 Nephi 29:11–14, the Book of Mormon teaches that God has revealed his truths to many peoples, both inside and outside the Judeo-Christian tradition: "And when . . . two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also." One example of this, of course, is the joining of the Bible and the Book of Mormon in the Latter-day Saint canon, combining their insights as witnesses to one more comprehensive message. However, what this passage envisions seems to involve many more records, from a wider range of peoples.

Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young speak powerfully of the need to gather up all truth as a part of spiritual progression, but due to limitations of time and circumstance, neither saw more than a beginning of this process. Indeed, as debates such as mine with the Givenses illustrate, Mormons have a long way to go just to fully identify and appreciate the message they have already received, let alone graft in truths from other spiritual traditions. The

14. For a survey of this and other similar developments see David L. Paulsen, "Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in His Bicentennial," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006): 35–128.

full process of restoration, however, seems to require both the revitalization and blossoming of the original Hebrew inheritance and the integration of much else that is good.

I have argued that the Givenses are mistaken in limiting the restoration through Joseph Smith to authority and ordinances in the narrow sense, with a mere gathering of truth. As an understanding of Joseph's accomplishments, this theory does not fit either the content of his revelations or the manner in which he received them. I have also argued that the shattered remnants of Christ's original message require not just gathering but transforming them to recover their true meaning. The Givenses are right, however, both that there is much truth to be found outside his revelations, and that in its full sense the restoration calls for a gathering in of this truth. Moreover, they have given us some marvelous examples of how this gathering might go.

The allegory of the vineyard offers a more nuanced picture of what it means for the church to be driven into the wilderness, and what is needed to bring it out again and realize its full vitality. While much truth needed to be revealed for the restoration to be launched, these revelations can provide a foundation for constructively gathering and grafting in much additional truth from other traditions, which is ultimately from the same God. Further, the full harvest of faithful people that the Lord looks forward to will require harnessing the fertility of these other truths as well as the foundation revealed to Joseph Smith. Joseph only lived long enough to give the restoration an explosive launch, founding the restored church and delivering its core message in just a few years. Yet the restoration's work of gathering, of both people and truths, will continue for generations to come.

Benjamin Huff is blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah.



A Radical Mormon Materialism: Reading *Wrestling the Angel*

by Adam S. Miller

Terryl Givens's *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* is a well researched, clearly written, and important book. It is required reading. However, while Givens's account of our received Mormon ideas is generally accurate, his account also highlights some of the theological knots endemic to the tradition. These problem spots cluster, in particular, around Mormonism's commitment to a radical and thoroughgoing metaphysical materialism. As a tradition, we claim to be materialists but we have no working definition of what it means to be materialists, and we continue to uncritically import traditional Christian paradigms that explicitly depend on various forms of idealism. The resulting inconsistencies bear, minimally, serious investigation. In what follows, I will roughly sketch one approach to a radical Mormon materialism and, then, take Givens's treatment of atonement in *Wrestling the Angel* as symptomatic of the kind of theological knots that we, as a tradition, may yet need to thoughtfully untie.

1. RADICAL MATERIALISM, LATENT IDEALISM

Wrestling the Angel is an important book because (1) it works to give an overview of Mormon thinking on a range of key theological issues, and (2) it situates these Mormon ideas in the broader historical context of Christian thought. Both contributions are valuable.

With these two goals in mind, Givens rightly emphasizes throughout the book that the key Mormon innovation—the innovation that fundamentally

reframes a Mormon version of Christianity—is Mormonism’s commitment to materialism. In Mormonism, Givens says, “dualism is rewritten as two-tiered monism (spirit as more refined matter), and laws are themselves as eternal as God.”¹ Thus, we get from Joseph Smith a “radical materialism” and this “fundamental claim of a thoroughgoing materialism gave indelible definition to the Mormon theological landscape.”² I think that Givens is right about this and his book does an excellent job of driving home exactly why this is right. As a result, it is my view that one of our theological priorities as contemporary Mormon thinkers should be to think all the way through—as far as we’re able—the philosophical and theological ramifications of this radical materialism.

However, on this front, we have a long way to go. Givens illustrates part of our basic problem in the passage cited above: “Dualism is rewritten as two-tiered monism (spirit as more refined matter), and laws are themselves as eternal as God.” Though we claim to be radical materialists, it’s hard for us to even finish that sentence before a traditional idealism threatens to sneak back into the picture. Givens isn’t alone, here. The problem is nearly universal. Refusing to be dualists—that is, refusing to divide the world into the ideal vs. the material—Mormons instead read spirit itself as a kind of matter. But this material monism is then immediately paired with a second claim about the nature of the *laws* governing this materiality.

What about these laws? What is their status? Are they, according to Givens, also material? We are told that these laws are universal, independent of God, and eternally existent. The implied model for these ideal laws is a Pratt-inflected, nineteenth-century brand of Newtonian physics, but I don’t think the details are especially important. It wouldn’t matter if we were to instead read the laws as Platonic or transcendental rather than Newtonian. In any of these cases, these eternal laws seem to be *ideal*. It’s true that, consistent with a radical materialism, Mormonism’s God now gets to be material. God the Father gets a body. Even spirits get to be material. But the philosophical vacuum created by God’s materiality, by his loss of immaterial ideality, is immediately filled by the ideality of these eternal laws. We’ve moved some pieces around, but idealism’s basic structure remains intact. All the work traditionally done by God’s own ideal immateriality is now being done by the ideality of these immaterial laws.

1. Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43.

2. Givens, *Wrestling*, 61.

2. A WORKING DEFINITION OF MATERIALISM

So what *would* a radical and thoroughgoing materialism look like? Traditionally, the whole of the Western philosophical tradition is in basic agreement about a handful of intertwined features that distinguish what is material from what is ideal. Plato himself hammers home these features in dialogue after dialogue, perhaps most famously in *The Republic*. We shouldn't accept these traditional definitions uncritically, but it would be idiosyncratic to start someplace else.

Classically, we have access to what is material by way of our five bodily senses, and these senses receive information about things that are (1) particular, (2) composite, and (3) subject to change. On the other hand, we have access to what is ideal by way of the mind, and the mind receives information about things that are (1) general, (2) simple, and (3) unchanging. The body receives information about things that are particular, composite, and subject to change because our bodies are themselves particular, composite, and subject to change. The mind (or soul) receives information about things that are general, simple, and unchanging because the mind is itself general, simple, and unchanging. Like knows like. We see, here, the grounds for the traditional Western definition of the soul as immaterial: if the soul weren't itself ideal, immaterial, and eternal, it would be impossible for us to know ideal, immaterial, and eternal things.

More, these complementary triads that define both the material and ideal are composed of tightly interlocking parts. Material things are subject to change and dissolution because they are composed of more than one part: composed of parts, they can be rearranged and fall apart. Also, it is because material things are composed of parts that they are themselves localized and particular (i.e., part-icular). Similarly, ideal things are eternal because they are simple: they can't be rearranged or fall apart because they have no parts. And, having no parts, they must also be general rather than particular. All of this is Western philosophy 101.

For the moment, let's take these traditional definitions as a starting point. Let's assume, as Givens does, that Mormonism is committed to a monistic materialism. This materialism can be "two-tiered" and allow for the existence of spirit, ideas, and laws, but all such things would still themselves have to be fundamentally material. Otherwise, we're back to either a dualism or a metaphysical idealism rather than a monistic materialism. Minimally, then, a thoroughgoing materialism would commit us to the claim that reality is

fundamentally: (1) particular, and (2) plural.³ For simplicity's sake, let's leave aside, for the moment, the related issue of change.⁴

What, then, are the implications of this materiality? Does this commitment to materiality mean that Mormons don't believe in spirit? No, as Givens has already pointed out it just means that Mormons claim that spirit is itself material. That is, it means that spirit is itself both particular and plural. Does this commitment to materiality mean that Mormons don't believe that ideas, generalities, and abstractions are real? Again, no. Ideas are definitely real. It just means that ideas and abstractions are themselves material. That is, ideas and abstractions are themselves particular and plural. The same follows for general laws. Given our thoroughgoing materialism, laws can certainly be real, but if they want to exist, they have to be material and, more, if they want to be material, they have to be particular and plural.

This is the key. Though ideas may map (by way of abstraction) some set of relations among the networks of material things that constitute our worlds, these abstractions do *not* escape the plane of particular material things to hover over or govern that plane. Rather, such idealizations are themselves *one more* material thing *added* to those networks of material things.

This point can be hard to grasp at first. Consider, by way of example, a paper road map. Road maps are useful because they abstract and condense a certain profile from the material network of roads that they represent. The map, as map, doesn't care at all about the concrete or paint these roads are made of (it leaves these real features entirely aside). The map just cares instead about the stable but relative position of each road in relation to all the other roads and then it uses ink and paper to reproduce those relations on a dra-

3. Now, granted, this definition of materialism is naïve in some respects. To be rigorous I think that we would need to drop the compromised language of "particularity" and deploy, instead, the kind of logics that evade traditional part/whole dialectics altogether—the kind of logics explored by thinkers like Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, François Laruelle, Bruno Latour, and others. However, without dragging logics of exception, set theoretical approaches, or non-standard quantum philosophy into the mix, I think we can cover a lot of initial ground with just the traditional model. For those interested in the details involved in rethinking religious ideas in the context of a radical materialism, this is my area of professional expertise. See either of my monographs on the topic: *Badiou, Marion and St Paul: Immanent Grace* (London: Continuum, 2008) or *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

4. Though, for what it's worth, I think a radical and thoroughgoing materialism would also commit Mormonism to a radical and thoroughgoing dynamism. If, then, the costs of such a materialism start to seem too high, this may be an indication that Mormonism is *not* actually committed to a radically monistic materialism. In many respects, this is likely the simplest response to most of the issues raised in this essay.

matically miniaturized scale. However—and this is the point—though this map is a real and at least partially faithful abstraction, it is still itself *one more material thing* in the world, a world that it can only ever *partially* represent. In this case, one could even imagine finding this particular road map, wet from rain, ironically plastered to the surface of one of the particular roads represented on the map itself! *That* is materialism.

The most immediately compelling consequence of treating abstractions and idealities as material things is the following: It is, by definition, impossible for any material network to completely coincide with any idealization (descriptive or normative) of that particular material network. The overlap between the abstraction and the network can only ever be partial because both the network and the abstraction are *themselves* particular things. In other words, the relationship between every idea and every material network that such ideas claim to abstract (or represent or govern) will be structured by an exception that both puts the two into relationship *and* prevents their complete coincidence. Some elements of the network will always be excepted from any given abstraction because the very act of abstraction, as a material process, requires that some profile be foregrounded while other elements are excluded.

But, we might ask, couldn't there still be a *master* abstraction, maybe a set of ideas or laws that captures and governs everything, without exception? Sure, there could be—in an idealism. But not in a radical materialism, not if all “master” abstractions are themselves material and particular and plural. For my part, I don't see any way around this conclusion: any kind of radical and thoroughgoing materialism will necessarily be structured by a generalized state of ontological exceptionalism.

3. LAW, ATONEMENT, MATERIALITY

So why does this matter? Allow me to give just one example of where this might matter quite a bit: Givens's explication of atonement in *Wrestling the Angel's* chapter on salvation. In this chapter, Givens offers an explication of atonement that, while clearly consonant with aspects of the Mormon tradition and elements of Mormon scripture, is also representative of the tensions and inconsistencies endemic to that broader tradition.

What are the implications of a radical materialism for how we think about the nature of atonement? The implication of a Mormon materialism for atonement is just this: *Our materialism rules out the possibility of thinking about atonement as the perfect conformity of particular material individuals with the governing ideality of eternal laws.* Why? Because if these laws are themselves material things that belong to the same plane of materiality as the particular material individuals that they govern, then these laws are themselves particulars, not immaterial universals. Because both humans and the laws are mate-

rial, their relationship is structured by an exception that both makes possible their overlap and prevents their perfect coincidence.

But this is the problem. Givens's account of the atonement depends on the existence of immaterial universals. It openly depends on a classical dualism. Givens emphatically frames the atonement as the eventually perfect coincidence of material subjects with an ideal law:

Christ's atonement sets up the conditions for humans to demonstrate through ever better and wiser choices, made in accordance with ever nobler and purer desires, that it is their will to live in a way consistent with the eternal principles Christ modeled throughout his exemplary life. Repentance is therefore an ongoing process of repudiating unrighteous choices, acknowledging Christ's role in suffering the consequences of those sins on our behalf, and our choosing afresh to better effect. The process continues—perhaps eons into the future—*until in perfect harmony humans have reached a sanctified condition that permits perfect atonement with God.*⁵

Or, again: “For Mormons, being made a saint, or sanctification, is a process of aligning the self with eternal principles.”⁶ Or perhaps most clearly: “Salvation is a natural consequence of compliance with law, just as God's own standing is the natural and inevitable consequence of his compliance with law—which eventual compliance is made possible by the gift of Christ's atonement.”⁷

For Givens, salvation is defined in terms of alignment and compliance. But if the defining condition of materialism is a thoroughgoing particularism that structures every relationship (especially laws, abstractions, and representations) with an exception, then such alignment is impossible. The misalignment—or only ever partial alignment—of material subjects with material laws is a structural feature of the real, not a local defect of a subject's will (though our wills may still have plenty of local defects).

Givens, I think, is free to disagree with the conclusions that I've just drawn. But, if so, it seems to me that he will have to respond in one of three ways. He'll need to: (1) propose his own definition of materialism that does not hinge on the classically agreed upon characteristics of a material thing's being particular, composite, and temporal—dismissing out of hand this working definition, especially given its well established pedigree, is not enough; (2) propose an alternate reading of his theory of atonement that avoids positing the existence of ideal laws free from the constraints of their materiality (i.e., their particularity); or (3) propose that Mormonism is not

5. Givens, *Wrestling*, 235; emphasis added.

6. Givens, *Wrestling*, 238.

7. Givens, *Wrestling*, 238; emphasis in original.

actually committed to a radical, thoroughgoing materialism but, instead, has room for a modified form of dualism that allows for the existence of general, immaterial, and eternal laws free from the constraints of materiality.

However, in my opinion, what we need, instead, is a theory of grace that explicates salvation not in terms of the coincidence of a material subject with an ideal law *but in terms of the exception itself*. I can't begin to lay out in this essay what it means to think about salvation itself in terms of an exception, though I have written about it at great length elsewhere.⁸ But, more, we are, I think, already familiar with the broad outlines of such a theory because thinking about salvation in terms of an exception—rather than in terms of that exception's elimination—is just what Christianity itself does, most clearly in the writings of Paul.

In this sense, I would argue that Paul's epistle to the Romans is the key to a genuinely radical and thoroughgoing Mormon materialism. As Paul demonstrates, salvation is possible, but it is not possible by way of the law. It is impossible to fulfill the law by way of obedience to the law. Only grace can fulfill the law. As a result, it seems to me that, if Mormonism wants to be a materialism, it's going to have to first learn how to be Pauline.

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8. See, for instance, Adam S. Miller, "A General Theory of Grace," in *Future Mormon: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 1–12.



Is Belief a Choice?

by Rosalynde Welch

Is religious belief a personal choice? Definitions first: let belief be intellectual assent to a proposition, and let choice be the conscious election of the will. Some caveats next: at both direct and indirect extremes of the question, the conclusions are fairly uncontroversial. At one level, factual belief, say on a question like global warming, is clearly *not* subject to direct personal choice, rather it's a complex psychological interaction between evidence and identity; at the other extreme, belief clearly *is* influenced indirectly by our mental environment, some aspects of which are chosen. But what about the question in the middle? Is religious belief, neither a strictly factual question nor a mere byproduct of the mind, therefore subject to direct, voluntary choice? In this paper I will argue that it is not. This thesis germinated in the character of my own encounter with belief and disbelief, but psychological exploration is not my aim today. Instead, I will try to show that reasoned grounds for the notion of belief-as-necessity (rather than belief-as-choice) are available in several key Mormon tenets and texts.

Let me acknowledge at the outset that I am swimming upstream. Though I have not conducted an exhaustive survey of official teachings, my sense is that the idea that belief is available for moral choice is relatively new and gaining prominence in Mormon culture. Latter-day Saints have long insisted that all should be free to choose their religious affiliation and worship "according to the dictates of our own conscience," of course (A of F 11). But a political defense of the religious liberty to believe and worship as one chooses is a rather different project than an epistemological claim that *a particular*

belief itself can be consciously chosen by the individual. By the 1990s, and perhaps earlier, that conceptual transition was underway. President Howard W. Hunter taught in 1989 that “[i]t is our freedom, our agency, our inalienable and divine right to choose what we will believe and what we will not believe, and to choose what we want to be and what we want to do.”¹ Over the last two and a half decades, this idea has grown in Mormon discourse, reaching a new apogee in October 2015 as Elder Anderson memorably declared that “faith is not by chance, but by choice.”²

There has been no more persuasive proponent of this idea than Terryl Givens, who, beginning at least as far back as 2006 with “Lightning Out of Heaven,”³ has developed and refined the idea in *The God Who Weeps*, *The Crucible of Doubt*, *Wrestling the Angel*, and many podcasts and interviews. Givens’s development of the idea has coincided with the online dissemination of difficult questions about Mormon history and theology, and the crisis of faith that these issues have provoked in some. The idea that religious belief can be chosen as an act of voluntary self-expression might be understood at least in part, then, as a pastoral response to members who have lost confidence in particular Mormon truth claims yet want to find a meaningful basis for continued membership in the church. The category of personal choice, with the prestige and legibility that it enjoys in our culture, provides such a basis.

I don’t mean to suggest that the current resonance of the idea rests on mere convenience. Belief-as-choice is not without scriptural justification. Givens argues vigorously in *Wrestling the Angel* that “moral agency is the bedrock value” of Mormon theology, and the implications of human moral choice inflect his treatment of every other category.⁴ A foundational text for this strain of theological libertarianism is 2 Nephi 2, Lehi’s ringing claim that “men are free according to the flesh,” “to act for themselves and not to be acted upon,” “to choose liberty and eternal life, or to choose captivity and death.” Lehi’s dualistic voluntarism echoes through the Book of Mormon and Joseph’s revelations, and it is certainly not unreasonable on this basis to elevate the notion of “agency unto oneself” as the master value of Mormonism.

1. Howard W. Hunter, “The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign*, November 1989, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1989/10/the-golden-thread-of-choice>.

2. Neil L. Anderson, “Faith Is Not by Chance, but by Choice,” *Ensign*, November 2015, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2015/11/general-priesthood-session/faith-is-not-by-chance-but-by-choice>.

3. Terryl L. Givens, “Lightning out of Heaven: Joseph Smith and the Forging of Community,” *BYU Studies* 45 no. 1 (2006): 18.

4. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

Lehi's voluntarism lends itself well to a thought exercise that Givens has invoked in the context of belief and doubt, the Ass of Buridan. In this scenario, a donkey, both hungry and thirsty, is positioned between a pile of hay and a bucket of water. If one item is nearer, the donkey will naturally approach and consume that item first. But if both items are precisely equidistant, the donkey, lacking free will in the absence of compelling motivation, is caught eternally between the two, unable to choose. By contrast, Givens argues, humans do possess free will and thus are able to choose freely between two equally counterpoised alternatives—say, belief or doubt in the Book of Mormon's historicity. Not only are we *able* to choose belief, he continues, but we are providentially required to do so:

Freedom to choose belief and a life of faith, freedom to choose one's principles and abide by them, freedom to cherish one set of values over another, those kinds of freedom might best unfold when we are not commanded in all things, by God or by the facts. To be an agent unto oneself may very well require that we operate in the valley of incertitude.⁵

Recast in Lehi's libertarian terms, Givens argues that humans, endowed with moral agency, mentally act “for themselves” not only upon physical objects and agents but also upon *conceptual* alternatives: subject and object are sharply distinguished, with the choosing self acting upon opposed propositions as inert as piles of water and hay. He suggests that this radical incertitude is by intelligent design, that “God has structured our lives here on this Earth in such a way that, when it comes to those issues of eternal import, we have to be free to affirm or to deny” their truth.⁶ Givens thus extends Lehi's robust *moral* voluntarism to a *doxastic* voluntarism, and he places “issues of eternal import”—that is, spiritual truth claims—in a special epistemological category of permanent undecidability. This is a kind of “faith of the gaps”: where ordinary forms of knowledge and judgement produce no compelling conclusion, the resulting epistemological gap is filled by personal choice. This undecidability is not a bug but a feature, conferring a special status on the object of choice as the avatar of one's truest self: “What we choose to embrace, to be responsive to, is the purest reflection of who we are and what we love.”⁷ Chosen religious belief is a form of spiritual self-expression that can only unfold in a context of absolute epistemological freedom and subjective agency.

5. Terryl L. Givens and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections On the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2014), 32.

6. “Terryl Givens—An Approach to Thoughtful, Honest and Faithful Mormonism,” September 28, 2011, in *Mormon Stories*, produced by John Dehlin, podcast, <http://mormonstories.org/terryl-givens-an-approach-to-thoughtful-honest-and-faithful-mormonism/>.

7. Givens, “Lightning Out of Heaven,” 18.

I've thus laid out what I understand to be Givens's strong claim—namely, that the priority of agency in Mormon teaching underwrites the notion that belief itself is a choice—and the corollary to, or perhaps a rationale for, this claim—that the act of choice itself confers a special significance on religious belief. Acknowledging the persuasive power of these ideas and their usefulness in buttressing faith in a doubtful age, I'd nevertheless like to test them here. My basic contention is that Mormonism's ontological monism, which Givens lays out strikingly in *Wrestling the Angel*, calls into question two dualities implicit in the notion that belief is a choice. The first, the dichotomy between subject and object, structures the primary claim, while the second, the opposition between sacred and profane, structures the corollary. I'll briefly examine each, and then conclude with a reading of Alma 32 that offers an alternative vocabulary for faith, a vocabulary that incorporates agency but avoids the theological thicket of libertarian choice.

One of the achievements of *Wrestling the Angel* is the elegance and erudition with which it distills a Mormon cosmology. The first principle of this cosmology is what Givens calls "eternalism," Joseph's distinctive teachings that elements are eternal, uncreated, and unending, that spirit and element share in the same cosmic substance, and that both are enlivened by self-directing intelligences. From this eternalism flows a metaphysical monism, a cosmic materialism, and an irreducible principle of agency. Mormonism rewrites "dualism . . . as two-tiered monism (spirit as more refined matter)," resulting in a "thoroughgoing materialism [that gives] indelible definition to the Mormon theological landscape."⁸ Givens's synthesis of the early Mormon sources is not novel, but it is striking in its force. I am attracted by the radically unconventional ontology it describes: a welter of agents, particles, intelligence, change, force, action, and response.

Indeed, so attracted am I by the ontology Givens conveys that I am moved to reconsider his epistemology. It seems to me that the notion of faith as choice, as developed by Givens in the sources above, is incompatible in important ways with the material universe alive with self-directing element described in *Wrestling the Angel*. In particular, a "thoroughgoing Mormon monism" calls into question the sharp distinction between subject and object implicit in the Ass of Buridan scenario. In a typical Western metaphysics of radically distinct spirit and matter, the human subject, animated by the divine spark of the spirit, acts unilaterally upon inert material objects: hungry, I decide on tomato soup for lunch instead of tuna, and I take the can from the shelf. Spiritual objects act, material objects are acted upon. In a monistic Mormon metaphysics, however, these distinctions dissolve and all entities,

8. Givens, *Wrestling*, 43, 61.

material and spiritual, become agents. Where there is no metaphysics, only physics, and where the universe is composed of self-directing and self-existing elements, traditional boundaries between the active human subject and its inert, “objective” environment fall away. Mormon ontological monism gives rise to a teeming elemental pluralism. Joseph’s cosmology thus departs rather sharply from Lehi’s soteriological division of the universe into “things that act” and “things that are acted upon”: in the Mormon cosmos, all elements are always both subject *and* object, both actor and acted upon.

Returning to the Ass of Buridan, then, we can no longer assume that the would-be believer, prior to her choice, remains in a privileged state of pure subjecthood, uncompelled by the counterpoised objects of her contemplation until the moment of decision, entirely possessing her agency. In truth, we are all at every moment both subject and object, ourselves acting upon and being acted upon by other agents of every kind, including religious claims. At the very moment I might reach toward faith, doubt may reach toward me. Indeed, the very judgment that two alternatives—say the faith or doubt in the Book of Mormon—are equally counterpoised is itself thoroughly conditioned by a host of ideas, loyalties, rivalries, expectations, and dozens of other forces at work on us. In fairness, Givens understands this and acknowledges it forthrightly. In the encounter with faith and doubt, he writes, “we are acted upon . . . by appeals to our personal values, our yearnings, our fears, our appetites, and our egos.”⁹ It seems to me, though, that Givens does not go far enough in reckoning with the effect of these appeals on the choosing self. If elemental agency is real, then the human self is not static within the shell of subjecthood, but rather is constantly available for remodeling, subtle or drastic, by the objects that circulate around, within, and through it. At the very moment that we might exercise a kind of choice upon the alternative objects, those objects are themselves recruiting, enlisting, or, in Book of Mormon language, enticing and acting upon us. We are always already acted upon by our beliefs. Thus if the choice to believe is a reflection of the self, that self is in turn a partial reflection of the chosen belief. This is not to deny the existence or efficacy of human agency: the ways in which we are acted upon by other agents may compromise agency in some cases, but in others they surely facilitate it. On this account, agency is not possessed but borrowed, not confined in the self but merely concentrated in it, extending outward through the social and ideological networks that claim us.

Givens would, I am sure, be the first to acknowledge that the Ass of Buridan scenario is limited in its application to the question of faith and choice. Let me suggest an alternate analogy: the choice of spouse. The unfolding of

9. Givens, “Lightning Out of Heaven,” 18.

a relationship, through stages of tentative circling, euphoric approach, and sober commitment, engages the agency of both parties and reveals in clarity “who we are and what we love.” Yet the relationship is both less and more than a personal choice. I did not choose my husband unilaterally, nor did he choose me, because the responsiveness and desire of *both* parties constitutes the relationship. As we grew closer, we mutually influenced one another’s values and dreams, and “who we were and what we loved” changed. Nor was it only a question of two people: our relationship was inaugurated and shaped through the collaboration of many other entities, including our families’ views, our shared culture of courtship and marriage, and the social norms reinforced by our peers. The happy couple in the wedding photo came together not through personal choice, nor even through two compatible personal choices, but through a miraculous confluence of subject and object, agency and answer, actions and ideas. The process by which we embrace a spouse, I suggest, is substantially similar to the process by which we embrace belief. Belief is both much more and much less than a personal choice, even though it actively engages the agency and the self. Like a lover and her beloved, believer and belief mutually re-shape one another, and the resulting faith, if it grows, is, like marriage, far grander and more deeply rooted than individual choice.

I’d like now to briefly attend to Givens’s corollary: that religious claims are providentially designed to be undecidable in ordinary ways, precisely so that we must wager some of the self in the choice. On the one hand, this is a brilliant apologia for the lacunae in the evidence for LDS truth claims, one that makes sense and brings comfort to the newly doubting. On the other hand, it seems to me that if we take Mormon materialism seriously—if we accept the proposition that spirit is a more refined matter, and that the substance of the universe truly is an ontological whole—then we are not justified in carving out separate epistemological categories for “spiritual” and “factual” truth. The spiritual and the factual are not radically distinct but rather share in the unified cosmic substance. Indeed, as Givens himself observes in *People of Paradox*, Mormonism “sacralizes and exalts the mundane even as it naturalizes and domesticates the sacred”.¹⁰ This mixture of the ordinary and the spiritual in lived religion is foregrounded in Mormonism, but the implied ontology may be fruitfully extended to religious experience generally. Many if not most of the “issues of eternal import” in religion generally and Mormonism in particular make ordinary, confirmable, and confirmed claims on the human mind—claims that the observer does not choose to believe or disbelieve

10. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.

at will. For instance, Mormonism's claim that on June 27, 1844, Joseph and Hyrum were mobbed and shot while confined at Carthage Jail in Hancock County, in western Illinois is well attested; we do not choose whether or not to believe that Joseph died in this way. Yet this "unchosen" truth nevertheless enlists our emotions, loyalty, and behavior in important ways. Ordinary happenings, relationships, and truths, in other words, call us to faithfulness as powerfully—perhaps more powerfully—as undecidable open claims, because all truth belongs to the same ontological category. Spiritual choice is not a necessary precursor for religious truths to invoke a faithful response.

To conclude, I'd like to offer a slim reading of Alma 32 as a counterpoint to Lehi's starkly libertarian vision, one that lends itself more readily to questions of faith and belief. Alma 32 begins with the Zoramites being cast out of the synagogue, and thus, as they think, prevented from worshiping. The theme of displacement thus contextualizes the following sermon on faith. Alma responds that their expulsion is a blessing, because it has compelled them to be humble, but how much more blessed, he asks, would they be if they "truly humbled themselves," freely, without compulsion? Alma thus shares Lehi's concern with the question of freedom and compulsion, but unlike Lehi, Alma explicitly takes up the question of *doxastic* freedom. In verse 16, the sermon takes a sharp conceptual turn:

Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe.

By analogy, then, one would expect the argument about faith to go like this: there is a kind of coercion in being brought to know the word of God by compulsory epistemological means; how much more blessed are those who believe freely, without compulsion—we might go so far as to say *by choice*. It's surprising, then, that absolute epistemological freedom is not what Alma describes in his account of the experiment upon the word. Rather, when the seed begins to swell, Alma teaches, we will say, "It must needs be that this is a good seed." "It must needs be"—this interesting phrase is repeated four times in this passage, describing our mental response to the growth of the seed. It describes something that is neither outright epistemological compulsion nor a radical epistemological freedom, but a kind of necessity: "You must of necessity acknowledge that the seed is good." I suggest that this necessity captures the way in which we are acted upon by the given conditions of our experience—not immobilized in a deterministic framework, but mentally obligated in certain ways to the beliefs and perceptions that act upon us.

Alma thus offers a rather different account of belief than Lehi's stark "Ye are free to choose" between two absolute alternatives. We act upon our beliefs, yes, but our beliefs act upon us, as well: "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, *let this desire work in you*, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" (Alma 32: 27). It falls to us not to choose belief in the word, but simply to *give place* to the word. "Give place" is a resonant inversion of the Zoramites' *displacement* that inaugurates the narrative. Let your faith, desire, belief, perception work in you, Alma says, until "ye can give place for a portion of my words." We cannot choose faith autonomously. All we can do is save a place for it.

A few comments in conclusion. To remove religious belief from the domain of personal choice is also, I think, to remove it from the realm of culpability. If I am right, in other words, then to possess or fail to possess a particular belief is neither morally culpable nor creditable *in itself*. Yet the question of moral *responsibility* outstrips narrow questions of moral culpability. Regardless of whether we are culpable for our beliefs, we are responsible for stewarding our mental environment well, taking care in what we seek out, what we dwell on, and what we amplify. And we are responsible for the weightier matter of how our beliefs ripple outward into our care of the people and objects in our orbit. Nevertheless, mere belief in itself probably does not, according to my argument, assign individual moral merit or fault within an ethical system based on individual choice and accountability. This gives me real pause. I am persuaded by Terry's suggestion that shared certainty and a robust moral rhetoric of belief are a powerful fuel for the sense of community that is at the heart of LDS lived experience. That community is one of the greatest goods in my life, and I treasure it. I do worry that removing moral stigma from disbelief may weaken the social trust and solidarity that the Saints enjoy.

On the other hand, we find ourselves now in the midst of a "secular age," to borrow Charles Taylor's phrase. Structures of feeling and perception have shifted, and the question that burned in Joseph's mind, "which of all the sects was right," no longer compels the modern seeker. It may be that reframing questions of belief and disbelief, transcendence and immanence, choice and necessity, open up new horizons of engagement between Mormonism and the secular age. That's a promise worth pursuing.

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Terryl Givens Among Romantic Heterodox Theologians

by James M. McLachlan

I will start with sycophantic fan worship before highlighting what I hope to accomplish in my reflections on the theological contributions of Terryl and Fiona Givens. I'm examining primarily two of Terryl Givens's works, *When Souls Had Wings* and *Wrestling the Angel*.

I will make three points in my examination. The first two are largely appreciative of Givens's introduction of clarifications about the Mormon theological tradition that I believe are important: first, that Mormonism offers a kind of two-tiered monism, and second, that Givens's discussion of Satan's plan as not being primarily about coercion but rather the elimination of order and consequence from human choice. In short, Satan's plan was a total universalism wherein nothing one did ultimately mattered.

Finally, third (and my main point offered to help expand LDS understandings of lesser-known points of connection rather than as criticism of Givens's work) is that I believe Givens misses an important tradition about preexistence and the kind of monism he reserves for Mormonism. This tradition is important in some strands of Romanticism and stretches back to the Jewish Kabbalist Isaac Luria and the Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme. It is a personalist move and an important alternative to the kind of Neoplatonic ontology to which most of the Romantics returned in their reactions to the Enlightenment. This is important not simply as a critique of what Givens says about the history of the notion of preexistence in Western religious thought, but it is also important for understanding the kind of eschatology that Mormonism shares with other heterodox traditions. This eschatology

does away with the Platonic essentialism that makes the eternal world unchanging, and, instead, replaces it with creative dynamism.

Terryl Givens is perhaps the most interesting and influential Mormon theologian writing today. One thing that Givens accomplishes via his recent work is just that: helping to lead a return, especially as he turns outward to write to the scholarly community as well as his own LDS peers, to Mormon theology. Mormon theology, at least since the 1950s, has been pretty well consigned to Mormon philosophers and theologians engaging exclusively with other philosophers and theologians. And even among them there has seemed to be a desire to put theological speculation to rest. James Faulconer is famous among those of us who do Mormon philosophy and theology for saying that Mormonism is *atheological*—“without an official or even semi-official philosophy that gives rational support to [its] beliefs and teachings.”¹ This has been a fairly common view since at least the 1990s. I was once on a panel discussing William Chamberlin with Sterling McMurrin and Richard Sherlock, in which the latter asserted that Mormonism, like Judaism, is primarily concerned with orthopraxy—hence, it generally views theology as unimportant. While I agree with both Faulconer and Sherlock that for Mormons orthopraxis trumps (or at least *should* trump) orthodoxy, I contend that theology is still important. But let me also add that what Sherlock said about the Jewish tradition is, at best, only partially true, as it seems to deny the rich Jewish philosophical and theological tradition running from Philo, Judah Helevi, Saadia Ben Gaon, and Moses Maimonides on through Moses Mendelsohn, Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Abraham Heschel, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. Although orthopraxis may be more important than theology in Mormonism, Judaism, and Islam, each of these traditions has created vibrant speculative theologies. Givens has shown convincingly, especially in *Wrestling the Angel*, that theological speculation has been an important aspect of Mormonism for most of its history.

Givens is difficult to categorize. He doesn't quite fit the narrow, traditional roles of historian, literary critic, or theologian. He was trained in comparative literature at the University of North Carolina, and he teaches at the University of Richmond, where he is Bostwick Professor of English. His early work was on the theory of mimesis. But the key to understanding his approach is his early graduate studies at Cornell, where he studied Western intellectual history. Until *Wrestling the Angel*, I had considered him not so much a theologian as an historian of ideas in the tradition of Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873–1962) and his classic text, *The Great Chain of Being* (1936). *Wrestling*

1. Quoted in Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

the Angel is something new. In this book, Givens is still doing the kind of Lovejoyan history of ideas that he pursued in *When Souls Had Wings*, but here and in his joint-authored (with Fiona Givens) *The God that Weeps*, he is pursuing a historical theology—a dialogue with Mormon and Western theological traditions in which he uses early Mormon theologians to illuminate and help differentiate his own theological positions. The heterodox Russian Orthodox philosophical theologian Nicolas Berdyaev (1874–1948), who plays an important part in Givens’s *When Souls had Wings*, did theology in much the same way: a kind of dialogue with the great thinkers of the past. Historians often quibbled with Berdyaev’s readings of certain figures in the history of religious thought in the same way they do now with some of Givens’s readings of the history of both Christian and Mormon theology. (I was one of the quibblers with his reading of Berdyaev in *When Souls Had Wings*.) But these are just that: quibbles. It is what emerges in Givens’s dialogue with the past that is important. It is a Mormon theology that distinguishes Mormonism from the rest of the Christian theological tradition and roots itself in a rich tradition of Mormon theological speculation.² Part of what he is able to accomplish in *Wrestling the Angel* is re-appropriate the Mormon theological tradition, while at the same time show its fragility, its tentativeness, and, not least, its theology’s relation to other intellectual streams of its time. In this, Givens recovers theological streams within Christian tradition that have been, like Mormonism, branded heterodox, and he traces them from their roots in Hebrew scriptures, pseudopigrapha, by early Christian philosophers such as Origen (one of his particular favorites), mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Julian of Norwich, on through the Cambridge Platonists, theological rebels like Edward Beecher, and eccentrics like Thomas Dick. Givens show us how Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, the Pratt brothers, James E. Talmage, B. H. Roberts, and John A. Widstoe experimented and speculated boldly about a variety of ideas that either did or did not become standard LDS doctrines. He shows us how other ideas became standard only to be later dropped as “accepted” elements of church doctrine.³ Givens makes a point that Smith borrowed freely from the ideas circulating during his time, “freely mingled oracular pronouncements with vigorous speculation,” and lamented that, be-

2. James McLachlan, “Pre-Mortal Existence and the Problem of Suffering: Terryl Givens and the Heterodox Traditions,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47, no 3 (Fall 2014): 121–45.

3. Brigham Young’s Adam-God doctrine was perhaps the most famous of these dropped doctrines, but there were also other policies that were later dropped, such as the practice of sealing adoptions.

cause of the expectations of his people that his every word was doctrine, he had lost the right of free speech.⁴

One of Givens's accomplishments not only in *Wrestling the Angel* but also in *When Souls Had Wings* has been to set Mormonism in its context within the history of ideas, and, in doing so, to point to the similarities as well as the uniqueness of certain Mormon doctrines when considered alongside that larger unfolding history. He admires the Romantics, and some of his early work is on Romanticism.⁵ He sees that the dynamism of the age of Romanticism is a part of Smith's cosmology. Allusions to Romantic poets, especially the English and American Romantics like Blake, Byron, and Emerson, are sprinkled throughout *Wrestling the Angel*, and Givens sees Joseph Smith as a child of this time:

If there was one prevailing sense in which Joseph Smith was a child of his age, it was in the avidity with which he reflected this dynamic, fundamentally Romantic view of the world, an orientation that suffused his cosmology, his human anthropology, and even his doctrine of deity.⁶

Givens sees Smith as closer in temperament and thought to Emerson and Whitman than to Alexander Campbell and other leading voices of the restoration movements of nineteenth-century American Christianity. Smith, like these Romantics, saw a dynamism in religion that was not simply the restoration of ideal principles that have been lost but also the dynamism of new revelation, new scripture:

But in essential ways, Smith had more in common with the secular apostles Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson than with a [Barton W.] Stone or [Joseph] Campbell. As David Holland has recently demonstrated, Smith was one of many American religious figures who resisted the strictures of a closed canon; he just happened to be more successful than most in creating "a Bible with the back cover torn off."⁷

In making this claim, Givens is referring to things such as a dialogical relation to deity, and eventually the dead—ideas which entail that revelation is an ongoing back and forth between the divine and the human, both of whom are parts of a single ontological reality. This is at the heart of Givens's claim that Mormonism gives us a two-tiered monism, not the monistic dualism of traditional theology.

4. Givens, *Wrestling*, 19.

5. Terryl Givens, "Adjectives of Mystery and Splendor': Byron and Romantic Religiosity," in *Recent Perspectives on European Romanticism*, ed. Larry Peer (Lewiston, NY: Mellon Press, 2002); and Terryl Givens and Anthony Russell, "Romantic Agonies: Human Suffering and the Ethical Sublime," in *Romanticism Across the Disciplines*, ed. Larry Peer (New York: University Press of America, 1998).

6. Givens, *Wrestling*, 52.

7. Givens, *Wrestling*, 30–31.

A TWO-TIERED MONISM

The term “monistic dualism” sounds like an oxymoron. We often think of Christian theism as a form of dualism, with a radical distinction between God and the world. We think of Advaita Vedantan Hinduism as a monism in which there is only one reality, one real Being, Nirguna Brahman. Or there is Spinoza’s monism, in which all individuals are simply manifestations of one substance containing infinite modes, of which mind and body are but two. But creedal Christians are quick to point out that the type of dualism in Christian theism is not a Manichean dualism in which both parties, in this case God and the world, possess an equal Being. God *is* Being. The world is derivative, finding its being only through God. Charles Hartshorne pointed out years ago that there is very little difference between a pantheistic non-dualism in Advaita Vedanta in which the world is illusion (*maya*) and completely dependent on Being (*Nirguna Brahman*) and an ontological dualism that claims the world has no reality “in itself” but is completely dependent on a God for its being. After all, just as in Advaita Vedantan Hinduism, the world does not actually “affect” the Christian God in His being, as He is perfect and unchanging.⁸ Givens claims that Mormonism proposes something different. Mormonism’s two-tiered monism emphasizes the unity of the world with God and also that the world and other persons genuinely affect the Divine. This is quite different from the way many Mormons, at least since McMurrin, have prided themselves as being ontologically materialists and pluralists. Givens’s description of Mormonism as a two-tiered monism is an interesting, and I believe vital, alternative.

A graded monism erases the radical ontological divide between matter and spirit as well as between the divine and the human. There is no dead stuff in the universe; all is dynamic matter. Matter and spirit are two aspects of the same reality. In this, Givens returns us to the nineteenth-century Mormon insistence on the eternity of laws: “Dualism is rewritten as two-tiered monism (spirit as more refined matter), and laws are themselves as eternal as God.”⁹ He quotes Joseph Smith on elevation of matter as God organizes the world from chaos: “Hence we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had.”¹⁰ God is the supreme intelligence in the universe, but he is not the source of all being, or even

8. Charles Hartshorne and William Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

9. Givens, *Wrestling*, 44.

10. Givens, *Wrestling*, 60.

the creator of that which constitutes the human soul.¹¹ As the 1833 revelation that became Doctrine and Covenants 93 puts it, “The elements are eternal”; humanity, as spirit or intelligence, was also “in the beginning with God”; and such intelligence “was not created or made, neither indeed can be.”¹²

Givens asserts that while Paul elevates the spirit over the flesh, Smith celebrated the relation between the two. He cites the King Follett discourse, which he sees not as new innovation in Smith’s thought but rather as an elaboration of themes already present from the beginning in the dynamism of 2 Nephi 2’s “opposition in all things” and Section 93, mentioned above. In the Abrahamic writings Smith produced, even the most fundamental forms of matter exhibit intelligence:

Further evidence that Mormonism had erased materiality’s inferior or subordinate status came in Smith’s Abrahamic writings, the first of which he produced in 1835. In Smith’s revised account of creation, the Gods utter their commands and then “watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed.” The Pratts took this to mean that the elements in their most fundamental aspect exhibit a degree of intelligence, or agency, and are therefore responsive to the Divine Will. Orson Pratt held that “an unintelligent particle is incapable of understanding or obeying a law, while an intelligent particle is capable of both understanding and obedience. It would be entirely useless for an Intelligent Cause to give laws to unintelligent matter.”¹³

Givens notes that this kind of Romantic dynamic monism is continued by Brigham Young, who claims “there is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities; it is in the rock, the sand, the dust, in water, air, the gases, and in short, in every description and organization of matter, whether it be solid, liquid, or gaseous, particle operating with particle.”¹⁴

Eternity ceases to be an escape to the ideal, changeless world, because eternity becomes endless time, endless dynamism. This will lead to radically different understandings of both the problem of evil and eschatology. The purpose of creation is not to escape time and return to pre-lapsarian perfection in God’s timeless eternity but to move forward to something *better* than the beginning of things. Mormonism has broken radically from the Christian tradition that it claims had broken from an original Christianity.

According to Augustine, if we study well and pray well, we will have a vision of beauty that will answer all our questions about suffering. We see the eternal, changeless perfection of God’s universe, wherein God is the ultimate artist. Augustine’s aesthetic solution to the problem of suffering is based on a

11. Givens, *Wrestling*, 45.

12. Givens, *Wrestling*, 53.

13. Givens, *Wrestling*, 60.

14. Givens, *Wrestling*, 60.

Christian Platonist view of being and its ultimate perfection. He saw this as a great harmony that brings together light and dark, and high and low elements in such a way that from the Divine point of view there is no evil; all suffering is a part of God's plan:

To thee there is no such thing as evil, and even in thy whole creation taken as a whole, there is not; because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which thou hast appointed for it. But in the parts of creation, some things, because they do not harmonize with others, are considered evil. Yet, those same things harmonize with others and are good, and in themselves are good. . . . I no longer desired a better world, because my thoughts ranged over all, and with sounder judgment I reflected that the things above were better than those below, yet that all creation together was better than the higher things alone.¹⁵

When we obtain this vision, we will see that just as a beautiful painting must contain contrasts of light and darkness, so must God's masterwork. The whole harmonizes all its parts. If we happen to be a criminal or an infidel, or even if we happen to be Judas Iscariot and burn in Hell eternally, we have performed our part in the divine plan, which, in its entirety, is beautiful and good. We hear this idea echoing down the centuries when someone says, after some tremendous tragedy, "It's all part of God's Eternal plan." This refrain claims that all we need to do is adjust ourselves to the eternal perfections, and then our experience of earthly injustice, no matter how great, will fade to insignificance as we take the "eternal perspective":

But when the soul has properly adjusted and disposed itself, and has rendered itself harmonious and beautiful, then will it venture to see God, the very source of all truth and the very Father of Truth. O Great God, What kind of eyes shall those be! How pure! How beautiful! How powerful! How constant! How serene!" . . . to us is promised a vision of beauty—the beauty of whose imitation all other things are beautiful, and by comparison which all other things are unsightly, Whosoever will have glimpsed this beauty, . . . how will it ever trouble him why one man, desiring to have children, has them not, while another man casts out his own offspring as being unduly numerous; why one man hates children before they are born, and another man loves them after birth.¹⁶

The ideal that a changeless, impersonal being is the highest perfection is Platonic. In Book 2 of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates explained to Glaucon and Adeimantus that stories about Zeus transforming himself in various forms in order to better seduce mortal women cannot be the highest idea of God, for

15. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7:13.

16. Augustine, *De Ordine*, in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, ed. Albert Hofstadter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 184.

something that must transform or change cannot be perfect, because to be perfect and to change would be to become less perfect. Socrates tells them, “Then it is impossible that God should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every god remains absolutely and for ever in his own form.”¹⁷

The Platonic conception of the changeless ideal as the real is the heart of Augustine’s aesthetic solution to the problem of evil. The Platonic ideal places Being above all else. Is-ness is the criterion of truth and righteousness. Being and principles, which are eternal, are more important than persons, who are temporal and changing. God, who may be a person but an eternal unchanging one, from eternity, sees the whole outside of time and space and sees that it is all good; the light and the darkness together complete the beauty of the composition. As Plotinus put it, “We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colours are not beautiful everywhere in the picture: but the Artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot.”¹⁸ Plato’s notion of perfection is presented in his discourse on love and beauty, *The Symposium*, where we climb the great chain of being away from the changing things of this world to the beatific vision of beauty which is eternal, unchanging, and One.¹⁹ From this point of view, what happens here in the vale of tears and suffering pales to insignificance.

Givens clearly rejects this kind of theodicy. In “Romantic Agonies: Human Suffering and the Ethical Sublime” that analyzes Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* and Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, Givens and co-author, Anthony Russell, apply the Kantian ethical sublime to Shelley and Wordsworth. Wordsworth’s last line in *The Excursion*, “and I walked along my road in happiness,” points to a resolution of the suffering encountered in the narrative.²⁰ Wordsworth’s wanderer attempts to escape the horror of Margaret’s tragic decline into misery through the romantic beauty of the story as with the romantic beauty of the ruins within a wild nature. Givens and Russell write that the aesthetization of the scene of Margaret’s misery is necessary to the enjoyment and happiness *we* feel. Beauty anesthetizes the suffering of another person, Margaret. Immanuel Kant said that the sublime is only enjoyable when we know we are safe and that the sublime is not the beautiful. Unlike

17. Plato, *Republic*, 381c, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 2, trans. B Jowett, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 30–31.

18. Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page, *Internet Sacred Texts Archive*, accessed August 7, 2017, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn197.htm>.

19. Plato, *The Symposium* in *The Works of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: The Dial Press, 1936), 342–43.

20. Givens and Russell, “Romantic Agonies,” 234–35.

the beautiful that requires form, the sublime shatters formal arrangements. In the experience of the beautiful, if we have a sense of the harmony of things, we can understand them. The sublime shatters these categories. Givens and Russell rightly see that Wordsworth's own use of the term "sublime" in the poem is not Kantian. It points toward beauty and beauty's sense of form and order that implies happiness. For Kant, beauty requires a kind of formality that he calls purposiveness. In this sense, the beautiful is a kind of theodicy: our hope that there is an order to nature. Our sense of beauty points toward happiness and order, while the encounter with the sublime shatters order and requires us to rethink all this. The sublime for Kant is either mathematical or dynamical, and both become important in post-Kantian romanticism and idealism. The mathematical sublime shatters our categories because it is simply infinitely large beyond anything that can be thought or captured in the categories of thought.²¹ There can be no Platonic Form of the sublime. Nature may be beautiful, but it is powerful and seemingly indifferent. Thus the sublime seems to point toward the absence of theodicy because it shatters the happy endings we create and forces us to confront the dynamic misery before us.²² And yet it is through this indifference of nature that humanity can recognize its freedom from nature. Nature may crush us but our superiority to nature is to know that we are being crushed. Givens and Russell quote the following passage from *Critique of Judgment*:

In the same way, though the irresistibility of nature's might makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical impotence, it reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different in kind from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us. This keeps the humanity in our person from being degraded, even though a human being would have to succumb to that dominance [of nature]. Hence if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength (which does not belong to nature [within us]), to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life, and because of this we regard nature's might (to which we are indeed subjected in these [natural] concerns) as yet not having such dominance over us, as persons, that we should have to bow to it if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between upholding or abandoning them. Hence nature is here called sublime [*erhaben*] merely because it elevates [*erhebt*] our imagination, [making] it exhibit those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature.²³

21. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar and Mary J. Gregor (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011).

22. Givens and Russell, "Romantic Agonies," 240.

23. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 262–63.

So how does this relate to Mormonism? Smith is similar to the Romantics in how he elevates the human to divine status. Smith's idea of eternity as endless time may sound much less sophisticated than an "eternal now" of Plato, but it seems to echo the experience of Kant's dynamic sublime. As Givens puts it, "Eternity was simply time 'without beginning of days or end of years,' or, as he emphasized later, 'Eternity means that which is without beginning or end.'"²⁴ Such an idea of eternity as endless time that included nature, the divine, and the human led to Young's assertions that even the Gods advance in knowledge, as they are affected by and interact with the world(s). Young claimed that "there never will be a time to all eternity when all the God[s] of Eternity will cease advancing in power knowledge experience & Glory for if this was the case Eternity would cease to be & the glory of God would come to an End but all of celestial beings will continue to advance in knowledge & power worlds without end."²⁵ Young's view of the universe resembles certain Romantic views: creation is a dynamic and unending perfection as opposed to an eternal changeless one. The problem of evil changes its nature in such a view. In the Platonic/Augustinian view, any change is a deviation from the ideal. Change is the original sin. In their conception, evil ends with the return to the pre-lapsarian ideal. The issue with this solution to the problem of evil is that nothing that happens in the world has any weight on the perfection of God.²⁶

SATAN, THE SUBLIME, AND THE WAR IN HEAVEN.

Givens's discussion of the War in Heaven and how nineteenth-century Mormons looked at the problem is illuminating. He argues convincingly that early Mormons regarded the story of Satan and his plan as a proposition in which actions would have no consequences, making the world a chaos. This is quite different from the typical contemporary reading in which Satan's plan was merely to coerce humanity back to heaven (and to, of course, receive great glory through effecting this result). Givens describes this common version of the story as Satan wanting to "force" people to be righteous or to keep the commandments. He suggests that the expression "sought to destroy the agency of man" has, in today's parlance, become equated with a strategy of compelling human beings to do the right thing. And he comments that it's hard to see how this would have been appealing to the heavenly hosts. He argues there are "more subtle and sophisticated ways to "destroy

24. Givens, *Wrestling*, 99.

25. Givens, *Wrestling*, 99.

26. There is of course a wide literature on the Problem of Evil. For the Mormon view that I believe differs radically from the Augustinian tradition, see James M. McLachlan, "The Problem of Evil" in *Oxford Handbook on Mormonism*, ed. Philip Barlow and Terryl Givens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

the agency” referred to in the scriptural passage—principal among them being simple tampering with the consequences of choice.”²⁷ Lucifer, in Givens’s view, is a total universalist. All would be saved regardless of what they do. This is a denial of law, which would create a total chaos. Choice becomes meaningless since there is no responsibility for any choice, as the result would be the same. Givens’s reading of Satan’s plan makes sense in relation to passages in the Book of Mormon where Nehor and Zeezrom claim that “all mankind should be saved in the last day” and that God will save people “in their sins” or that “mercy cannot rob justice.”²⁸ Besides the Book of Mormon, Givens cites a considerable amount of evidence from W. W. Phelps, Orson Pratt, George Q. Cannon, and more recently J. Reuben Clark in support of the understanding that Satan would not coerce all to be good but rather would be “saving men in their sins.”²⁹

What is important in this discussion for what will follow is the idea in the Mormon narrative of creation and the council of Gods that laid down the “foundation of the world” is the idea that that foundation was created by “the gods,” organized out of some sort of preexisting chaos both in nature and in humanity. The discussion of the foundation of the world and priesthood in Alma 13 points to this setting-up of order. God ordained priests to teach the people commandments that they would be free and responsible agents. In verse 3 these priests are called from “the foundation of the world.” Foundation here is important. The world comes into existence from chaos with the establishment of laws and commandments. In discussing the preexistence, Orson Pratt asserted

27. Givens, *Wrestling*, 132.

28. Givens, *Wrestling*, 133.

29. Givens, *Wrestling*, 134. While I agree with what Givens says here, I think coercion still plays a role in the explanation of Satan’s fall. Though I have little time to fully explain it here, the key is in the Romantic notions of the two wills of existence found in Jacob Boehme and the German Romantic F. W. J. Schelling. Schelling describes these as the “will of the ground” and the “will to love.” In the first, the individual asserts his individuality, differentiating himself from the whole. This “freedom from” allows the individual to be as an individual but with her or his being pushed to the extreme results in total isolation from others. As personified in Satan, it is the desire to control, to set oneself off as independent from all others, as the ground of his own being. In the second, the will to love is pushed to extreme results in the kind of chaos Givens describes as there being no consequences to any action. The self dissolves in the totality, and relation to others is again lost. God and Christ represent a balance between mercy and justice that is non-coercive and enables the freedom of the Other. F. W. J. von Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

that to be a person and not a machine is to be responsible in relation to order.³⁰ The foundation of the world is not dictated; rather, it is decided in council as persons become persons by choosing a first estate, an order.

Governance by council is patterned on the cosmo-vision of the whole of reality as the work of a council of divine beings in cooperation. Joseph Smith explained, "Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council."³¹ Thus the Priesthood Councils on earth are a microcosm of the Grand Priesthood Councils of Eternity, and the order of the earth is in the image of the Councils of Heaven. Law and order, unless refused, permeate the entire creation through cooperation (D&C 88:34–37).

John Brooke, who argues for a Hermetic and heterodox reading of early Mormonism, sees the Book of Mormon passage about priesthood as another affirmation of the association of priesthood and councils. Alma 13:1–19 is important not only in the development of the idea of priesthood but also God as finite, and related to other divine beings in a divine council.³² These priests were "ordained" or "fore-ordained" from the foundation of the world to a "high priesthood" that is "without beginning or end." Just as with gods, so it was with priests; Mormonism gives us as many as the sands of the sea. Unlike the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews that singles out Christ and Melchizedek alone for becoming priests, the Book of Mormon states, "There were many before [Melchizedek], and also there were many afterwards" (Alma 13:19). Joseph Smith retranslated Hebrews 7 to read, "All those who are ordained unto this priesthood become like unto the Son of God; abiding a priest continually" (Heb. 7:3 JST). Where John L. Brooke saw this as a link to Hermeticism, Harold Bloom argues a link to the Jewish Theurgy. Though both are possible historically, I think it would be more important to note the theological similarities and notice the resources for Mormon theology that stem from these traditions and particularly the kinds of personalist theologies that developed from them later.

30. Orson Pratt, "The Pre-existence of Man," *The Seer* 1, no. 4 (April 1853): 52–53.

31. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1938), 365.

32. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

HETERODOX PERSONALISM AND THE CIRCUITOUS JOURNEY: LURIA, BOEHME, SCHELLING, BERDYAEV

I've argued elsewhere that in his masterful *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought*, Givens misses a very important eschatological point about certain heterodox portions of Jewish and Christian traditions. I will argue that the reason for this is that there lingers in Givens's thought, and in many (though not all) Romantics and Mormons, a basic Neoplatonism that remains committed to eternal, unchanging, impersonal ideals. There is a tension in a good deal of Mormon thought between the new and the ancient, between progression and creativity and the restoration of an ideal order.

In the Jewish mystical tradition, Lurianic Kabbalism posits the creation as the result of a crisis in the heart of the absolute. Creation happens to correct that problem. Opposed to traditional theistic notions that start with a changeless and self-sufficient Deity, in Lurianic Kabbalism, God *with* the World adds to God and is thus greater than God alone. This pattern is picked up in the German Mystic Jacob Boehme, and later in his romantic, personalist, and existentialist followers, F. W. J. Schelling and Nicolai Berdyaev, among others. I think this tradition is closer to a type of tiered monism that Givens describes among Mormons. It erases the distinction that Platonist traditions have made between time, change, and matter on one side, and a changeless and immaterial eternity on the other.

While I greatly admire what Givens does in *When Souls Had Wings* as he recounts the history of ideas about preexistence, I believe that in one instance in particular during his discussion of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinking about ideas of preexistence, the Fall, and original sin, he overplays the differences. I disagree with Givens's readings particularly of the three thinkers Boehme, Schelling, and Berdyaev, and the exclusion of the importance of Jewish Kabbalism for heterodox, non-Platonist doctrines of preexistence. Givens platonizes the Boehmian tradition when he folds it into the larger tradition of preexistence in which the preexisting human soul falls into time from timeless eternity, and in which God, in His perfection, is exempt from the trials of change and evolution. Luria, Boehme, Schelling, and Berdyaev provide us with a different interpretation of preexistence not present in the Platonic strain of preexistence ideas that Givens places on center stage in *When Souls Had Wings*.³³

What Givens doesn't seem to see is the import of the personalist move in this tradition. This is what distinguishes this kind of personalism from Neoplatonic ideas of preexistence. The irony here is that one of Givens's in-

33. Terryl Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

fluences, the founder of the history of ideas, Arthur O. Lovejoy, was also a personalist. Lovejoy notes the distinction in his classic work, *The Great Chain of Being*.³⁴

Whereas Plato sees the world as a dim material reflection of timeless perfect eternity, Luria, Boehme, Schelling, and Berdyaev see a God creating Him- or Herself in relation to the world. While Platonic thinkers such as Philo, Origen, and the Cambridge Platonists tell a positive story of the Fall and see the perfection of humanity through its pilgrimage in the world, the four thinkers I'm highlighting also include God in this pilgrimage. This is ultimately a distinction between a notion of divine perfection that is eternal in the sense of being changeless, and an evolutionary idea of divine perfection. One can capture the distinction in the question "Is God (the Divine) *with* the world greater than God (the Divine) alone?" The way we think about this affects a good deal of the way we think about religion and how we explain suffering in a world created by a just and compassionate Deity. And, as Givens rightly notes, such a view of preexistence affects how we see the divine and human projects. Mormonism emphasizes the development of human beings into divine beings. This is the joy of embodiment. The Fall has very positive elements. Life is not simply the project through which—whether through human effort, intellec-

34. Lovejoy refers to this difference by placing it in the pantheism controversy fought out by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Schelling in 1812 when Jacobi, Schelling's one-time inspiration, became his sharp adversary. Jacobi reacted against Schelling's evolutionary ideal of the person and God, arguing that the creator was perfect and could not evolve. This evoked an impassioned and angry response from Schelling, who claimed that if one held that the more perfected preexisted eternally as pure act and not as potential, then it would have never created a world with all its suffering and frustration in the first place.

[This] is difficult for many reasons, but first of all for the very simple one that, if it were in actual possession of the highest perfection [or completeness], it would have had no reason (*Grund*) for the creation and production of so many other things, through which it—being incapable of attaining a higher degree of perfection—could only fall to a lower one.

Schelling continues that God is not what God was at the beginning, God as the Omega is more than God as Alpha, and God plus the World is greater than God alone:

I posit God as the first and the last, as the Alpha and the Omega; but as Alpha he is not what he is as Omega, and in so far as he is only the one—God "in an eminent sense"—he can not be the other God, in the same sense, or, in strictness, be called God. For in that case, let it be expressly said, the unevolved (*unentfaltete*) God, *Deus implicitus*, would already be what as Omega, the *Deus explicitus* is.

See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 32, 325.

tual understanding, or divine grace—we are able to return to a static perfection. It is instead the creation of deeper ties of love and sociality.

It is difficult to see where this tradition begins. Following Berdyaev and Schelling, I have thought that it originated with Jacob Boehme, but its origins may be in Lurianic Kabbalism. The Lurianic tradition differs from other forms of Kabbalism and Christian Kabbalah, which are closer to Neo-Platonic emanationism.

Isaac Luria (also called Ari, “the Lion,” 1534–1572) posited a crisis within the Absolute. The most innovative concept that lies at the heart of Luria’s teachings is the imperfection of beginning. Existence does not begin with a perfect Creator bringing into being an imperfect universe; rather, the existence of the universe is the result of an inherent flaw or crisis within the infinite Godhead, and the purpose of creation is to correct it.

The initial stage in the emergence of existence is described by the Lurianic myth as a negative one: the withdrawal of the infinite divine *ein sof* from a certain “place” in order to bring about “empty space” in which the process of creation could proceed. The Lurianic mystics called this process *zimzum* (constriction). Here, however, it is not constriction into a space, but withdrawal from a space, creating what Luria called, in Aramaic, *tehiru* (emptiness). Into this empty region a line of divine light began to shine, gradually taking the shape of the structure of the divine emanations, the *sefirot*.

It is evident that Luria conceived the eternal, infinite Godhead that preceded these processes to be imperfect, with the origins of evil deeply embedded in it in a potential manner. It is very rare that theologians and mystics view the origins of evil as divine and eternal. The dualism presented here has nothing to do with humanity and its sinfulness, because evil existed long before they came to be. Existence—even divine existence—is not the source of evil; rather, everything was emanated and created within the framework of divine attempts to rid itself from this dualism and bring about, for the first time, divine perfection and unity. According to the Lurianic worldview, existence is derived only from the good divine light; nothing can exist for even a moment without deriving its power from a good divine source.

Tikkun (“mending” or “uniting”) points to the cosmic role of humans. By keeping the Commandments of Torah and by adherence (*devequt*) to the body of Torah through strict intention (*kawwanah*), the mystic helps mend the world. Only after the *tikkun* is achieved will the Creator’s position be recognized, and he will be crowned the King of the Universe. Thus God is in important ways affected by the actions of humanity in mending the world.³⁵

35. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Boston: Schocken, 1996), 244–86.

Most of the Christian Kabbalah is Neoplatonic. It is possible to interpret the Zohar and Kabbalistic traditions before Luria in a Neoplatonic fashion, and this is certainly what Pico Della Mirandella, Marcello Ficino, and almost all others in the tradition of Christian Kabbalism do. However, ideas of initial crisis and development like those of the Lurianic Kabbalah show up in Boehme and the romantic traditions that appropriated him, particularly Schelling and Hegel.³⁶

As Nicolas Berdyaev pointed out long ago, Boehme is an exception in the Christian tradition. Much of the secondary work on Boehme has acknowledged the similarity between Luria and Boehme (Robert Brown, Gershom Scholem, and others). The idea of God's contraction of Himself prior to expansion outward is also an important element of Boehmean mysticism. The similarities between Boehmean theosophy and the Kabbalah have been noted by the great scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem.³⁷ It may even be that Boehme met with a Lurianic Rabbi.³⁸

36. Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85–86.

37. Alexandre Koyre, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968); Robert Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Jacob Boehme on the Works of 1809–1815* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1977), 52–64. Gershom Scholem argued that Boehme has the greatest affinity to Kabbalism among Christian mystics:

The great theosophist Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), the shoemaker of Goerlitz whose thoughts exercised so great an influence on many Christian mystics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in Germany, Holland and England. Boehme's doctrine of the origins of evil, which created such a stir, indeed bears all the traits of Kabbalistic thought. He, too, defines evil as a dark and negative principle of wrath in God, albeit eternally transfigured into light in the theosophical organism of divine life. In general if one abstracts from the Christian metaphors in which he tried, in part at least, to express his intuitions, Boehme, more than any other Christian mystic, shows the closest affinity to Kabbalism precisely where he is most original.

Scholem, *Major Trends*, 237. Boehme may have actually thought about his relation to the Kabbalah. We have this from a third hand account from the pietist F.C. Oetinger:

F. C. Oetinger, one of the later followers of Boehme, relates in his autobiography that in his youth he asked the Kabbalist Koppel Hecht in Frankfort-on-Main (died 1729) how he might best gain an understanding of Kabbalism, and that Hecht referred him to a Christian author who, he said, spoke of Kabbalism more openly than the Zohar. "I asked him which he meant, and he replied: Jacob Boehme, and also told me of the parallels between his metaphors and those of the Kabbalah."

Scholem, *Major Trends*, 238.

38. Boehme biographer Andrew Weeks speculates that Boehme may have met with

Givens sees the most important influence on the seventeenth-century German mystic Boehme as Neoplatonism.³⁹ But Boehme cannot be melted neatly into the Platonic fold on questions of preexistence. Doing so is to miss an important development in the history of philosophy that will not come into full fruition until Schelling and Hegel. This is not to say that Givens completely misunderstands Boehme, only that he underestimates his radical departure from the Neoplatonic tradition. He quotes Nicolas Berdyaev's study on Jacob Boehme's idea of the *Ungrund* that appeared as the introduction to the 1930s French edition of Boehme's monumental commentary on the Book of Genesis, *Mysterium Magnum*. In it, Berdyaev interprets Boehme's seminal doctrine of the *Ungrund* as the pre-ontological abyss. It is prior to being, but it's important to understand that it is not a perfection at the basis of the universe. Rather, closer to the Kantian Sublime, it is a chaos that entails a primordial freedom, and it is this freedom that is the source of the possibility of good and evil.

The mysterious teaching of Boehme about the *Ungrund*, about the abyss, without foundation, dark and irrational, prior to being, is an attempt to provide an answer to the basic question of all questions, the question concerning the origin of the world and the arising of evil. The whole teaching of Boehme about the *Ungrund* is so interwoven with the teaching concerning freedom, that it is impossible to separate them, for this is all part and parcel of the same teaching. And I am inclined to interpret the *Ungrund* as a primordial freedom . . . indeterminate even by God.⁴⁰

Boehme's and Berdyaev's understanding of the primordial abyss is that it is the source of being, primordial freedom that precedes being. What Givens seems to misunderstand, or perhaps to underestimate, is how this is a break from Neo-Platonism, which sees the One or the Absolute as Being itself, absolute and perfect. Here the potential of the sublime primordial chaos precedes the establishment of order. For Boehme, the abyss is the absolute, the One, but it is the chaos of freedom that is not yet Being. Both Platonism and Neoplatonism in all their forms seek to return to the perfection of pre-existing Being. For Boehme and Berdyaev, on the other hand, the abyss, *the*

a Lurianic Rabbi Low who visited Gorlitz the year of Boehme's revelation. This could have been Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezaiel the Maharal of Prague (1529–1609), an important Lurianic teacher. Andrew Weeks, *Boehme, An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century German Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 102ff.

39. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings*, 145.

40. Nicholas Berdyaev, "Deux études sur Jacob Boehme," in Jacob Boehme, *Mystérium Magnum*, Tome I (Paris: Aubier, 1945), 39, quoted in Givens, *When Souls Had Wings*, 146.

Ungrund, is only the chaotic freedom that is logically prior to creation, the desire for creation, the desire of nothing to become something. This is radically different from Platonism and its Christian, Jewish, and Islamic manifestations. However, there is yet a second and even more radical element in Boehme and Berdyaev. This kind of chaos, this non-rational given, is also in God; thus God too must develop, must evolve.

The Absolute is impersonal. The *Ungrund* itself is envisioned as the undifferentiated abyss of non-being that precedes Being, the primordial realm of origination. It is the nothing that is also everything—potentiality without form. Boehme also called it *Wonne*, or bliss. But at a deeper level, the *Ungrund* is not or cannot be characterized at all, except as the “*ewiges Kontrarium*,” the eternal opposition. It precedes the foundation of the world.

I think this idea of a pre-rational chaos at the basis of everything, even God, is critical to Mormon understanding of freedom as well. For example, one can read the famous discussion of the source of suffering and joy in the opposition of all things from 2 Nephi 2 to reflect a movement from the unity of the primal chaos before God’s creative acts, to an alienated, conflictual multiplicity of this world, and finally to a freely chosen conscious unity in multiplicity (or sociality) of love in both this world and the world to come.⁴¹ The problem with the eternal bliss of the One is that it is dead. Thus, although it may be unified, it is not something to which one would want to return. One

41. 2 Nephi 2 shows how clearly the plurality of the world, with all its conflict, is superior to the serenity of the One:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. *Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.* Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God. . . . And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth. . . . And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. . . . Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. (vv. 11–12, 19, 22–23, 25; emphases added)

finds joy in relation with others, in sociality that only comes after the Fall (2 Ne. 2:25, D&C 130:1–2). The beginning, in the absolute, is pure undetermined will; this gives Boehme’s thinking a voluntaristic character that is new in Western thought. As in 2 Nephi 2:27, agency precedes order and freedom. One chooses freedom or bondage by choosing for or against the moral law set up at the foundation of the world. The personalist move here is that the moral law is founded on the existence of others, independent persons, who because they can make choices are worthy of our respect and love. Choice and law comes into existence in relation to others. They are not eternal, unchanging deals. Persons are the source of all reality. Even God must respect this, and for this reason universalism, a hallmark of Origen’s Platonic ideal of preexistence, is rejected as Satan’s plan because it robs humanity of its freedom and responsibility.

In his conclusion to *The Great Chain of Being*, Lovejoy claims that Schelling presents an evolutionary theology that at last turned the Platonic scheme of the universe upside down. It is a view in which even God is affected by time and relation and in which even the Ideal Person develops or “is alive.” This notion militates against the “devolutionist” metaphysics of Plato and Plotinus that was Christianized by Augustine and Origen.⁴²

Schelling followed Boehme in the important idea that God had to be a person. He goes as far as saying that we must think of God in anthropomorphic terms. This is a crucial difference between Boehme and Schelling, on the one hand, and the Platonists, like Origen, on the other. Boehme and Schelling see an evolution in God and, even more radically, see this evolution as an advance from the primal One, the absolute unity. The key intuition is that God is a person.⁴³ To be a person is to be in some sense finite, to be

42. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 32.

43. Schelling recognized this difference when he set Boehme off from the rest of the Western esoteric tradition:

One must, of course, distinguish Jacob Boehme, in whom everything is still pure and original, from another class of mystics, in whom everything is already corrupt; the well know Saint Martin particularly belongs in this class: one no longer hears in him, as one could in J. Boehme, the person who has been originally stirred but only the mouthpiece or secretary of alien ideas, which have, moreover, been prepared for purposes of a different kind; what in Jacob Boehme is still living, is dead in him, only, so to speak, the cadaver, the embalmed corpse, the mummy, of something originally living, of the kind that is displayed in secret societies which simultaneously pursue alchemical, magical, theurgic purposes.

F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 183.

limited by and related to another, and this is an improvement on the unity of oneness. Thus, God must be related to other beings like Him or Her.

God can only reveal God's self in creatures who resemble God. That is, in free, self-activating beings who are as God is.⁴⁴ Thus things, once created, are alive in themselves. Schelling claims they have divinity in them. Schelling's line "He speaks, and they are there" is interesting from the perspective of what he has said about God's self-revelation. To speak is always to speak to another. God requires humanity.⁴⁵ This could be interesting from a Mormon point of view. On its face, it sounds quite different than the Mormon idea that persons are co-eternal with God. But notice that for Schelling, God as a person and human persons emerge from the primal impersonal absolute at the same time. Also notice that Schelling and others in this tradition see this as an advance on the Absolute. They are in this sense co-eternal.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION: WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

What does all this mean for Mormonism and Terryl Givens's contribution to Mormon thought? For one thing, it means there are resources beyond our tradition, and traditional Christian theology, that we should plumb. Terryl has shown this is something that Joseph himself did. Smith's admiration for Thomas Dick and his interest in the Kabbalistic traditions of Judaism show a mind willing to search for truths wherever they might be. As Brigham Young said

"Mormonism," so-called, embraces every principle pertaining to life and salvation, for time and eternity. No matter who has it. If the infidel has got truth it belongs to "Mormonism." The truth and sound doctrine possessed by the sec-

44. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 18.

45. Schelling already approached this position in his early work, such as *The System of Transcendental Idealism*. Just like the motif found in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Schelling likens God to a playwright who is not just outside his work but in it:

But now if the playwright *were to exist* independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written, If he *does* not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he *would not be*, then we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play.

F. W. J. Schelling, *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 210.

46. I have discussed this in James McLachlan, "Of Time and All Eternity: God and Others in Mormonism and Heterodox Christianity," *Sunstone* 150 (July 2008): 48–59.

tarian world, and they have a great deal, all belong to this Church. As for their morality, many of them are, morally, just as good as we are.⁴⁷

But beyond this, reading a phrase like “before the foundation of the world” in a passage like Alma 13 or Section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants takes on a very different meaning depending on whether one approaches it from a Platonic point of view or a Boehmian one. In the first, one sees impersonal laws as eternal and unchanging, the laws by which the worlds and creations of God(s) are governed. Many Mormons have taken this position. In the second, all laws stem from a moral law that is established because of the existence of persons who, as agents and children of God, are without price and worthy of respect.

Think of this difference in relation to the current controversy over same-sex relationships. If we take the Platonic position that gender is eternal, in the sense of a Platonic ideal form, we have little room to navigate on the issue.⁴⁸ Taking a position closer to the Boehmian personalists allows for evolution in our ideas of gender. As we confront otherness in other persons, we must discover ways to love them. Many of our moral ideas may be socially constructed since eternity and history and time are seen, not as two ontologically different ways of being, with the later only the pale reflection of the perfection of the former, but as the developing creative reality of the sociality between persons. Many of our moral norms may be pragmatic rules of order that change over time according to the needs of persons.⁴⁹ What does not change is the ethical value of persons. On this law, all blessings are predicated (D&C 130:20–21).

James McLachlan is blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah.

47. Brigham Young, April 8, 1867, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 11:375.

48. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 357.

49. Taylor Petrey, “Towards Post-Heterosexual Theology,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44 no. 4 (Winter 2011): 129.



Responses

by Terryl L. Givens

BEN HUFF

I am glad to hear Ben engaging me on the question of apostasy and restoration. We are agreed that narratives of the past in this regard have been overly simplistic and overly caustic with regard to mainstream Christian tradition. And we are agreed that we need to see “a more positive way for Mormons to look at other faiths and other strands of Christianity.” Nevertheless, as I read him, Ben argues that I have given too much ground in my efforts at Christian détente, am denying or minimizing Mormon exceptionalism, and construct a narrative out of harmony with both scripture and restoration history. Most significantly, he disputes my major contention (jointly made with Fiona in our collaborative works) that in Joseph’s self-understanding, the focus of apostasy and restoration is on authority and ordinances, and not on truth or dogma. I don’t find his alternate reading more persuasive than my own and, indeed, I think at times Ben makes my case for me. I find his critique largely supplemental for this reason, rather than incompatible. Ben makes four central points in his critique, so it may be best to list them here before addressing them in turn:

1. Christian creeds are “an abomination” and we must “preach the truth boldly,” not hesitating to decry the dearth of Christian truth.
2. My account is “minimalist” with regard to Mormon “truth.”
3. My account is “a difficult fit” with scripture.
4. My account is “a difficult fit” with actual restoration history.

1. Creedal abominations

The first point of dispute is a disagreement about the extent to which “truth” was present in the Christian world of Joseph Smith, and the extent to which his restoration of truth was *ex nihilo* rather than assimilative or syncretic. Let me offer several reasons for my position that we have misunderstood and misrepresented the nature of apostasy.

i. The allegory of apostasy, which Ben imputes to my and Fiona’s reading of Revelation 12, was actually Joseph Smith’s. He declared the woman in the wilderness to be a symbol for the church, and the language clearly indicates that she flees underground, to await a time of coming back “out of the wilderness.” So two facts militate against a version of truth being utterly lost. The language explicitly declares the church has merely migrated to the peripheries. (This is why we don’t find it in the creeds, which are rightly called “an abomination.”) And abundant evidence demonstrates most restoration truths *were* present in the peripheries.

ii. For example, abundant contemporary evidence suggests that the creedal abomination that was the focus of Smith’s concern was a God devoid of “body, parts, and passions” (Westminster Confession). Paramount in this regard is the alleged impassibility of God. Few tenets could be more hurtful to true religion and slanderous of God’s character than to deny him the capacity to be moved by human suffering. Much of restoration scripture was a corrective to this abomination, especially Jacob 5 and Moses 7. However, it is much to my point here that Wesley anticipated Smith’s work in this regard, by removing the “and passions” from Methodism’s version of the creed. What to my mind was the greatest single “plain and precious truth” lost from scripture was already reentering the Christian mainstream by 1830.

iii. If we take Smith’s own description of the gospel “truths” present in Mormonism, we find virtually no doctrinal innovation at all. If Ben is right that a correct version of restoration must accord with the history of that restoration, it seems that Smith’s own account of what that restoration entailed would be the prime test case for our differing interpretations. And here is what we find: Article of Faith 1 is a universal Christian tenet. Article 2, denying original sin, was already in process of transforming Christian debates. Try and find a Christian today who affirms we are guilty for Adam’s sin. (Okay, outside of the South!) Article 3 states that salvation is through atonement and obedience (the Catholic church never stopped preaching that one); Article 4 enumerates the first principles and ordinances, which formulation was lifted wholesale from the Campbellites; Article 5 addresses authority and ordinances and prophecy—which is *not* a Christian commonplace and supports my contention that this is where we do find Mormon exceptionalism; Article 6

preaches apostles and prophets, which the Irvingites again beat us to, and so on and so on with spiritual gifts, millennialism, pursuit of virtue, lawfulness, etc. Only the Book of Mormon stands out as new, and as I have argued extensively elsewhere, its principal function was not doctrinal restoration, but a signal of Smith's authority and commission. When Smith was asked what doctrines were to be identified as Mormon, he said on one occasion, "that [Christ] died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven . . . and all other things are only appendages to these."¹

iv. Smith explicitly affirmed the value of Christian truths found elsewhere time and again. He taught that the "old Catholic Church is worth more than all,"² and told the Saints to absorb all they could from the Presbyterians, Baptists, and others, and to come out "a pure Mormon."³

2. Truth

So there can be no doubt, I believe, that most gospel truths were present in the peripheries of the Christian tradition. Ben complains that Fiona and I must "range rather widely to find the continuities and resonances they highlight. They also have often drawn on rather unorthodox sources to underscore how the mainstreams of traditional Christianity had rejected so many precious truths." This is what I mean by him making my case for me. If Brigham said he would go to hell itself to retrieve truth, I am quite happy to go to a fourteenth-century nun or a nineteenth-century Congregationalist. But is this view "minimalist" and a discredit to Smith's work or Mormonism's charge? Ben writes,

To say that these ideas can be found in the prior tradition, however, is not enough to support the Givenses' minimalist account of the restoration. For one thing, to say that traditional Christianity includes "shattered remnants" of the true gospel is quite different from saying that the truth was already present and simply needed priesthood authority to be added to it. That many people had fragments of the true gospel does not imply that anyone had even a majority, let alone the whole of it.

This is good, solid engagement, and I welcome the opportunity to expand and clarify my position. Ben did not have access to my forthcoming volume on Mormon ecclesiology, but I will quote from it to distinguish my version of apostasy and restoration from the above "shake and bake" version:

1. Joseph Smith, "In Obedience to our Promise, We Give the Following Answers to Questions," *Elders' Journal* 1, no. 3 (July 1838): 44.

2. Lyndon Cook and Andrew F. Ehat, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Orem, UT: Grandin, 1991), 381–82.

3. Cook and Ehat, 234.

Through historical processes and corruptions willful and inadvertent, the larger cosmic context of the everlasting covenant was lost (after Christ's death, but recurrently in prior ages as well), the consummation toward which all was tending was diminished, and hence fallible humans and their institutions reconfigured the covenant in a tragically attenuated form, of limited prehistory, extent and impact.

So in Mormon conception, the apostasy does not represent some minor corruptions of sacramental words or ritual forms. It is not about supposedly wicked priests whom God punished by removing their priesthood. (Mormons are not Donatists; unworthy administrators do not invalidate the ordinance.) It is about a fundamental misapprehension of the context and purpose and extent of the covenant (premortal origins, mortal incarnation, and eventual theosis and sealing into eternal families) and the mode by which it is executed (temple covenants that effect the constituting of those chains of belonging, completing our journey from intelligence to deity). The apostasy was not about baptizing at the wrong age or in the wrong medium. It was about not knowing that baptism makes us—all of us eventually—literally of Christ's family and his co-heirs. It was not about a different conception of marriage. It is about failing to see marriage as a key mode of eternal association, associations that are at the very heart of what heaven is. Similarly, the Restoration is not about authority for authority's sake—it is about officiators who understand the origins of that authority and the purposes for which priestly authority is to be exercised, and who can perform those sacred sacraments under God's immediate direction, according to his original intentions and designs. It would appear that in Smith's understanding, the origins of apostasy are in a critically impoverished account of God's everlasting covenant, one that rendered all sacraments and ordinances ineffectual not through wickedness but through loss of understanding of their scope and purpose. It is possible, on the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the rule of prayer determines the rule of belief) that the direction of influence was the reverse: if it is liturgy that fosters theology, then changes in the original sacraments would have produced the altered and diminished theological framework. Whether the theological underpinnings were lost, and ordinances altered and given new meaning as a consequence, or the changes in sacraments and liturgy provoked new theological formulations, the result was the same from the LDS perspective—a critically impoverished account of God's everlasting covenant.⁴

Now it is my impression that Ben would be much happier with this characterization of what was lost and what was restored. If he wants to characterize the essence of what I have described as “the truth,” then that is a reasonable position. But I would maintain that the covenantal framework of the restoration, based as it is in sacramental forms (ordinances) and administered in sacred settings through authorized representatives, is more aptly charac-

4. The revised and published passage can be found in Terryl L. Givens, *Feeding the Flock: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Church and Praxis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 27.

terized as centered on keys and ordinances than on doctrinal propositions, dogmas, or Christian truths.

3. *Scripture*

Even as Ben avers I have been “selective” in my evidence gathering, he admits that in his own reading, he “emphasizes a different set of scriptural passages” than I do. So readers will have to determine which is a better fit. I believe that Doctrine and Covenants 10 makes the case very powerfully and unambiguously that Christ’s church never disappeared from the earth. This is because in verses 52 and following, the Lord utters repeated words of comfort and assurance to “my church.” This revelation was given in 1829, a year before the LDS Church was organized.

4. *Restoration History*

Is my account consistent with the history of restoration? Absolutely, I believe. Already having intimations of his impending death, Smith summed up his life’s work in one of his last recorded sermons. This is what he said:

The Bible says “I will send you Elijah before the great & dreadful day of the Lord Come that he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the Children & the hearts of the Children to their fathers lest I Come & smite the whole earth with a Curse,” Now the word turn here should be translated (bind or seal). But what is the object of this important mission or how is it to be fulfilled, The keys are to be delivered the spirit of Elijah is to Come, The gospel to be established the Saints of God gathered Zion built up, & the Saints to Come up as Saviors on mount Zion but how are they to become Saviors on Mount Zion by building their temples erecting their Baptismal fonts & going forth & receiving all the ordinances, Baptisms, Confirmations, washings anointings ordinations & sealing powers upon our heads in behalf of all our Progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may Come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted to thrones of glory with us, & here in is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the Children, and the Children to the Fathers which fulfills the mission of Elijah.”⁵

Certainly there is truth here, but can one doubt that Smith believed that myriad truths have been lost and restored, and that many are to be sought out and incorporated, in an ongoing process? But he saw the essential project of the restoration as complete when the last keys were delivered and became operative in the sealing rituals of the temple, making final and complete sense of the cryptic words he had heard from Moroni’s lips two decades earlier.

5. Cook and Ehat, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 318.

In an important account of Smith's First Vision, he related being told that "all the sects" were "wrong, & that the Everlasting covenant was broken."⁶ To a friend, Smith wrote that the absence of spiritual gifts was evidence of a diminished church, but the most important loss involved the original "Laws," "ordinances," and "covenants" of the gospel.⁷ And in the scriptural preface that heralded the restoration, the Lord announced the same fact: the world had "strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant" (D&C 1:15). Henry B. Eyring explained the case simply: "This is the true Church, the only true Church, because in it are the keys of the priesthood" but also because "through the Church and the ordinances which are in it . . . the blessings of the sealing power reach into the spirit world."⁸ In this view, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a portal of salvation, not the domain of the saved.

Finally, I believe the version I have presented of apostasy and restoration is consistent with the beautiful admonition of Hugh B. Brown:

Our revealed truth should leave us stricken with the knowledge of how little we really know. It should never lead to an emotional arrogance based upon a false assumption that we somehow have all the answers—that we in fact have a corner on truth. For we do not.⁹

ADAM MILLER

The main issue with Adam Miller's reading of my work is not really about my work at all. He is rather taking issue with Joseph Smith's monism and challenging his two-tiered monism as an end run around materialism. ("Though we claim to be radical materialists, it's hard for us to even finish that sentence before a traditional idealism threatens to sneak back into the picture.") Moreover, it's far from clear that Adam's proposed definition is as

6. Reported in Levi Richards, Journal, June 11, 1843, LDS Church History Library. Available at <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/levi-richards-journal-11-june-1843-extract/2>.

7. Joseph Smith, letter to Noah Saxton, January 4, 1833, in Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 352.

8. Henry B. Eyring, "The True and Living Church," *Ensign*, May 2008, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2008/05/the-true-and-living-church>.

9. Hugh B. Brown, "An Eternal Quest—Freedom of the Mind," presented at Brigham Young University, May 13, 1969, Provo, Utah. Audio available at <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown-eternal-quest/>.

widely accepted as he believes it to be. The majority of physicists and cosmologist operating today, for example, would identify themselves as materialists and deny the traditional Christian cosmological dualism (“the heterogeneity of matter and spirit,” in Coleridge’s depiction) that Smith was opposing in his particular brand of monism. But I am unaware of a single cosmologist or theoretical physicist who believes that the most hard-core reductive materialism is inconsistent with the notion of universal laws, as Adam wants to argue. On the contrary, science is inconceivable apart from an assumption that the whole enterprise is geared to the discovery and articulation of laws that are constant, timeless, and universal. I don’t follow Adam, nor I trust would most non-philosophers, in believing that recognizing the regular and predictable behavior of objects in the universe is to impute a material ontological status to our characterization of such patterns. Even philosophers like Thomas Nagel refer to “the timeless laws of physics,”¹⁰ and philosopher Antony Flew has recently noted that even those cosmologists who take refuge in the multiverse theory to avoid the theistic implications of the anthropic principle will necessarily have to find “the laws governing the entire multiverse, the overarching theory governing the ensemble.”¹¹ Whether the materialism of modern scientists (and many philosophers) and the monism of Joseph Smith have a lot or a little in common is an open question, but neither one coincides with Adam’s proposed definition.

It is not, as Adam argues, that such materiality is “hard to grasp.” It is just so radically incompatible with Joseph’s cosmological pronouncements, the scriptural canon, and LDS soteriology, that, lacking for me any inherently suasive force, I don’t find it requires further refutation on my part and in this theological context. Adam finds it relevant to a theory of atonement because it leads him to conclude that, just as a map is assumed to transcend the plane it maps but is actually imbricated in the same plane of materiality, so too are things like laws and principles inadequate to their imputed task of perfectly mapping our own spiritual telos, because they can never be identical with it.

The stakes here are significant if, as Adam argues, this problem renders atonement problematic within a Mormon, materialist (monist) cosmology. He sums up the problem as follows:

Our materialism rules out the possibility of thinking about atonement as the perfect conformity of particular material individuals with the governing ideality of eternal laws. . . . Because both humans and the laws are material, their relationship is

10. Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12.

11. Antony Flew, *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 120.

structured by an exception that both makes possible their overlap and prevents their perfect coincidence. (Emphasis in original)

More simply put, Adam is claiming that our materialism precludes atonement as requiring eventual, perfect conformity of particular individuals with ideal laws.

If Adam is correct, then I would insist that not just my particular reading of atonement but the core role of law and the possibilities of sanctification and theosis as scripturally defined cannot be valid, and Smith's entirely soteriological scheme is doomed from its start. Here is Doctrine and Covenants 88:34–39:

And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same. That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. All kingdoms have a law given; . . . All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.

So what do these verses claim? (1) Sanctification is attained by subjection to, or conformity to, law. (2) There is no mechanism of salvation, no atoning power, that can operate independently of this principle (*even grace can't do it*). (3) These laws are inescapable: they govern the occupants of every kingdom. (4) Principle 1 is repeated for emphasis; individuals must “abide”—that is, comport with, obey, and be subject to—these laws for atonement to be efficacious.

Numerous scriptures and LDS authorities of influence reaffirm a perfect compatibility of a material universe with eternal laws that transcend the particular. This is why I believe that his counter-theology, even if it were interesting and philosophically coherent and could find support in Paul, would not in any way be recognizably Mormon.

Adam states that laws in my usage “are universal, independent of God, and eternally existent. The implied model for these ideal laws is a Pratt-inflected, nineteenth-century brand of Newtonian physics.” But once again, Adam is trying to posit my reading of Mormon cosmology as a combination of Prattian speculation and Enlightenment physics, when in reality, Mormonism's challenge to Divine Command Theory is scriptural. As was so often the case with Smith's theology, the seeds of this radical repositioning of law relative to God were in the Book of Mormon. The prophet Alma taught that those who “are without God in the world . . . have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:11). He continues, intimating that happiness has preconditions with which God is in perfect harmony, and that God must himself abide the requirements of justice or forfeit his identity as God: “Mercy could

not . . . destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God" (42:13). John Widtsoe agreed; God was "part of [the] universe;" his "conquest over the universe" was a function of his "recognition of universal laws" and "the forces lying about him."¹² As Mormon philosopher Kent Robson notes, "although there has been a lot of discussion about the laws, it seems to me that [in Mormon thought] they are clearly independent of God and to some extent out of God's control."¹³

Finally, I think Adam's critique of the role of law in LDS soteriology makes a fundamental error in confusing conformity with identity. In Adam's critique of my reading of LDS atonement theology this is most apparent. I have written that

Christ's atonement sets up the conditions for humans to demonstrate through ever better and wiser choices, made *in accordance* with ever nobler and purer desires, that it is their will to live in a way consistent with the eternal principles Christ *modeled* throughout his exemplary life. Repentance is therefore an ongoing process of repudiating unrighteous choices, acknowledging Christ's role in suffering the consequences of those sins on our behalf, and our choosing afresh to better effect. The process continues—perhaps eons into the future—*until in perfect harmony humans have reached a sanctified condition that permits perfect atonement with God.*¹⁴

Note that the diction in my definition was carefully chosen to indicate conformity, not identity, which are very different things: *accordance*, *model*, *harmony*. To play a concerto in *accordance* with, according to the *model* of, or in *harmony* with a score, is not to paint cleff marks on yourself and look like sheet music. To bake a cake in *accordance* with, after the *model* of, or in *harmony* with, specific instructions, is not to paint Betty Crocker on your forehead and dress in a binder. And so neither does the fashioning of a rock, or a person, *according* to, after the *model* of, or in *harmony* with, a template presuppose an eventual condition of identity. To live in accordance with chastity, after the model of purity, or in harmony with perfect love, is not to become idealized laws that enjoin those qualities.

So I don't see the validity of his critique of the LDS theology of atonement or of Doctrine and Covenants 88's claims. Adam concludes with a challenge, that I must redefine materialism in contravention of its "well-established pedigree." But as I indicated above, even if the definition of materialism were as

12. John A. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology* (Salt Lake City: General Boards of the Mutual Improvement Association, 1932), 175, 23–24.

13. Kent Robson, "Omnis on the Horizon," *Sunstone* 8 no. 4 (July and August 1983): 21.

14. Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 235; emphasis added.

well-established as Adam claims, and if the category of law brings in its wake the ontological rupture of materialism he insists it does, it seems my dilemma is shared by millions of scientists and mathematicians and ethicists and philosophers, not to mention theologians and modern prophets, who thought they were safe espousing eternal law within their materialist universe, and I will defer the challenge to them. Otherwise, Adam suggests, I need to move in the direction of a Pauline theology of grace. I clearly do not read Paul as Adam does. I align more closely with the Lutheran Krister Stendahl's reading of Paul, who wrote:

The point where Paul's experience intersects with his . . . understanding of the faith, furthermore, is not "sin" with its correlate "forgiveness." It is rather when Paul speaks about his weakness that we feel his deeply personal pain. Once more we find something surprisingly different from the Christian language that most of us take for granted: it seems that Paul never felt guilt in the face of this weakness—pain, yes, but not guilt. It is not in the drama of the saving of Paul the sinner, but it is in the drama of Paul's coming to grips with what he calls his "weakness" that we find the most experiential level of Paul's theology.¹⁵

More significant, and as I think is implicit in the sources I have relied upon above, the limits of grace for LDS soteriology are fairly well circumscribed in Smith's Olive Leaf revelation (D&C 88). Debating the role of grace—or its absence—in Mormon theology is a challenge for another day. For now, I will simply say that I believe we often err to the extent that we join the Protestants in over-theologizing a concept that had little theological valence for Paul. In Mormon theology, and in my reading of atonement theology, grace is *not* what closes the gap between a perfect model and its imperfect simulacrum. That's the bicycle theory of atonement, for those familiar with Stephen Robinson's analogy.¹⁶ I reject that reading precisely because section 88 explicitly tells us grace cannot close such a gap independently of the laws that govern sanctification. Neither do I see grace as making space for an *exception*. I think the whole weight of Mormon theology at its deepest, radical core, rebuts the Protestant legacy with its infinite divide, unbreachable chasms, and eternally incommensurate ontologies of the divine and the human. We are invited into full relation and communion, and that can only transpire, in my understanding, by a willed emulation. Grace in my reading is the unbidden, undeserved forgiveness for inflicting pain, doing harm to ourselves and our relationships, and grace is God's willed choice to keep alive our ever present opportunity to choose and choose again, here and throughout eternity, in

15. Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 40–41.

16. Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ: The Parable of the Bicycle and Other Good News* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

quest of playing the music in conformity with the score. John Donne hinted as much, when he prayed,

Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door.¹⁷

Grace forgives all false notes, and helps us, empowers us, eventually to find the right keys.

ROSALYNDE WELCH

Rosalynde Welch has given us a very lovely and perceptive readings of Alma 32 as a counter to my version of belief as necessarily a choice. I will make four points by way of response:

1. A restatement of my position, as framed by Aquinas, for clarity's sake (and because I want a big gun in my corner).
2. An explanation of what I see as the moral implications that compel my designation of belief or faith as willful.
3. Reasons why Smith's monism does not imply what Rosalynde claims it implies.
4. A simple analogy to perhaps persuade where my argument does not.

1. Restatement:

Aquinas: *de veritate*

But only two things move the possible intellect: its proper object, which is an intelligible form, that is, a quiddity . . . and the will. . . .

For, sometimes, it does not tend toward one rather than the other, either because of a lack of evidence, as happens in those problems about which we have no reasons for either side, or because of an apparent equality of the motives for both sides. This is the state of one in doubt, who wavers between the two members of a contradictory proposition.

And in this situation our understanding is determined by the will, which chooses to assent to one side definitely and precisely because of something which is enough to move the will, though not enough to move the understanding.¹⁸

In other words, Aquinas imposes strict boundaries to the range of willed belief. Intellect plays its part. Preponderant evidence at one end, or utter dearth of reasonable grounds for assent at the other, would leave intellect and

17. John Donne, "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness," in *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. E. K. Chambers (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1896).

18. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, vol. 2, trans. James V. McGlynn (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 209–10.

intellect alone adequate to the task of evaluating and deciding upon truth claims. But occasions occur in which the most rigorous investigation of the evidence, based on what information by way of intrinsic qualities or features is accessible to our analysis, leave us with insufficient grounds for favoring option A over option B. At that point, he argues, without any determinative reasons grounded in the thing itself, the only resource left to exploit for purposes of decision-making must needs be an internal one (that is, our will), which has the capacity to make a choice on the basis of something internal to our self. In that case, we *choose* to believe in one or the other proposition.

2. Moral Implications

The moral problematic is clearly implied by scripture: “Blessed are those who believe without being compelled to believe” (Alma 32:16) or “blessed are they that have not seen, yet have believed” (John 20:29). As we are enjoined to have faith, and are blessed for showing, exhibiting, having faith, then I take it as a commonsensical given that belief must be a function of the will, in the same sense that “blessed are the merciful” entails that we can choose to be merciful. “Blessed are the pure in heart” entails that we can choose a life of purity or not. “Blessed are the peacemakers” means peacemaking does not come upon us unbidden, we choose that role. So too, God would not enjoin and bless us for an affective response or mental operation over which we have no autonomous control. So if belief or faith (for simplicity’s sake, I ignore finer points of definition and distinction here) are morally laudatory, but are *not* within the power of our will, then God is a capricious, unjust, even malicious God. He would be not better, and no more worthy of our worship or adoration, than a deity who proclaimed, “blessed are the red-heads,” or “blessed are those who inherit high-IQs.” “Blessed are those who believe” must mean, in my theological universe, that we can choose to believe.

2. Smith’s Monism

Rosalynde finds in Smith’s ontological monism a challenge to Lehi’s subject/object dualism. She similarly argues that “because all truth belongs to the same ontological category,” it is doubtful that we can claim different modes of knowing (and presumably assign different moral values to those modes of knowing). I disagree on both counts.

I don’t think without metaphysics, self-directing and inert become inoperative labels. I think the subject/object dichotomy does not operate in parallel with ontological categories—or even biological ones. I would invoke Buber’s work here, as an example of how we can objectify both people and things, and of how subjects can become objects and objects subjects. As she herself indicates, our will is always a negotiated will, acting and responding,

being moved and moving. I think Lehi's dichotomy indicates two polarities between which we are always in motion, aspiring toward full selfhood but being pulled by the allure of victimhood. More to the point of my argument about belief as willed, however, is her contention that a monistic cosmology implies only one variety of epistemology, since "all truth belongs to the same ontological category." Reality is multilayered, represented and accessible through various semiotic systems, and subject to a wide variety of modes of verification. My wife's love for me, the Pythagorean theorem, and the claim that "much depends on a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rainwater, beside the white chickens,"¹⁹ may be amenable to radically different kinds of epistemological certitude, without calling into question the existence or non-existence of supernatural, non-material realms.

4. *A Simple Analogy*

I believe we have all experienced, or can at the least envision, a scenario roughly approximating the following. You are married and plan an anniversary dinner at your favorite restaurant. You show up at 5 p.m. but your wife is not there (*mutatis mutandi*). You wait till six, but no show. Then seven, eight—finally you eat alone and go home. At one o'clock in the morning, your wife crawls quietly into bed, reeking of men's cologne. You turn on the light and find her hair mussed and her makeup smeared. You suddenly remember several phone conversations that she abruptly terminated as you entered the room. You ask, "Where have you been?" She refuses to explain, looks distressed, and will only say, "I can't talk about it—but please trust me. I'm sorry."

It is my assertion that, in at least many such cases, you will have to acknowledge that you have a choice to make, and that it will be a willed choice. Following Aquinas's outline, we find a neat parallel. Outwardly, you have reason to trust her. You have been married fifteen years. She is a good woman. There has never been dishonesty. Outwardly, you also have good reason to disbelieve her protestations. The surreptitious phone calls. The cologne and dishabille. The refusal to explain. Following Aquinas, I would urge that in this instance, your choice will depend on something internal to yourself. Are you willing to risk? Do you tend to be a trusting or a cynical person? Do you seek to find beauty and goodness in the world, or seek out what is dark or ugly?

In this case, you choose to believe. And you find later that your wife spent the evening holding your oldest son as he confessed a transgression and sobbed in her arms, begging her not to betray his secret.

19. William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow," in *Spring and All* (N.p.: Robert McAlmon's Contact Publishing Co., 1923).

The analogy is not perfect. But it does indicate that there are occasions when most of us would acknowledge a role for the will in deciding whether we will adopt a posture of belief or of disbelief. This is a decision that is informed by evidence but is not determined by the evidence. And that in such a case, our choice to believe or not carries moral weight, or at the least, reveals something of our heart and its dispositions.

In conclusion, in her lovely reading of Alma 32, Rosalynde is willing to concede the role of volition in “giving place” for the seeds of faith to take root. At that point, it seems our difference shrinks almost to the most semantic quibble. Because if the plant blooms in our heart, it still remains there, inert, a body of evidence waiting to be acknowledged, embraced, or acted upon. We have to consent, in other words, to what we have witnessed—and act. To return to Aquinas, “*Assent belongs to the intellect, but consent to the will.*” And nothing that Alma has said about that evidence suggests it is sufficient to compel us. We just have something good, delicious, and real to posit in opposition to the array of countervailing data points that are never far removed from the path of discipleship. We have to choose.

JAMES MCLAUGHLIN

I appreciate Jim’s attention to my treatment of the Mormon doctrine of a War in Heaven, largely because I think this bit of arcana holds crucial keys to our understanding of agency and atonement, and has been reduced to comic book caricatures in Mormon discourse, being shorn in the process of its theological heft. Jim notes in a footnote that he thinks coercion still has a vital role to play in the story of Satan’s fall, and hints at suggestive ideas in Boehme and Schelling about the “will of the ground” and the “will to love.” Without alluding to personalism specifically, Jim hints at a more fruitful exploration of the centrality of relationality in Mormon theology and how we might turn to those figures to help explicate and mediate the tension in Mormonism between the kind of radical independence celebrated by Young (“to be as independent in our sphere as God is in his”) and the sociable heaven of Smith. I would applaud such a move, since I believe that personalism is a school with profound potential for further developments in Mormonism and its integration into larger conversations. As he later notes, I am myself deficient in this tradition.

Jim is the third in this roundtable to draw attention to my discussion of Smith’s “two-tiered Monism.” It may be late in the game, but I think it relevant to point out here my belief that Joseph’s monism was primarily intended as a disavowal of a generalized religious cosmology that bracketed off one half of the universe from human perception and experience in order to perpetuate the reign of mystery, mystification, and an infinite qualitative divide between

the divine and the human. Put simply, I think his monism was meant to deconstruct the facile cosmology suggested by Coleridge: “The heterogeneity of matter and spirit is the ground of all miracle.” So I would not situate him in a philosophical tradition in this regard, as much as in a particular kind of Romantic trajectory, of which William Blake is the most typical proponent. This is also evident in Smith’s tendency, remarked upon by Jim, to effect what Blake called “a marriage of Heaven and Hell,” or, in other words, a repudiation of that dualism that set things of the spirit and mind in hostile opposition to things of the heart and flesh (“while Paul elevates the spirit over the flesh Smith celebrated the relation between the two”).

Jim faults my discussion of Boehme, Schelling, and Berdyaev and points to my exclusion of the importance of Lurianic Kabbalism. Here I can only say that I am happy to be better informed. As he notes, my primary purpose was to show the expansive attention that serious thinkers have paid to preexistence, and I can well admit that I have erred in some of the intricacies of how some of those thinkers treated the concept, especially those who fall outside the purview of my very limited expertise.

Finally, as for my preoccupation with referring preexistence philosophy to Plato, it is for the following reason. The entirety of Plato’s corpus is first made available to the English-speaking world in the moment of Joseph Smith’s birth. Platonism is everywhere in the anglo-American world of the Romantic era. So it’s easy to infer a simple line of influence on Smith. To the extent that I can demonstrate Smith’s non-parallels with Platonic precedent, I think the freshness and startling originality of his work and unexpected congruences with earlier, Near Eastern traditions are shown in greater relief. In that regard, the precise positioning of Boehme himself was a secondary concern. His elucidation of the Ungrund in terms evocative of an evolutionary conception of God are of course highly suggestive.

All four of these colleagues have pushed me to think harder about the meaning of Mormon theology, and I thank them.

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