

# (Re)Interpreting Early Mormon Thought: Synthesizing Joseph Smith's Theology and the Process of Religion Formation

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Nine months after Joseph Smith and his brother were assassinated by an angry mob in June 1844, Parley P. Pratt published a proclamation addressed to the Church's large and dispersed membership to assure them that all was well. In doing so, he sought to accomplish two things: first, to praise Smith's legacy as the founding prophet of a movement that had attracted thousands of converts on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean; and second, to insist on the necessity of the Quorum of the Twelve's institutional leadership—a role that meant not only continuing, but fulfilling and extending, Smith's religious vision. "The chaos of materials prepared by [Smith] must now be placed in order in the building," he wrote. "The laws revealed by him must now be administered in all their strictness and beauty. The measure commenced by him must now be carried into successful operation."<sup>1</sup>

Pratt's metaphor of organizing chaotic matter is a potent symbol for tracing the process of religious formation and succession as a whole as well as an astute assessment of Joseph Smith's legacy. Only through admitting the role of reinterpretations and appropriations performed by those not typically recognized as the founders of religious movements is it possible to glimpse the scaffolding behind the "strictness and beauty" of the resulting "successful operation." To better understand early Mormonism and situate it within its broader context, focus must be broadened

from the movement's founder to include his numerous followers. Mormonism's apostles, despite some backsliders within its own ranks, as a quorum ultimately won the allegiance of the largest group of Smith's followers. What is more, they held it by navigating a tenuous relationship with, on the one hand, the inchoate "material" left from the movement's founder and, on the other, ideas and tensions present in their surrounding American culture. Their motive was their need to validate their own succession rights and to construct a coherent Mormon theology. Their success depended on the ability to offer both resistance and accommodation to both internal and external influences.

Two theological essays published just months before Smith's death by Parley P. Pratt, one of the Twelve Apostles, offer a micro-historical lens through which we can examine the process of synthesis and interpretation. Pratt's 1844 writings are used as gateway texts through which to explore two burning issues of the period: Mormonism's relationship to the American nation and the LDS conception of continuing revelation. These two themes strike at the heart of Smith's religious legacy as an "American revelator." Indeed, they are rooted in the egalitarianism, amateurism, and Americanness that often dominate the scholarly image of Mormonism's founding prophet and are central to the attempts at placing Smith within his cultural context. Yet the direction the Twelve took with Mormonism's theological corpus not only nuanced but also challenged its democratic flavor—a move that brought stability to a fledgling movement and authority to a contested debate. Taken together, the debates over these features in Joseph Smith's thought magnify a synthesizing process that shaped how Mormon theology was to be understood for the rest of the nineteenth century and even until today.

## I

This dynamic of interpretation and synthesizing was hardly unique to the LDS Church. Three decades before the founding of Mormonism, and thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean, a similar debate raged over the interpretation of Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) philosophy. German theologian Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), in defense of his interpretation of Kantian idealism, argued for a distinction between "the inventor" of an

ideological system, and “his commentators and disciples.” Fichte explained:

The inventor of a system is one thing, and his commentators and disciples are another. . . . The reason is this: The followers do not yet have the idea of the whole; for if they had it, they would not require to study the new system; they are obliged first to piece together this idea out of *the parts* that the inventor provides for them; [but] all these parts are in fact not wholly determined, rounded and polished in their minds. . . .

The inventor proceeds from the idea of the whole, in which all the parts are united, and sets forth these parts individually. . . . The business of the followers, is to synthesize what they still by no means possess, but are only to obtain by the synthesis.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the progression of an intellectual movement always includes a gap between founder and disciple, and a pure continuity in worldview is impossible when perpetuating a philosophical or theological system—even from a systematic thinker like Kant. While the specifics of Kantian philosophy that Fichte was debating are of little importance for the interpretation of Mormonism, the tension he outlines between an “inventor” and “disciple” is a useful rubric for examining the development of early Mormon thought.

Students of the development of Mormon theology have long focused on Joseph Smith, with good reason. As prophet and founder of the LDS Church, his revelations and teachings laid the foundations for the movement, and his voice is considered most authoritative when considering early Mormon beliefs. However, Smith’s theology is difficult to determine on at least two grounds. First, his premature death at age thirty-eight prevented the completion of his religious revolution. Though he had been the recognized prophet and leader for nearly a decade and a half, the explosive theological development during his last three years showed no signs of slackening, and it can be assumed that much of his religious vision was left inchoate and unfulfilled. Indeed, it was not until the last three months of his life that Smith’s sermons started to piece together what had previously been only theological fragments; and in his private teachings, he began to expound these ideas to his closest followers.<sup>3</sup>

The second reason for the difficulty of developing a coherent

corpus of Smith's theological work is the very nature of Smith's prophetic persona and relates to the Kantian dynamic outlined above. Smith was by nature eclectic, rather than systematic, and his teachings were emblematic of that approach. Though they were perhaps a coherent whole in his mind, Smith's teachings were never presented in a systematic order but rather, as Richard Bushman aptly described, in "flashes and bursts."<sup>4</sup> This collection of fragments has left many historians bewildered at the difficulty of presenting a coherent picture of his beliefs. For instance, one recent writer waved the metaphoric white flag by describing Smith as "simultaneously an eminent Jacksonian, a scion of the Yankee exodus, a creature and critic of the Second Great Awakening, a Romantic reformer, a charismatic utopian, a mystic nationalist, and a hustler in the manner of Barnum."<sup>5</sup> Further, Smith's eclecticism has made it difficult to position him among his antebellum contemporaries, because his teachings are malleable enough to be considered emblematic of numerous—and sometimes contradictory—cultural tensions. Gordon Wood wrote that the principles Smith laid out contained elements "mystical and secular; restorationist and progressive; communitarian and individualistic; hierarchical and congregational; authoritarian and democratic; antinomian and arminian; anti-clerical and priestly; revelatory and empirical; utopian and practical; ecumenical and nationalist."<sup>6</sup> Other scholars have cited Smith as an example of the American prophetic voice, the preeminence of modern revelation, the climactic merging of folk-magic and religion, the continuity of Renaissance mysticism, or merely as a theological response to pluralism.<sup>7</sup> Thus, just as Smith's religious successors inherited a dynamic theology with countless possibilities, modern historians are left with a collection of innovative fragments from which to make a distorted picture.

While attempts to articulate Joseph Smith's vision will—and should—continue, it may prove fruitful to look in other directions for ways to understand and contextualize early Mormon thought. It should be remembered that the vast majority of Mormon print came from the disciples who were still trying to understand Smith's theology even as they were explicating it. Just as Fichte worked from the bits and pieces of idealism he inherited from Kant, Mormon thinkers like Parley Pratt, John Taylor, and Wil-

liam W. Phelps sought to synthesize the Prophet's revelations into an intelligible dogma. Indeed, especially after the Quorum of the Twelve took control of the Church in 1844, there was an acute anxiety to complete and expand Smith's vision even as ambiguity remained. The diversity in these synthesizing attempts reveals not only the pliable nature of early Mormon thought but also the difficulty of systematizing eclectic ideas into a coherent theology.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, the process of the theological authority shifting from Smith to his successors is significant in its own right. Sociologists Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, building on the religious theories of Max Weber, have argued that this process of systematizing is an important moment in the development of any religious movement. Religious formation, they argue, is "a two-stage process of innovation." The first is "the invention of new religious ideas," while the second is "gaining social acceptance of these ideas" through adaptation and expansion. The latter stage is accomplished primarily by drawing from cultural tensions and expectations in an attempt to further accommodate the movement's religious goals and make their message more persuasive.<sup>9</sup> In other words, those synthesizing the innovative ideas have a specific culture in mind as their audience and a distinct set of cultural preconceptions as their tools. The doctrinal formulations of the early theologians of Mormonism are marked not only by the innovation of the religious innovator—in this case, Joseph Smith—but also of the culture in which they interpreted the innovator—in this case, antebellum America.

It is commonplace to view changes in early Mormonism as an instance of Weberian "routinization of charisma," sometimes even locating the beginning of that transition prior to Smith's death. But these interpretations are often applied almost prescriptively, assuming a linear development that progressed in predictable and perhaps even determinative ways. A closer examination of the Mormon example, however, reveals a dynamic system with multiple possible trajectories and a development that was by no means predetermined. Because they did not receive a coherent intellectual system that could merely be taken to its logical conclusions, those who followed Smith built with the raw materials of the theology they inherited, guided by their own personalities and beliefs, immediate contexts, and parochial concerns.

While the internal dynamics of the church body dictated in broad outlines the ways in which Smith's legacy was to be reinterpreted, external tensions were also influential—whether consciously or not—in shaping the contours of those reinterpretations. Only by examining the particulars of these transitions, then, and acknowledging that other sorts of development were possible, can we both make sense of the significance of Mormonism's transformation and properly identify the role of the surrounding environment in the process.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the synthesizing of Joseph Smith's theology provides an opportunity to examine the procedure of religious formation in a tumultuous intellectual climate. The first half of the nineteenth century is known for being rife with religious innovation, as numerous new religious movements emerged from the fertile ground of the Second Great Awakening. However, while many new sects sprang into existence, only a few matured enough to last beyond the first generation. Mormonism, as one of a handful of movements that survived, is thus an important case study into the dynamics of religious formation. The success of its maturation, I argue, exists in the ability of Smith's interpreters to merge their prophet's teachings with larger cultural trends, offer enough of a critique of that culture to make the movement relevant and necessary while still utilizing common cultural fears and misgivings, and finally to provide parameters that were simultaneously broad enough to enable theological divergence while still maintaining legitimate boundaries.

## II

“In the opening of this year [1844] I completed a number of miscellaneous works, some of which were published in pamphlet form,” reminisced Parley P. Pratt at some point during the 1850s while penning his *Autobiography*. Pratt, one of the original apostles chosen by Joseph Smith in 1835, had crafted a niche as the religion's chief defender and extrapolator. He published numerous works during his apostolic career, including theological treatises, apologetic pamphlets, books of poetry, hymnals, and his own memoirs (published posthumously), all of which served to spread and synthesize the Mormon religion. His literary production was halted only by his death at the hands of the ex-husband of one of

his plural wives in 1857. The year 1844 found Pratt at the height of his popularity. He had just returned the previous summer from a successful three-year mission to the United Kingdom where he had introduced Mormonism to thousands of converts and where his printed works were published in tremendous numbers. Once back in America, he discovered Joseph Smith's religious developments of 1842–44—including human deification, theological materialism, divine embodiment, temple rituals, and the still secret practice of polygamy. Pratt was anxious to explore these intellectual possibilities in print and enter the dialogue of what Mormon theology entailed.<sup>11</sup>

Eight months before his assassination, the Prophet took the bold step of declaring himself a candidate for U.S. president, thus thrusting Mormonism into national politics and coloring much of the period's writing with a patriotic and nationalist hue.<sup>12</sup> The first essay in Pratt's collection was "An Appeal to the Inhabitants of New York," written in the context of the LDS Church's continued effort to obtain redress for its forcible expulsion from Missouri five years earlier. In a meeting on November 29, 1843, Joseph Smith encouraged everyone willing and able to "wield a pen [to] write an address to his mother country" in defense of Mormon rights and restitution. Pratt responded promptly, composing his "Appeal" in less than a week, and presenting it to Smith and other leaders of the Church on December 4. Staking his claim as a descendent of the "early settlers of the colonies of *Plimouth* and *Sea-Brook*" with regard to his national pride, and appealing to the "honest and patriotic sons of liberty" and "lovers of your country," Pratt positioned the Mormon movement in a way that not only made the movement appear worthy of the nation's help but which also described Mormon believers as appropriate representatives of America's promise and potential—a theme that was central to Joseph Smith's teachings, yet an idea that was subtly appropriated in the years following his death. Smith provided a complex and paradoxical corpus of teachings on America, and it was left to his successors to reorient and reframe those teachings to meet immediate needs, both by appropriating Smith's teachings and also by incorporating contemporary influences.<sup>13</sup>

The broader intellectual and religious context in which Pratt wrote was equally vibrant. The antebellum period was simulta-

neously a triumphant and unsteady time for Protestant America. Religious disestablishment led to the flowering of new religious movements with variant expressions of faith claiming national legitimacy, yet the relationship between religious belief and American citizenship remained alarmingly tenuous. Churches claimed not only theological validation from their adherents but American approval from the general public: Just as citizens in the Early Republic sought to label their country as a “Protestant Nation,” religious movements, even those that originated in Europe, fought to prove that others should recognize their churches as “American religions.” Being heir to the biblical Christian tradition was not enough—religionists had to prove that they were also heirs of the American Revolution. Thus, in constructing religious “Others” in an attempt to validate one’s own identity, competing faiths were depicted as not only wrong, but as *un-American*. The battle over the title of “citizen” was just as important among American religious movements as that of “Christian.”<sup>14</sup>

Mormonism’s relationship with the American nation was consistently tenuous during the nineteenth century. Most of those who joined the faith in its first decade were children and grandchildren of the Revolutionary generation and were raised in a period of great national pride following the War of 1812.<sup>15</sup> This devotion was severely tested as Mormons were forced out of their communities and were unable to secure restitution from the local—and later, federal—governments. But despite deep conflicts with competing religionists and citizens, they still held on to what they believed to be the pure patriotism of America in the face of being denigrated as outcasts. Shortly after Mormons were forced out of their settlement in Independence, Missouri, in 1833—the first of many conflicts between Mormons and their neighbors—Joseph Smith penned a revelation stating that God himself “established the constitution of this Land by the hands of wise men whom [he] raised up unto this very purpose.”<sup>16</sup> Even in Nauvoo, when external difficulties were increasing and a possible civil war seemed imminent, Joseph Smith’s solution was not to reject the American nation altogether, but instead to run for the American presidency himself with the goal of realigning the nation with its divine purpose. Just as Christianity had fallen into apostasy and



was in need of a restoration, so too did the nation descend into a degenerate state that required divine recovery.

Parley Pratt made it clear to his audience that the current atrocities committed against Mormons were a rejection of America's founding virtue. "Here then is an end of our western empire," he bemoaned in a typically grandiose flourish. "Here then is the consummation of all your labors, toils and suffering." The nation's true enemies were found amongst Mormonism's adversaries, and the constitution—that "sacred instrument"—was being "trampled under the feet" of those who oppressed the LDS Church. Pratt urged Americans to locate "that pure fire which animated the bosoms of our fathers," and to offer the help due "by the kindred ties of citizen-ship" toward their fellow Americans. Indeed, Mormons owned "a right to claim [America's] aid and assistance" stemming from their identity as rightful heirs of American rights, liberties, and patriotism.<sup>17</sup> Writing even before Joseph Smith's presidential candidacy, Pratt implied that Mormonism's cause was central to the nation's principles.

This appeal to American citizenship only became more complex and vehement following Joseph Smith's death. To many Mormons, the murder of their prophet was an affront to what they believed to be religious liberty in America, and the fault was laid at the feet of the American nation. Eliza R. Snow, Mormonism's poetess and one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, penned, "Where are thy far-fam'd laws—Columbia! Where / Thy boasted freedom—thy protecting care?" Yet Mormons' allegiance to America became even more complicated. On the one hand, they were weary of the nation's failure to protect their liberties and were anxious to flee its borders; on the other, they felt certain that they, as the true inheritors of divine promises on the nation, would be taking America's pure tradition with them.<sup>18</sup>

In one anonymous editorial written in 1845—the year after Smith's death—this connection was more than merely implied: "When in the course of the divine economy it becomes necessary for one people to separate themselves from the religious and political fellowship which has once bound them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth that just and equal standing to which God and nature has designed them, a decent respect

for the opinions of others would seem to require them to show the causes which impel them to separation.”<sup>19</sup>

These words, appearing nearly seventy years after America’s Declaration of Independence, were explicitly written to demonstrate how Mormonism inherited its identity not only from Joseph Smith but also (at least in its rhetoric) from Thomas Jefferson. In depicting the battle between Mormons and anti-Mormons, the author makes the former not only God’s chosen people but also the very representation of America’s promised citizenship; Latter-day Saints were recapitulating not only the biblical narrative, but also the Revolution of 1776. As Parley Pratt wrote elsewhere, a Mormon was not only “a believer in revealed religion,” but also “a patriot, who stands firmly for the laws of his country, and for equal rights and protection”; an “Anti-Mormon,” by contrast, was not only a “mobber,” but also “a man opposed to the laws of his country.”<sup>20</sup>

This tension—rejecting America while still preserving the “American” ideal—was a crucial paradigm in constructing a cogent post-Joseph Smith Mormon identity and was key to their creation of a stable religious movement. Those who followed Joseph Smith inherited a collection of scriptural texts, written revelations, and oral teachings that, though perhaps coherent in Smith’s own mind, came across as disjointed messages pregnant with meaning. This corpus of theological materials, then, could be synthesized in different ways to produce different results. Yet historians have continued to treat these developments from one ecclesiastical leader to the next as if they were all part of a logical and cogent trajectory.<sup>21</sup> As Michel Foucault noted, this type of intellectual genealogies inherently “credits the discourse it analyzes with [a] coherence” that was not really there.<sup>22</sup> There were indeed persistent strains that continued through the period following Smith, but it remains crucial to acknowledge the multiple directions and open-ended possibilities that were available at each point of transition.

One way in which Smith’s successors navigated this obstacle-strewn sea of continued meaning was by determining a distinction between America the *nation* and America the *land*. In doing so, they creatively unearthed portions of Smith’s scriptural texts that had previously been either overlooked or under-theorized.

While Smith and others had previously used these texts to present a tenuous future for the American nation, his followers now used them to divorce the principles and potential associated with the ideals of America from what they believed to be a corrupt government that had apostatized from those ideals. They accomplished this end through an emphasis and reinterpretation of the Book of Mormon that placed the American continent rather than the American nation at the center of God's divine will.

Parley Pratt outlined this perspective in an editorial nearly a year after Smith's death. In contrasting the Bible and the Book of Mormon, Pratt proclaimed that the latter held more importance, not only due to its "home production," but due to the fact that the narrative took place in a more relevant physical geography. "This point need not be argued," he wrote, "as all persons must admit that America, is a larger and better country than Palestine, Egypt, Arabia and the neighboring provinces generally enclosed [sic] in the bible history." He then waxed eloquent upon the importance of America based entirely upon the actual land rather than the symbolic nation:

It must be admitted on all hands to be a country of vastly more importance, both as it regards the history of the past, and its future destiny.—Being larger in extent, and more fertile [sic] and productive in mineral and vegetable [sic] wealth; consequently better calculated to sustain a numerous population. And this is the principle point in the estimated value and importance of any country. And judging from the antiquities which are daily coming to light, we feel safe in saying, that America has been more densely populated than almost any country in the world. And as to its future destiny all are willing to admit, that it must stand foremost, and take the lead of all other nations and countries while time endures.<sup>23</sup>

Pratt was drawing upon a common cultural sense of American exceptionalism that argued that America's preeminence extended even to its natural landscape. It was akin to Thomas Jefferson's strenuous efforts to prove the American continent better suited for vegetation, animals, and human population than any other piece of land in the world, repudiating the "regeneration" thesis that had previously been popular among Enlightenment thinkers.<sup>24</sup> Even the American continent, it seemed, was destined for the climax of humanity. Thus, for Pratt, America was unique,

not just for its constitutional government—that very government that was depriving Mormons of their rights—but also for its physical location, something Mormons could still claim and embrace. Yet rather than making the United States the fulfillment of the continent's potential, Pratt argued that the American republic was just one more temporary tenant.

Further, Mormons emphasized America's chosen status through attachment with the Nephite civilization and the future role in God's kingdom. Apostle Wilford Woodruff recorded how reading the Book of Mormon "teaches the honest & humble mind the great things of God that were performed in the land of promise now called America," as well as "the fate & Destiny of the American Nation." The scriptural text taught that there were expectations and standards that must be met to retain possession of the physical geography and that failure to do so would trigger dangerous repercussions. "Unless [the American nation] speedily repent of their sins & humble themselves before God," Woodruff wrote the year after Joseph's death, "they will be destroyed from the land."<sup>25</sup> This separation between the promised Zion of the American continent from the actual nation then in control allowed Mormons to maintain loyalty to the ideals of Americanism, for now those ideas transcended the American nation.

Immediately before the migration from Nauvoo in February 1846, Mormon newspapers were filled with disillusionment at America's failure to live up to its scriptural and principled mandates. Particularly, they were obsessed over the injustices shown toward God's chosen people—not just the Mormons, but also the Native Americans, whom they believed to be the descendants of the Book of Mormon people. Importantly, the native population symbolized the American continent's other chosen civilization, a group alienated, like the Mormons, from the American nation. Mormons were especially critical of the government's treatment of Indians through westward imperialism, "shoving these Lords of the soil 'further west'" whenever the American "gentiles" ran out of space.<sup>26</sup> Smith had shown support for the nation's manifest destiny before his death, but that support was contingent on "the red man's consent."<sup>27</sup> But now Smith's successors determined that America had trespassed a moral line and was unworthy of its geographic birthright. "It is a melancholy fact, among all classes,

sects, and denominations, (save the Mormons only),” one Mormon editorial critical of America’s dealings with the Oneida Indians summarized, “that there is not virtue enough among the better to create a reverence for purity among the worse portions of community.”<sup>28</sup> The American land and its ideal principles were destined for the House of Israel, and the government’s malpractice meant that retribution was imminent. As a result, America’s fall and degradation would pave the way for Mormonism’s kingdom of God. Apostle Orson Hyde preached: “Here is the United States. . . . But we are told that the kingdom of God shall come, and his will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.” The ideals and principles of America that Mormons so cherished would depart from the degenerate nation and merge into God’s kingdom.<sup>29</sup>

Where many of Smith’s predictions for the American future rested on a restoration and reformation—he did, after all, run for president of the United States hoping to right the nation’s wrongs—Smith’s texts and revelations were now used to call for a more radical refutation, and perhaps even revolution. Pratt’s views expressed in his “Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York” soon morphed into his “100 Years Hence,” an 1845 apocalyptic article that looked to a future time in which the American nation was wiped out and the kingdom of God ruled unmolested. These elements were embryonic in Smith’s own teachings, but the new leadership and circumstances brought new emphases and, in turn, a new framing for American nationalism within the Mormon movement.<sup>30</sup>

But to be culturally relevant, Smith’s successors could not rely only on Mormon texts; they also responded to broader cultural themes. Indeed, these Mormon apostles spoke not just for their Mormon constituents, but also for a large—if often overlooked—segment of antebellum society that struggled with the juxtaposition of ideals and reality in American culture. Political strife, growing consumerism, religious intolerance, the continuance of slavery, and other dividing factors weakened the faith of American citizens only two generations removed from the Revolution. The antebellum period led many to question the nation’s exceptionalism and wonder how, as one historian puts it, “America should gain, or regain, its stature as an exemplar of liberal democ-

racy,” a position seemingly lost somewhere in the previous five decades.<sup>31</sup> By drawing on this cultural unrest, as well as giving new attention to several passages from the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s revelations, Pratt, Woodruff, and Hyde were able to construct a dynamic and compelling identity for Mormonism within the American nation.

Indeed, in the wake of Joseph Smith’s death, Mormons were forced to reinterpret what it meant to be “Mormon” and “American,” and eventually determined that an exodus to the West, leaving the confines of the American republic, was the only option remaining. Ironically, however, due to westward expansion in 1848, Mormonism would remain within the confines of the United States and continue a tense battle over citizenship and Americanism for the rest of the century—a battle that began with Joseph Smith but continued long after his death.

### III

Even beyond overt appeals to patriotism and Americanism, LDS theology both challenged and appropriated subtle—if still important—themes within American democratic culture. Part of what made Mormonism so scandalous was its claim of new scripture in an age dominated by Bible-centrism. Joseph Smith’s entrance into the religious marketplace was not with a theological treatise, published sermon, or even a conversion-oriented pamphlet; rather, it was a book claiming ancient origins, supernatural translation, and scriptural authority, challenging the traditional—and staunch—views of canonicity of the period. In his essay “The Fountain of Knowledge,” published in early 1844 as part of the same compilation that included “An Appeal,” Parley Pratt countered the generally accepted Protestant epistemology of antebellum America by arguing that religious knowledge stemmed not from the Bible, but from immediate revelation from God.<sup>32</sup> In doing so, he synchronized a Mormon discourse that both embraced and adapted American notions of common sensism and a fluctuating canon.<sup>33</sup>

America had long been a Bible-oriented culture. British subjects in colonial America and citizens in the new United States perceived themselves as members of the modern-day house of Israel. Cities were named after Old Testament towns, children were

named after biblical figures, and rules of society were modeled closely after biblical prescriptions. This emphasis only increased in the early nineteenth century, which one book peddler described as “the very season . . . of the Bible” because “the crater of the public appetite” was so large that it consumed anything Bible-related.<sup>34</sup> But the Bible was far from just a cultural symbol—it was also the measuring stick for knowledge. Biblical common sense was how Americans differentiated their rationality from that of the deist Tom Paine, and which, coupled with the Scottish philosophy of common sense, provided an epistemology that not only based human knowledge on revelation but also allowed the Bible to be the standard of truth. “Theistic common sense”—as Mark Noll aptly put it—dominated American religious discourse, as a religion’s validity depended on whether a movement could tether its belief system to the biblical text.<sup>35</sup>

“Modern men have been traditionated to believe that a sacred book was the fountain of Divine knowledge,” Pratt wrote in “The Fountain of Knowledge.” They believe “that the heights and depths, and lengths and breadths of heavenly intelligence is contained therein, and that the human mind must be limited and circumscribed thereby, so as never to receive one particle of knowledge except the small amount contained within its pages.” Pratt challenged this quintessentially Protestant notion, arguing instead that divine truths were independent of the written word; imagining the Bible as superior to independent revelation was placing the buggy before the horse. Relying entirely upon one book of scripture was stultifying to humankind’s progress: “A sacred book could never be made to contain a millionth part of the knowledge which an intelligent being is capable of receiving and comprehending.” It would not be until Christians “burst the chains” of Bible-centrism that they could fully comprehend the divine will. Biblical common sense emphasized building on the foundation of scriptural text—Pratt sought to attack and adapt that very epistemology. “Does not common sense teach you,” he responded, “that you must feast as well as [those in the past], or perish forever?” Like Ralph Waldo Emerson’s iconic manifesto—though bent toward a completely different end—Pratt essentially proclaimed, “the sun shines to-day also.”<sup>36</sup>

But in rejecting biblical common sense, Mormon thinkers

were introducing a unique epistemology that worked to merge empiricism and supernatural discourse. The cultural context in which they lived was similarly at a crossroads. On the one hand, even though the American Enlightenment was in decline by the beginning of the nineteenth century, it had made a lasting impact on the intellectual climate. As E. Brooks Holifield wrote, “Never had the issue of rationality assumed as much importance as it did in the early decades of the nineteenth century,” when it gave rise to what he titled “evidential Christianity.” Paradoxically, this was also the moment at which Romanticism encouraged rebellion against the neo-classical structure of the previous age deemed both stifling and limiting to human potential. Romantic thinkers argued for an ideology that placed no limits on the soul and, with its yearning to know the unknowable, privileged the sublime and the supernatural. But while Romanticism influenced many religious groups of the day—including the Mormons, the requirement for a rational presentation and defense still remained. What religionists of the period desired was an intellectual approach that balanced rational inquiry while at the same time maintaining the reasonableness of religion, revelation, and supernaturalism.<sup>37</sup>

Nowhere was this epistemological convergence more evident than in Joseph Smith’s account of how to differentiate false from true angelic beings. “If an Angel or spirit appears offer him your hand,” Smith explained to his close confidants. “If he is a spirit from God he will stand still and not offer you his hand. If from the Devil he will either shrink back from you or offer his hand, which if he does you will feel nothing, but be deceived.”<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere, the instructions included the addition that, if the angel were a resurrected personage, he would grasp the individual’s hand—literally interlocking mortal flesh and blood with what Smith described as immortal flesh and bone—and the physicality of the angel would thus prove his pure intentions and divine authority. Not only were supernatural, extra-canonical experiences possible, but they were capable of withstanding empirical testing. Similarly, Smith explained in an editorial that Mormons believed in the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, but only “rationally, reasonably, consistently, and scripturally, and not according to the wild vagaries, foolish notions and traditions of men.”<sup>39</sup> Most importantly, these



moments of knowledge were available to all, and could be confirmed through individual reason and revelation.

Especially during the Nauvoo period, Joseph Smith and other early Mormons fully employed this version of the commonsensical approach to color their theological discourse. When Joseph Smith preached on the possibility of salvific certainty, he prefaced his remarks by claiming, "It is so plain & so simple & easy to be understood that when I have shown you the interpretation thereof you will think you have always Known it yourselves."<sup>40</sup> When he attacked the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, he explained that it was not only on the basis of revelation but also because "it is contrary to a Rasanall [rational] mind & Reason. that something could be brought from a Nothing."<sup>41</sup> It was this combination of reason and revelation that Parley Pratt felt was the key to unlocking theological truths: "Revelation and reason, like the sun of the morning rising in its strength, dispel the mists of darkness which surround him; till at length heaven's broad, eternal day expands before him, and eternity opens to his vision. He may then gaze with rapture of delight, and feast on knowledge which is boundless as the ocean from which it emanates."<sup>42</sup>

Debates over revelatory authority within Mormonism stretched all the way back to 1830, when Hiram Page claimed his own revelations and forced Joseph Smith to emphasize his own preeminence over those matters. Yet even as Smith continually affirmed his prophetic position, his revelations and sermons emphasized the revelatory responsibility placed on every member of the Church. This paradoxical strain continued through his life and created a complex web of revelatory responsibilities in which Smith was the center while the peripheries still maintained a degree of autonomy. It is to be expected, then, that this dynamic canonical structure, based on consistent tension, faced a substantial challenge when the center figure was removed.<sup>43</sup>

The dynamics and tensions between reason, revelation, and tradition immediately took center stage in the dialogue that followed Joseph Smith's death, but were now tinged with the Twelve's authoritarian zeal. With Mormonism's founding prophet gone and several competing factions struggling over Smith's authoritative mantle, the question of how truth was obtained was a defining feature of one's claim to legitimacy. While the Quo-

rum of the Twelve eventually took control and moved the largest coherent unit of the Saints west, their approach to revelation and epistemological authority, their mode of interpreting Smith's revelatory legacy and their emphasis on prophetic authority were deeply affected by their debates with competing successors and a desire to centralize institutional authority.

Most importantly, they met a surprising challenger in James J. Strang, a recent convert in Michigan who asserted his claim based on angelic visitations, a new book of translated scripture, and a corpus of continued revelations that composed an impressive prophetic mimesis in opposition to the Twelve's claims to leadership. The most significant problem the Twelve faced when combatting Strangite missionaries was that the latter group emphasized exactly what Mormonism had hitherto highlighted: the necessity of a prophet and immediate dialogic communication with God. Brigham Young and the Twelve were at a theoretical disadvantage because they lacked a prophetic figure as compelling as James Strang. Previously, Parley Pratt had adapted a common American folk song to proclaim, "A church without a Prophet, / Is not the church for me / It has no head to lead it, / In it I would not be." However, now that they lacked that very "head" celebrated in the hymn, the Twelve—according to one amused Strangite observer—dropped the song "like a hot potato."<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, Strang's followers embraced both the song and its message, positioning themselves as the true successors to Mormonism's revelatory claims and Joseph Smith's prophetic legacy.<sup>45</sup> These battles waged between followers of Brigham Young and James Strang over the dynamics of revelatory authenticity and canonicity are acute examples of how Smith's corpus of teachings was molded to fit internal questions.

These tensions played out in a debate that took place in Nauvoo on March 3, 1846, just as thousands of Saints were beginning their exodus out of America and into the West. John E. Page, formerly an apostle in the LDS Church but now a loud and persuasive convert of James Strang, argued against the Twelve's authority because they lacked the power of continuing revelation: "It is for the voice of God to say who the [leader] shall be, & then the people shall say amen." To follow the tradition of Joseph Smith, a divine intervention and infallible voice from the heavens was the

manifestation needed to identify God's chosen prophet. But, he lamented, now there is only "talk of the *people* appoint[ing] a [president]," and by so doing, "we have to trample upon the Doc[trine] & Cov[enants]"—the collection of Joseph Smith's revelations, and the tangible manifestation of Smith's mantle and expansion of the scriptural canon. The problem with Brigham Young was he "had no more power to give rev[elations] than any of the other[s]—it requires the 'thus saith the Lord' to put a man in his place." Page emphasized that his embrace of Strangism and rejection of Young was a product of being a faithful follower of Mormonism for over a decade. "If I have erred," he insisted, "it is because I placed too much confidence in them that taught me." Persuasively, Page sought to demonstrate that the only possible interpretation of Mormonism required a figure of continuing revelation—the "thus saith the Lord"—and anything else was counterfeit.<sup>46</sup>

In response, Orson Hyde, one of the apostles left behind to watch over those remaining in Nauvoo after the first company moved west, voiced what had come to be the dominant rhetorical message of the Twelve: Smith's revelatory position was not being "trampled," but it had evolved into the esoteric rituals of the temple—the climax, according to Hyde, of Smith's prophetic career. Through temple ordinances, the Church was still linked to Smith and the fountain of revelation. "Joseph Smith is [still] the Hook in Heaven—the 12 [are] the next link—& you [are] all linked on," Hyde explained.<sup>47</sup> The image of the hook reinforced the connected nature of the gospel structure, with the Twelve maintaining a central position that made all others peripheral and dependent. This interconnected chain drew from Smith's cosmology, where all spirits were located within an evolving web of familial sealing, a web made literal and imminent through priesthood rituals and ecclesiastical control.<sup>48</sup>

Hyde continued his sermon four days later, expanding the linkage between Smith, gospel knowledge, and the Twelve's authority: "Recollect Jesus Christ was the president of the Church he choose 12 Apostles & they were witnesses, to go to all the nations & preach—by & bye the Lord was crucified & ascended to heaven—did he take the keys with him or leave them on the Earth—he did both—he left knowledge on Earth & took knowl-

edge with him, & Knowledge is power—says he to Peter, I give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>49</sup> Just like Christ in the meridian of time, Smith passed the keys of knowledge on to the Twelve.

In the early years of the Twelve’s leadership, “knowledge” and “priesthood keys” became intrinsically connected, creating a canon of religious knowledge centered on priesthood authority. Whereas with Smith the temple rites were to be the apex of gospel learning, with the Twelve they became the standard of all knowledge and validity—a merging of several disparate themes into a centralized base. It was only through the priesthood keys that the fountain of knowledge could continue. Indeed, that the term “keys” came to be the dominant descriptor for salvific truth demonstrates the lengths to which the Twelve routinized epistemological authority. Smith’s revelations had laid the foundation, but now the temple ordinances ritualized and fulfilled that spirit and message. “I asked Elder Page the other day,” Hyde mused, “which is the greater, this Book (the D&C) or the Sprit [sic] that gave it?”<sup>50</sup> And for the previous year, in the aftermath of Joseph’s death, the Twelve had emphasized that the temple was the apex of this spirit of revelation. Strang, himself, had never been inducted.

Because this debate between Hyde and Page took place less than six months after thousands of Saints initially experienced these salvific ordinances and because the discourse was given in the shadow of the temple, listeners would have recognized the connection between “knowledge” and “priesthood keys” as further confirmation of the apostles’ succession claims. While Smith made this connection himself during his Nauvoo sermons and further emphasized it through private teachings and rituals to close associates, the extent to which it touched the average Saint was mostly limited. The Twelve, however, further publicized it, making it a focal point of the Mormon lived experience. Though Smith had intended these rites to be shared by all those found worthy within the Church, they still played an important role in cementing the Twelve’s authoritative claims. Knowledge could and would be gained through reason and revelation, but it could be solidified only through priesthood rites. In this sense, Mormonism’s canonicity expanded to include not only recorded revelations but also ritual experience.

This rhetorical and interpretive strain also dominated the Twelve's debate with another schismatic figure, Sidney Rigdon, further demonstrating the malleability of their message. Previously, Rigdon had been the first counselor in Smith's First Presidency, possibly placing him second in authority and power. However, he had gone through significant periods of alienation from Smith, especially over plural marriage, and had not participated in the new doctrines Smith had shared with his inner circle. Rigdon challenged the Twelve, urging his own claim to be "guardian" of the movement until Joseph's oldest son, then twelve, came of age. Similar to Strang, Rigdon claimed a revelation that he felt validated his authority. Thus, in their battles with Rigdon—and especially his excommunication trial—the Twelve emphasized that the former leader lacked the knowledge, power, and authority necessary for Church leadership, which could only be gained through the highest temple ordinances. In the epistemological crisis in which competing supernatural revelations are claimed as support for practical concerns, the only determining factor was priesthood keys, which the Twelve emphasized they obtained from Smith himself. By binding knowledge to priesthood rites and authority, it lessened the threat of competitors who presented ecclesiastical claims and doctrinal revelations as validation.

"There is a way by which all revelations purporting to be from God through any man can be tested," Orson Hyde explained at the trial over Rigdon's membership. "Brother Joseph said, let no revelation go to the people until it has been tested" in the highest councils. This interpretation of Smith's teachings emphasized order and authority in determining what was truth. Further, this precedent was especially relevant in the months preceding Smith's death, bolstering the Twelve as the central figures in this epistemological hierarchy, because they "were in council with Brother Joseph almost every day for weeks." Smith had prepared them for this position by "conduct[ing] us through every ordinance of the holy priesthood and when he had gone through with all the ordinances he rejoiced very much, and says, now if they kill me you have got all the keys." It was only then, Hyde recalled Smith proclaiming, that "Satan will not be able to tear down the kingdom" and corrupt the doctrines and ordinances of the gos-

pel. Parley Pratt added to Hyde's testimony, explaining that, though "the quorum of the Twelve have not offered a new revelation" since Smith's death, that was only due to the fact that "we have spent all our time, early and late, to do the things the God of heaven commanded us to do through brother Joseph"—most especially, building the temple and officiating in its ordinances.<sup>51</sup> Revealed truth had all pointed to the temple and its priesthood sealings. Future knowledge depended on its completion.

The antebellum period in which these debates took place was riven by competing ideas: It was heralded as the age of democratic freedom, in which each individual believer set off to pave his or her own religious path, but there was an equally palpable fear concerning this radical dispersion of knowledge. In terms of scriptural canonicity, there were "those who overtly punched holes in the traditional boundaries of the biblical canon in order to make room for new truths that they considered worthy of canonization," one historian has written, "and those who expressly viewed the rise of new moral or religious imperatives as a sinister threat to the sanctity and unity of the closed canon."<sup>52</sup> On one side were figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Lorenzo Dow who argued for a more egalitarian model of spiritual truth, and on the other there were those who maintained a skepticism toward the excesses of democratic power, even—and perhaps especially—in a religious setting.

Mormonism, at different times and in different situations, occupied positions on both sides of these cultural tensions. Smith himself, while often heralded as the epitome of opening the "canon" of spiritual truth, took steps to restrain a concomitant outpouring of revelatory anarchy. These restraints included a hierarchical priesthood structure not too dissimilar from Methodist conferences in their ability to oversee and manage an otherwise democratic structure. And, as it had within Methodism, this turn to more centralized and systematized knowledge introduced more stability in the tumultuous environment of the mid-nineteenth century—a religious trend that pervaded much of the period. So in drawing from these contemporary tensions, Smith's successors incorporated a potent blend of cultural tools and influences while adapting Mormonism's revelatory tradition in response to immediate concerns.<sup>53</sup>

By placing the temple and priesthood keys at the center of Mormonism's epistemological claims, the Twelve succeeded in establishing a theological framework in which their claims could triumph over competing schismatic options while drawing from elements in both Mormon and American culture. By holding the keys to the temple, Brigham Young and the apostles held the keys to knowledge. But in doing so, they dictated that Joseph Smith's revelatory legacy would be understood in a way that led first and foremost to the future temple rituals—ordinances that had been introduced only two years earlier and not made public until shortly after his death. What had been a set of secret rituals limited to a small circle of initiates—though they planned to have larger participation once the Nauvoo Temple was completed—was now the only path by which believers could gain salvific knowledge. Pratt's "Fountain of Knowledge" of 1844 focused on Smith's teachings of dialogic revelation through personal connection to deity; now the "fountain" was more to be *experienced* rather than merely learned. But more than just experiencing truth—a framework that could inherently be disruptive—the experience was established within a strict set of liturgical boundaries and overseen by tight ecclesiastical control. While this adapted perspective of revelatory knowledge threatened to routinize what had hitherto been a dynamic understanding of truth, it succeeded in centralizing epistemological power in the hands of Brigham Young and the Twelve and in attaching believers to a unified religious movement; personal and familial revelation was still possible, but validation and control were further centralized.

#### IV

The process of correlating and synthesizing Joseph Smith's revelations and teachings largely continued in step with the new developments and evolutions in Mormon history and culture. Settlement in Utah introduced theocratic dominance, frontier discourse, and sometimes violent reformations; the end of isolation brought more spiritually oriented boundaries; the stepping back from authoritative support for polygamy by 1904 forced a reformulation of what constituted "families" and "kingdoms" in the Mormon cosmos; and finally, the twentieth century brought a growth of fundamentalist and neo-orthodox thought in reaction

to an increasingly secular and skeptical world. Indeed, the transformations in LDS thought during its first two centuries offer in microcosm the larger intellectual trends of the cultures in which Mormons acted within and reacted to.<sup>54</sup>

And therein lies the significance of the interpretation(s) and reinterpretation(s) of LDS theology. The growth and development of Mormonism from a frontier faith to a Utah theocracy to the twentieth-century “American” religion depended to a large extent on the ability of Smith’s successors to both incorporate and challenge broader cultural tensions in the process of synthesizing and expanding the teachings of its founding prophet. This task required innovation in sustaining—or recreating—a uniquely Mormon and coherent theology with a tenuous and dynamic relationship with the broader culture. As a result, the study of how that theology developed not only sheds added light on the movement itself but also on the dynamic process of religious formation and transformation in both a vibrant movement and an energetic culture.

#### Notes

1. Parley P. Pratt, “Proclamation. To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Greeting,” *Millennial Star* 5 (March 1845): 152.

2. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge,” in J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 57; emphasis his.

3. For the most incisive overview of Smith’s theology, as well as the most persuasive argument for its coherency and consistency, see Samuel M. Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

4. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xxi.

5. Walter A. McDougall, *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 180.

6. Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61 (October 1980): 380.

7. For other intellectual frameworks for Smith, see John L. Brooke, *Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987); Jan



Shippo, "The Reality of the Restoration and the Restoration Ideal in the Mormon Tradition," in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, edited by Richard T. Hughes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 181–95; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Terryl L. Givens, "Prophecy, Process, and Plentitude," in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, edited by Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 107–18.

8. The ascension of the Quorum of the Twelve to authority was not the only option for succession following Joseph Smith's death. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), esp. 143–262. Indeed, Smith's eclectic nature left the question so open that numerous different branches were formed in a continuation of what each successor felt was Smith's religious vision. See various articles in Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer, eds., *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Press, 2007); Newell G. Bringhurst, "Joseph Smith's Ambiguous Legacy: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity as Dynamics for Schism within Mormonism after 1844," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 27 (2007): 1–48. A recent and useful treatment is Christopher Blythe, "Re-creating Religion: The Response to Joseph Smith's Innovations in the Second Prophetic Generation of Mormonism," (M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 2010).

9. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 156. For more on this formation, see their Chapter 8. See also Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), esp. 46–79.

10. For a more anthropological theory that is based in isolated tensions, see Danny L. Jorgensen, "Dissent and Schism in the Early Church: Explaining Mormon Fissiparousness," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 15–39.

11. Parley P. Pratt [Jr.], ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Embracing His Life, Ministry and Travels, with Extracts in Prose and Verse, from His Miscellaneous Writings* (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 367. The definitive biography of Pratt is Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley Parker Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For Pratt's writings and theology, see Peter Crawley, "Parley P. Pratt: Father of Mormon Pamphleteering," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 13–26; Benjamin E. Park, "Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early

Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 1–44.

12. On Joseph Smith’s run for the American presidency, see Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 514–17. For the origins of Smith’s political thought, see Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Zion Rising: Joseph Smith’s Early Social and Political Thought” (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2008).

13. Manuscript History of the Church, Book 1E, 1789 [November 29, 1843], 1791 [December 4, 1843], LDS Church History Library. Parley P. Pratt, “An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York,” in *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York, Letter to Queen Victoria (Reprinted from the Tenth European Edition); The Fountain of Knowledge; Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection* (Nauvoo, Ill.: John Taylor, Printer, 1844), 1.

14. For Christianity during the Early Republic period, see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

15. For the patriotic age in which Mormonism’s first converts were raised, see Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 24–50.

16. Joseph Smith, Revelation, December 16, 1833, in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books*, Vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of the Joseph Smith Papers, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 271.

17. Pratt, “An Appeal,” 3–5.

18. Eliza R. Snow, “The Assassination of Gen’ls Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith . . . ,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 12 (July 1, 1844): 575.

19. Anonymous, “American Independence Declared Over Again; with Amendments to Suit the Times,” *The Prophet*, March 22, 1845, not paginated.

20. Parley P. Pratt, “The Science of Anti-Mormon Suckerology—Its Learned Terms, and Their Significance,” *The Prophet*, May 10, 1845, not paginated. For Mormonism’s complex relationship with American patriotism during this period, see Ryan G. Tobler, “Parley Pratt and Evolving Views of the American Republic in Early Mormonism,” paper presented at the 2009 Joseph Smith Seminar; copy in my possession.

21. See, for example, Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982); Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham, and the Twelve: A Succession in Continuity," *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 301–41.

22. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 149. This new form of a cultural history of ideas has taken root in histories of early America. See Michal Jan Rozbicki, *Culture and Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Gordon S. Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, edited by John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

23. Parley P. Pratt, "The Bible and the Book of Mormon Contrasted," *The Prophet* 1, no. 47 (April 12, 1845): not paginated.

24. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1785), 71–111.

25. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), 2:610, November 1, 1845.

26. "Indian Affairs," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 4 (March 1, 1845): 829.

27. Joseph Smith, *General Smith's Views of the Power and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Nauvoo, Ill: John Taylor, 1844), 8.

28. "The Oneida Indians," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 20 (January 1, 1846): 1080–81.

29. "Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, Delivered Sunday, June 15, 1845," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (August 15, 1845): 1002. See also Parley Pratt, "The Remnants of Lehi," *The Prophet* 1, no. 47 (April 12, 1845): not paginated; "Indians in Canada," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 13 (July 15, 1845): 964; "Ephraim and Manasseh," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 13 (July 15, 1845): 965–66.

30. Parley P. Pratt, "100 Years Hence," *Nauvoo Neighbor*, September 1845, rpt. in *The Essential Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 141–45. These ideas were also fleshed out in a larger text, *Angel of the Prairies*, which was written around the same time and published posthumously. Parley P. Pratt, *The Angel of the Prairies; A Dream of the Future*, by Elder Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, edited by Abinadi Pratt (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1880).

31. Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Chal-*

lence to American Exceptionalism (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 185. See also Sean Willentz, *The Rise of Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 425–55; John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, eds., *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 99–124; Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

32. Pratt, “The Fountain of Knowledge” in *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York*. . . , 15–20.

33. Mormons, of course, were not the only minority group that challenged the canonical borders. Hicksites and Quakers made similar claims. The tensions of canonicity in early America are deftly explored in David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

34. Mason Weems, quoted in Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, eds., *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3.

35. Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93. For the importance of the Bible in the period, see various essays in Hatch and Noll, *Bible in America*. For American religious use of common sense rhetoric, see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), esp. 174–80; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

36. Parley P. Pratt, “The Fountain of Knowledge,” in Pratt, *An Appeal*, 15, 19. See also Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971–94), edited by Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson, 1:7. For similarities and contrasts between Mormonism and American Romantic critiques of Bible-centrism, see Benjamin E. Park, “‘Build, Therefore, Your Own World’: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, and American Antebellum Thought,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 59–64. Mormonism’s founding scripture denounced Bible-centrism as a perversion of religious devotion. “Thou fool, that shall say, A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible,” the God in the Book of Mormon queried ironically. “Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word?” *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, translated by Joseph Smith (Palmyra:

Printed by E. B. Grandin, for the Author, 1830), 115 (current [1979] LDS edition 2 Ne. 29:3–11).

37. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 175. For an overview of Romanticism and Mormon thought, see Givens, “Prophecy, Process, and Plentitude,” 55–56.

38. Joseph Smith, Sermon, December 1840, recorded in “William Clayton’s Private Book,” and reproduced in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 44.

39. Joseph Smith, “Gifts of the Holy Ghost,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (June 15, 1842): 823. For Mormon angels, see Benjamin E. Park, “‘A Uniformity So Complete’: Early Mormon Angelology,” *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 2 (2010): 1–37; Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, chap. 9.

40. Joseph Smith, Sermon, May 21, 1843, in Howard and Martha Coray Notebook, reproduced in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 206.

41. Joseph Smith, Sermon, January 5, 1841, in Frank McIntire Minute Book, reproduced in *ibid.*, 61.

42. Parley P. Pratt, “Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body,” in Pratt, *An Appeal*, 23.

43. Terryl L. Givens has identified this constant tension of centralized authority and radical individualism to be a central tenet of Mormon thought. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–20.

44. The original text of the song is from “Poetry,” *Times and Seasons* 5 (February 1, 1845): 799. “Hot potato” comes from “The Corner Stones,” *Voree Herald* 1, no. 9 (September 1846): [37].

45. Robin Scott Jensen, “Mormons Seeking Mormonism: Strangite Success and the Conceptualization of Mormon Ideology, 1844–50,” in Bringhurst and Hamer, *Scattering of the Saints*, 100.

46. John E. Page, quoted in Thomas Bullock, clerk, “Minutes of a Meeting Held in Nauvoo, March 3, 1846,” 2–3, LDS Church History Library, emphasis mine; transcribed by Robin Scott Jensen. This debate is further engaged in Robin Scott Jensen and Benjamin E. Park, “Debating Succession, March 1846: John E. Page, Orson Hyde, and the Trajectories of Joseph Smith’s Legacy,” article under review.

47. Orson Hyde, quoted in Bullock, “Minutes,” 4.

48. For Smith’s cosmological chain, see Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, chaps. 8–9.

49. Hyde, quoted in Bullock, “Minutes,” 4–6.

50. Ibid.

51. "Trial of Elder Rigdon," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 17 (September 15): 649–51, 653. For this trial and its relevancy to the succession debates and temple ordinances, see Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances," 189–236.

52. Holland, *Sacred Borders*, 9.

53. For Methodist conferences, see Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1996); Kathleen Flake, "From Conferences to Councils: The Development of LDS Church Organization, 1830–1835," in *Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows' Papers, 1997–1999*, edited by Richard L. Bushman (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History, 2000): 1–8; Christopher C. Jones, "'We Latter-day Saints Are Methodists': The Influence of Methodism on Early Mormon Religiosity" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009), 84–88. For the religious shift toward more centralization in the mid-nineteenth century, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 348–63; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 258–60; John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 173–96.

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