

REVIEWS

Making Visible the Hand of Ritual

Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds. *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005); Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds. *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies, 1845–1846: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005); Devery S. Anderson, ed., *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011).

Reviewed by Stephen C. Taysom

Although we may not know it, we live our lives immersed in ritual. Many of our daily exchanges with other human beings are ritualized. We often categorize and compare religions by referencing how highly structured, or not, their liturgical worlds are. I grew up being told that Mormons avoided ritual because it connoted empty practice and vulgar symbolism. The truth is, however, that Mormon temple worship is among the richest symbolic systems of worship in Christianity.

Within the temple rituals, one can, for example, identify almost all of Catherine Bell's six genres of ritual action. Bell was, before her untimely death from cancer in 2008, among the most prominent scholars of ritual theory in the world. A specialist in Chinese religion, Bell not only studied rituals but also produced important work on the history of the study of ritual. Bell's work has allowed a new generation of scholars to apply ritual studies theory to a strikingly broad range of specific religious traditions.

Given the strength of the theoretical framework available, it is time that the Mormon temple ritual receives serious study *as ritual*. Unfortunately, it has not received as much of this attention as it should have.¹ Since Joseph Smith introduced the temple endowment in 1842, it has been a source of curiosity, contempt, and even fantasy for those outside of the faith. Even for insiders, the temple has always been somewhat perplexing. Because Mormon tradition holds that matters of any specificity regarding the temple ceremonies must not be discussed outside the temple itself,

those who are preparing to attend for the first time are understandably nervous. Adding to this tension is the fact that the temple is simultaneously the heart of Mormon piety and the least “Mormon” thing that most Mormons do.

In a Church where the sacramental elements are bread and water, there is no local professional clergy, and many Church buildings are centered around an indoor basketball court, the temple ceremonies represent a different sort of devotional mode altogether. They are liturgically rich and involve ritual vestment changes and symbolic body posturing, sacred words and the enactment of a holy and comprehensive mythology. No other Christian church in America comes close to the level of individual involvement in the abstract ritual performance of a sacred story that is found in LDS temples.

Most Mormons know very little about the history of the temple endowment. Signature Books, in its three-volume documentary history of LDS temple worship, has given a great gift to scholars and believers who wish to understand the historical development of these rituals through a study of the documents that believers have produced. This review looks at these three volumes, focusing on how the documents collected in each volume illuminate the possible future study of LDS temple worship, as well as what the documents tell us about using the history of temple worship as a lens through which to view LDS history more generally.

Volume 1: *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed*

In the first volume of the trilogy, editors Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera focus on documents bearing on the origin and development of Smith’s “Anointed Quorum.” This group, first organized in May 1842, initially met in Smith’s Red Brick Store in Nauvoo and thereafter in a variety of private locations, including the homes of quorum members. At the group’s meetings, they would initiate new members and perform a ritual that would be more or less familiar to modern Mormons as the temple endowment. The documents collected in the first volume are drawn largely from the journals of quorum members, most of whom were very circumspect in writing about the ritual. The documents range in content and style from the specific and voluble to the vague and rhetorically enthusiastic.

An example of the former is drawn from the journal of L. John Nuttall, who recorded an 1877 recollection from Brigham Young. According to Nuttall, Young recalled that, when the first endowments were given in Nauvoo, “we had only one room to work in with the exception of a little side room or office where we were washed and anointed had our garments placed upon us and received our new name. And after he [Joseph Smith] had performed these ceremonies, he gave the key words, signs, tokens and penalties” (7). A rather more succinct and veiled entry is found in Smith’s diary entry from September 26, 1842, in which he wrote, simply, that he spent some time “in the large room over the store” (16). Although few of the documents contain specific information about the endowment itself, when read as a whole, these early sources provide historians with several important pieces of information, including the process by which new members of the quorum were selected and the role of the quorum’s meetings in the larger problem-solving operation of the Church. On the first point, this was a small, insular group of mostly American-born converts. The nationality issue is significant in view of the fact that Nauvoo was becoming increasingly internationalized, as first the British and later the Scandinavian missions were bringing thousands of new Latter-day Saints into Nauvoo each year. Most members of the Anointed Quorum were not part of that new demographic. Members of the quorum nominated those whom they believed to be trustworthy, thus creating a web of relationships that were mapped onto the demographics of this new, sacred unit.

With regard to the second point, the documents included in this volume make it abundantly clear that Joseph Smith confronted the vast array of difficulties facing his Church in the 1840s through what he believed to be the profound spiritual power available through petitioning God in special prayer rites. These rites sanctified the entire meeting and created a sacred space in which revelation would flow unimpeded. Although the term “prayer circle” does not appear in any of the collected documents in the first volume, it is obvious from the context that the prayers offered during meetings of the Anointed Quorum involved dressing in temple robes, praying in a circle, and invoking the attention of God through the use of ritual signs. Heber C.

Kimball referred to it in his journal as the “Holy Order,” and he recorded that the order prayed for rain July 10, 1845 (127). Smith and his fellow quorum members prayed about a wide range of practical issues during these sessions, including “the prosperity of Israel” (176) and “that the Lord would turn away the sickness now prevailing amongst the children in the City” (129).

Prayers were also offered up for sick individuals, and what would be categorized by scholars of religion as prayers of cursing were also mentioned. For example, Willard Richards recorded a meeting after Joseph Smith’s death in which “George A. Smith prayed that the evils of the course William Smith had pursued would fall upon his own head” (135). In addition to the prayers themselves, the now-sanctified environment was used for the discussion of political, economic, and social problems that were pressing upon the Mormons. That these documents so clearly indicate that Smith conceived of and used the meetings of the Quorum of the Anointed not only to perform rituals but also as a setting uniquely suited to finding solutions to vexing problems is fascinating because the problem-solving function of temple worship among ordinary Mormons now represents one of the central features of temple worship; members speak often of receiving inspiration about practical problems during the time they spend in the temple.

Also during the period covered by the first volume, women were inducted into the Anointed Quorum and the practice of plural marriage was introduced, largely through the auspices of the quorum and the relatives of quorum members. The records are largely silent on the issue of plural marriage, as one would expect, but Todd Compton’s insightful introductory essay to the first volume, as well as many of the footnotes, help readers identify subtle references to the practice.

In sum, Volume 1 is about the creation of an elite group focused on ritual practices of mythological performance, apotropaic prayer, and eternal marriage. In subsequent volumes, Bergera and Anderson’s documents demonstrate how this process was first democratized and then modernized.

Volume 2: The Nauvoo Endowment Companies

The second volume is the longest despite the fact that it covers

only the period from 1845 to 1846. Volume 2 consists largely of lists. The majority of its nearly 700 pages are devoted to reproducing temple records concerning ordinance work performed in the Nauvoo Temple between December 1845 and the Mormons' departure from Nauvoo in February 1846. Obviously, this volume will be of interest to genealogists. But what use will historians or scholars of religion or even readers of Mormon history find in this massive collection of lists?

For me, what these records represent is a tangible manifestation of the democratization of the endowment and sealing rituals. This may seem a minor point, but in fact it represents a substantial and unusual development in the context of ritual studies. In most cases, rituals that are introduced to and, in fact, serve to create an elite are closely guarded by the elite that makes, and is made, by the rituals. In the case of the Mormon temple rites, the alacrity of the shift from the status of elite rituals to rituals serving an entire religious community, to say nothing of the shift itself, is truly remarkable. And it is in this volume that we see that shift take place.

It is one thing to be told that Mormon temple rites were democratized after the death of Joseph Smith. It is another thing entirely to read the truth of that in the lists of names. Obscure, ordinary, non-elite Latter-day Saints are initiated by the thousands into the rituals that we saw in Volume 1 being administered only to the elite. In my estimation, this is the most important, but not the only, contribution made by Volume 2.

While the masses were being washed, anointed, endowed, and sealed in the Nauvoo Temple, Church leaders were continuing their temple meetings. One of the tasks that takes up a surprising amount of Church leaders' time as chronicled in these documents is the ritual dedication of objects. The horns that held the holy anointing oil were dedicated individually. The oil, too, had to be ritually consecrated, something that was often done while the ritual actors were wearing temple robes. Most interesting, however, were the cases in which objects not directly connected with temple service underwent ritual dedication in the temple. For example, on December 16, 1845, a "letter which had been written by E[ld]er Hyde was dedicated to God with prayer that the desired object may be accomplished by it" (47).

What the documents in Volume 3 make clear is that, by the

mid-1840s, the temple itself was seen as a locus of power—not only a place set apart for the performance of sacred ritual, but a place in which actions that could be performed outside of the temple stood a better chance of achieving efficacy when performed within. The issue of efficacy is always salient in discussions of ritual. In the case of the LDS temple endowment, Volume 2 makes it clear that Church leaders believed and taught that the prayers offered up in the temple were particularly efficacious. Apostle Amasa Lyman told a group of Mormons who had just been through the endowment ceremony: “You have learned how to pray. You have been taught to approach God, and be recognized. This is the principle by which the Church has been kept together, and not the power of arms. A few individuals have asked for your preservation, and their prayers have been heard, and it is this which has preserved you from being scattered to the four winds” (120). All of these details help us develop a picture of how the Mormons viewed the power of the temple as a place and the rituals themselves as providing greater access to God and allowing God greater access to them.

These meetings also included the ritual prayer circles and discussions of the meaning of the temple endowment with Brigham Young “giving much instruction at different intervals” (58). Some of this instruction involved the proper relationships among men, women, and God. In a particularly telling temple sermon, Heber C. Kimball told the women present: “[God] did not make the man for the woman; but the woman for the man, and it is just as unlawful for you to rise up and rebel against your husband, as it would be for man to rebel against God. When the man came to the veil, God gave the key word to the man, and the man gave it to the woman. But if a man don’t use a woman well and take good care of her, God will take her away from him, and give to [sic] another” (120). This fragment is significant because it demonstrates that the LDS temple endowment, like most rituals, allows participants to incorporate contemporary cultural ideals into a ritually performed mythology that is assumed to be unchanging and eternal. In this case, the notion that women were not only third in a hierarchy that ran from God to man to woman, but also that women were objects to be acted upon, possessed, and even redistributed is incorporated into the most sacred of Mormon ritual contexts.

While it is a sad truth that most nineteenth-century Americans would have found such misogyny unremarkable, one of the problems that ritual-making presents is that it tends to put believers in a double bind when it comes to social change. On the one hand, they are bound by their culture, but even when the culture begins to change, the old cultural ideas have been tied with an all-but-invisible bond to sacred ritual structures within the faith itself. As Catherine Bell noted: “Ritual must simultaneously disguise its techniques and purposes and improvisations and mistakes. It must make its own invention invisible.”² Thus, rituals sometimes hamper efforts by religious groups to make social changes commensurate with changes being made within the broader culture. The documents presented in Volume 2 demonstrate that Mormon temple rituals follow a pattern common to many other rituals across time and space—a process by which “cultural or conventional orders, by themselves arbitrary and fragile, come to partake of the necessity and durability of natural law and brute fact.”³ In Volume 3, discussed below, we will see the modern Church negotiating this struggle to make the invention visible so that change can be made to the most brutish of facts without appearing to subvert the eternal rites.

Aside from the important contribution that the documents in Volume 2 make to the study of Mormon temple rituals qua ritual, they also shed light on some issues attendant to the practical management of the temple. The temple was the largest building in the area; and by the time it was completed, the Mormons in Nauvoo had become so ostracized by their neighbors that they were all focused on spending time in the temple for entertainment as well as liturgical purposes. Many of the documents record Brigham Young’s efforts to control the use of the temple building for recreation—especially dancing. While he strongly supported the Mormons in their desires to kick up their collective heels, he was particularly concerned with the “wicked” individuals who found their way inside the temple. In a document extracted from William Clayton’s journal, Church leaders noted that “some three or four men and perhaps more, had introduced women into the Temple, not their wives, and were living in the side rooms, cooking, sleeping, tending babies, and toying with their women.” The same entry noted that “there were also many persons lounging about, who had

no particular duty to attend to, but who thought they had a right to be present, because they had once passed through the Vail" (193). The democratization of ritual apparently had its price.

Volume 3: *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000*

The third and final volume is perhaps the one that contemporary Mormons will find the most interesting. This volume is like the first two inasmuch as it illuminates a major shift not only in the history of temple worship but also in the history of Mormonism itself. In the case of the final volume, we see through these documents a church that has established itself as a staple of American cultural life but which finds itself struggling to negotiate the rough waters of modernity.

During this period, especially beginning with the twentieth century, Mormons were forced to make important choices about how far they were willing to separate themselves from the broader American culture. This process of separation was made more painful and difficult than it had been since the 1840s because Mormons were beginning to see themselves, for the first time in many decades, as full participants in the rising tide of American cultural influence. Also, the Church continued to struggle with the problem of democratization that had initially emerged during the very late Nauvoo period. Volume 3 contains many possible examples that could be used to illustrate these points, including discussions of polygamy, second anointings, suicide, and the move to the commercial production and sale of temple clothing.

Two examples are particularly illuminating: the evolution of the temple garment and the prayer circle. First introduced as part of the original Anointed Quorum endowment rites in the 1840s, by the early twentieth century the garments were beginning to pose some practical problems. Garments for both men and women consisted of thick union-suit-type articles with long sleeves and long legs. They tied up the front, had a collar, and did not feature a closed crotch. Instructions issued to temple presidents in 1904 underscored the fact that "garments . . . must not be altered or mutilated and are to be worn as intended, down to the wrist and ankles, and around the neck. These requirements are imperative; admission to the Temple will be refused to those who do not comply therewith" (139). The same instruction was reissued in 1911.

What the documents in this volume reveal is that, as late as 1911, most Church leaders understood the garments to be sacred, not only in function but also in design. In 1923, Salt Lake Temple President George F. Richards, acting as part of a committee to re-examine temple practices, pushed hard for a modernization of the garments, to include “dispensing with the collar, using buttons instead of strings, using the closed crotch and flap, and for the women wearing elbow sleeves [sic] and leg length just below the knee” (198–99). The First Presidency eventually approved the changes to the garment; and according to an article in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, included in Volume 3, the motivation for these changes stemmed largely from the experiences of women. “The younger of the gentler sex complained that to wear the old style with the new finer hosiery gave the limbs a knotty appearance, . . . [and] was embarrassing in view of the generally accepted sanitary shorter skirt” (200).

The *Tribune* article notes that the changes were met with resistance from some older members of the Church. One woman was quoted as saying: “I shall not alter my garments, even if President Grant has ordered me to do so. My garments now are made as they were when I was married in the endowment house long before the temple was built. The pattern was revealed to the prophet Joseph, and Brother Grant has no right to change it” (199). The point of view expressed by this anonymous woman—that the pattern of the garment was revealed to Joseph Smith and was, therefore, immutable—was the standard notion held by most Mormons throughout the nineteenth century.

In fact, one of George F. Richards’s main tasks was to demonstrate to the committee of apostles that Joseph Smith had, in fact, experimented with a number of designs for the garment and that the specific pattern was not revealed from God. Once Richards had successfully made this case to most of the Church leaders (Joseph Fielding Smith voted to oppose most of the proposed changes), further modifications to the garment were increasingly frequent. In 1936 the Church moved to produce a garment “without sleeves” in order to “obviate undesirable exposure of the garment which now so frequently occurs through the wearing of present-day patterns of clothing” (241). This is a clear instance in which the behavior of the members of the Church persistently

conformed with American cultural norms and which, in turn, led to a liberalizing of ritual practice.

While one might be tempted to view this development as evidence of the weakness of hierarchy in the Church, I see this type of development as a choice on the part of the hierarchy to avoid the exacerbation of tension both between the hierarchy and its members and between the Church and the broader culture. It is worth noting that Church officials felt some ambivalence toward the changes being made in the garment. This ambivalence appeared in the requirement, in force until 1975, that all patrons coming to perform temple ceremonies were required to wear the “old-style” garment while in the temple. Eventually, however, that requirement was also dropped. In 1979, the Church authorized the production of a two-piece garment (437). As of 2011, the one-piece variety is available only by special order and is not carried in LDS Church Distribution centers. Remember that one of Bell’s central arguments about ritual is that it faces the double-edged sword of power and inflexibility from the occlusion of its own construction. By making the creation of one aspect of the ritual visible again, to return to Bell’s earlier framing of the issue, George F. Richards introduced a high level of flexibility to the ways Mormons wore and thought about their ritual undergarments. It is also not surprising that this development occurred in the twentieth century, a period of “unprecedented visibility of the very dynamics of ritual invention,” according to Bell.⁴

On the issue of prayer circles, the documents in Volume 3 are equally enlightening. As noted in Volume 1, the prayer circle formed an important element in the meetings of the original Quorum of the Anointed. Once established in Utah, Mormon leaders performed prayer circles regularly as part of their meetings, as well as part of the endowment. Additionally, members of the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency formed their own private prayer circles that included members of their families as well as close friends. An excerpt from the diary of Apostle Richard R. Lyman, written when his prayer circle was disbanded in 1929, sheds light on how these private prayer circles operated: “Two weeks ago tonight . . . I met with my prayer circle for the last time—and disbanded it. The [first] presidency and the Council of the Twelve decided . . . that only official prayer circles be continued—that is, cir-

cles which have other business to do as for example high council and our weekly council meeting. It is nearly 33 years since Francis M. Lyman invited me into the circle. President Grant presided over it after the death of FM Lyman until he became president of the church—since then I have been its president” (224). These private prayer circles thus evolved with an orderly succession and invitation process and imitated in striking detail the form and function of many of the meetings that the Quorum of the Anointed held during the lifetime of Joseph Smith.

Finally, some individual stakes also had prayer circles for various priesthood quorums, as Lyman alluded to in his journal. Volume 3 includes extracts from a history of one such prayer circle that was attended by elders in the Salt Lake Stake beginning in 1898 (225). Such official, but locally organized, prayer circles persisted until 1978. That year, the First Presidency wrote: “Because of the increasing number of requests for such prayer circles, viewed in light of the rapid growth of the church, and because of the complications that holding prayer circles on Sunday have created . . . [we] have decided that such prayer circles . . . be discontinued immediately” (434). The letter suggests that a suitable replacement for the local prayer circle was for stake leaders to attend a regular endowment session and participate in the prayer circles being held there. The real difference, of course, is that the prayer circles held as part of the endowment ceremony would not allow local leaders to act as voice in the prayers and thus they would be unable to vocally ask for guidance on specific local matters.

On the surface, it appears that the case of the prayer circles demonstrates the process of what Max Weber called the routinization of charisma. Considered more carefully, however, it is clear that the documents pertaining to the prayer circles indicate several dynamic historical processes at work. First, it is clear that Church leaders were concerned with the centralization of authority and that they were aware, especially with regard to the private prayer circles, that divisions within the Quorum of the Twelve could be incubated into full-fledged schisms in the context of individual prayer circles. While it may be difficult for modern Mormons to comprehend, meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often contentious, frequently factious, and occasionally rancorous. The move

to disband the private prayer circles of such leaders may have served to lessen the propensity for division within the quorum.

Second, the move to disband local prayer circles, most of which existed in Utah, was at least as much about the increasing availability of temples as it was about an attempt to rob local authorities of power. Also, as the twentieth century progressed, so did the view of the temple as a place of devotion and contemplation, a view that was replacing the older sense of the temple as a place for ritual work. Therefore, it is not surprising that Church authorities would seek to make the temples the exclusive home of the most spontaneous and contemplative element of the ritual.

Conclusion

It is true that many elements of temple worship have been dealt with in articles and books such as David J. Buerger's *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994) and D. Michael Quinn's "Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles" (*BYU Studies* 19, no. 1 [Fall 1978]: 79–105. But any historian will affirm that there is nothing quite like reading the primary source documents and working out their significance and meaning for oneself. With these three volumes of primary materials, Signature Books has bestowed a gift on readers—especially on LDS readers who want to understand the roots and the history of the rituals that mean so very much to them.

There is nothing here that would destroy faith or besmirch the sanctity of the temple rituals. On the contrary, these books function, in some sense, as manuals that will make LDS temple worship richer and more powerful for the believer; these books are a record of how hard Mormons have worked over the course of almost two centuries, how much thought and effort and time and money they have invested in maintaining these rituals, in keeping them relevant, in ensuring that their essential elements did not wash into the sea of anachronism as the culture changed around them. Indeed, these documents provide a more powerful testimony of the enduring importance of temple rituals to Mormons everywhere. Furthermore, the books present scholars of religion and ritual with a wealth of data that can be analyzed and interpreted in sophisticated ways that will further our understanding of the relationship between ritual and cultural development.

Notes

1. One major exception to this trend is Kathleen Flake, “‘Not to be Riten’: The Mormon Temple Rite as Oral Canon,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 9, no. 2 (1995): 1–21.

2. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 224.

3. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 166.

4. Bell, *Ritual*, 224.

Errand Out of the Wilderness

Matthew Bowman. *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith*. New York: Random House, 2012. 352 pp. Hardback: \$26.00. ISBN 978-0-679-64490-3

Reviewed by Robert Elder

In Perry Miller’s famous essay on the Puritans, he described how John Winthrop and his fellow dissenters left England in the hopes of establishing on the other side of the Atlantic a godly society that could serve as a model for the reformation of the mother country and its church. In the wake of the English Civil War and as the end of the seventeenth century neared, their descendants were plagued by the sense that the mission of their fathers had foundered. “Having failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on the hill,” wrote Miller, “they were left alone with America.”¹

It was a problem that at various times in their history many Mormons would have welcomed. As Matthew Bowman’s *The Mormon People* makes clear, despite the striking similarities between the Puritan “errand into the wilderness” and the Mormon saga in America, for most of their history Mormons have suffered the opposite problem from the Puritans. The rest of the country watched, often intently, as Mormons undertook their errand into, and then out of, the wilderness. Bowman offers a timely account of this still ongoing process in a book that is clear-eyed in its approach to a church he clearly loves as well as beautifully written, braiding together a fascinating narrative with insightful analysis.

Bowman narrates the story of Mormon origins in a style remi-