

# PEDAGOGY OF PERFECTION: JOSEPH SMITH'S PERFECTIONISM, HOW IT WAS TAUGHT IN THE EARLY LDS CHURCH, AND ITS CONTEMPORARY APPLICABILITY

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*It is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.<sup>1</sup>*

The Nauvoo period in LDS history was a time of “welding” for Joseph Smith: bringing together previous revelatory teachings and actively shaping rituals into “a whole and complete and perfect union.”<sup>2</sup> He believed he was opening a “dispensation,” or a pouring out of knowledge and authority from heaven, and was anxious to finish it. He had a vision—at

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1. From a letter by Joseph Smith “to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Sept. 6 1842, [D&C 128:18].

2. *Ibid.*

least in the down-to-earth sense of a “goal”—of *all* Saints being educated in the knowledge prerequisite for a salvation he coined “exaltation.”

This exaltation can be seen as a unique form of Christian “perfectionism.”<sup>3</sup> Most early-nineteenth-century Christian denominations were seeking after salvation, differing in forms and degrees, but united in their desire for certainty. Denominations based on Calvinism found it in God-given grace to a *select* few, while Arminian-based theologies like that found in Methodism believed that *all who chose* Christ as their Savior *could* be saved. Universalists, like Joseph Smith’s grandfather,<sup>4</sup> went the furthest in their belief Christ would save *all*. The basic premise of Christian theology—forgiveness of sins through Christ’s atonement—seemed undebated, though. Each acknowledged that a power went forth from the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The debate was on *how* to *access* that power; *how* one could be certain that power was manifest, and hence whether salvation was *sure*.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Smith went about revolutionizing the idea of and prerequisites for salvific surety into a perfectionism that was both concrete and attainable, but to most quite unimaginable: becoming as God, or becoming gods.<sup>6</sup> The rationale is that to be certain one can re-enter the presence of God, one

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3. For an extensive treatise of precedents to LDS perfectionism (or “theosis”), see Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 21.

4. Richard L. Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s New England Heritage*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2003), 162, 133–35.

5. Steven C. Harper, “First Vision Accounts: Joseph Smith History, circa summer 1832,” YouTube video, posted by LDS Church History, Apr. 15, 2015, <https://youtu.be/IobA9THKx-M>.

6. It is to this day the singular most-contested doctrine upon which mainstream Christianity disavows the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as a Christian religion. An example is: “Response to the 1982 anti-Mormon film *The God Makers*,” *FairMormon*, [https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Criticism\\_of\\_Mormonism/Video/The\\_God\\_Makers](https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Criticism_of_Mormonism/Video/The_God_Makers).

should strive to know or see God and progress to be like him.<sup>7</sup> In other words: he saw theophany as a precursor to theosis. Where was this to take place? In God's temple.

But what was Joseph Smith's pedagogy? What educational means did Smith and his contemporaries devise to make this perfectionism comprehensible and tangible? And how has that teaching continued into the present day? Are all educational means still intact and accessible? And what is needed in our time of ongoing secularization to teach this perfectionism effectively? Finally, what happens or can happen to the "temperature" (degree of devotion)<sup>8</sup> of Saints, when this great end goal of perfection is no longer taught as concrete and attainable, as Joseph did?

In this paper, I will answer these questions by first sketching the cultural religious context within which this perfectionism took shape. Next, I will draw from Joseph's teachings about gaining certainty of exaltation from his revelations, public sermons, and more private teachings.<sup>9</sup> Third, I will examine the pedagogy, the modes of teaching, and the associated ordinances Joseph Smith devised. Fourth, I will sketch briefly the most important developments in dispensing those modes of teaching to all the Saints to this day. Finally, I will draw some conclusions, make suggestions, and raise questions about how to go about teaching perfection in our day.

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7. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, "April 10, 1842 Wilford Woodruff Journal," in *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 113.

8. In his Revelation (3:15–16) John writes to the Saints in Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." A psychological commonplace is that when people lose track of their end goal, motivation decreases.

9. I used the most original sources available: The Joseph Smith papers, or Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook's *Words of Joseph Smith*, or other sources like Wilford Woodruff's diary. Regarding the revelations, when no serious change was found, I refer to the LDS standard works.

## Conceptual Notes

Speaking about “certainty” and its synonyms quickly leads to a debate on epistemology, especially when the terms “certain” or “sure” are coupled with “knowledge,” pointing to “truth” or “true knowledge.” All of these terms are found in Joseph Smith’s teachings (and many of his contemporaries), but most epistemological claims Smith makes refer to revelation as the ultimate source of truth. Even though Joseph and early Church leaders sought knowledge in original scripture, languages, “best books” (D&C 88:118), and Masonic temple rites, these insights had to be confirmed by revelation, either personal revelation or public revelation from the prophet himself. A great focus lay on the *applicability of that knowledge* to bring about salvation.

The differing Protestant (Puritan Presbyterian, Wesleyan Methodist, Universalist Unitarian, etc.) concepts of justification, sanctification, and perfection are too intricate to be discussed in full in this short paper. Instead, I will focus mainly on the division between the *underlying* Calvinistic, Arminian, and Universalist *theologies* and compare them to Joseph Smith’s perfectionism.

I will distinguish *two “lines” of certainty*: The first is about believers who looked for *certainty* that the power of God was present, and that by that presence God showed his acceptance of the exercise of their faith. In other words, that their *religious acts or rites* were recognized by God, and that they administered them—as a church—with (a degree of) *authority*. The second “line” is about *surety of salvation*, expanding on the first line because it has to do with reassurances received in this life about our *ability to transfer to the next life* in a “saved state.” We will see that the definition of that “saved state” determines a lot about these reassurances and the authority needed. We will now go into these concepts more specifically, contrasting Calvinist, Universalist, (mainly) Methodist, and LDS theologies about them.

## 1: Historical Context: Protestant View of Perfectionism; Search for Certainty of Salvation

Joseph Smith's contemporary religious teachers and reformers were united in their search for salvific certainty. One could say that, as Protestants, they had left the security of Catholic sacramentalism behind and had all proposed different substitute doctrines for achieving that goal.<sup>10</sup> Joseph himself describes the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists as three of the main sects he and his family were in contact with. He said he "attended their several meetings as occasion would permit" and that his "mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect."<sup>11</sup> This begs the question: how much did Methodist (and others') soteriology influence or even shape Smith's own search for a—personal and later doctrinal—surety of salvation? Despite the doctrinal differences of these Christian sects, there was some consensus on the idea that humanity's fallen and sinful state had to be overcome through the mediation and power of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. As mentioned earlier, the debate was focused on how to access that power and how one could be certain that power was manifest and hence salvation was sure.<sup>12</sup>

Steven Harper describes the sectarian landscape as divided over the question of individual choice in salvation. For Calvinistic Presbyterians, there was no choice: God had to elect you and make it known

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10. There is nuance that must be maintained here: not all Protestants left sacramentalism. Some reformists like Calvin and followers (e.g., Beza, Turretini) viewed "sacraments" as instruments of grace (albeit not in the same way as Catholicism [e.g., the Council of Trent]).

11. Joseph Smith History, vol. A-1, 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/2>.

12. Steven C. Harper, in "First Vision Accounts: Joseph Smith History circa Summer 1832," remarks "There is a serious concern, among Joseph Smith and so many others, about how to overcome fallenness. Everybody knows that you overcome fallenness by accessing the atonement of Jesus Christ. The big contention is, how do you access the atonement of Jesus Christ?" (1.42–2:00).

in a spiritual outpouring of grace. For Arminian-Wesleyan Methodists, individuals could choose to accept Christ's atonement and exercise faith to bring about good works and confirming spiritual experiences. For Universalists, no choice existed, for all were saved. The divide was present in Joseph Smith's own family, where mother, brothers, and older sister joined the Presbyterian Church and father turned from a Universalist to a more neutral standpoint and didn't then adhere to a particular church.<sup>13</sup> Joseph was most likely sparked by a Methodist camp meeting to an individual endeavor to gain certainty of forgiveness for his sins and was deciding on which church to join in pursuit of that. He attended meetings but didn't seem to have the same level of excitement, nor experience the physical sensations that others had. This set Joseph in dire need of a different confirmation or source of certainty.<sup>14</sup>

Methodists looked for certainty through scripture,<sup>15</sup> full devotion to a Christian life, and receiving spiritual manifestations of different kinds. These were commonly sought after and celebrated when received, confirming to faithful seekers that God corroborated their efforts with an "outpouring" of his power. The most well-known spiritual manifestations, mainly derived from biblical reports, were speaking in tongues, healings, dreams, and visions. Also, very physical effects were seen, like "people [who] went into trances, jerked, rolled and crawled on the ground," or were, in Joseph Smith's time, at least "crying, mourning,

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13. Joseph Smith History, vol. A-1, 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/2>; Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision: A Guide to the Historical Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 14–21.

14. Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 23–25.

15. Methodist also clung to *sola scriptura*; whatever "revelation" received, it must be in accordance with scripture.

and sighing.”<sup>16</sup> The feeling of being “touched upon” or “recognized” or “accepted” by God was mostly a communal experience. Among the Methodists, camp meetings were predominant in bringing about this communal excitement, aimed at a “revival” or bringing souls “from darkness to light, and from bondage of iniquity to the glorious liberty of the sons of God . . . attended with an awakening sense of sin and with a change of temper and conduct, which cannot be easily concealed.”<sup>17</sup>

This begs the question: once such an “acceptance” took place, did those in the congregation who were part of this group experience feel secure about their stance before God; did they feel were they “forgiven of their sins”? If so, this must have been more of an individual certainty, for not all present experienced it. The ecclesiastical counterpart of that experience was the “power” or “authority” of a church to extend the right doctrines and means whereby its adherents could have these reviving experiences.<sup>18</sup> If false doctrine were preached or one adhered to a corrupt faith, there was danger of damnation, or at least, such things were being preached in an effort to dissuade converts from one sect to another.<sup>19</sup>

Christopher Jones, in his thesis, points out that Methodists were very likely to accept dreams and visions, like Joseph Smith’s First Vision, to be authoritative revelations from God. Joseph’s vision, seen through a Methodist lens, can be seen as a conversion experience whereby God answers a prayer by an apparition of sorts, invoking spiritual gifts and/

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16. Milton V. Backman Jr., “Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision,” in *Exploring the First Vision*, edited by Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper (Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book Company, 2012), 177–78.

17. William Neill, “Thoughts on Revivals of Religion,” *Christian Herald*, Apr. 7, 1821, 708–11, in Backman, “Awakenings,” 186.

18. The partaking of the sacrament in LDS theology can also be seen as a weekly “reviving” spiritual experience.

19. Joseph Smith History, vol. A-1, 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/2>.

or forgiving sins. Phineas Young, a Methodist who later converted to the LDS Church, had a similar experience as Joseph when he prayed to be “made holy” to fulfil his recent calling.<sup>20</sup> From the earliest account of Joseph Smith’s First Vision we learn that his initial effort was indeed a search for confirmation of forgiveness of personal sin. His prayer, he writes, was answered by God appearing and saying: “Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee.”<sup>21</sup> This was the first certainty Joseph looked for.

Pertaining to authority as a church, Joseph sought additional certainty about which church to join, a church that would be “accepted of God.” Wesleyan teachings on power derived from “spiritual witness” were indicative of the certainty needed to be a *living* church. When denied, he taught, “there is a danger lest our religion degenerate into mere formality; lest, ‘having a form of godliness,’ we neglect if not ‘deny,

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20. The similarities are quite striking: in Young’s own words: “I prayed continually to God to make me holy, and give me power to do good. While in this state of mind I had a very singular manifestation. . . . when all of a sudden I saw the Heavens open and a body of light above the brightness of the sun descending towards me, in a moment it filled me with joy unutterable, every part of my system was perfectly light, and perfectly happy; I soon arose and spoke of things of the Kingdom of God as I never spoke before. I then felt satisfied that the Lord had heard my prayers and my sins were forgiven” (Young, “Life of Phineas Howe Young,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL, quoted in Christopher C. Jones, “We Latter-day Saints are Methodists: The Influence of Methodism on Early Mormon Religiosity,” MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009. Harold B. Lee Library, All Theses and Dissertations, Paper 1747, 33, available at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1747/>).

21. “History, circa Summer 1832,” in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, 3, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letterbook-1/9>. Shortly before on page 2 Joseph states the reason for his inquiry: “my mind become exceedingly distressed for I became convicted of my sins and by searching the scriptures I found that mand <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my own sins and for the sins of the world.”



the power of it.”<sup>22</sup> This resembles a statement of the Lord in Joseph Smith’s 1838 account of his First Vision, and was part of the answer and instruction Joseph received to join none of the churches he was in contact with.<sup>23</sup> What was truly remarkable and very decisive for his later perfectionism—as we will see below—is that Joseph professed to receive these confirmations by God the Father and Jesus Christ *in person*. The accompanying conclusion, one that up to this day maybe is the greatest kick to the shins of other Christian denominations, is that the church Joseph was asked to organize was not his own, but the Lord’s, and the gospel he proclaimed was not his own, but restored by the Lord himself.

With regard to perfectionism among Methodists, John Wesley wrote three works with “perfection” prominent in their title.<sup>24</sup> In his treatise on perfection he defines it as follows:

that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies being cleansed from sin, “from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit”; and, by consequence, being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; being so

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22. Wesley, “Sermon 11, The Witness of the Spirit II” 1, no. 2, (1767) in *The Works of John Wesley* vol. 1 edited by Thomas Jackson (1872), 285, quoted in Christopher C. Jones, “We Latter-day Saints are Methodists,” 42.

23. “My object in going to enquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. . . . I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors were all corrupt, that ‘they draw near to me to with their lips but their hearts are far from me, They teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof’” (Joseph Smith History, vol. A-1, 3, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/3>; see also Isa. 29:13, Matt. 15:9).

24. *On Perfection* (Sermon 40, 1739), *Christian Perfection* (Sermon 76, 1784). These were sermons on sanctification, which hints at how Wesley understood “perfection.” Also see *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (treatise, 1739).

“renewed in the image of our mind,” as to be “perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.”<sup>25</sup>

And:

“A restoration not only to the favour, but likewise to the image of God, implying not barely deliverance from sin, but the being filled with the fullness of God”<sup>26</sup>

“Holy,” “cleansed from sin,” “endued with Christlike virtues,” “renewed in mind” all imply a change brought about by the exercise of faith and the working of grace, but which makes the human only “as to be” perfect as God. Receiving “the image” of God or being filled with his “fullness” seem to point more to a refinement of Christian character, not to the more literal sense of “becoming a god” Joseph Smith adopted. Methodist perfection can more readily be incorporated with their teaching of “entire” sanctification, as shown in two other quotes from Wesley, stating that perfection is “deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin” and “a Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin.”<sup>27</sup> These could be taken as prerequisites to Joseph’s idea of perfection (see §2).

A lesser known influence on Joseph Smith was that of the Universalist Society, originating in Boston but present in most of New England and to which Joseph’s grandfather and father adhered,<sup>28</sup> or the related

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25. John Wesley, “A Plain Account on Christian Perfection,” in *The Works of John Wesley* 11, no. 29, edited by Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1872), 366–446.

26. John Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming” (Sermon 62), Wesley Center, available at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-62-the-end-of-christs-coming/>.

27. John Wesley, “A Plain Account on Christian Perfection,” 36–446.

28. Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 17. Also, Richard L. Bushman makes a strong claim of Universalism present in the New England area and influence on Asael Smith’s religious beliefs, in Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1984), 27–28.

Unitarians. Terryl Givens quotes William Ellery Channing, the latter movement's dominant minister, teaching that "likeness to God is a good so unutterably surpassing all other good, that whoever admits it as attainable, must acknowledge it to be the chief aim of life."<sup>29</sup> It is unclear how much of this teaching passed from Joseph's grandfather and father to him. One Universalist idea Asael Smith certainly taught that can be recognized in Joseph's soteriology is its anti-Calvinistic conception of God's universal salvific love: a desire to save all his children.<sup>30</sup> It is likely that Joseph accepted this desire that God *could* save all, but also adhered to the Methodist requisite of agency and exercise of faith to bring about saving grace. We will now investigate how Joseph situated this reciprocal desire for human and God to reunite in perfect unity in an almost Catholic sacramental "covenant" theology and with accompanying temple ordinances.

## 2: Joseph Smith's Own View on Certainty and Perfection: The Pinnacle of Salvation

*If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses. . . . A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, . . . Hence [we] need revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God.*<sup>31</sup>

Church history scholars have argued about the doctrinal differences of the Kirtland/Missouri and Nauvoo eras. There seems to be both a continuum and a split. One general observation that we can make is that there was a shifting focus: from a literal *city of Zion* and urgent

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29. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 263.

30. Richard L. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 136.

31. Sermon delivered at Nauvoo, Ill. on Sunday Apr. 10, 1842, Wilford Woodruff Journal. In: Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 113.

*millennialism*, to a more spiritualized seeking for a *Zion society* and preparing to meet God in the *temple*.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, many teachings on principles later incorporated in the temple ordinances can be traced back to earlier times, and just as many new teachings evolved in the last three years of Joseph's life, as David Buerger and Andrew Ehat have abundantly shown.<sup>33</sup> What occurred after the shift can be described by the concepts *consolidation* and *dissemination*.<sup>34</sup> The bringing together (*con*) of principles of salvation into tangible (*solid*) ordinances that can be experienced, and teaching them to more and more of the saints (*dis*) to eventually bear much fruit (*seminate*). The Nauvoo Temple was built and a "Quorum of the Anointed" established to fit these purposes.

I argue that the *two lines of certainty*, mentioned in the introduction and §1, also came together: 1) The power of God present, acceptance by God, authority 2) Surety of salvation.

As for the first, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, while translating the Book of Mormon, described how they had received priesthood from heavenly messengers: the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist and the Melchizedek Priesthood from Peter, James, and John. A revelation received just before the Church was organized (now D&C 20) explains the several offices in those priesthoods. People were baptized, confirmed, the sacrament performed, using these priesthoods to do it with authority.

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32. Terryl L. Givens argued that the failed Zion's camp can be seen as a turning point for this shift in focus. The argument was communicated orally in a group discussion during the 2015 Summer Seminar on Mormon Culture.

33. For my description of Joseph Smith's "pedagogy of perfection" pertaining to the doctrinal origins of the temple ordinances, I drew much from their extensive work, for which I like to express my appreciation and thanks. See David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994 / 2003), 5; and Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982)..

34. This term is not meant to be associated with the later evolving practice of plural marriage.

In Kirtland, however, at Sidney Rigdon's initial suggestion, a new and higher office in the priesthood was installed—after the order of the ancients—namely the High Priesthood.<sup>35</sup> David Buerger illustrates how the innovation of the High Priesthood allowed Joseph and the Twelve to “seal [people] up to eternal life” (D&C 68:2, 12 also 1:8–9), introducing ordinances that were later incorporated in the temple endowment,<sup>36</sup> and thus to do what “strict Calvinists reserved solely to God.”<sup>37</sup> “Sealing” is another word connoting certainty and can be seen in connection with the sealing or binding power Peter and Nephi received “to bind on earth as in heaven” and later the receiving of the sealing keys of Elijah in the Kirtland Temple.<sup>38</sup> Zebedee Coltrin in 1831, Jared Carter in 1832, and Orson Pratt in 1833 all testify of the outpourings of the Spirit, not only on individuals, but on whole groups that Joseph gathered in his School of the Prophets, to “seal them up” “to the Lord” “unto eternal life” “by the power of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>39</sup> These much resembled Methodist

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35. This was not without controversy though, since some opposed it as being imagined by Rigdon. Eventually Joseph confirmed this addition by explaining this “order of the High priesthood” as the “power given them to seal up the Saints unto eternal life. And said it was the privilege of every Elder present to be ordained to the High Priesthood” (“Far West Record,” Oct. 25, 1931, Church History Library). (Thanks to David Buerger, see note 40).

36. This “Kirtland endowment” included washings and anointings of kinds (see *History of the Church* 2:379–82), the washing of feet (and face) and the sacrament (see *History of the Church* 2:410–30), as found in D&C 88:127–41.

37. Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness*, 5. He further explains: “Key players in the sixteenth-century Reformation used many of these sealing passages [in the Bible] as evidence for their belief in predestination. Liberal reaction to Calvinist doctrine arose early in the seventeenth century when Arminians rejected this view, asserting that God’s sovereignty and human free will were compatible, that such sealings depended on choices of the individual believer.”

38. See Matthew 16:19, Helaman 10:4–7, and D&C 110:13–16; and Joseph Smith’s explanation in D&C 128:5–18.

39. See Zebedee Coltrin Diary, Nov. 15, 1831, Church History Library; Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sept. 27, 1832,

communal outpourings, but in a completely new doctrinal context of apostles and “prophets”<sup>40</sup> being called to the ministry (D&C 95:4–5).

As for the second, Joseph Smith’s first quest for personal salvation was answered by a personal visitation<sup>41</sup> of the Father and the Son, which is exactly the theophany that he later posed as the end goal of temple practice. I say “practice” because the *gaining of knowledge, exercise of faith, and accompanying works*, Joseph melted together in a *development* toward perfection or godhood. The temple was a place to meet God and “a place of *learning*” in preparation for that.<sup>42</sup> These can be seen as original additions to the Methodist “faith and works” required for spiritual approval from God: searching for the mysteries of God(liness) “by *study* and by faith,” made *education* into a mode of *worship*. We could rephrase the word worship now as “a mode to approach God,” a reciprocal act to return to him.<sup>43</sup> Joseph started this early on by erecting (on divine

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Church History Library; and Journal of Orson Pratt, Aug. 26, Sept. 8, 1833, Church History Library.

40. The name for the school was received in a revelation (D&C 88:127–38), and it is interesting to see that all participants were thus seen as “prophets,” or in any case Saints that were being trained to be prophet-like ministers.

41. Actually several visitations, because three years after his First Vision he again prayed to know his standing before God, and as an answer angel Moroni appeared: “I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when on the evening of the above mentioned twenty first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me that I might know of my state and standing before him. For I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation as I had previously had one” (History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], 5).

42. D&C 88:118–19, 67–68.

43. A well-known quote by Joseph is: “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge” (Apr. 10, 1842, Wilford Woodruff Journal, in Ehat and Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 113). See also the opening quote of this section. Being brought back into God’s presence by gaining knowledge is an idea found in the Book of Mormon: “And because of the knowledge of this man [Brother

command) the previously mentioned *School* of the Prophets in Kirtland. It was in this school, and later—upon completion—in the Kirtland Temple, that he started preparing others to meet the Lord, preparatory for their missions as—literal—witnesses of Christ. He taught them:

How do men obtain a knowledge of the glory of God, his perfections and attributes? By devoting themselves to his service, through prayer and supplication incessantly strengthening their faith in him, *until*, like Enoch, the Brother of Jared, and Moses, they obtain a *manifestation* of God to themselves.<sup>44</sup>

This resembles the Methodist method to come to entire sanctification, up until the word “*until*” appears, after which Joseph refers to other prophets in the scriptures who were called by God in person.

To make that viable, the Kirtland Temple needed to be built. The twelve apostles Joseph Smith had chosen were charged “not to go to other nations . . . [but to] tarry at Kirtland until [they were] endowed with power from on high.”<sup>45</sup> Oliver Cowdery gave them this “charge”:

The ancients passed through the same. They had this testimony, that they had *seen* the Saviour after he rose from the dead. . . . You must bear the same testimony, that there is [p. 156[a)] but *one God and one Mediator*; he that has *seen* him will *know* him and *testify* of him.” . . . You have been indebted to other men in the first instance for *evidence*, on that you have acted. But . . . [p. 159] You will, therefore see the necessity of getting this testimony from Heaven. Never cease striving until you have seen God, face to face. Strengthen your faith, cast off your doubts, your sins and all your unbelief and *nothing can prevent*

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of Jared] he could not be kept from beholding within the veil . . . wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and He did minister unto him” (Ether 3:19–20).

44. Lectures on Faith, Second lecture, as found in Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), 25. Italics mine.

45. “Minute Book 1, [ca. 3 Dec. 1832–30 Nov. 1837],” Church History Library, Feb. 21, 1835, 162. Note the resemblance with Luke 24:49.

*you from coming to God. Your ordination is not full and complete till God has laid his hand upon you.”*<sup>46</sup>

This “ordination” refers to the “fullness of the priesthood,” which flows from having seen God. In other words, the Twelve had to make their “calling and election”—as apostles—sure, just like Joseph was called in the grove in 1820. The event of seeing God the Father and his Son occurred (at least for most of the Twelve<sup>47</sup>) “at one of these meetings after the organization of the school, (the school being organized on the 23rd of January, 1833).”<sup>48</sup> Afterwards the prophet Joseph said: “Brethren, now you are prepared to be the apostles of Jesus Christ, for you have seen both the Father and the Son and know that they exist and that they are two separate personages.”<sup>49</sup> So the same surety of “calling” he personally received in Palmyra, he also deemed necessary for the Twelve and others sent out to the ministry in Kirtland. It is interesting to see that many also received a blessing by the laying on of hands whereby their “sins were forgiven them.”<sup>50</sup>

Here we see a complete unity of the two lines of authority in Joseph’s conception of perfection: 1) three priesthoods were restored, including the sealing power, and 2) the most sure you can get of your salvation is

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46. “Minute Book 1, [ca. 3 Dec. 1832–30 Nov. 1837],” Church History Library, 156a–b; 159; 162.

47. “There were members as follows: Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, William Smith, Frederick G. Williams, Orson Hyde (who had the charge of the school), Zebedee Coltrin, Sylvester Smith, Joseph Smith, Sr., Levi Hancock, Martin Harris, Sidney Rigdon, Newel K. Whitney, Samuel H. Smith, John Murdock, Lyman Johnson and Ezra Thayer.” As related by Zebedee Coltrin in “Minutes, Salt Lake City School of the Prophets,” Oct. 3, 1883.

48. This remark by Zebedee Coltrin obscures the date when this took place. He doesn’t state the date, only the date of the organization of the School. The apostolic charge was given in 1835 and the temple dedicated Mar. 27, 1836.

49. As related by Zebedee Coltrin in “Minutes, Salt Lake City School of the Prophets,” Oct. 3, 1883.

50. “Minute Book 1, [ca. 3 Dec. 1832–30 Nov. 1837],” Church History Library, 154.



by meeting God, but this was also a way of having the apostles' "calling and election" made sure; to be able to teach with authority as witnesses of Christ. Nevertheless, this theophany to the Twelve in preparation of their ministry was only a precursor to what was about to come. Their "calling and election" had *not explicitly* to do with surety of salvation. The leadership were still learning, and repenting, confessing their sins to one another, bearing one another up. Theophany as a means whereby one could be sure of salvation, being sealed unto eternal life or exaltation, Joseph started to teach, to all, in Nauvoo.

In a sermon delivered at the Nauvoo Temple grounds on Friday, May 12, 1844 Joseph pleaded with all Saints present there: "I am going on in my progress for eternal life, . . . Oh! I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and election sure."<sup>51</sup> Surely Joseph had been adamant in his search for knowledge: the inspired or explanatory translation of the Old and New Testaments, the discussions in the School of the Prophets, the ongoing revelations, receiving the sealing keys of Elijah, the discovery of the Abraham papyri, and entering the Masonic Lodge, were all sources of knowledge—ancient and new—Joseph employed to construct his theology of exaltation. All were coming together: the knowledge and principles needed to guide all Saints to meet God in his temple and thus be sure of salvation. This surety of salvation he named after Peter's "calling and election made sure" (2 Pet. 1:10, 19). Joseph explained in May 17, 1843, "The more sure word of prophecy means a man's knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood" (D&C 131:5–6). Now the Protestants around him used these scriptures too, e.g., Calvinists talked about them, using scriptures on "sealing" to corroborate their doctrine of predestination. Methodists, like John Wesley, as we saw above, had teachings on sanctification and even perfection. But none went as far in teaching perfectionism as becoming as God.

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51. Thomas Bullock report, Friday, May 12, 1844, Book of Abraham Project, available at <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Parallel/1844/12May44.html>.

Now Joseph made one more addition, unique to LDS theology, to his concept of “exaltation”: eternal marriage, and for some plural marriage.

One day before this explanation on the more sure word of prophecy, Joseph taught:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom: he cannot have an increase.<sup>52</sup>

Joseph, who already divided the heavens up in three kingdoms of glory in his vision of February 1832 (D&C 76), now divided up the celestial glory into three degrees. The “increase” mentioned, points to similar blessings Abraham received pertaining to his posterity, “both in the world and out of this world” (D&C 132:30).<sup>53</sup> This revelation on both the sealing power and on the covenant of eternal (and plural) marriage, made exaltation and perfection—becoming gods—more explicit: all gods are married—or sealed to one another—and continue in procreation in the eternities. Any lesser form of salvation (“saved state”), would be a limitation to eternal progression:

For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever. (D&C 132:17)

Later on in this revelation it seems to show that to have those blessings confirmed or sealed upon you while “in this world” is prerequisite for exaltation:

For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the *exaltation and continuation of the lives*, and few there be that find it, because ye

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52. Joseph Smith History, vol. D-1, 1551, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/194>.

53. See also Abraham 2:11.

receive me not *in the world* neither do ye *know me*. But if ye receive me *in the world*, then shall ye *know me*, and shall receive your *exaltation*; that where I am ye shall be also.<sup>54</sup>

Joseph was now doctrinally prepared to make these highest of blessing available to all who were “Spiritual minded” and “prepared to receive” them.<sup>55</sup> And he wanted to make haste, as he expected to be taken from this world and needed “to instruct the Society and point out the way for them to conduct, that they might act according to the will of God . . . delivering the keys to this society and the church.”<sup>56</sup> This “society” was the Nauvoo Relief Society, but it was also an allusion to the Quorum of the Anointed, in which—logically—women played an equal part, because that is where he eventually revealed all these ordinances of exaltation. Joseph started with the initiation of a select few, twenty-four couples and seventeen others to be exact,<sup>57</sup> but with a broader view ahead:

In this Council [Quorum] was instituted the Ancient order of things for the first time in these last days. . . . and there was nothing made known to these men, but what will be made known to all <the> Saints of the last days, so soon as they are prepared to receive, and a proper place is prepared to communicate them, even to the weakest of the Saints.<sup>58</sup>

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54. D&C 132:22–23, italics mine. This assertion can be debated, for these ordinances were and are performed also for the dead. See pp. 128–29 and note 73 further on in this paper for additional arguments on this question.

55. Joseph Smith History, vol. C-1, 1328, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/502>.

56. “Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes,” *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds. Ehat and Cook, Apr. 28, 1842, 116.

57. See table with list of initiated in Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances.”

58. Joseph Smith History, vol. C-1, 1328, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed Dec. 10, 2018, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/502>.

That proper place was the (Nauvoo) temple, but it was still under construction, so Joseph went ahead and set up the upper room of his red brick store to serve as an ordinance room. By this last addition of marriage, the gospel of Adam and Eve one could say, the full meaning of the word “sealing” was established: this sealing of couples to one another and to God, now extended—through the Abrahamic covenant and the keys of the sealing power of Elijah (D&C 110:13–16)—to all progenitors and posterity, *both living and dead*, so that the entire human family could be bound together on earth and in heaven. And this led to another addition to the idea of perfection: that we “without our dead cannot be made perfect.”<sup>59</sup> Hence, all the ordinances that Joseph had installed were able to be performed by proxy for ancestors. The outward forms and their role in teaching perfectionism to the Saints we will discuss next.

### 3: Outward Forms: Joseph Smith’s Search for Fitting Ordinances: A Pedagogy of Perfection

*And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. (D&C 84:21–22)*

*The question is frequently asked: Can we not be saved without going through with all these ordinances &c. I would answer: No, not the fullness of Salvation, any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a Celestial law & the whole law to.<sup>60</sup>*

Now that the doctrines were in place, consolidated, they were ready to be passed on, disseminated. How? Orally. An oral canon of scripture was about to be opened, expounded upon, and fitted to the envisioned purpose: to have every Saint who was ready to receive it meet God in person

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59. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:15 and Hebrews 11:40.

60. Sermon delivered at Nauvoo, Ill. on Jan. 21, 1844, in *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal: 1833–1898, Typescript Volumes 1–9*, edited by Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983).

and be assured of exaltation. Oral transmission of sacred truths, which were “not to be ritened,”<sup>61</sup> serves several important purposes. It was done by the Jews, Egyptians, Masons, and, as far as we can infer from the limited canon of the New Testament, also in the days of the early apostles.<sup>62</sup> Joseph considered many plain and precious things from the gospel to have been lost,<sup>63</sup> mostly from scripture, but much, he believed, had been preserved in oral traditions. Joseph’s discovery of the Egyptian papyri, his involvement in the Masonic temple, and his own revelations received while reading the Old and New Testaments in their original languages had helped him discover precious parts of that lost tradition. Following his pattern of dissemination, he introduced them to the Twelve and others and expounded on them in his public sermons. Then, in Nauvoo, he urged the Twelve and hundreds of others to join the Masonic lodge<sup>64</sup> to learn what he had learned and help him bring it into one revealed whole.

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61. From Heber C. Kimball, in a letter to Parley and Mary Ann Pratt, dated Jun. 17, 1842, Church History Library. “We received some pressious things though the Prophet on the preasthood that would caus your Soul to rejoice. I can not give them to you on paper fore *they are not to be ritened*. So you must come and get them fore your Self. We have organized a Lodge here. Of Masons. Since we obtained a Charter. That was in March since that thare has near two hundred been made masons Br Joseph and Sidny was the first that was Received in to the Lodg. All of the twelve have become members Exept Orson P. . . . thare is a similarity of preast Hood in Masonry. Bro Joseph ses masonry was taken from preasthood but had become degenerated but menny things are perfect” (italics mine).

62. A complete study of aspects of the LDS temple ritual that can be traced back to Jewish, Egyptian, Masonic, and the early apostles lies far beyond the scope of this paper. Hugh Nibley’s extensive work on this can be consulted. I have focused, for the latter part of this paper, on the intended purposes of the mode of teaching that was devised.

63. See 1 Nephi 13:20–29. Verse 26b says: “for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.”

64. Also from Heber C. Kimball’s letter to Parley P. Pratt dated Jun. 17, 1842, Church History Library. See note 61.

The next step Joseph took was to fit all these saving principles into a mode of teaching that would, on the one hand, be instrumental in *revealing* unto the participant all knowledge necessary to re-enter God's presence. On the other hand, since it was *sacred* knowledge, he had to *safeguard* it. This put Joseph in a delicate position, and the way he went about it was to create an oral tradition of *knowledge by initiation*. The Masonic temple rites are the most exemplary for this mode of teaching.<sup>65</sup> The point I want to make about this *mode of teaching* is how Joseph Smith envisioned it and its purposes. It is a mode of teaching that resembles Jesus' usage of parables: to communicate "hidden" knowledge to those who had "ears to hear," but conceal at the same time the "pearls from the swine."

Education<sup>66</sup> and pedagogy<sup>67</sup> are in their Latin and Greek roots almost interchangeable. "Educare" (leading out) is mostly associated with training

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65. There are many excellent books on the comparison and evolvement of Masonic and LDS temple ordinances, e.g., Buerger compares them in *The Mysteries of Godliness*, 1994 / 2003), there is Matthew B. Brown's book *Exploring the Connection Between Mormons and Masons* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2009), a recent article by Jeff Bradshaw, "Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 159–237, and again Hugh Nibley, e.g., *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992).

66. educate (v.) mid-15c., "bring up (children), to train," from Latin *educatus*, past participle of *educare* "bring up, rear, educate," which is a frequentative of or otherwise related to *educere* "bring out, lead forth," from *ex-* "out" (see *ex-*) + *ducere* "to lead" (see *duke* (n.)). Meaning "provide schooling" is first attested 1580s. Related: Educated; *educating*. According to "Century Dictionary," *educere*, of a child, is "usually with reference to bodily nurture or support, while *educare* refers more frequently to the mind," and, "There is no authority for the common statement that the primary sense of *education* is to 'draw out or unfold the powers of the mind'" (from: [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=educate&allowed\\_in\\_frame=0](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=educate&allowed_in_frame=0)).

67. pedagogue (n.) late 14c., "schoolmaster, teacher," from Old French *pedagoge* "teacher of children" (14c.), from Latin *paedagogus*, from Greek *paidagogos* "slave who escorts boys to school and generally supervises them," later "a teacher," from *pais* (genitive *paidos*) "child" (see *pedo-*) + *agogos* "leader,"

the powers of the mind, oriented more at the *transmittal* and sharing of *knowledge*. “Παιδαγωγία” or paidagōgía (leading a child) is more relational, associated with *mentoring* and the *development* of a child. In the combination of these concepts we can find the need for both teaching of *principles* and *knowledge*, and the leading, guiding, or mentoring that is part of *initiation* and catering to certain *experiences* necessary for *development*.

“Hidden” knowledge of principles, and the experiences necessary to internalize these principles “deeply into the bone,” are made into a whole by initiation into ordinances or rituals. Ordinances are tools in teaching, but not only that, they are—like Catholic sacraments—binding rituals designed to bring about salvation. One can view the temple ritual in both Methodist and Calvinist senses of perfection: it can be instrumental in receiving spiritual outpourings and confirming one’s holiness or standing before God. “Binding” or “sealing” are both terms referring to a *covenant relationship* between humans and God, meant to bridge the gap between them. Another Methodist element, one could say, is that the relationship is entered into of one’s own free will and choice. A ritual can be defined as a symbolic act, meant to “bridge a distance,” to initiate a “passage” or symbolize a relationship of “belonging.”<sup>68</sup> All these can be applied to the temple ordinances, which for Joseph Smith and the early leaders were seen as parts of one ritual. Maybe with the exception of baptism for the living—the first initiation rite to become a member of the Church—all other ordinances were done in temple setting: sacrament,<sup>69</sup> washings and anointings, endowment, marriage

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from *agein* “to lead” (see act (n.)) (from: [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=pedagogue&allowed\\_in\\_frame=0](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=pedagogue&allowed_in_frame=0)).

68. Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 16 and 121.

69. The sacrament of course was also performed outside of the temple, in regular Sunday meetings. It seems to have been an ordinance to remember Christ’s sacrifice on any occasion the early brethren seemed fit. For an extensive treatise on the sacrament see Ugo A. Perego, “The Changing Forms of the Sacrament,”

sealing, washing of feet, etc. (D&C 88:75; 138–41). The same pattern of dissemination emerged: all ordinances were revealed by Joseph, done or “tested” with the Twelve in Kirtland,<sup>70</sup> and then shared with selected men and women in the Quorum of the Anointed in Nauvoo.

The “testing” for the new (Nauvoo) additions to the endowment and marriage ordinances was done in the upper room of Joseph’s red brick store. He had asked five men who were masons to prepare the room according to his instructions. Eight people were the first to receive this improvised endowment on May 4, 1842. It is illustrative to consider how Joseph later apologized for the improvised quarters, saying to Brigham Young:

this is not arranged right, but, we have done the best we could under the circumstances in which we are placed, and I wish you take this matter in hand . . . organize and systematize all these ceremonies . . . [Brigham Young:] We performed the ordinances under Joseph’s supervision numerous times and each time I got something more so that when we went through the Temple at Nauvoo I understood and knew how to place them there. We had our ceremonies pretty correct.<sup>71</sup>

It was an evolving ceremony, and frankly, it has been evolving ever since,<sup>72</sup> which tells us something about its instrumental nature. Symbols,

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*Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 1–16, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-changing-forms-of-the-latter-day-saint-sacrament/>.

70. Except of course the new elements of the endowment ceremony and marriage ceremonies devised in Nauvoo.

71. L. John Nuttall, diary, typescript entry for Feb. 7, 1877 (Provo: Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

72. As the publication of this article was pending, the First Presidency announced new changes to the temple using these words: “Over these many centuries, details associated with temple work have been adjusted periodically (. . .). Prophets have taught that there will be no end to such adjustments as directed by the Lord to His servants” (First Presidency Statement on Temples, Jan. 2, 2019, available at <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/temple-worship>). The last major changes in the endowment date from 1990, some minor changes in



by their metaphorical nature, are meant to “carry over” (μετα-φέρειν) meaning from one realm of reality to another. For example, the story of Adam and Eve can have meaning within the context of their dealings with God, but at the same time carry over meaning for all (married) men and women going through mortal life. The portrayal of the stories and symbols—with exception of some key elements—does not have to be exact every time. There is constant interpretation: some (though little) by the persons portraying the symbols (live performance) and even more by the persons receiving them. In fact, every individual receiving them can make his or her own interpretations and apply them in his or her life.

Now let us look a bit closer to how these ordinances of the gospel, by initiation into higher knowledge and ritual experiences, work toward meeting God and becoming like God. Baptism is the first initiation ordinance and already points to the end from the beginning. It is symbolic of birth and death, rebirth and a new life in the resurrection. In Nephi’s words:

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path [i.e. by baptism], I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. . . . Wherefore, if ye shall *press forward*, feasting upon the word of Christ, *and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.* (2 Ne. 31:19–20, italics added)

Baptism resembles the path from infancy (in the gospel) to adulthood: having the Father tell you that you shall have eternal life, or, as Joseph

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the initiatories were made more recently, diminishing the communal part of touching at the pronouncement of blessings, see below and John-Charles Duffy, “Concealing the Body, Concealing the Sacred: The Decline of Ritual Nudity in Mormon Temples,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 1–21. A full account of all policy and content changes can be found in the works of David Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994 / 2003) and “‘The Fulness of the Priesthood’: The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 10–44.

or Peter taught: “having our callings and election made sure.” All intermediate ordinances can be seen as steps on the “ladder,” a pedagogy toward perfection. In the well-known King Follett Sermon delivered April 7, 1844 Joseph explained:

Here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power; . . . When you climb a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and go on until you learn the last principle; it will be a great while before you have learned the last. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it is a great thing to learn salvation beyond the grave.<sup>73</sup>

This last sentence again raises debate as to whether the sealing unto eternal life has to take place in this world or if it might be received in the hereafter. One could argue that, after passing through death, all will see God and know that he is. The other option is that the ordinance does have to take place in this life and that only then will progression continue after death.<sup>74</sup> Notwithstanding these possibilities, Joseph Smith seemed eager to prepare the Saints to meet God in this life and have the promised blessing sealed upon them in this life. All further temple instructions point to that.

Washings and anointings were among the first ordinances to be performed in this dispensation. An important part of these are the references to our own bodies and blessings connected to them. So, one’s own body becomes an instrument in sanctification, by overcoming the natural tendencies of the flesh and instead using the body to acquire these spiritual blessings. One could say the Methodist sense of perfection,

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73. Joseph Smith, Discourse, Nauvoo, Ill., Apr. 7, 1844; in *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (Nauvoo, Ill.: Aug. 15, 1844): 613–14.

74. A detailed account of this debate is discussed by Buerger in his article “The Fulness of the Priesthood,” 43–44.

becoming entirely clean of (the blood and) sins (of this generation), took on this sacramental form in Joseph's perfectionism. Again, internalization through the ritual is very prominent, as these blessings are memorized and one's own body—and the symbolic garments it is clothed with—serve as daily reminders. It also has a communal aspect of great trust, whereas the washings and anointings are performed by touching by a brother or sister, providing the experience that internalizes the ritual.

The endowment is even closer to a “ladder” of sanctification, as the initiate is literally taken from one phase to the other, symbolized by the different rooms one passes through, the increasing brightness of light, and the ever deeper commitments entered into. Deeper commitments also lead to deeper connection with the divine, in anticipation of reuniting with God at the end of the ceremony, where one ritually steps into God's presence by passing through a veil (Ether 3:20).

Temple marriage is, of course, a direct symbol of uniting man and woman in God and having these relationships “sealed” beyond the grave. Children are “born into the covenant,” and covenant relationships can be extended vicariously to ancestors. Blessings pertaining to offspring in this world and the next are represented in symbolic representations of fertility.<sup>75</sup> Unity in marriage as a way to grow nearer to God the Father and Mother sets up family life as a learning environment as well: practicing to become gods and have an “increase” (D&C 131:4).

We could go on expanding on the symbolism of these ordinances, but I noted only some that had relation to the perfectionism Joseph taught. (See table 1, a series of principles that are taught and internalized by experiencing temple ordinances.) *The LDS temple ritual is deeply pedagogical*: anyone can learn new things relevant to one's current phase of development and as the Holy Spirit may direct. This, one can say, is the *perfect* mode of learning, tailored, deeply spiritual, and experiential. It is *revealing* on the one hand, to the individual through personal

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75. This is most obvious in the Salt Lake Temple where the celestial room is adorned with many fertility symbols.

revelation brought about by communal symbolic rites and experiences, and *safeguards* on the other hand the sacredness of these teachings by the initiation principle and the promises entered into. It is this mode of teaching I call Joseph's Pedagogy of Perfection. In essence it is that *all Saints can, of their own free will and choice, partake in ordinances as means to experience spiritual maturation, to the end purpose of meeting and becoming like God.*

EDUCATION	PEDAGOGY
Principle = Knowledge	Ordinance = Experience
Repentance, new life, resurrection	<i>Baptism</i> , washed clean, out of water
Pure life, overcome sins of generation	<i>Washing</i> , blessings on bodily parts
Act righteously with power given, stewardship from small to great	<i>Anointing</i> , preparatory king and priest
Set apart from the world, discipline over body, searching for truth, faithfulness	<i>Priesthood garments</i> , wear always, constant reminder, protection, etc.
Line upon line, growth in priesthood power, strong against temptations of Satan	<i>Endowment</i> , going from room to room, learning, clothing, covenants
Marriage for eternity, fidelity, family, offspring	<i>Temple marriage</i> , sealing, blessings
...	...
ALL: preparing to meet and be like God	ALL: preparing to meet and be like God

Let us return to the early Saints who first received these ordinances, who were still innovating and learning to apply this new mode of teaching to their development and spiritual life. I would like to show, from their own experiences, how they thought these teachings were to be applied and disseminated. Just as Joseph had openly *preached* about many of the *principles* pertaining to exaltation and making one's calling and election sure, partakers of the ordinances were *discussing* their *experiences* in the temple. Helen Mar Whitney recorded Amasa Lyman's insights and

experiences of the temple ordinances he received on December 21, 1845, which reveal some keys to the perceived purposes of temple pedagogy:

These things [are] to put you in possession of the means of salvation, and be brought into a proper relationship to God. . . . It is the key by which you approach God. No impression which you receive here should be lost. It was to rivet the recollections of these things in your memory, like a nail in a sure place never to be forgotten. The scenery through which you have passed is actually laying before you a picture or map, by which you are to travel through life and obtain entrance into the celestial Kingdom hereafter.<sup>76</sup>

According to this statement, the ritual accomplishes three things: It is meant to “bridge the gap” between humans and God (it is relational). Second, it provides a specific goal to internalize the “oral scripture” by memorizing the proceedings of the ordinances. Third, there is a close relation between our “travel through the temple” and our everyday “travel through life.”

Easily overlooked, but to me very poignant, is that the quotation above comes from minutes made of meetings held just after the performance of the ordinances. This was like a “temple testimony meeting,” with seventy-five brothers and sisters present and where several shared their views on what they had just experienced. These early Saints, under the direction of Heber C. Kimball, helped each other understand and get a testimony of these important saving ordinances. They were actively making that connection with real life, as we also see with prophets of old and others in the scriptures. This begs the question: how do Latter-day Saints, from the early times to the present, go about making that connection? How do they liken the oral scriptures of the temple to themselves? Where and when do they discuss them, to mentor one another to further initiation? Next, I want to discuss the extension of temple ordinances

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76. Helen Mar Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo, and Incidents from H.C. Kimball’s Journal,” *The Woman’s Exponent* 12 (Aug. 1 and 15, 1883), 26, in Ehat, *Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances*, 115–16.

and of the accompanying temple education over time, and the evolving modes and policies surrounding them.

#### 4: Extension of Teachings and Blessings to the Saints Abroad—Gathering Reversed

*But there has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. . . . Even the Saints are slow to understand. I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God, but we frequently see some of them after suffering all they have for the work of God will fly to pieces like glass as soon as any thing comes that is contrary to their traditions, they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, go through and receive their exaltation I am unable to say but many are called and few are chosen.<sup>77</sup>*

Joseph Smith's lamentation that the early Saints were slow to understand demonstrates that he was struggling with the dilemma of widespread dissemination and selective initiation already in his day. Likewise, from the earliest days of Joseph's teaching about perfection and eternal marriage, there have been exposés and distortions by dissenting members and others. Balancing the needs of members learning and maintaining the sacredness of the temple teachings has been a constant conundrum. Policies about both content and dissemination of temple blessings have been evolving ever since.

When Joseph Smith was martyred, he had only performed the full temple ordinances with sixty-five Saints.<sup>78</sup> Brigham Young continued overseeing the temple construction and performed these saving ordinances wherever possible. In the meantime, he made some late innovations to the ceremonies. Upon completion of the temple, the ordi-

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77. Sermon delivered at Nauvoo, Ill. in front of Robert D. Foster's hotel on Jan. 21, 1844 in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*. Italics and corrections mine

78. *History of the Church* 7:543–80. See table of ordinances in Ehat, *Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances*.

nance work started and took off at an unfathomable pace, as thousands of Saints were yearning to be “endowed” and married before their God. Just before the trek to the West, over 5,000 members went through the temple, around 600 of whom received the highest blessings pertaining to exaltation.<sup>79</sup>

Once in the Utah mountains, Brigham Young continued extending endowments and sealings to as many as possible as soon as possible. Before any buildings were erected, some ordinances were performed on hilltops: “Addison Pratt received his endowments on Ensign Hill on the 21st [July 21, 1849], the place being consecrated for the purpose. Myself . . . being present.”<sup>80</sup> Mountains were, scripturally, seen as places equal to temples and this seemed in line with earlier practices of performing ordinances elsewhere when there was no operating temple.<sup>81</sup> The endowment house was erected to make ordinances available before temples were finished; in 1855 endowments were continued, and in 1867 the other sealing ordinances.<sup>82</sup> In 1877, the St. George Temple was dedicated. Ordinances were standardized and recorded in written form the year before President Young’s death. President Taylor reinstated the School of the Prophets in 1883, introducing “worthy” married members with the washing of feet as had been done before, but only as a reminder or repetition of blessings already pronounced and as a sign of unity and selfless service. President Taylor explained at a meeting of the school on October 12, 1883:

The reason why things are in the shape they are is because Joseph felt called upon to confer all ordinances connected with the Priesthood. He felt in a hurry on account of certain premonition [*sic*] that he had

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79. In Buerger, “The Fulness of the Priesthood,” 32.

80. William S. Harwell, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Collier’s, 1997), 224–25.

81. D&C 124:29–40.

82. Buerger, “The Fulness of the Priesthood,” 27–28.

concerning his death, and was very desirous to impart the endowments and all the ordinances thereof to the Priesthood during his lifetime, and it would seem to be necessary that there should be *more care* taken in the administration of the ordinances to the Saints in order that those who had *not* proven themselves *worthy* might not partake of the fulness of the anointings until they had proven themselves *worthy* thereof, *upon being faithful to the initiatory principles*; as great *carelessness* and a lack of appreciation had been manifested by many who had partaken of these sacred ordinances.<sup>83</sup>

This remark illustrates the point of careful initiation, and the School had the purpose of preparing those who had received the “initiatory principles” to be instructed—and thus initiated—further, until they were worthy and ready to receive further ordinances. President Taylor and George Q. Cannon decided, for this purpose, “it would be advisable for the endowment to be administered in separate stages.”<sup>84</sup> In these first few decades of the Utah-based Church, General Authorities generally knew all Church members, so members’ progress could be monitored closely. Ordinances were mostly done by temple presidents and General Authorities, so the needed balance between members’ getting instruction and the ceremonies’ being kept sacred was maintained.

With only four temples available in the first seventy-three years of the Church,<sup>85</sup> converts abroad who wanted to receive the temple blessings had no choice but to come to the United States. The policy of the gathering was underlined by the idea of a “compact society”:

TO THE SAINTS ABROAD. In order that the object for which the saints are gathered together in the last days, as spoken of by all the holy

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83. “School of the Prophets Minutes” 1, in Buerger, “The Fulness of the Priesthood,” Oct. 2, 1883, 32. Italics mine.

84. “School of the Prophets Minutes,” in Buerger, “The Fulness of the Priesthood,” Aug. 2, 1883, Sept. 27, 1883, 32.

85. From the dedication of the Nauvoo Temple in May 1846 until the first temple outside of Utah dedicated in Laie, Hawaii, in Nov. 1919. The four temples meant are those in Utah from St. George in 1877 on until 1919.



prophets since the world began, may be obtained, it is essentially necessary, that they should all be gathered in to the Cities appointed for that purpose; as it will be much better for them all, in order that they may be in a situation to have the *necessary instruction*, to prepare them for the duties of their callings respectively. . . . And we wish it to be deeply impressed on the minds of all, that to *obtain all the knowledge* which the circumstances of man will admit of, is one of the principle objects the saints have in gathering together. Intelligence is the result of *education*, and education can only be obtained by living in compact society.<sup>86</sup>

This 1838 charge by Sidney Rigdon was still the standing policy at the time the Saints settled the Utah basin. A “perpetual immigration fund” provided means for converts to travel and settle, but the economic “panic” in the 1890s and the Great Depression in the 1930s probably sparked a change in policy of the gathering, as Utah Saints weren’t able to accommodate the immigrants. Nevertheless, immigration was substantial until after World War II.

The policy, however, eventually changed from gathering in Utah to gathering in “stakes of Zion” abroad. A first European-based temple came in 1955 in Bern (Zollikofen), Switzerland. With the first two stakes outside of the United States in the 1950s (Hamilton, New Zealand, and London, England), also came two temples in 1958. South America and Japan followed in 1978 and 1980. A massive surge in temple dedications abroad (and in general) began in 1983 by Gordon B. Hinckley,<sup>87</sup> who also started the “small temple plan,” announced in October 1997. He urged that temple blessings and “all other ordinances to be had in the Lord’s house” be available, be “presided over, wherever possible, by local men called as temple presidents, just as stake presidents are called,” and be

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86. Sidney Rigdon in “Elders Journal 1” (Kirtland, Ohio: Far West, Mo., Aug. 4, 1838), 54. Italics mine.

87. “Temple Chronology,” <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/chronological/>.

performed by “local people who would serve in other capacities in their wards and stakes.”<sup>88</sup> Temples now approach 200 in number.

Judging by this trend in extending temple blessings, one could say the gathering is definitively reversed. This demanded different ways to prepare, initiate, and monitor worthiness for extension of ordinances, especially as judging worthiness was delegated to local leaders.<sup>89</sup> But what was the international equivalent of the School of the Prophets? There is an official temple preparation class, and up until 1990 there was a “sermon at the veil” providing some explanation on the symbolism of the performed ceremony. But systematic teaching about the temple as in the School of the Prophets, or like the “temple testimony meetings” of 1845, have been discontinued. Whenever relevant scriptures are discussed in priesthood and Relief Society classes now, references to the temple ordinances can be made only as brief hints, as both endowed and non-endowed members are present. The communal discussion about

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88. The announcement was as follows: “But there are many areas of the Church that are remote, where the membership is small and not likely to grow very much in the near future. Are those who live in these places to be denied forever the blessings of the temple ordinances? While visiting such an area a few months ago, we prayerfully pondered this question. The answer, we believe, came bright and clear. We will construct small temples in some of these areas, buildings with all of the facilities to administer all of the ordinances. . . . They would accommodate baptisms for the dead, the endowment service, sealings, and all other ordinances to be had in the Lord’s house for both the living and the dead. They would be presided over, wherever possible, by local men called as temple presidents, just as stake presidents are called. . . . All ordinance workers would be local people who would serve in other capacities in their wards and stakes” (Virginia Hatch Romney and Richard O. Cowan, *The Colonia Juárez Temple: A Prophet’s Inspiration* [Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009], Appendix C. President Hinckley’s General Conference Announcement, Saturday, Oct. 4, 1997).

89. Actually, this delegation already took place in the Utah-based Church after 1889 under President Wilford Woodruff. During these years, different standards and lists of criteria for worthiness were developed, e.g., by President Lorenzo Snow. See Buerger, “The Fulness of the Priesthood,” 32–34.

temple symbolism is discouraged outside as well as inside the temple.<sup>90</sup> Still, the importance of teaching perfection and the principles and ordinances pertaining to it, have been a major mission of the Church, as stated, for example, by President Benson:

The temple ceremony was given by a wise Heavenly Father to help us become more Christlike. . . . We will not be able to dwell in the company of celestial beings unless we are pure and holy. The laws and ordinances which cause men and women to come out of the world and become sanctified are administered only in these holy places. They were given by revelation and are comprehended by revelation. It is for this reason that one of the Brethren [ElRay Christensen] has referred to the temple as the “university of the Lord.” No member of the Church can be perfected without the ordinances of the temple. We have a mission to assist those who do not have these blessings to receive them.<sup>91</sup>

The mission of “perfecting the Saints” and that of “redeeming the dead” are intertwined in the ability to repeat the temple ordinances for deceased ancestors. In my opinion, though, the focus has shifted to “the great work of redeeming the dead, fulfilling the mission of Elijah.”<sup>92</sup>

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90. It goes too far for the scope of this paper to discuss all these changing trends and policies; that can be a topic for a different paper. What I derive from it is that temple education or pedagogy is not systematically embedded.

91. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2014), 250–52; see also Elder Ray L. Christiansen, “Why Temples,” *Conference Report* (Apr. 1968), 134.

92. In speaking in regard to the Saints becoming saviors upon Mount Zion, the Prophet Joseph said thus to his brethren [Jan. 20, 1844.]: “But how are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations, and sealing powers upon their heads, in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead, and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them; and herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, which fulfils the mission of Elijah.” See: Marriner W. Merrill, “Temple Work” General Conference, Oct. 4, 1895, *Collected Discourses* 4:359.

There have been urges to reinvigorate temple attendance for the purpose of *individual* development in the gospel, but no structural *communal* policy changes have been made recently.

With a worldwide membership of sixteen million and adding thousands every day, it is understandable that the focus of teaching can shift to the basic principles. But at the same time, with more members, more will also be “ready to receive” the highest blessings of the temple, and more will strive for their calling and election to be made sure. So how can the LDS Church go about initiation in a way that is more open, to more and more members, while safeguarding the sacredness of these ordinances in an information age where all of them can be found in one Google search? In sum, how can graduating from “temple university” become more achievable? In my conclusion I will draw from all the above to make some suggestions and raise some questions on how to go about clever teaching and mentoring.

### Conclusion and Suggestions: Pedagogy of Perfection: The End in Mind and Education Toward That End

*“God’s earthly kingdom is a school in which the saints learn the doctrines of salvation. Some members of the Church are being taught elementary courses; others are approaching graduation and can do independent research where the deep and hidden things are concerned. All must learn line upon line and precept upon precept.”*<sup>93</sup>

Both Moses and Jesus tried to bring the temple to the center of the religious life of their followers. They disseminated the knowledge and ordinances of the temple, first to their disciples and through them to others. Joseph Smith set up the same mode of teaching for the Latter-day Saints, a series of ordinances to be available for all who are ready

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93. Alma 21:9–10 and Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 323.

to receive it. But do we teach about it in the same ways and as often as Joseph and the early Saints did? What is needed in our age?

With temple ordinances being officiated around the world and with Church leaders trying to safeguard the sacredness of the temple ordinances, it is no wonder that we tend to err on the side of not talking about the temple. We must be *careful*, but I think also we need to look for *inventive* ways to teach about the temple in order to perfect the Saints more universally. Joseph Smith was clear about this: the temple is the center of our worship, but it is for initiates. So even though the outward ordinances have been exposed,<sup>94</sup> the knowledge will always be safe, because it can only be received by initiatory experiences and revelation. Initiation in ritual *is* the safety measure.

Education is still the form of worship most dominant in LDS Church meetings and home, with Church members being encouraged to keep rereading the standard works of scripture, helped by Sunday School, seminary and institute classes. But does this bring about sufficient development? If one is to learn “line upon line,” ascending Joseph’s ladder, one needs constant *hints* to new possible meanings, *insights*<sup>95</sup> into new layers of deeper knowledge that were not yet “present” to the understanding. I argue that the same goes for the oral scripture of the temple. Progress without mentoring is hard.

Following Joseph’s cry to all Saints to make their calling and elections sure,<sup>96</sup> how are we to go about teaching that in a careful way?

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94. Starting as early as 1842 with John C. Bennett in Nauvoo, until fairly recently with Tom Philips in England, 2012.

95. In the literal meaning of “looking into” or “peeking.” So “dropping hints” and letting others “take a peek,” becomes part of the teaching skill. In Dutch there is a phrase that comes even closer to this skill: *Een tip van de sluier oplichten*, “lifting up a tip of the veil.”

96. “I am going on in my progress for eternal life, . . . Oh! I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and election sure.” “Thomas Bullock report, Friday May 12, 1844,” Book of Abraham Project, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Parallel/1844/12May44.html>.

Enduring to the end, explained simply as not falling away on hidden paths, is not as motivating as a concrete and attainable goal in this life: the tangible sign of one's "calling and election being made sure." The suggestion I want to make here is that this goal could be communicated more clearly to faithful couples. In light of this great end goal, all other "work" toward it gains meaning. Enduring can become joyful, or the prospect can become a rock in times of tempest, and be preventive of becoming lukewarm<sup>97</sup> by the many routines and repetitions.

Joseph's pedagogy of perfection is quite a unique form of salvation theology, which makes the LDS Church (and temple) stand out more than it blends in. This gives rise to a paradox,<sup>98</sup> already in Joseph's time, of stressing the newly revealed points of doctrine (including premortal existence, eternal marriage, and exaltation) on the one hand, and wanting to be accepted as a Christian religion on the other. But the Church today, especially in Europe, is surrounded more and more by secular philosophies. Converts come from different paradigms and are less concerned about how "different" the Church is from other Christian denominations. The idea of a God who is an exalted human living in a different realm of this universe with a plan to have us come to earth for a mortal moral apprenticeship, preparatory to returning to dwell in his presence, is actually pretty "down to earth." It fits in a disenchanting perception of God, who is not seen any more as pure Spirit and unreachable, but as a God we can relate to and even touch and meet. Likewise, the idea of developing line upon line, from the preparatory gospel to the "temple university," advancing in the priesthood (for both male and female), is a pedagogy similar to our educational systems.

But where are the professors, the mentors, those who guide the initiation, teaching "research methods," toward eventual "graduation"? I

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97. Think again about John the Apostle's letter to Laodicea in Revelation 3:15–16.

98. The fourth paradox as explained by Terryl Givens in *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53–62.

suggest that the LDS Church could put initiation and mentoring forward as a priority, with less concern about secretiveness, but proud that it has a tangible and achievable way to prepare faithful believers in Christ to the point where they are ready to meet him. It could take the same pride in the teachings as did the early saints who announced it in bold terms:

These teachings of the Savior [in 1 John 3:2–3; 1 Peter 1:15–16; Matthew 5:48; John 14:12; 17:20–24] most clearly show unto us the nature of salvation, and what He proposed unto the human family when He proposed to save them—that He proposed to make them like unto himself, and He was like the Father, the great prototype of all saved beings; and for any portion of the human family to be assimilated into their likeness is to be saved.<sup>99</sup>

And they could recognize, as did Bruce R. McConkie, that to continually advance toward God is an innate human desire:

Among those who have received the gospel, and who are seeking diligently to live its laws and gain eternal life, there is *an instinctive and determined desire to make their calling and election sure*. Because they have tasted the good things of God and sipped from the fountain of eternal truth, they now seek the divine presence, where they shall know all things, have all power, all might, and all dominion, and in fact be like Him who is the great Prototype of all saved beings—God our Heavenly Father. (D&C 132:20.) *This is the end objective, the chief goal of all the faithful*, and there is nothing greater in all eternity, “for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation.” (D&C 6:13)<sup>100</sup>

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99. “Lectures on Faith, Seventh lecture, verse 16,” as found in *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835).

100. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 325. Italics mine.