



— Carl Bloch 1881

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DIALOGUE

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Errata

In our Spring issue, we mistakenly omitted Terence L. Day's biographical note. Our sincerest apologies.

TERENCE L. DAY (terence@moscow.com) is retired from the Washington State University faculty where for 31 years he popularized agricultural and family science research findings and pursued freelance writing and photography on the side. Although his was a convert baptism, in Japan, he descends from the earliest Mormon pioneers. He lives in Pullman, Wash., with his wife, Ruth, whose third great-grandfather, Newel Knight, baptized Terry's third great-grandfather, Ira Jones Willes, in 1831. Terry has experienced the Church in Japan, California, Wyoming, Utah, and Washington. His major callings have included teaching Gospel Doctrine, Elders Quorum president, ward clerk, ward mission leader, stake mission presidency (as an ordained Seventy), high priest group leader, bishop's counselor, stake high council, stake executive secretary and stake clerk. He also fulfilled a service mission and currently is a ward family history specialist.

There was also a mistake in the printing of James Goldberg's poem, "The Feather Pen." It should have appeared as follows:

The Feather Pen

The angels' wings are molting, so I'll make my pen.
Sound me down to earth or hell, but let me take my pen.

While I was sleeping all the stars burned to ash—
perhaps this emptiness of night is what will wake my pen.

My mind? A Zen garden. My memories? Stones.
And where in all the chaos is a rake? My pen.

Break my bones, break my heart, break my spirit for his sake:
But does he really think I'd let him break my pen?

He speaks like rushing waters; I write his words to ice.
Imprisoned where clear walls have turned opaque. My pen.

It wasn't till I saw his finger writing on the wall—
I knew what I could be if I'd forsake my pen.

“The Highest Class of Adulterers and Whoremongers”: Plural Marriage, the Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerite), and the Construction of Memory¹

Christopher James Blythe

“Anyone who says Father Cutler ever sanctioned, upheld, or practiced polygamy are ignorant, unlearned, dishonest, or deceived, for they took false reports for facts, not knowing the truth.”²

The Mormon polygamous passage was not traversed solely by those who sided with Brigham Young. Plural marriage was part of the legacy handed down from the Nauvoo experience and as Joseph Smith III once stated, “nearly all of the factions into which the church broke had plural marriage in some form.”³ There were certainly exceptions to this rule—Sidney Rigdon and Charles B. Thompson, for example, never practiced plural marriage. However, polygamy and questions about its origins and extent could not easily be ignored by any of the sects.

In fact, polygamy served and continues to serve as a means by which one variant of Mormonism positions itself against another. Although some of those who would become members of the Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerite) were involved in the plural marriage experience in Illinois and Iowa, by the time of its official inception in 1853, the church had rejected the practice. This article

traces the evolving memory of and public reaction to plural marriage among the Cutlerites in an effort to understand how a religious movement conceptualizes and re-conceptualizes its past in order to solidify its identity in the present.

Studies of memory—that is, how a community remembers and represents its own past—have already proved useful to scholars seeking to understand Mormon culture. Both Kathleen Flake and Stephen C. Taysom have demonstrated how the LDS Church has “forgotten” its polygamous passage via emphasizing other distinctive historical moments (e.g., Flake’s argument concerning the first vision)⁴ or whitewashing these events in Mormon popular histories (e.g. Taysom’s discussion of Gerald N. Lund’s *The Work and the Glory* series).⁵ A similar approach also informed David Howlett’s compelling study of how the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now known as the Community of Christ) came to remember the practice of polygamy, as their cousins came to forget it.⁶

As these scholars have already emphasized, memory is a crucial component of how institutions define themselves and police their borders. The particular lens through which a group chooses to see its past shapes its members’ understanding of who they are in the present. As David Lowenthal has stated, “the past as we know it is partly a product of the present; we continually reshape memory, rewrite history, refashion relics.”⁷ “History” as we are using it here refers to the crafting of the past via available source materials. Neither the process of constructing memory nor the writing of history is unbiased, but the latter is “based on empirical sources which we can decide to reject for other versions of the past,” whereas the former is shaped more by the present requirements of the community’s self-definition.⁸

This article is divided into two major parts. The first section is devoted to a history of the proto-Cutlerite—that is, the movement as it existed as a colony before organization as a church—involved with polygamy. Here we will count wives and husbands and measure the extent of overall knowledge of polygamy during the period. The second section is devoted to a history of the Cutlerite—that is, the movement after the official founding date of the Church of Jesus Christ—memory or representation of polygamy.

The history of Cutlerite understandings of polygamy—their

memory of Mormonism's polygamous past—can be divided into three major periods. The first period, between 1853 and 1864, was characterized by a collective and institutionally enforced silence, which attempted to mute those voices who knew of polygamy's past. During this period, the Cutlerites were *haunted* by the memory of polygamy, even when (or perhaps, particularly because) it was unacknowledged in public. As we will see, there were unavoidable reminders of a polygamous past in their midst.

A second period was initiated at Alpheus Cutler's death and brought on by the growing intensity of RLDS missionary work that closely equated the community with their apparently unfortunate past. Gone was the policy of silence on polygamy altogether. A new strategy emerged in its place, one in which the church openly denied and distanced itself from any involvement in past polygamy. As we will see, such public denials hid residual private anxieties in the second generation. Regardless, it was during this period that the community's collective aversion to polygamy led the Cutlerites to form their own identity—by pushing against the Brighamites, with their corrupt marital practices, while simultaneously seeking to respond to the insinuations made by RLDS missionaries, former Cutlerites, and neighboring non-Mormon communities.

A third period began with the twentieth-century arrival of Cutlerites to Independence, Missouri. In their new environment, where they were surrounded by a variety of Mormon sects, identity formation became all the more important. Likewise, the twentieth century presented new contradictions to the Cutlerites' narrative of plural marriage from another source: professional historians. Scholars published en masse concerning Joseph Smith's many plural marriages; later in the century, they even turned their attention to Alpheus Cutler. The Cutlerites responded in the form of official church histories and even found allies in other movements' apologetic histories. In effect they moved from doing memory, presenting the past from their personal knowledge, to the claim that they could construct the past from historical documents. Likewise during this period, the effort to construct identity by pushing against the Brighamites was intensified and as a result, Brigham Young and other historical Mormon figures began to appear as stock villains. The history of the Church of Jesus

Christ offers us a view of how one denomination has tried both to preserve and to construct a heritage rooted in the past—a heritage which has shifted and been re-imagined over the course of its history.

A Twenty-First Century Encounter

On June 4, 2002, I held my first and only interview with Stanley Whiting, president of the Melchizedek Priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ. Like many students of Mormonism, I stumbled across the church in the writings of Danny Jorgensen and D. Michael Quinn and wanted to know something about this small group of believers who claimed to have maintained the Mormonism of Nauvoo intact into the twenty-first century. As I sat in the Whitings' living room in Blue Springs, Missouri, I found something very tender in the elderly gentleman, who would periodically remark that I looked just like his grandson. We spoke for several hours as he bore testimony of the Restoration in general and the history of the Cutlerites in particular. He had recently traveled to visit the rebuilt Nauvoo Temple, before it was dedicated, and kindly expressed the similarities of our faiths, especially the fact that both communities maintained what he referred to as "the upper room work" or simply "the priesthood."

We had only spoken a few minutes, when he looked at me, smiled, and said, "Now I'm picking on you now and I don't want you to take this personal, but you belong to the Utah [Church] . . . to us, one of the grossest sins in the world is polygamy." He went on to express his irritation with scholars who had persistently tried to "destroy our integrity" in reference to whether Alpheus Cutler and the early Cutlerites were polygamists or not. He continued, "And we have got proof in our records that we don't show to people what happened clear back through Alpheus Cutler. Alpheus Cutler was claimed by the church—your church—as having twenty-seven wives, eighteen wives." He raised his hands, exasperated. "I don't pay any attention to that. He only had one wife and that's Lois."⁹

Six years later, when I finally presented some of my research on the Cutlerites at a conference of the John Whitmer Historical Association, I remembered Whiting's concerns and for that reason decided to avoid any mention of polygamy at all. Instead, I

was excited to probe the singular ecclesiology of the faith. However, by the end of the session, I was reminded of the interest and controversy in questions concerning the Cutlerite involvement in plural marriage. After finishing the public Q&A, I was approached by several scholars who wanted to discuss the topic. One senior scholar, who had inadvertently offended a Cutlerite a year previously, simply asked if I felt it was accurate to say that Cutler practiced polygamy. Another asked in hushed tones whether the records mentioned anything about their plural marriages. When I answered in the negative, he commented that the records were probably doctored or the important portions left unavailable; otherwise, he speculated, we would find the information “we all” suspected was there.

Despite the guaranteed interest in such a project, I had decided I would leave the subject of plural marriage for someone else to unravel. I wanted to avoid the controversy. Yet, as I continued my research, I came to think that the Cutlerites’ experience and reaction to polygamy was and remains a crucial part of their story. Specifically, I began to look for a way that would allow me to tell the story of Cutlerite polygamy in a historically accurate way—drawing on all of the available source material, while being responsible as a scholar to both my subject and my audience, and even sympathetic to the Cutlerite plight.

Ultimately scholars still do not have access either to those hypothetical documents that Stan Whiting claimed would exonerate Cutler from the allegations leveled against him or to those that the above-mentioned historian suggested would add even further exciting details of polygamy’s heyday. Yet the records we do have paint a more complicated and compelling portrait of the movement than we could gain from being able to add to or subtract wives from the story. Instead, the history of Cutlerism’s reaction to polygamy is one of coping with a memory silenced, repressed, and deliberately forgotten, but ultimately important to the Cutlerite construction of identity.

The History of the Cutlerites and the Cutlerites in Mormon History

Alpheus Cutler, a Latter-day Saint since 1833, grew to prominence in Nauvoo as a member of the city’s High Council, one of

the temple committee, and the temple's "master builder." As a confidant of Joseph Smith, Cutler was entrusted with Nauvoo's emerging esoteric theology. On October 12, 1843, he was initiated as a member of the Holy Order (also known as the Anointed Quorum), through what would come to be known as the temple endowment. On November 15, 1843, he was sealed to his wife, Lois, and subsequently the couple received the ceremony referred to as the "fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood." Although he was not one of the original members of the Holy Order endowed in 1842, he was only the sixth man to receive this capstone anointing, one week before the first of the twelve apostles, Brigham Young, received the rite.

On March 11, 1844, Alpheus Cutler was chosen as one of the charter members of the Kingdom of God, frequently referred to as the Council of Fifty, a religiopolitical society designed to promote the Saints' political interests, including interactions with governments, Joseph Smith's candidacy for the presidency of the United States, and colonization efforts. The Kingdom was tied to Mormon millenarian expectations and was intended to function as a worldwide government during the millennial reign of Christ. One responsibility associated with the Council of Fifty was the effort to bring the Mormon gospel to the Native Americans. During this period, Cutler received an assignment to conduct such a mission in Kansas.¹⁰

As a member of the High Council, Cutler played a key role in supporting the leadership of the twelve apostles following Smith's death. This support included participating in the excommunication of supporters of rival movements.¹¹ He also served in the temple, administering the ceremonies of the Holy Order to the rest of the Latter-day Saints. Once the westward migration began, Cutler served as the president of the Municipal High Council in the settlement of Winter Quarters. By the end of 1847, he was eager to fulfill the assignment he had previously received as a member of the Council of Fifty. With Brigham Young's support, he established a mission to the Native Americans, and in the following months relocated to Silver Creek, Iowa, where he served as the branch president.¹²

The period from the undertaking of this mission to the official founding of the Cutlerite church in 1853 could be termed the

Proto-Cutlerite period, in which those who accompanied Cutler on his mission began to see themselves as distinct from the rest of Mormonism. In time, the separation between those who accompanied Cutler, with their focus placed on converting the Native Americans, and other Mormons, who were focused on the trek west, led to increasing tensions between the two communities. By the time Young had re-established the first presidency and planned for the colonization of the Great Basin, the proto-Cutlerites had begun to see messianic possibilities for their movement in general and for their leader, Alpheus Cutler, in particular. They saw themselves as responsible for building relationships with the Native Americans—relationships that would result in the re-establishment of the Saints in Missouri. Though the rift had its origins in what Richard Bennett has referred to as “difference over place and priorities,” in time it blossomed to encompass competing mental worlds of Mormonism’s future.¹³

Lamanism, as Mormons in the surrounding area termed the proto-Cutlerites’ message, was seen as a heretical threat to the Church. Following a series of investigative trials with the regional High Council directed by the apostle Orson Hyde, the official sanction for the Native American mission was withdrawn. Many of those who were active in the mission were excommunicated; eventually, on April 20, 1851, Alpheus Cutler was excommunicated as well.¹⁴ Not long thereafter, the proto-Cutlerites abandoned their missionary efforts due to a lack of conversions and overwhelming hardship.¹⁵

In 1852, the colony relocated to southwest Iowa, where they founded the town of Manti. On September 19, 1853, Alpheus Cutler announced that he had had a revelation to re-organize the Church of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Beginning on that date, his followers were re-baptized and a new church leadership body was selected. The community prospered, numbering a few hundred at its height. In the late 1850s, the Cutlerites attracted the attention of another movement founded only a few months before their own: the “new organization,” later known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The evangelistic group quickly depleted a large chunk of the Cutlerites’ membership.¹⁷ With pressures from the encroachment of RLDS ministers and

the death of Alpheus Cutler in 1864, the Cutlerites decided once again to relocate, this time to Minnesota, where they founded the town of Clitherall.

The Cutlerites struggled at the end of the nineteenth century, especially following their renewed encounter with Josephite missionaries, to the point that the church rarely held meetings. With the death of Chauncy Whiting in 1902, there was an eight-year hiatus of any meetings of the organization until Isaac Whiting, his successor, accepted his position. For these reasons, there is a fourteen-year gap in the organization's minutes before they begin again with a notice that the church "started anew in 1910."¹⁸ Few of the first generation of Cutlerites remained to assist in this renewal.

In 1930, a group of Cutlerites relocated to Independence, Missouri, an action which inadvertently resulted in schism. Although the Cutlerites were divided between two rival churches for some time, one in Minnesota and one in Missouri, the only surviving community by the 1950s was in Independence, where the church currently resides. For the past hundred years, the community has never been more than a handful of believers, often on the verge of extinction.

The Cutlerites attract a unique degree of interest from scholars and armchair historians compared to the other churches of the Restoration. Among the most compelling components of the Church of Jesus Christ is its connection with Nauvoo esotericism. After all, Cutler's claim stemmed from secret commissions received as part of the Council of Fifty and the Anointed Quorum, his reception of the Second Anointing, and most importantly, the perpetuation of the Nauvoo-era endowment into the present. Mormons of various factions have fantasized that the Cutlerites exist in a timeless state, unchanged since Nauvoo. Some wonder what the ceremonies performed on the second floor of their meeting house encompass, and if knowledge of them would demonstrate what the twelve apostles of the LDS Church must have changed since Nauvoo. For example, one writer has noted that the Cutlerites' ceremony was evidence that Masonic elements were additions made by the Brighamites—regardless of the fact that he had no access to details of the Cutlerite ceremony.¹⁹ Although the trope of Cutlerites as the keepers of Nauvoo eso-

tericism is what undoubtedly piques our communal curiosities into the smallest remaining nineteenth-century sect, there is no reason to question whether the Church of Jesus Christ has somehow escaped the impact of time and space.²⁰ The history of all known institutions includes change over time.

Our historical curiosity also has something to do with our tendency to position the Church of Jesus Christ on a constructed spectrum of the Restoration. We are used to thinking of the LDS Church as the proponents of Nauvoo Mormonism with its emphasis on temple rites and, historically, plural marriage, on one side of the spectrum, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, who vehemently opposed polygamy, on the other. We have come to popularly think and speak of the Cutlerites as existing in a space somewhere between these two poles, part LDS since they maintain Nauvoo esotericism, and part RLDS in that they reject plural marriage. There are two problems with this comparative methodology employed to understand the Cutlerites: first, this spectrum is much too simplistic; second, it tries to come to terms with the Cutlerites through analogy rather than by examining the tradition on its own merits. Of course, my comments are not designed to discourage our interests in the Church of Jesus Christ, only to encourage us to suspend what we think we know about the community in order to gain a perspective fully positioned in the sources at our disposal.

Polygamy in Nauvoo and Silver Creek (1845–approx. 1851)

Before we can use the Cutlerites as a case study in memory construction, we should look at the historical moment to which the new institution was reacting. The first subject we need to probe is to what extent the available records suggest Cutlerites were involved in plural marriages. Should scholars speak of the proto-Cutlerite period as a polygamous phase in the sect's history? What knowledge did individual Cutlerites have about plural marriage, in their own sect or among the followers of Brigham Young, prior to Orson Pratt's 1852 announcement?

When exactly Alpheus Cutler was introduced to plural marriage as sponsored by Joseph Smith or other ecclesiastical leaders is uncertain. However, his membership in the Holy Order and Nauvoo's High Council would have positioned him with plenty of

opportunities to learn of the practice. For example, Cutler may have been in attendance when Hyrum Smith read the July 12, 1843, revelation before the Nauvoo High Council on August 12, 1843. Unfortunately, there was no attendance taken during the historic meeting and Cutler was absent the following week.²¹ Because the Holy Order was populated with many of those who were involved in early plural marriage, Cutler would have also been able to discover the practice through these associations. That he remained unaware of polygamy until after Joseph Smith's death seems highly unlikely.

It is certain that by 1845 Cutler had become fully immersed in the world of post-martyrdom plural marriage. His twenty-year-old daughter, Clarissa Cressy Cutler, married the apostle Heber C. Kimball on February 29, 1845. (Cutler's seventeen-year-old daughter, Emily, also married Kimball, but not until December 1845.) On August 9, 1845, Kimball, in turn, performed the ceremony that sealed Cutler to his first plural wife, the recently divorced ex-wife of Orrin Porter Rockwell, Luana Hart Beebe.²² On January 14, 1846, following a general policy for those couples that had previously been sealed outside of the temple, Alpheus had his sealing to Luana, as well as his earlier sealing to Lois, performed again within the edifice. The same procedure was followed with the re-performance of Cutler's higher anointings, although this time with both Lois and Luana accompanying him in the rite.²³ On February 3, 1846, Cutler was sealed to five additional women: Margaret Carr, Abigail Carr, Sally Cox, Disedy Caroline McCall, and Henrietta Clarinda Miller.²⁴ Cutler's new wives received their anointings on the same day.

Of these seven women, we only have a record of three accompanying him during the Native American mission. Alpheus Cutler had children with only one of his plural wives, Luana. Danny Jorgensen's research has uncovered three children born to the union between 1846 and 1850 or 1851. In order to conceal their paternity, the two children to survive childhood did not use the last name Cutler. Jacob Lorenzo, a son born in 1846, was given Cutler's mother's maiden name, Boyd, and Olive Luana, a daughter born in 1850, used the surnames of Luana's two later husbands alternately.²⁵

Alpheus Cutler, his wives, and his daughters appear to have

been the only actual participants in plural marriage from the group of individuals in Silver Creek who eventually became Cutlerites. However, during the proto-Cutlerite period, there was one other polygamist family connected to the community: F. Walter Cox, one of Cutler's counselors, and his three wives. Luman H. Calkins, Cutler's other counselor and the bishop of the Silver Creek Branch, though not technically a polygamist, was also sealed to multiple women in the Nauvoo temple, as he was sealed to both his current and his deceased wife.²⁶

Yet as Jorgensen's research has demonstrated, this was far from the extent of the colony's polygamous ties. Many of those who would become Cutlerites participated in the Nauvoo Temple experience and began the trek westward to Winter Quarters, where polygamy was becoming an increasingly public affair.²⁷ Although Jorgensen may have overstated the situation when he wrote that early Cutlerites possessed an "intimate, detailed directly experiential knowledge" of plural marriage, their associations make it unlikely that many of Cutler's followers needed Cutler to introduce them to plural marriage, as they would have already learned of the practice either by rumor or by personal experience with the rest of the Brighamites.²⁸

Further, there were several Cutlerites with relatives who practiced plural marriage either in Nauvoo or later in Utah. In most cases these were female relations polygamously married to men who continued to accept the leadership of the twelve apostles. There were also at least two additional male polygamists related to the community. Chauncy Whiting, Alpheus Cutler's eventual successor, was never a polygamist, but his brother Edwin Whiting was sealed to three women in the Nauvoo Temple.²⁹ One of Edwin's wives also had ties to the community. Mary Elizabeth Cox Whiting's brother, Amos Cox, would also become a Cutlerite. In fact, three of Amos's siblings were polygamists and his own father-in-law had been sealed to eight women in the Nauvoo Temple.³⁰ Finally, Calvin Beebe, who would act as the branch president of the Farm Creek Branch of Cutlerites, performed plural marriages in the Nauvoo temple.

The proto-Cutlerites were also aware of Alpheus Cutler's and F. Walter Cox's practice of plural marriage. As will be shown, Cox

made very little effort to conceal his polygamous status. Of course, asserting that all Cutlerites knew about Cutler's polygamy would be a dangerous assumption. It is possible that knowledge of Cutler's relationships were only shared with the community's elites, a practice that would have had a strong precedent in 1840s Nauvoo.

However, it is evident that there were those who knew detailed information about Cutler's marriages. Iva Gould, a Cutlerite descendant who belonged to the RLDS faith, recorded her experience of probing her parents and grandparents for information concerning polygamy. In an undated (twentieth-century) letter, she wrote:

I asked my folks some of the questions about the Cutlerites that you asked yesterday. They said it was common belief in the early days that Alpheus Cutler had been a polygamist, though the present generation of Cutlerites deny it. My father said that at one time on a short journey he stopped at the home of Mrs. [Luana Beebe] Boyd who told him she was one of the wives of Alpheus Cutler, that she had been a poor girl without relatives to care for her and Cutler told her if she would be sealed to him he would support her.

On reaching home my father asked my grandfather, Francis Lewis Whiting, a brother of Chauncey Whiting, if it was true that Father Cutler had more than one wife. He answered reluctantly, "I suppose it is true that he had three wives." And when I asked if Mrs. Boyd was one of them, he said, "Yes, I suppose she was." He was a staunch Cutlerite and did not like to admit it but was too honest to deny it. My grandmother then said that Father Cutler got rid of his wives before he started the church, that he took one of them on a mission to the Indians and she died there. Another he gave away to a man who wanted to marry her.³¹

This is a crucial source mainly because it is the only record—although secondhand—from a first-generation Cutlerite affirming Cutler's polygamous status. For such a late document, it is surprisingly accurate. The three wives spoken of would have included the three who remained with Cutler in Iowa: Lois Cutler, Cutler's public spouse; Luana Hart Beebe, who remarried with Cutler's apparent consent; and Henrietta Clarinda Miller, who died around 1851, during the Cutlerites' Native American mission.³²

"Alpheus Cutler Decided to Put Away His Plural Wives"

By 1851, the man who had once had seven women sealed to

him in the Nauvoo Temple had completely abandoned the practice. When a pair of Brighamite missionaries returned to Utah from Clitherall, Minnesota, in the 1880s, they noted their surprise that the Cutlerite community denied that “Joseph Smith ever taught or practiced plural marriage.” A report of their experience, published in the *Deseret News*, stated that “Cutler himself had three wives before he left the Church, two of whom he abandoned on leaving.”³³ These missionaries had left Clitherall with the understanding that Cutler had left his wives when he *left the Church*. So far as I have been able to ascertain, this is the only time a reason—Cutler’s excommunication—was assigned, if only by implication, to the ending of Cutler’s polygamous lifestyle.

The first historical study to address how Alpheus Cutler became a monogamist was Clare B. Christensen’s self-published history, *Before and After Mt. Pisgah*. Christensen notes that in 1851, Mills County, Iowa, instituted a new piece of anti-polygamy legislation, which resulted in F. Walter Cox’s arrest. In reaction to the threat of incarceration, he reached a compromise with the courts that he and his wives would move from Iowa. Although Christensen does not cite his sources, he explains that Cutler also faced charges from the county. In Christensen’s words:

Alpheus Cutler was 67 years old. Life was not easy for him. He was a stone mason in a land where there was little stone to build with. Confronted with problems from the law, Alpheus decided to put away his plural wives. Not knowing what else to do, at least two of his wives although disowned, continued to live as part of the community.³⁴

Subsequent historians followed Christensen’s explanation—often citing his statement that Cutler “put away his plural wives.” Unfortunately, the current narrative as promoted in Biloine Young’s *Obscure Believers* goes so far as to suggest that the dissolution of Cutler’s marriages occurred abruptly and cruelly in 1851. Young writes:

Like Abraham sending Hagar into the wilderness, Cutler, with a single pronouncement, cast off the five women he had pledged to support and protect. There is no mention of where the five found the basic necessities of food and shelter, who befriended them or how they managed to survive. Four of Cutler’s five plural wives simply disappear from Cutlerite history as if they had never existed.³⁵

Young's narrative is based solely on her reading of Christensen, particularly her interpretation of the twentieth-century historian's words "put away."

We will arrive at a better understanding of the events that led up to the end of these six marriages over the course of five years, if we place them in their proper historical context. First, it should be remembered that only three wives accompanied Cutler to the Indian mission and, thus, we should be very open to the fact that four women may have already ceased to see themselves as Cutler's wives. The fate of the two remaining plural wives is discussed in Iva Gould's account above. If any wives were "put away," it was likely only Luana, whom Cutler arranged to be remarried to one of his followers. While the annulment of Cutler's marriage to Luana may have signaled the end of polygamy for the community, it is also helpful to examine the fate of his four other sealings.

Cutler's Nauvoo temple sealings were performed in two parts: first, the (re-)sealings of his first wife and Luana Hart Beebe occurred on January 14, 1846, followed in February by his sealings to Margaret Carr, Abigail Carr, Sally Cox, Disey Caroline McCall, and Henrietta Clarinda Miller. Because these five women were not present for the ceremony to be performed in January, it seems likely that they made the decision to be sealed to Cutler sometime during those three weeks.

What we know about polygamy in this period suggests that such speedy courtships were far from an anomaly. The zeal to perform temple ceremonies during the three months in which the Nauvoo temple was available meant that many relationships were arranged with very short notice. Even monogamous arrangements were brought together on short notice in order to assure one's access to the rituals. Mosiah Hancock, who was only eleven at the time, was sealed to a twelve-year-old girl and later remembered that the couple was instructed "not to live together as man and wife until we were 16 years of age." He explained, "The reason that some were sealed so young was because we knew that we would have to go West and wait many a long time for another temple."³⁶

What was the motivation for such speedy courtships? With less emphasis on romantic love and more emphasis on the salvific basis of such unions, historian Lawrence Foster notes that women

sought “status and relationships in the afterlife,” as well as economic support for the impending excursion westward.³⁷ This perspective helps explain why four of Cutler’s marriages did not endure. According to the Iva Gould statement, Luana Hart Beebe cited her own poverty as her motivation, and Cutler’s promise that “if she would be sealed to him he would support her” was a prime factor for the union.³⁸ Yet if temporal welfare was the draw for the thirty-one-year-old Luana, who was recently divorced with five children, others may have been attracted by the salvific component of a ritualistic relationship. Luana’s marriage was, of course, unique. She had been Cutler’s wife for several months by the time she was sealed in the Nauvoo temple. The ceremony re-performed there certainly came with the assumption that a literal familial relationship would continue.

Although it has been debated, age does seem to have played a role in whether relationships arranged and ritually sealed in Nauvoo would lead to a typical marital relationship thereafter. This largely had to do with another motivation for plural marriage, sexual reproduction. The five women who were sealed to Alpheus Cutler on February 3, 1846, ranged in age widely: 74, 65, 51, 43, and 23 respectively. It was only the youngest, Henrietta, who remained with Cutler until her death in 1851. At the age of twenty-three, it would have likely been expected that the union would produce children.

The difficulty of maintaining these Nauvoo temple marriages was felt by those who traveled to Utah as well. Cutler’s son-in-law, Heber C. Kimball, was a prime example. According to Fanny Stenhouse’s popular exposé, Kimball had once stated (for effect, no doubt) that besides the wives he had in Salt Lake City, he also had “about fifty more scattered over the earth somewhere. I have never seen them since they were sealed to me in Nauvoo, and I hope I shall never see them again.”³⁹ Although Kimball, in actuality, did not have fifty estranged ex-wives, he did have ten of these Nauvoo temple marriages annulled with an additional “six [wives who] are unaccounted for after the move West.” His biographer has attributed this lacuna to “the unusual [i.e. salvific] and pragmatic [i.e. economic] nature of these marriages.”⁴⁰

In any case, rather than “a single pronouncement” made in

1851, we should see Cutler's polygamous relationships, like many others begun in Nauvoo and certainly those established during the winter of 1845–1846, as tenuous from the start. By 1848, he seems to have already gone from seven wives to three. These relationships were entered into with a spirit of zeal that, with the exception of Luana and Henrietta, ended perhaps as quickly as it had begun.

The new legislation that outlawed polygamy should not be seen as the single cause behind Cutler giving up polygamy. After all, Cutler could have followed F. Walter Cox's example, relocated, and preserved his wives. Rather, Cutler's decision to end his relationship with Luana Hart Beebe may have been justified by a new piece of legislation, but likely reflects his own personal aversion to plural marriage.

Cutler's lived experience likely played a role in his growing distaste for plural marriage. A great deal had occurred since he had knelt at the Nauvoo Temple's altar. There were the broken marriages of his two daughters and their husband, Heber C. Kimball, who had left to participate in the trek west.⁴¹ Both women had remarried in 1849. Although we don't know the details of Cutler's life as a polygamist, simply by numerical calculations, he may have felt like a failure in the new system. Four of his wives had not accompanied him to Silver Creek. And if the impossibility of a successful polygamous lifestyle wasn't enough, the cholera epidemic had robbed him of Emily, Clarissa, and his youngest wife.

It was a combination of both internal and external pressures that mounted to cause Alpheus Cutler to "put away" plural marriage. By 1851, Alpheus Cutler was a monogamist and two years later formed a monogamous church. One first-generation Cutlerite, Sylvester J. Whiting, a half of a century removed, claimed that "After Father Cutler reorganized the church in 1853 he, by the authority of the holy priesthood, vetoed polygamy till the coming of Christ. . . . Anyone who says Father Cutler ever sanctioned, upheld, or practiced polygamy," he continued, "are ignorant, unlearned, dishonest, or deceived, for they took false reports for facts, not knowing the truth."⁴² Although Whiting was himself mistaken, or perhaps even lied about Cutler's marital status, there

is no evidence to suggest that polygamy continued into the Church of Jesus Christ once the new organization was formed.

In fact, it should be noted that there is no evidence that any plural marriages were formed amongst those who became Cutlerites following the Nauvoo Temple period. There is also no contemporary record to suggest that Alpheus Cutler ever taught plural marriage. For this reason, the brief interaction with plural marriage could and would be quite easily seen by first-generation Cutlerites as an unfortunate aftermath of the Nauvoo temple experience.

Enforced Silence in Manti, Iowa, 1853–1864

In September of 1853, in the newly organized town of Manti, Iowa, Alpheus Cutler looked into the sky to see two half-moons with their backs to one another. His followers later believed that Cutler had been awaiting this sign since 1844, when Joseph Smith had told him that the manifestation would one day appear. It was at this time that Cutler should re-organize the church. On September 19, 1853, the Church of Jesus Christ officially came into existence.

Of course, it is not as if a new people was entirely created on that day. There was a direct continuation between the Cutlerites' theology previous to 1853 and the theology that emerged afterward. However, the moment was sacralized for the growing body of rebaptized Cutlerites. If before they had coalesced around their (now-abandoned) mission to the Native Americans, they could now coalesce around the effort to build the church organization and see themselves as completely independent from their Brighamite critics.

Because of this event, it became possible for Cutlerites to conceptualize their community as beginning in 1853 and thus unmoored by the disturbing memories of the past decade. Their collective memory could theoretically start afresh on the date that also featured the membership's rebaptism. The earlier period was no longer relevant, as made clear by the symbols of renewal. The suspicion that references to the polygamous past of the community have been "scrubbed" from the church minutes and other records during this period may hold some truth. What is unmistakable is that the records unintentionally reveal how the Cutler-

ites themselves developed a taboo forbidding any discussion of this most controversial element of their history. A controversy that occurred in May and June of 1863 poignantly demonstrates this process.

On May 17, 1863, Joseph Fletcher spoke during the morning session of a church conference. The minutes state simply, "A few words by Father Fletcher," not recording what the subject of Fletcher's sermon was. According to the record of the afternoon session, Fletcher spoke again and "occupied the time upon the subject spoke of in the forepart of the day and closed." F. Lewis Whiting spoke next and suggested that instead of preaching, they should hold a prayer meeting. The minutes conclude that "it was thought advisable so to do."⁴³

The following month, on June 28, 1863, Fletcher took the stand again during a service. He complained that the church had taken away his privilege to preach. According to the minutes, "he was told that it was not so, it was only that particular subject relative plurality." Fletcher persisted that he "had a right to preach on what subject he pleased, and if he could not have the privilege here he would go into the world where he could have the privilege, and still persisted in preaching that or nothing." The congregation's president, Almon W. Sherman, who was also the son-in-law of Alpheus Cutler, argued that he "did not consider in that thing, that [Fletcher] was actuated by the spirit of the Lord." However, he suggested that the only way to move forward was for the two to "lay the matter before Father Cutler, and let him decide." The congregation voted unanimously for this resolution and the meeting immediately closed. The minutes conclude with an emended postscript: "The matter above mentioned was settled. Father Cutler decided that it was not wisdom to meddle with that subject, so the matter was dropped."⁴⁴

We do not know from what vantage point Joseph Fletcher approached his preaching on plural marriage; however, it was apparent that the church members agreed that it should not be discussed. And, more importantly, it was apparent that Alpheus Cutler forbade it himself.

Memory was carefully and institutionally regulated. The effort to mute the past seems to have functioned as a means of avoidance. Cutler and his followers experienced real trauma in their encoun-

ter with plural marriage. By discouraging public discussion, they ensured that the practice, along with its accompanying pain and angst, was not confronted and relived by the community.

Yet the decision to suspend the practice and place the conversation on hold may have only been conceived of as a temporary solution to their difficulties. Sylvester Whiting's statement that Alpheus Cutler "by the authority of the holy priesthood, vetoed polygamy till the coming of Christ" suggests that the Cutlerites saw the decision to suspend the practice (and their conversation of it) in light of their millenarian expectations. In other words, because Alpheus Cutler was God's representative on Earth he held the authority necessary to lay aside the issue of plural marriage until Christ would appear to deal with it for them—both in reference to the laws of the state and the burden of the practice itself. Similarly, in the Brighamite experience, historian Dan Erikson has suggested that the belief that the second coming was imminent may have played a role in the widespread support for the LDS Church's issuing of the 1890 Manifesto.⁴⁵

Efforts to control social memory—to force forgetting, as in the case of the 1850s Cutlerites—frequently prove a much more difficult task than institutions would hope to be the case. Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* looks at these attempts to cover the past and their frequent futility. She describes her project in the following words:

I used the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view.⁴⁶

As much as the silence benefitted the church, one thing is certain: an absence of discussion did not mean that the community had forgotten about plural marriage. There were plenty of remaining specters who were all too visible. There was Joseph Fletcher, but also the Brighamites and Josephites who refused to obey the community's rule. Unfortunately for the Cutlerites, there were also two not-so-subtle reminders of their own polyga-

mous roots remaining in the community: the progeny of Heber C. Kimball and his two wives, Emily and Clarissa Cutler. The community coped by insulting the youths, referring to them by well-known polygamist names such as Brigham or Heber. In the words of Abram Alonzo Kimball, the son of Heber and Emily:

My brother and I were repeatedly ill-treated by Uncle's family and were continually persecuted and called names for being polygamy children in order to tantalize us. The men of the family would call us "Bastard", "Brigham", "Heber", etc. and on the slightest provocation they would threaten to send us to Utah, telling us that the Mormons would soon settle us.⁴⁷

Further evidence that the topic was off-limits was that although Abram knew he was the son of a Utah polygamist, he was not sure which of the well-known church leaders had once been married to his mother.⁴⁸ Thus, the Kimball children were raised in a similar fashion to Cutler's own polygamous children, who were also unaware of their parentage.

In later years, as Cutlerites began to speak about polygamy, they still maintained their hesitance to discuss Cutler's wives. As Iva Gould's father intuited that the "staunch Cutlerite," Francis Lewis Whiting, "did not like to admit it," the anxiety felt over offering this disturbing and privileged information was high. The silence resulted in the second generation and those not in the know holding onto a "common belief" that Cutler was once a polygamist. These rumors were discouraged and did not continue for long. Because collective memory must be preserved and memorialized in order to endure, in time, the enforced silence resulted in a legitimate forgetting. As sociologist Paul Connerton noted, when dealing with "collusive silence brought on by a particular kind of collective shame there is detectable both a desire to forget and sometimes the actual effect of forgetting."⁴⁹ The taboo did not serve as it may have been intended—as a temporary solution to cognitive dissonance—but as an implicit, enduring rejection of plural marriage. This is not to say that specters of polygamy would rest for long.

The Clitherall, Minnesota, Period, 1864–1902

With the death of Alpheus Cutler, the Church entered a tenuous period in which the sect's leadership worried over their ability

to maintain the organization. In their effort to regain their equilibrium, the Cutlerites decided that the first step was to abandon Manti, Iowa. Their relocation was designed to place geographic distance from the RLDS ministry and the ex-Cutlerites who had joined their ranks. But equally important was for the Cutlerites to forge and strengthen their communal identity through pushing against their competitors. On one hand, this meant defining themselves against the Josephites—namely, the Josephites’ rejection of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo ritual system. On the other hand, this meant defining themselves against the Brighamites by breaking their silence on plural marriage.

In addition to their own internal anxieties over plural marriage, which were intensified by their interactions with RLDS and LDS ministers, during this period the Cutlerites were also affected by and reacting to two overlapping discourses. First, they were a captive audience and later minor actors in the conflict between Josephites and Brighamites over whether it was Joseph Smith or Brigham Young who first instituted plural marriage. Second, during a period of intense national attention on the Utah territory, they felt the burden of being seen as closet Brighamites. Both of these discussions encouraged the Cutlerites to break the previous taboo against speaking about polygamy; the latter even encouraged them to bring their voices into the public square.

Concerning the first discourse, the early Cutlerites quickly embraced the idea that Brigham Young, rather than Joseph Smith, had instituted plural marriage—an idea principally although not exclusively promoted by the Reorganization. The tentativeness of this approach was revealed as Brighamites undertook an effort to collect various affidavits from those involved in Nauvoo polygamy, including Smith’s numerous widows. It was after becoming familiar with a heated exchange between Lyman O. Littlefield, a popular Mormon author, and Joseph Smith III that Sylvester Whiting sought his sister’s opinions on the matter.

Several Cutlerites had maintained correspondence with their relatives. Letters from Chauncey and Sylvester Whiting to their Brighamite relatives included frequent references to religious matters—often with an effort to justify their decision to follow Alpheus Cutler. They did not, however, turn to these apostate kin

for help in understanding spiritual matters. It was a last resort when, in 1886, Sylvester Whiting drafted a letter to his sister, Emmeline Cox, the plural wife of F. Walter Cox. Just as he had never sought her advice before, he had also never discussed with her the intricacies of polygamy. He penned:

I should like to ask your opinion in regard to when and who started polygamy as there is such a dispute between the Josephites and the Utah Mormons on that question. I see in L. O. Littlefield's statements that some 8 or 10 women testify that they were sealed to Joseph or Hyrum as his wives and I have heard Cordelia Morley was sealed to Joseph before she was to Walter. I wish you would ask her and then tell me if it [is] so and what your opinion is in such an order of things. Confidentially I am not prepared to say that there is not such an order of some kind or other. Of course I can't see how there could be and not conflict with the law.⁵⁰

The rumors were true. Cordelia Morley, Emmeline's sister wife, had in fact been sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity, with her future husband, F. Walter Cox, standing as Smith's proxy. Afterwards, Cox and Morley were married for mortality. Cordelia's story is an interesting one. She had rebuffed a proposal from Joseph Smith in the spring of 1844, but had reconsidered at the insistence of her intended husband.⁵¹ Whether Emmeline responded to her brother's plea is unknown. Appealing to the views of a backsliding sister suggests the urgency of Whiting's desperation, but his request for confidentiality about his own questions is perhaps the most revealing. It demonstrates the anxiety experienced by someone who was publically opposed to polygamy while at the same time harboring doubts as to the correctness of his position. It was clearly not an acceptable position to entertain the possibility of the existence of "such an order of some kind or other."

Whiting's comments also reveal the extent of Cutlerite knowledge. It is unlikely that Whiting did not know about Cutler's marriages, despite later denials. But his questioning was not directed as to whether Cutler was once a polygamist—he knew better—but whether Joseph Smith or Brigham Young had introduced the practice. Because Cutler did not marry his second wife, Luana Hart Beebe, until after Smith's death, it may have been thought (perhaps accurately) that Cutler was influenced by the apos-

ties—likely Heber C. Kimball, who not only married two of Cutler’s daughters but who also performed the ceremony between Cutler and Beebe.

Whiting’s letter presents a rare moment of honesty expressing his own uncertainty about the subject of plural marriage. He was not expressing the party line. Like Joseph Fletcher’s attempt to break the rule of silence in the 1853–1864 period, this letter reflects a typical rupture in institutionally directed forgetting—another specter come to the surface and a symptom of a broader anxiety likely not captured in the historical record. A community experiences genuine cognitive dissonance when new narratives are introduced that seemingly contradict known events. Memories of polygamy preserved through rumors or gossip about who was involved haunted the Cutlerites. The ghostly hand of the Josephite missionaries inflated these concerns, but the RLDS church also offered new ways to conceptualize the past that the Cutlerites found appealing.

The Josephite campaign against plural marriage seems to have aided the Cutlerites in their effort to find an acceptable history. The aversion to discussing plural marriage was initially founded upon the awareness that Cutler (as well as other close friends and relatives) had been polygamists, and furthered by the community’s uncertainty over who had begun the practice in the first place. However, with the decision made that the blame should rightfully be ascribed to Brigham Young, a response to polygamy could be offered. Perhaps there were other Cutlerites who, like Whiting, confidentially continued to question their absolute disavowal of polygamy, but the public face of the movement was one of absolute certainty. As historian David Lowenthal stated, “the most vividly remembered scenes and events are often those which were for a time forgotten.”⁵²

During the intense period of national interest in the “Mormon Question,” the Cutlerites worked to publically distinguish themselves from the Brighamites, who naturally, based on their size, dominated the nation’s impression of Mormonism. Chancey Whiting, serving as the church’s president and public spokesperson, responded. In an 1885 article he wrote in response to questions from the local *Fergus Falls Journal*, he inserted the entire

length of Doctrine and Covenants section 111, setting forth the pre-Nauvoo monogamous policies of the Church. At this time, Whiting also attributed the break with the Brighamites to the issue of polygamy. "And now, under these considerations, and being assured that we had no need to break the laws of the land to keep the laws of God, we could not fellowship with or follow a people who encouraged or practiced such things." He assured the readers of the newspaper that "some of the Salt Lake elders say that our little society is among the hardest opposers to the polygamy question of any people that they had conversed with."⁵³

In 1889, Chauncey Whiting inferred from an article published in the *Minneapolis Tribune* concerning the Mormon Question that "by all appearance a large portion of the censure, was intended to reflect heavily upon the society commonly known as the Old Clitherall Mormons, or Cutlerites." He noted that

the polygamy question [was] so carefully noticed as to lead the people [to believe] that the Clitherall Mormons are believers in, and practicing the doctrine on the sly seems almost too simple for any thinking mind to brook, and more especially as we are living in the heart of civilization, and surrounded with respectable and intelligent inhabitance, who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand, and where law and justice can be administered to the guilty according to the criminality of the offense.⁵⁴

He further explained his continued exasperation that despite numerous responses to regional newspapers, confusion still existed over their stance on polygamy.

Nevertheless, I will again affirm that this people are not guilty of the crime, neither are they believers in the doctrine. Hence with all boldness and clear conscience we denounce polygamy, with all its kindred evils, not only to the outside world (as accused) but to the inside church (if I may speak) in the most strenuous emphatic terms.⁵⁵

Journalists painted the Cutlerites with a Brighamite brush. Whiting's response strategy was to distance the small sect from any and all Brighamite associations. His ongoing assurances that Mormonism should not be equated with polygamy took on many forms. Most importantly, it included the construction of an origin story in which a rejection of plural marriage was the cause behind the Church of Jesus Christ's founding. Cutlerites were "among

the hardest opposers to the polygamy question”—just ask the Brighamites. He also used the language of morality commonly employed against Mormon polygamy, referring to “polygamy, with all its kindred evils”—evils that Whiting expected his audience to already know. Furthermore, he employed the language of law. Polygamy was a crime and Cutlerites would not fellowship with criminals.

The general refusal to acknowledge the Cutlerite story was particularly aggravating for Whiting. He appealed to common sense: how could they conceal their plural marriages while “living in the heart of civilization”? His rhetorical strategy of disavowing polygamy to both “the outside world” and the “inside church” assured them that he was not involved in a strategy of doublespeak. Yet the Cutlerites continued to feel that their own versions of events were ignored. It was likely this grievance that caused Chauncy Whiting to proclaim in an 1889 church meeting that he “did not know of any one [in Clitherall] that advocated polygamy.”⁵⁶

The portrayal of the Cutlerites as part and parcel of a monolithic, polygamous Mormonism frustrated the sect’s efforts to define itself. As a result, the Cutlerites felt pressure to clarify their identity, a process that occurred not only in the public forum but also through everyday encounters with outsiders. Despite their attempt to geographically distance themselves from other forms of Mormonism, Cutlerites continued to have periodic visitors from both the LDS and RLDS faiths—visitors who were both a threat and a blessing to the community’s future.

The most obvious example of this can be seen in the direct criticism of the Brighamites. Humor such as that employed in reference to Abram and his brother, Isaac, was also used to deflect the efforts of LDS missionaries to the community. On April 12, 1885, a meeting was held in which the Cutlerites discussed their treatment of other Restoration churches: specifically, the council discussed “our often speaking in a joking way of having more than one wife and of calling their preachers nicknames, etc.” The Council concluded “that all these things were wrong and must be stopped as they were apt to hurt feelings and lead the wrong way, etc.”⁵⁷

Of course, we should not read this effort to encourage politically correct language as a sign of a new ecumenical approach. This was designed to prevent direct conflict between the communities—conflict which was closer to the surface at some times than at others. In private meetings, the Cutlerites did not mix words in reference to the Brighamites. In a meeting held on July 10, 1886, the Cutlerite council discussed its decision to deny a Utah elder's request to preach in the church's meeting house. According to F. L. Whiting, this decision was made "as they viewed the Utah church to be the highest class of adulterers and whoremongers of any religious church on the face of the earth." He was followed by Warren Whiting, who commented that "there was not one word in the bible to prove polygamy." Finally, Chancey Whiting, Cutler's successor in the church presidency, stated that "he did not fellowship either the Josephite, or the Utah Church, and did not know of any one here that advocated polygamy."⁵⁸

Despite their opposition to the licentious practices of the Brighamites, Cutlerites had a much more volatile relationship with members of the RLDS organization. Like journalists who portrayed the Cutlerites as crypto-polygamists, Cutlerites saw the RLDS as working diligently to contradict their community's telling of its own history. RLDS refusal to accept the Cutlerite denial of involvement in plural marriage was only one example of this tendency. During the lifetime of Alpheus Cutler, RLDS missionaries questioned Cutler's claim to be a member of a group of seven men invested with sacerdotal authority, arguing that it was only a committee to discuss political affairs. Perhaps most threatening was the claim by former Cutlerites that Alpheus Cutler had initially prophesied that Joseph Smith III would succeed his father. Based on this telling of the Cutlerite past, RLDS apostle T. W. Smith argued that the church in Clitherrall should be referred to as the "Whiting faction, for they are not Cutlerites any more than Josephites, i.e., do not keep Cutler's teachings any more than they do Joseph Smith's."⁵⁹

Although there are few overt references to Cutlerite polygamy from RLDS sources during this period, there is evidence to suggest that there was a sense that the organization had been tainted by its polygamous past or perhaps its polygamous present. Former Cutlerites, such as Iva Gould, came with stories passed down

from the early days in Nauvoo and Silver Creek. One Cutlerite noted that the Josephites frequently claimed that “the quorum” involved with the sect’s upper room work taught “immorality.”⁶⁰

The ongoing suspicion erupted into a controversy following the conversion of Wheeler Baldwin, a former Cutlerite, to the RLDS Church. The church had instituted a policy that recognized baptisms performed previous to the death of Joseph Smith, if and only if the individual did not lend his support to the practice of polygamy. Wheeler Baldwin had been baptized in 1831 and thus would have qualified; however, members of the Reorganization, including apostle Charles Derry, objected post-facto based on their suspicions that Baldwin had become embroiled in polygamy while a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

On August 14, 1863, Joseph Smith III penned a letter to Derry in response to the situation:

I am sorry that you meet with so much confusion and contention, but much of it, almost all is so very uncalled for, and growing out of a mistaken notion that every man is in duty bound to rectify the evils he sees in his brother, regardless of his own, so he sets about it and loses his time and throws both into the grasp of the evil one, and no good is done to either. They who cawl at Bro. W. Baldwin’s authority and standing, if busied about the making of their own election sure, would have little time to find fault, and indeed would find less cause to do it. Bro. B. is an old member of the church, has never been legally disposed [sic] of his membership, and when with the Cutlerites supposed they were the only ones striving for the Kingdom, and if in his manner he strayed into acknowledging polygamy, his connections with us is a renouncement of that eror, if he was guilty which I do not believe, and behind that recaption no man can legally go, for in it we burry [sic] the past and do misdeed.⁶¹

Joseph III’s willingness to give the Cutlerites the benefit of the doubt over polygamy influenced references to the community that found their way into print. This did not, however, mean that the associations were entirely repressed; they would appear periodically in Josephite literature.

Cutlerites necessarily defined themselves against both Josephites and Brighamites in the nineteenth century, as they do in the present. The strategy employed differed depending on the front. Pushing against the Brighamites took shape in public and private opposition, sometimes including intolerant rhetoric. Yet, for all

the repugnance Cutlerites felt against the Latter-day Saints, it was the Josephites whom they saw as their own persecutors. As Terry Givens has pointed out, a sense of “persecution more often serves to strengthen resolve than to stifle it.”⁶² We should think of these processes of identity formation, of course, as a movement attempting to preserve its vulnerable membership rolls, but also as a means to alleviate the cognitive dissonance of multiple histories of the past.

Theological Consequences for the Late Nineteenth Century

On March 10, 1844, Joseph Smith publically taught the idea of familial sealings, using Alpheus Cutler as a hypothetical example.

Let us suppose a case; suppose the great God who dwells in heaven should reveal himself to Father Cutler here by the opening heavens and tell him I offer up a decree that whatsoever you seal on earth with your decree I will seal it in heaven, you have power then, can it be taken off No, Then what you seal on earth by the Keys of Elijah is sealed in heaven, & this is the power of Elijah.⁶³

A decade later, early Cutlerites accepted—if they did not embrace—the concept that there were rites that when performed by priesthood authority would enable the family unit to endure beyond death. Jorgensen has pointed to the sect’s patriarchal blessings for relics of this belief. For example, one blessing states that the recipient and her husband will be “sealed together that no power of earth or hell can separate you in time or in eternity.”⁶⁴ We can also find oblique references to the concept in the minutes of Cutlerite meetings. For example, one Cutlerite assured his estranged spouse that she would belong to him in the hereafter.

Within thirty years of Alpheus Cutler’s death, however, marital or other familial sealings were no longer a component of Cutlerite teachings. Although refutations of such sealings would not appear until the mid-twentieth century, the second Cutlerite prophet, Chancey Whiting, did not place much stock in the idea. At the death of his wife, he wrote to Brighamite relatives that “Perhaps the Lord called h[e]r home to dwell with h[e]r dear children who had gone before h[e]r. Of these matters however I will not decide but leave it for Him whose right it is to judge.”⁶⁵ The following year, he drafted another letter:

I suppose that there is a great many who comfort themselves with a view that after death they will meet, and enjoy the society of their friends and loved ones in a bright, beautiful and glorious mansion on high, and that too in the presence of the Lord of life and glory. . . . Could I know that with my relation and friends I would be more at peace and rest.⁶⁶

The demise of the ideas of eternal marriage occurred in parcel with and perhaps as a result of the church's rejection of plural marriage. Although these concepts were not always presented in tandem by Joseph Smith and were eventually parsed out in twentieth-century LDS theology, their nineteenth-century predecessors came to believe that the endurance of monogamous marriages was based on the condition of contracting a second marriage. This connection may have engendered a sense that suspending one idea—plural marriage—meant suspending the other, eternal marriage.

In addition, the performance of sealing ceremonies held an inevitable potential for at least the existence of theological or ritual plurality. For when a widower was sealed to his second spouse, he was in effect becoming a polygamist—if only in the religious imagination.

Finally, we should note that it is likely not a coincidence that Chauncy Whiting's verbalized doubts about eternal marriage occurred during a time period in which plural marriage was being openly criticized and rebuffed. In other words, it seems likely that the era of silence set aside the discussion of eternal marriage as well as polygamy. When the matter was first discussed in the 1880s, three things had changed. First, the Cutlerites had come to accept the Josephite narrative for the origins of polygamy; second, Alpheus Cutler had died; and third, they had lost a collective memory preserving Smith's teachings on the matter. This is not to say that first-generation Cutlerites had forgotten that sealings took place. They hadn't, but the importance for their own story had been discarded. As a result, the practice could perhaps be questioned as an appendage to the overall criticisms of plural marriage, and in the next generation was entirely rejected. In 2002, Stanley Whiting pointed me to the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, in which it stated that "in the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage;

they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). Like plural marriage, sealing had become a matter set apart for contest.

Changes in how one aspect of the past is remembered can have large effects on other related matters. The historian David Lowenthal commented, "To exorcise bygone corruptions even one's own treasured relics may have to be destroyed."⁶⁷ Such was the case with the doctrine of eternal marriage.

Writing History in the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century, Cutlerites have continued to define themselves against the Brighamite practice of polygamy, even after the Brighamites themselves rescinded the practice. With the Cutlerite renewal of 1910, there were a number of statements offered to explain that even the founding of the institution was fundamentally anti-polygamous. It was at this time that Sylvester Whiting first issued the idea that "by that authority [of the Kingdom] Father Cutler vetoed the doctrine of plural wives or polygamy until the coming of Christ."⁶⁸ The new narrative colored the story of the Cutlerites, as related in a local history published in 1916. According to the non-Cutlerite author, following the martyrdom, "those who rejected the polygamous doctrine of Young separated from him and chose as their leader one Cutler."⁶⁹ Finally, during this era, the Cutlerites were able to insert their voice effectively into the public forum, if only on a regional level.

The new meetings continued with various statements against polygamy. For example, on October 2, 1910, Isaac Whiting "said polygamy is of the devil for it is contrary to the law of God."⁷⁰ Such statements would have been at home in an earlier era, but the renewal brought in additional ideas, often drawing on the Brighamite hierarchy as stock villains who had among other things sought to kill Alpheus Cutler via poisoning.⁷¹ The renewal of the church occurring alongside a renewal and intensification of anti-Brighamite discourses appears as a tool to aid in the ever-dwindling community's retrenchment.

In the succeeding decades, as the body of the Cutlerites came to be predominately located in the Independence area, they found themselves as part of a multi-denominational landscape built around the Temple Lot. As a result, it became increasingly important to explain who they were in the face of so many peoples

sharing competing stories. During this period, the Cutlerites began to publish their own writings and to communicate with other sects.

The trope of the intentionally dishonest and scheming Brighamites continued as an essential part of the Cutlerite story during this period, as evidenced by the first full-length public church history, *Alpheus Cutler and the Church of Jesus Christ*, written by Rupert J. Fletcher, then president of the church, and his wife, Daisey Fletcher. Of most importance, the Fletchers wrote:

Shortly after assuming the new roles of leadership some of these men began collecting as many as possible of the historical records of the church, journals of the elders, minutes of the conferences, and council meetings, etc. Soon they were busily engaged in correcting, revising, and editing all that came into their hands. In many cases the records were deliberately altered to conform to new doctrines and practices not taught in the church before. Others were suppressed or destroyed, so the true story of all that happened in Nauvoo may never be known.⁷²

Commenting on the apparent success of the apostles, they noted that “beneath the surface there lurked evils that were bound to erupt into conflict sooner or later. The moral structure of the church was being undermined.”⁷³

This telling of the story explains why there were nineteenth-century documents that suggested both Joseph Smith and Alpheus Cutler were polygamists. Viewed in one light, the accusation made little sense—not because early Brighamites wouldn’t have altered records when preparing publications, for example—but from the Brighamite point of view the idea that Cutler was a polygamist was a compliment. Cutler’s marriages were not portrayed as illicit in the sources, but as legitimately sealed in the temple by Heber C. Kimball and Parley P. Pratt, both highly respected apostles in the church’s hierarchy. In another light, the portrait is of Brigham Young deliberately introducing corruption, knowing full well the sinister nature of his plan and finding it necessary to trump up evidence against those that might try to question or expose him. The image is a vibrant one. The charge against the early Brighamite hierarchy is designed to vindicate Smith and Cutler, but it also implicitly continues a more subtle argument—that the

Cutlerite reading of the past is correct and untainted. This conversation has naturally continued into the present.

This revisionist perspective also influenced how Cutlerites came to relate to Mormon scholarship in the latter part of the twentieth century. Indeed, Mormon historians are a part of Mormon history, a fact that is clearly evidenced in the past twenty-five years of the Cutlerite experience. If for a time the Cutlerites were almost ignored by the scholarly community, with the rise of new Mormon history the Church of Jesus Christ became a frequent example in the work of such LDS historians as D. Michael Quinn and Richard Bennett, as well as the focus of at least nominally-RLDS historians Danny Jorgensen and Biloine Whiting Young. These historians were eager to plot the Cutlerites into the Mormon succession crisis that followed Joseph Smith's death by focusing on the usual areas of conflict: priesthood keys, temple ceremonies, secret councils, and, of course, plural marriage.

Specifically, as of 2002, the most important published works that aimed to understand the Cutlerites were written by Jorgensen and Young, two scholars who like many earlier critics had family roots in the Cutlerite community and presumably an agenda in the present.⁷⁴ The Cutlerite response to this more recent scholarship has been an intensified angst against the telling of the Cutler-as-polygamist narrative and what some have interpreted as a mistrust of scholars.

From the Cutlerite perspective, this new assault, which drew on the same stories used a generation before to discredit the faith, had simply continued in a new form—now armed with academic language and citations. Yet the Cutlerites were far from defenseless. As they had in the past, they developed strategies to deal with competing histories. The new genre of new Mormon history was a threat to more than just the Cutlerites. Conservative members of the Reorganization also struggled against the growing tendency of RLDS historians to accept the idea that Joseph Smith—not Brigham Young—was the originator of plural marriage. This meant that the Cutlerites now had intellectual allies in securing their understanding of the past. The resources of the Restoration branches, specifically Richard Price's *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy*, a well-documented (though many would argue historically inaccurate) study, strengthened the church's sense of

the past. The two volumes, the church's history and Price's volume, were both marketed on the church's website in the first part of this decade and represent a dual effort to respond to the less-than-desirable alternative histories of the faith.

Yet more important than scholarly texts that defend the Cutlerite position was the claim to possess irrefutable oral histories and primary source material that vindicated the movement's collective memory. The earliest statement I have discovered to promote this strategy was a letter written by Amy L. Whiting in the 1960s. Addressing the claim that Joseph Smith was a polygamist, she wrote: "Some of our close ancestors were in the church in Joseph's day, and were working with him and knew him personally and positively knew that he never did advocate that doctrine of polygamy . . . even some of our school books teach that Joseph Smith was the founder of that doctrine of polygamy but it is absolutely false."⁷⁵ As cited above, Stanley Whiting offered the same solution in 2002, access to special sources of historical knowledge. This new strategy took seriously the contest as it was occurring, from the Cutlerite perspective, in the historical enterprise of Mormon studies, but it also re-verified that the only voice that truly mattered for understanding the Cutlerite past was the Cutlerite voice.

As a twenty-year-old Latter-day Saint sitting in Stanley Whiting's living room, it felt strange to be confronted with Mormonism's polygamous past. After all, Brighamites have long since given up the practice of plural marriage as part of their identity. Yet for Cutlerites, the issue of plural marriage is a matter of the present just as much as it is one of the past.

The title for this article, "The Highest Class of Whoremongers and Adulterers," was taken not from a quote describing the Cutlerites, but from one Cutlerite's reference to the practice as propagated by their competitors, the Brighamites. As a result, this brief quote captures the core of the Cutlerite experience with polygamy. As Rupert J. Fletcher and Daisy Whiting Fletcher accurately stated, an essential mission of the early Cutlerite church was to "eradicate any taint of plural marriage" that, from their perspective, had infected so much of Mormonism. Whether it was the reason for the church's founding or whether it emerged in

quick succession thereafter is unimportant; this was the community's defining mission. The continual push against polygamy and those specters that continued to appear defined them as much as any other trait. For Cutlerites, the polygamous passage was a means for the community to find identity.

What is at stake in the midst of this emotionally-charged subject is the ability to claim access to and legitimacy from a sacred past. The Cutlerite sense of chosen-ness could only be preserved on claims to an accurate understanding of the past. As a people who see themselves as responsible for bringing forward the teachings of Nauvoo, particularly surrounding the upper room work, into the present, any chink in the armor of the community's past is a real danger on the mission of the present.

As scholars we should, of course, understand the Cutlerites' sensitivity to those that challenge the official story on the relationship of their community with polygamy. For one thing, it is not entirely accurate—once the church was founded, it was always a monogamous organization—but more importantly, the crypto-polygamist has been a major trope used against the Cutlerites from both non-Mormons and Mormons of various denominations for over one hundred fifty years. The fierce response is a sigh of exasperation. The ongoing denials are a means of defense against a world that seems to assume the Cutlerite voice cannot be an accurate one.

Notes

1. The author would like to express his appreciation to Christine Elyse Blythe, Danny Jorgensen, and Benjamin Park who read early drafts of this paper and offered their critiques.

2. Quoted in Biloine Whiting Young, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler* (Pogo Press, 2002), 195.

3. Joseph Smith III, letter to Joseph Davis, October 13, 1899, quoted in Joseph F. Smith Jr. and Richard C. Evans, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage: A Discussion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1905), 49.

4. Kathleen Flake, "Re-placing Memory: Latter-day Saint Use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century," *Religion and American Culture* (Winter, 2003); also *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

5. Stephen C. Taysom, "A Uniform and Common Recollection: Joseph Smith's Legacy, Polygamy, and the Creation of Mormon Public Memory, 1852–2002," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 113–144.

6. David J. Howlett, "Remembering Polygamy: The RLDS Church and American Spiritual Transformations in the Late Twentieth Century," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 24 (2004): 149–172.

7. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 26.

8. *Ibid.*, 212–213.

9. Interview with Stanley Whiting, June 4, 2002.

10. For a discussion of the Cutlerites as an outgrowth of the Council of Fifty, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 192–212.

11. Fred Collier, *The Nauvoo High Council Minute Books* (Hanna, Utah: Collier's Publishing, 2005), 156–57.

12. For a discussion of this period, see Danny Jorgensen, "Conflict in the Camps of Israel: The 1853 Cutlerite Schism," *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Spring 1995): 25–64; and "Building the Kingdom of God: Alpheus Cutler and the Second Mormon Mission to the Indians, 1846–1853," *Kansas History* 15 (1992): 192–209.

13. Richard E. Bennett, "Lamanism, Lymanism, and Cornfields," *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1986–87): 49–50.

14. Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 208.

15. Jorgensen, "Building the Kingdom of God," 206–207.

16. For a discussion of the organization of the Cutlerite church, see Christopher James Blythe, "The Church in the Days of Alpheus Cutler: New Insights into Nineteenth-Century Cutlerite Ecclesiology," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 29 (2009): 73–93.

17. See Barbara Bernauer, "Gathering the Remnants: Establishing the RLDS Church in Southwestern Iowa," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 20 (2000): 4–33; Danny Jorgensen, "The Scattered Saints of Southwestern Iowa: Cutlerite-Josephite Conflict and Rivalry, 1855–1865," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 13 (1993): 80–97.

18. Mss 2394, Church of Jesus Christ (Cutlerite) Collection (1853–ca. 1970), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Cutlerite Collection), Box 2, Folder 5, 14.

19. Christopher Warren, "Eugene O. Walton and the Restored Church of Jesus Christ: A Brief Historical and Theological Evaluation," *Restoration: The Journal of Latter Day Saint History* 7:4 (October, 1988): 6.

20. It should be noted that the principal scholars of the Cutlerites,

including Danny Jorgensen, Biloine Whiting Young, and Mike Riggs, have often been able to avoid this problem.

21. Nauvoo High Council Minutes, August 12 and 17, 1843, LDS Church Archives. In affidavits offered by those in attendance, Cutler is only sometimes listed. See Gary James Bergera, "Illicit Intercourse,' Plural Marriage and the Nauvoo Stake High Council, 1840-1844," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 23 (2003): 59-90.

22. Journal of Heber C. Kimball, August 9, 1845, in Stanley B. Kimball (ed.), *On the Potter's Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 133.

23. *Book of Anointings*. See Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera (eds.), *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies, 1845-1846: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 415.

24. *Ibid.*, 459.

25. Danny L. Jorgensen, "The Old Fox: Alpheus Cutler, Priestly Keys to the Kingdom, and the Early Church of Jesus Christ" in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, edited by Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 162.

26. Anderson and Bergera, *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies*, 463-464.

27. Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 195.

28. Jorgensen, "The Old Fox," 170.

29. George D. Smith, 630.

30. *Ibid.*, 609.

31. Iva Gould, undated letter quoted in Biloine Whiting Young, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler* (Lakeville, Minn.: Pogo Press, 2002), 197-198.

32. Danny Jorgensen suggests that Henrietta's death may have been caused "from cholera of childbirth." Danny Jorgensen, "Building the Kingdom of God: Alpheus Cutler and the Second Mormon Mission to the Indians, 1846-1853," *Kansas History* 15 (1992): 206.

33. "In Minnesota and Wisconsin, Among the Cutlerites, Rigdonites, and Mobberites," *Deseret News* XXXIII (October 15, 1884), 3.

34. Clare B. Christensen, *Before and After Mt. Pisgah* (Salt Lake City: privately published, 1979), 183.

35. Young, *Obscure Believers*, 57.

36. Mosiah Hancock Journal, LDS Church Archives.

37. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 198. Historian Kathryn M. Daynes has noted of the period that "no evi-

dence points to marriages entered into solely because of romantic love, companionship, or sexual attraction, although these may have developed as a result of the marriage.” Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910*. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2001), 38.

38. Iva Gould, undated letter quoted in Biloine Whiting Young, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler*, 197–198.

39. Mrs. T. B. H. [Fanny] Stenhouse, *An Englishwoman in Utah: The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (London: Sampson Low, Mars-ton, Searle and Rivington, 1880), 211.

40. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 123

41. Richard E. Bennett, “Lamanism, Lymanism, and Cornfields,” *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1986/87), 50.

42. Quoted. in Biloine Whiting Young, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler*, (Pogo Press, 2002), 195.

43. Minutes of conference, May 17, 1863, box 2, folder 5, 48, Cutlerite Collection.

44. Minutes of church service, June 28, 1863, box 2, folder 5, 51, Cutlerite Collection.

45. Dan Erickson, “*As a Thief in the Night*”: *The Mormon Quest for Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 204.

46. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, new edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; first published 1997), xvi.

47. Abraham A. Kimball Reminiscences and Journal, 1877–1889, LDS Church Archives, 6 .

48. *Ibid.*, 18–19.

49. Paul Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” *Memory Studies* 1 (2008), 67.

49. Cited in Christensen, *Before and After Mt. Pisgah*, 433–434.

50. Cordelia Morley Cox Autobiography, Typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

In the spring of 1844, plural marriage was introduced to me by my parents from Joseph Smith, asking their consent and a request to me to be his wife. Imagine, if you can, my feeling, to be a plural wife. Something I never thought I could ever be. I knew nothing of such religion and could not accept it, neither did I then. I told Joseph I had a sweetheart; his name was Whiting, and I expected to marry him. He, however, was left by the wayside. He could not endure the persecutions and hardships. I told the Prophet I thought him a wonderful man and leader, but I wanted to marry my sweetheart. After Joseph Smith's death, I was visited by some of his most intimate

friends who knew of his request and explained to me this religion, counseling me to accept his wishes, for he now was gone and could do no more for himself. I accepted Joseph Smith's desire, and 27 January 1846, I was married to your father in the Nauvoo Temple. While still kneeling at the altar, my hand clasped in his and ready to become his third plural wife, Heber C. Kimball tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Cordelia, are you going to deprive the Prophet of his desire that you be his wife?" At that, Walter Cox said, "You may be sealed to the Prophet for eternity and I'll marry you for time." Walter was proxy for Joseph Smith, and I was sealed to him for eternity and to Walter for time.

52. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 205.

53. *The Saints Herald*, 51, no. 47 (Nov. 23, 1904), 1096.

54. Box 2, Folder 9, 63–64, Cutlerite Collection.

55. C. Whiting, letter to editor of *Battle Lake Review*, Box 2, Folder 9, 64–65, Cutlerite Collection.

56. Minutes of Council, July 10, 1886, Bpx 2, Folder 3, p. 32, Cutlerite Collection.

57. Minutes of Council, April 12, 1885, Box 2, Folder 3, p. 6, Cutlerite Collection.

58. Minutes of Council, July 10, 1886, Box 2, Folder 3, p. 32, Cutlerite Collection.

59. T. W. Smith, letter to "Dear Bro. Oliver," July 19, 1875, *Herald* (August 15, 1875): 501.

60. Minutes of church service, May 14, 1911,, Box 2, Folder 6, p. 37, Cutlerite Collection.

61. Joseph Smith III, letter to Charles Derry, August 14, 1863, Joseph Smith III Papers, P15, f2, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

62. Terryl Givens, *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60.

63. Wilford Woodruff Journal, March 10, 1844, LDS Church Archives.

64. Pliney Fisher Patriarchal Blessing Book, 58, quoted in Danny Jorgensen, "Fiery Darts of the Adversary: An Interpretation of Early Cutlerism." *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 69.

65. C. Whiting, letter to "Ever respected relations and friends," May 5, 1893, LDS Church Archives.

66. C. Whiting, letter to sister Emeline, July 24, 1894, LDS Church Archives.

67. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 67.

68. Minutes of church service, June 21, 1910, Box 2, Folder 6, 15, Cutlerite Collection.

69. Eben E. Corliss, *Reminiscences of the Early History of Otter Tail County* (1916), 15.

70. Minutes of Council, October 2, 1910, Box 2, Folder 6, 20, Cutlerite Collection.

71. "History of the Church of Jesus Christ Cutlerites, Book 319," Box 2, Folder 8, 46, Cutlerite Collection.

72. Fletcher and Fletcher, 37–38.

73. *Ibid.*, 38.

74. For an autobiographical discussion of Young's Cutlerite roots, see Biloine W. Young, "Minnesota Mormons: The Cutlerites," *Restoration* 2: 3 (July 1983): 1, 5–12.

75. Amy Whiting, "A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ," Box 2, Folder 8, p. 61, Cutlerite Collection.

“My Principality on Earth Began”: Millennialism and the Celestial Kingdom in the Development of Mormon Doctrine¹

Blair Dee Hodges

Early Mormonism was thoroughly premillennial.² The saints watched for latter-day signs of the times in anticipation of Jesus Christ’s imminent return, spoke of them in sermons, and published them in newspapers. The righteous would reign for one thousand years while the wicked would be swept off the earth to await their resurrection and judgment. Mormon missionaries urgently preached that God was gathering his elect before Christ’s coming in the clouds—a priority that overshadowed a salvation-to-heaven-or-damnation-to-hell eschatology in Mormon discourse of the period. Latter-day Saint views of the very nature of eternal post-mortality, which to the present are considered a distinctive aspect of Mormon belief, developed out of their anticipation of Christ’s millennial reign. Specifically, beliefs about the location and type of life enjoyed by the millennial saints directly informed their expectations about life *beyond* that first thousand years. Mormons combined millennially-interpreted biblical texts about procreation, husbandry, and community building with Joseph Smith’s revelations on heavenly degrees of glory. Before Mormons speculated about the creation of new worlds and countless spiritual offspring, they wrote about the millennial paradise on the very earth on which they stood where they would raise children in a peaceful kingdom. This article explores the intersections between the nature of the millennium and the nature of eternal life in early Lat-

ter-day Saint thought, including the idea of continued procreation in the eternities. These intersections are traceable in revelations to Joseph Smith as well as the writings of other prominent Mormon leaders published in the Church's various periodicals.

Despite Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon's paradigm-shifting vision of a three-tiered afterlife in 1832, early Latter-day Saint views on eternity remained situated within the traditional heaven/hell dichotomy common to Christianity. Rather than exploring the potential ramifications of this multi-level heaven, many Mormons simply began using the term "Celestial" in place of "Heaven" while keeping to the same general framework of their Protestant heritage.³ The saints fully expected the imminent millennial return of Christ, an expectation that often outweighed other doctrinal questions. It was "a day of warning, and not a day of many words" (D&C 63:58)⁴ as an early revelation dictated by Joseph Smith asserted. Latter-day Saints, like many other Christians, looked to John's Apocalypse for clues about the end of the world, including its timing. The revelation of the three degrees of glory (D&C 76) was shortly followed by a revelation written as a series of questions and answers regarding the Apocalypse.⁵ Rather than asking about the particulars of the degrees of glory, the questions in Doctrine and Covenants 77 shifted their attention from the "where" of eternal life discussed in the previous revelation back to the "when"—unsurprising, given the urgency felt by early Latter-day Saints regarding Christ's return, the coming resurrection, and the thousand years of peace on earth. One question focused specifically on the place of the Latter-day Saints themselves on the timeline of the earth's "temporal existence":

Q. What are we to understand by the sounding of the trumpets, mentioned in the 8th chapter of Revelation?

A. . . . in the beginning of the seventh thousand years . . . the Lord God [will] sanctify the earth, and complete the salvation of man, and judge all things, and shall redeem all things, except that which he hath not put into his power, when he shall have sealed all things . . . and the sounding of the trumpets of the seven angels are the preparing and finishing of his work, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years—the preparing of the way before the time of his coming. (D&C 77:12)

This dispensationalist revelation, following closely on the

heels of Doctrine and Covenants 76, depicts Christ as returning to judge, redeem, and seal. The questions do not examine the implications of section 76 where humans would be assigned to kingdoms based upon their works or the law they were willing to obey. The return of Christ was the foremost issue, receiving more attention here than the differences between the “mansions” Jesus said he would “prepare” for his disciples (John 14:2–3).

Smith’s question-and-answer revelations were more of a group-inspired or directed product than the univocal dictates of a lone prophet. Mormons in a variety of leadership positions had ample opportunity to develop and disseminate their own views, including some women. By 1840, the Saints continued blurring the conceptual boundary between the millennial earth and the celestial kingdom. For instance, the editor of the *Times and Seasons* published a four-part essay called “Mrs. Laura Owen’s Defence Against the Various Charges That Have Gone Abroad.” According to the editor, Owen was “cast out of the Presbyterian church for embracing truth.”⁶ Among her heresies was her expectation of Christ’s second coming—her hermeneutic is typical of the literalism common to the early Saints: “How unexpected will that day come to the greatest part of the world! . . . A gentleman told me the other day, we were not to understand the prophecies faster than their fulfillment. That, indeed, is a strange idea. If that be the case, what is the use of them?”⁷ It was imperative to believe their living prophet, gather with the Lord’s elect, and prepare for the day when Christ will “restore the earth to its former paradise, establish his kingdom and reign with all his saints a thousand years.”⁸ Owen continued: “As you hope to enjoy a millennium: as you hope to come into the celestial glory of God and enjoy his presence,” you must “embrace the fullness of the gospel.”⁹ The celestial glory is introduced here as another way to describe the millennial earth, while no mention is made of other degrees of glory. The eschatology remains bound to the earth upon which they stood.

John’s Apocalypse and other biblical scriptures continued to inform Mormon expectations for their celestial millennium. Similar to Laura Owen, Heber C. Kimball discussed the celestial kingdom using millennial concepts. In his missionary journal Kimball asked the Lord to “bless this people, save them from sin, and pre-

pare them for thy celestial kingdom, and that thy servant may meet them around thy throne.” He hoped to gather people to Zion where they would “be prepared to meet the Savior when he shall descend in the clouds of heaven” at the beginning of the millennium.¹⁰ The Lord coming in the clouds is an image found in Matthew 24, the millennial chapter that Joseph Smith revised.¹¹ The worthy are depicted as gathering around God’s throne, just as in John’s Apocalypse.¹²

Images from the millennium described in John’s Apocalypse also saturated an 1841 epistle from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The epistle informed readers that “the set time to favor Zion has come.” Completing the Nauvoo temple would give “the great Jehovah . . . a resting place on earth . . . where his law shall be revealed, and his servants be endued from on high.” Those who would “live according to God in the Spirit” would soon “come forth in the celestial kingdom . . . a place where . . . the saints shall unite in the songs of Zion, even praise, thanksgiving and hallelujahs to God and the Lamb, that he has wrought out their deliverance, and bound Satan fast in chains.” These are clear descriptions of the millennial reign found originally in the Apocalypse of John, where a “new song” of praise would be sung to “God and the Lamb, and where Satan would be bound in chains.”¹³

In addition to John’s Apocalypse, Jesus’ New Testament promise that the “meek shall inherit the earth” carried special significance for the oft-displaced Latter-day Saint communities. The tenth Article of Faith asserted that Christ would return and renew the earth to its paradisiacal Edenic state, which the saints hoped to inherit. Prolific pamphleteer and apostle Parley P. Pratt described this paradisiacal state in his article “Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter.” When Christ returns, wrote Pratt, “the curses which came upon the earth by reason of sin will then be taken off.” Barren deserts would become fruitful, mountains and valleys would be made flat. “Men will then plant gardens and eat the fruit of them, they will plant vineyards and drink the wine of them, they will build houses and cities, and inhabit them, and the Lord’s elect will long enjoy the work of their hands.” Citing these prophecies from Zechariah 8, Pratt looked forward to the

“great Sabbath of creation; the thousand years of rest and peace; the long expected Millennium.”¹⁴

As Latter-day Saint writers described the millennial kingdom with greater specificity, their literal reading of scripture not only received scornful attention from other sects; it also created some tension within the fold. A literal Bible reading combined with Joseph Smith’s revelations commanding the Saints to gather and build Zion, which led to concrete preparations as the Saints sought to build a literal Zion on earth. These attempts were often met with hostility from those who felt the saints too freely mingled the temporal and spiritual.¹⁵ Further, other Christian preachers sometimes found the material expectations of the saints alarming. In the spring of 1840 a pamphlet skirmish was waged between two Mormon elders and a Methodist preacher. The Methodist had charged the Saints with anticipating a “carnal Paradise,” evidently a heaven with procreation. Mormon elder Samuel Bennett countered the preacher’s criticism by differentiating between the resurrected Saints and those still mortal at the time of Christ’s coming: “Because those saints who are alive, and remain at the coming of the Lord, will not be so far changed, as that the relation of husband and wife, parent and children, will be annihilated, therefore, you would fain create the impression that we teach procreation in the resurrected saints.” Bennett insisted the preacher was “a base, unblushing liar.” This did not prevent the preacher from publishing another pamphlet with the same claim.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Elder Erastus Snow had arrived in the area. He published a retort, taking issue with the assertion that “The Mormon resurrection is in carnality, begetting children, multiplying, &c.”¹⁷ Snow said Bennett had already “positively contradicted” the claim. Citing Isaiah 65, Snow said “the saints who are still alive on earth at the time of Christ’s coming, (who have not been raised from the dead, because they have not died,) will continue to multiply and replenish the earth; to build houses and inhabit them, to plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them; they and their children, and their children’s children, through the millennium or 1,000 years reign.”¹⁸ The elders in this discussion believed procreation was for pre-resurrected beings.

Were these elders retroactively proof-texting their scriptures for such views, or were such views spurred by the scriptures them-

selves? Regardless of the precise line of influence, Latter-day Saints believed there would in fact be children living during the millennium, whether they were born during the thousand years or were simply alive at the coming of Christ and remained on earth to reign. Parents in Nauvoo who desired their children to be “saved in the celestial kingdom” were encouraged to teach them to be “prayerful, watchful, and godly.” If they imbibe them with “the doctrines of the kingdom” “they will soon come to the day, that they will grow up without sin unto salvation.” Growing up without sin unto salvation is a significant phrase that stems from a promise made to the Saints in 1831 regarding the state of children during Christ’s millennial reign (D&C 45:58).¹⁹ Once again, the celestial kingdom and millennial earth are invoked in the same breath.²⁰

A millennium that would include children, homes, flocks, gardens, temples, and saints seemed thoroughly material. Materiality was central to Parley Pratt’s conception of the millennium. Even the physical earth itself was to receive salvation through Christ’s atonement. “In the resurrection, and the life to come,” Pratt wrote,

men that are prepared will actually possess a material inheritance on the earth. They will possess houses, and cities, and villages, and gold and silver, and precious stones, and food, and raiment, and they will eat, drink, converse, think, walk, taste, smell and enjoy. They will also sing and preach, and teach, and learn, and investigate; and play on musical instruments, and enjoy all the pure delights of affection, love, and domestic felicity. While each, like the risen Jesus can take his friend by the hand and say: “Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”²¹

Pratt’s expectations of a material millennial kingdom were grounded upon a literal reading of the Bible. His was not an undisputed reading, however. Other ministers took notice and responded, and their responses shed further light on developing Mormon views. S. A. Davis, editor of a Universalist newspaper, visited the Mormons at Kirtland, Ohio, in 1837. The universalist reported that he had been “hospitably entertained and kindly treated by Elder [Parley] Pratt and others, who spent most of their time while we were there, in showing us the ‘buildings of the temple,’ and giving us instruction of their new religion.”²² Davis was

most impressed with the “kindness” and “liberality of sentiment and Christian charity” exhibited by the Saints, but found them in some respects quite “superstitious.” What struck him most was their belief “that the glorious millenium [sic] is at hand.” On this point “they have too much worldly wisdom connected with their religion—too great a desire for the perishable riches of this world—holding out the idea that the kingdom of Christ is to be composed of ‘real estate, herds, flocks, silver, gold,’ &c. as well as of human things.”²³ Undoubtedly Pratt’s instruction to Davis emphasized the materiality of the kingdom.

Davis wasn’t alone in his opposition to Mormon materialist millennialism. Even some Mormons themselves were uncomfortable with Pratt’s material descriptions. W. A. Cowdery, editor of the *Messenger and Advocate* at Kirtland, reprinted Davis’s article, commending Davis’s kindness but taking issue with his objection to the temporal expectations of the Saints by offering his own clarifications. “There may be,” conceded Cowdery, “and indeed we fully believe there is, an undue attachment in some of the saints to amass wealth and heap up perishable treasure.” However, “We believe the gentleman must be mistaken if he has imbibed an idea that we consider the kingdom of heaven will be composed of real estate, houses or lands, flocks or herds.” To Cowdery, the kingdom “consisted in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”²⁴ Competing interpretations continued not merely between Mormons and outside groups, but within the fold itself.²⁵

Like Cowdery, Joseph Smith undoubtedly believed the kingdom of God would include righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. But his revelations also described a literal kingdom on earth to which Christ would return and reign for one thousand years with the Saints (D&C 29:11). At the end of the thousand years Satan would be loosed for a little season and a last battle waged (D&C 43:29–33). Ultimately, the earth would be fully purified and the Saints would inherit it for eternity. To Parley Pratt *this* was “the great secret, which none but the saints have understood; and which was well understood by them in all ages of the world; which is this, that man is to dwell in the flesh, upon the earth with the Messiah . . . not only one thousand years, but forever and ever.”²⁶ The earthly millennium extended into eternity; the de-

scriptions of the thousand-year reign were the buds of eternal life's blossoms. Rather than an ethereal spirit existence or an eternal beatific vision, the Saints anticipated a continuation and perfection of the millennial earth. "After all our longings for a place beyond the bounds of time and space . . . we are at last brought to our common senses, and given to understand, that man was destined forever to inherit this self same planet . . . it being redeemed, sanctified, renewed, and purified, and prepared as an eternal inheritance of immortality and eternal life."²⁷ The Saints were beginning to more explicitly differentiate between the millennial reign and the celestial kingdom.

The earth's actual transition from millennial to celestial was poeticized in the first Latter-day Saint hymnbook compiled by Emma Smith. This hymn, published in 1835, preceded the squabbles between Cowdery, Bennett, Pratt, and others:

That glorious rest will then commence,
Which prophets did foretell,
When Christ will reign, with saints on earth
And in their presence dwell
A thousand years: O glorious day!
Dear Lord prepare my heart,
To stand with thee, on Zion's mount,
And never more to part.

Then when the thousand years are past,
And satan is unbound,
O Lord preserve us from his grasp,
By fire from heav'n sent down,
Until our great last change shall come,
T' immortalize this clay,
Then we in the celestial world
Will spend eternal day.²⁸

What would take place during that eternal day? John's "new song" sung by the saints in the millennium provided a scriptural touchstone for Pratt's interpretation of the "where" and "what" of eternal life: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy

blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9–10). "Immortal man," wrote Pratt, will be "made a king and a priest to God." Earth is man's everlasting home. It, along with "the other material creations which spangle the firmament with a flood of glory, are all heavenly kingdoms, together with the inhabitants thereof: so far as they are glorified. Heaven, then, is composed of an innumerable association of glorified worlds, and happy immortal beings, beaming with an effulgence of light, intelligence and love, of which our earth, small and insignificant as it is, must form some humble part."²⁹ Millennial earth would rise to join celestial earths.

As these planets would be organized, so would human families. Just as the location of eternal life was revealed by Joseph Smith, so too was the substance. Joseph emphasized the human element of the millennium that would inform his understanding of the post-millennium. A frequently cited verse from 1 John promised Christ's disciples that when he returns "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Joseph explained that this scripture referred to the recognition and relation between humans and Christ after his second coming: "When the savior appears we shall see that he is a man like unto ourselves, and that same sociality which exists amongst us here will exist among us there only it will be coupled with eternal glory which we do not enjoy now."³⁰

Smith's project became that of securing relations on earth, binding them here that they would be bound in heaven. As early as 1839 Pratt was aware of the possible eternal duration of the family. It was Joseph, Pratt explained, who first taught him that the wife of his bosom "might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore."³¹ This view was much closer to the "carnal Paradise" earlier criticized by the Methodist preacher. The earth, according to Pratt, "is the place where family organization is first formed for eternity,

and where the kindred sympathies, relationships and affections take root, spring forth, shoot upward, bud, blossom and bear fruit to ripen and mature in eternal ages.”³²

This focus on families was the purpose of the coming of Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Joseph rephrased Elijah’s “turning” the hearts of the children to the fathers as described in the book of Malachi:

Now the word turn here should be translated (bind or seal) But what is the object of this important mission or how is it to be fulfilled, The keys are to be delivered the spirit of Elijah is to Come, The gospel to be established the Saints of God gathered Zion built up, & the Saints to Come up as Saviors on mount Zion. They would become saviors by building temples and performing all of the necessary ordinances for “all our Progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may Come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted to thrones of glory with us, & here in is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the Children, & the Children to the Fathers which fulfills the mission of Elijah.”³³

Elijah would come shortly before the millennium not merely to herald the thousand-year reign of Jesus but to help initiate crucial soteriological practices. Joseph Smith’s millennialism became a project in which the Saints would actively participate. They would not simply wait for the coming of Christ and be taken up to heaven for a blissful eternity. Rather, they would preach the gospel and seal their families together prior to the coming of Christ, then continue that work during the millennium. Otherwise the earth would be “smitten with a curse” (D&C 128:18; Mal. 4:5–6). For Joseph, the true curse would be the cessation of the family unit. He preferred annihilation of the self over the annihilation of relationships between family and friends.³⁴ He claimed to have received the priesthood authority necessary to make familial commitments permanent: in New Testament parlance, to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. For centuries many Christians taught that such relationships would dissolve in eternity. The gospel of Luke provides the commonly-cited reply Christ gave to the riddle of the Sadducees. He states that in the resurrection people “neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”³⁵ Commenting on these verses, Joseph asserted that

No man can obtain an eternal Blessing unless the contract or cove-

nant be made in view of Eternity All contracts in view of this Life only terminate with this life. . . . Those who keep no eternal Law in this life or make no eternal covenant are single & alone in the eternal world . . . and are only made Angels to minister to those who shall be heirs of Salvation never becoming Sons of God having never kept the Law of God ie eternal Law.”

The same scripture used by many interpreters to deny family relations in the resurrection was used by Joseph to affirm the necessity of authorized ordinances performed in view of eternity.³⁶ “The earthly is the image of the Heavenly,” Joseph explained, which “shows that is by the multiplication of Lives that the eternal worlds are created and occupied.”³⁷

As the earthly was in the image of the heavenly, so was the millennial earth in the image of the celestial. For Latter-day Saints, the geography—as well as activities—of the millennium extended into eternity. “They are not only to reign on the earth a thousand years after the resurrection,” Orson Pratt explained, citing Revelation 5:10, “but in another passage he says, ‘They shall reign for ever and ever,’ (Rev. 22:5).”³⁸ The present earth would become the place of the millennial kingdom, which itself would be an embryo of eternity. The concepts informing the thousand-year millennial age rolled into the eternal celestial kingdom of God. Parley P. Pratt clothed the beautiful and eternal condition of his earthbound Zion in poetry—but even that glorious inheritance would be composed of “worthless toys,—Mere baubles” were it not for the presence of his awaiting family—the promise of an earthly millennium extended into eternity. Pratt wanted nothing more than to live on earth as he would in Heaven and in Heaven as he lived on earth:

I love thee, for thyself, O land of Zion! . . .
 There dwell my family,—my bosom friends,—
 The precious lambs of my Redeemer,—my
 Best of Heaven’s gifts to man,—my germs of
 Life and immortality,—my hope of Heaven,—
 My principality on earth began,—
 My kingdom in embryo, big with thrones
 Of endless power and wide dominion.
 Ye kindred spirits from worlds celestial!
 Offsprings of Deity. . . .³⁹

Early Latter-day Saint leaders including Parley P. Pratt initially conflated or equated the millennial and celestial location and condition. Even as they began to develop theoretical differences between these states they continued to project their early millennial-driven views onto broader eternal realms.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mormon Scholars Foundation Summer Seminar held at Brigham Young University, July 5, 2010. The author thanks the Mormon Scholars Foundation as well as the seminar participants for their advice and support.

2. The best study on Mormon millennialism is Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Despite being exhaustive, Underwood's work does not draw the connection between Mormonism's millennial views and their peculiar beliefs about the nature of the afterlife.

3. Not all Saints were enthusiastic about the new perspective. See Grant Underwood, "'Saved or Damned': Tracing a Persistent Protestantism in Early Mormon Thought," *BYU Studies* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 93.

4. Unless otherwise noted in the case of important differences, all Doctrine and Covenants references are to the LDS Church's 1981 edition.

5. Section 76 was recorded on February 16, 1832. Section 77 is dated March 1832. A brief revelation calling Frederick G. Williams to the First Presidency (now section 81) separates the two transcripts in the revelation book. See Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelation Books*. Facsimile edition. Vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 255.

6. "Mrs. Laura Owen's Defence Against the Various Charges That Have Gone Abroad," *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 4 (December 15, 1840): 254.

7. *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 6 (January 15, 1841): 279. Phillip L. Barlow describes Mormons as employing a "selective literalism" approach to scriptural interpretation and traces that impulse to the present in *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32.

8. *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 7 (February 1, 1841): 301.

9. *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 6 (January 15, 1841): 279.

10. "Extract from the Journal of Heber C. Kimball," *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 19 (August 2, 1841): 493.

11. See Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27. The revision of Matthew 24 was originally published as an unsigned broadsheet at Kirtland, Ohio in 1831 called "Extract from the New Translation of the Bible." See Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church Volume One, 1830–1847* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997), 60–61. Franklin D. Richards later included it his 1851 book *The Pearl of Great Price*, published in Liverpool, England.

12. See Rev. 5:11; 7:11.

13. "An Epistle of the Twelve, to the Brethren Scattered Abroad on the Continent of America, Greeting," *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 24 (October 15, 1841): 569.

14. Parley P. Pratt, "Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter," *The Millennium, and Other Poems: To which is Annexed, a Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter*, (New York: W. Molineux, 1840), 145–46.

15. See J. Spencer Fluhman, *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

16. Samuel Bennett, *A Few Remarks by way of Reply to an Anonymous Scribbler, Calling Himself a Philanthropist, Disabusing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints of the Slanders and Falsehoods which he has Attempted to Fasten Upon It* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Brown, Bicking & Guilbert, 1840), 14.

17. *E. Snow's Reply to the Self-Styled Philanthropist, of Chester County* (November 1840), 10.

18. *Ibid.*

19. N.a., "Schools," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 6 (January 15, 1842): 662.

20. Raising children in the millennium was also described in the first Mormon hymn book:

"There shall the will of God be done,
And saints and angels greet;
And there, when all in Christ is one,
The best from worlds shall meet.
There in the resurrection morn',
The living live again,
And all the children will be born
Without the sting of sin."

See Hymn number 34 in Emma Smith, comp., *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F.G. Williams & Co., 1835), 45 (emphasis in original).

21. Park seems to present materialism as a concern that progressively displaced Pratt's millennial focus whereas I argue his materialism was an outgrowth of his millennialism and literalist biblical interpretations.

22. S. A. Davis, "Kirtland,—Mormonism, &c.," *Glad Tidings and Ohio Christian Telescope* 1, no. 17 (March 14, 1837): 263.

23. Ibid.

24. W. A. Cowdery, ed., "Editorials," *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 7 (April 1837): 489. Cowdery may well have believed there would be a material millennium with houses and so forth, but the anticipatory acquisitiveness of the Saints evidently bothered him to the extent that it seemed symptomatic of their unrighteous temporal expectations.

25. This point serves as caution against historical treatments of Mormonism that present a linear or monolithic progression of doctrines and beliefs.

26. Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People, Containing a Declaration of the Faith and Doctrine of the Church of the Latter-day Saints* (New York, N.Y.: W. Sandford, 1837), 166–67.

27. Ibid., 83.

28. Edward Partridge, "Let Zion In Her Beauty Rise," Hymn number 66 in Smith, *A Collection*, 88.

29. Pratt, "Immortality and Eternal Life," 35.

30. William Clayton diary, April 2, 1843. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 169. Selections from this entry became D&C 130.

31. Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 329. This is another example of theological extensions and developments Mormon leaders fueled alongside—and following the death of—Joseph Smith. Benjamin E. Park argues persuasively for the need to recognize such theological negotiations in "(Re)Interpreting Early Mormon Thought: Synthesizing Joseph Smith's Theology and the Process of Religion Formation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 59–88.

32. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology: Designed as an Introduction to the First Principles of Spiritual Philosophy; Religion; Law and Government; As Delivered by the Ancients, and as Restored in This Age, For the Final Development of Universal Peace, Truth and Knowledge* (Liverpool: F.D. Richards, 1855), 162. Pratt earlier used the budding/blossoming anal-

ogy in regards to education and knowledge. See Pratt, "Immortality and Eternal Life," 35.

33. Wilford Woodruff Journal (January 21, 1844), in Ehat and Cook., *Words*, 318; spelling in original.

34. "More painful to me the thought of anihilation [sic] than death, if I had no expectation of seeing my mother Brother & Sisters & friends again my heart would burst in a moment & I should go down to my grave," Joseph Smith Diary, by Willard Richards (April 16, 1843) in Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 196.

35. Luke 20:35.

36. See Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 2d ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Nota Bene, 2001), 24–32. They discuss other strategies employed by nineteenth-century religious figures on 259–64.

37. Franklin D. Richards, "Scriptural Items," (July 16, 1843), Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 232.

38. Orson Pratt, "Power and Eternity of the Priesthood," *The Seer*, 1, no. 10 (October 1853): 150.

39. Pratt, *Autobiography*, 388–89.

Communicating Jesus: The Encoding and Decoding Practices of Re-Presenting Jesus for LDS (Mormon) Audiences at a BYU Art Museum

David W. Scott and Daniel A. Stout

Introduction

There is a growing recognition among scholars that museums are discursively constructed sites. One scholar noted that museums often are merely a “structured sample of reality” where science empowers their message.¹ Alternatively, museums might encourage a pseudo-religious experience of ritually “attending” them—factors, some critics observe, that reduce the probability of resistant readings by patrons.² Either view suggests a potential for tension between the secular and the religious, or perhaps the discourse of the museum versus the worldviews of patrons. This paper addresses this tension by examining the meaning-making practices of a museum and patrons at an art exhibit featuring both original religious paintings and digital media at a Carl Bloch exhibit at the Brigham Young University Museum of Art (MoA).

Historically, traditional museums emphasized the sanctity of the artifact³ and the ritualistic practice of “attending” them.⁴ However, since the advent of cinema and other competing media, museums have retooled their relationships by increasingly emphasizing new media rather than artifacts to appeal to a larger number of people.⁵ Curators are adding interactive features⁶ and investing in public relations campaigns while retooling their ex-



Christ Healing the Sick at Bethesda (1883); oil on canvas, 101" x 126".
Bloch art courtesy Brigham Young University, Museum of Art (MoA).

hibits to appeal to populist views.⁷ These shifts in museum presentation strategies alter the ritual-symbolism of attending a museum and of fetishizing the object—creating the potential for tension between educating and entertaining the patrons.

When history is conflated with theology and technology (as might be the case in an exhibit featuring historical works of religious art), which perspective is dominant in the discourse of that exhibit? Which elements resonate with visitors? Does the exhibit emphasize the historic or the religious, and how is its message either resisted or reinforced by the religious views of the patrons? This paper addresses these questions with an analysis of an art exhibit at BYU featuring Carl Bloch paintings of New Testament stories.

Background

Carl Bloch: The Master's Hand was the title of the religious art exhibit presented at the MoA from November 12, 2010 through

May 7, 2011. The exhibit featured five large altar paintings (one owned by the museum and others borrowed from churches in Sweden and Denmark) and other works of the nineteenth-century artist (including portraits, landscapes, and sketches). Entrance to the exhibit was free, but patrons paid a fee to use an iPad with interactive features that included panoramic views of original placement of altarpieces and churches where they originated, discussions of the art by MoA staff and LDS Institute instructors, and recordings of Mormon leaders' sermons about Christ.

The exhibit was preceded by a public relations campaign that included articles in BYU and MoA magazines, press releases across the media (especially in Church-owned newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stations), an official website from the MoA, and a BYU television documentary about Bloch and the exhibit.⁸ Although the media blitz extended beyond Utah borders, the emphasis in church-owned media certainly made clear the primary targets were people within the LDS community.

This study draws in part from Stuart Hall's encoder/decoder model, which was initially used to show how audience members' socioeconomic standing could narrow their interpretation of mediated texts.⁹ We expand this model in two ways: first, we read a museum (rather than television or newspapers) as a text; second, we move beyond the politics of class—focusing instead on religion in both the production and interpretation of meaning. Given that patrons describe museum attendance as a numinous experience,¹⁰ we seek to know whether such experiences are plausible given various institutional pressures and technological filters accompanying the exhibit.

Our approach recognizes that museums are organized using the sense-making practices of both producers and audiences, and that attendees bring to an exhibit varying social practices and worldviews which influence their experience.¹¹ The interplay of religious culture and museum discourse plays a significant role in the process—at least in the case of the Carl Bloch exhibit. Hence, patrons are likely to apply a “negotiated” reading of the exhibit. Such a reading “accord[s] the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to local conditions.” We suggest that reli-



Christ with a Crown of Thorns (1882); etching 5 1/16" x 3 7/16".

gious discourse can be localized in the interpretive practices of museum attendees particularly because “other discourses [especially religious ones] . . . are always at play besides those of the particular text in focus.”¹² These other discourses, Hall later notes, mean that we see our subjectivity as disunited—a site of struggle—rather than as ideologically cohesive.¹³

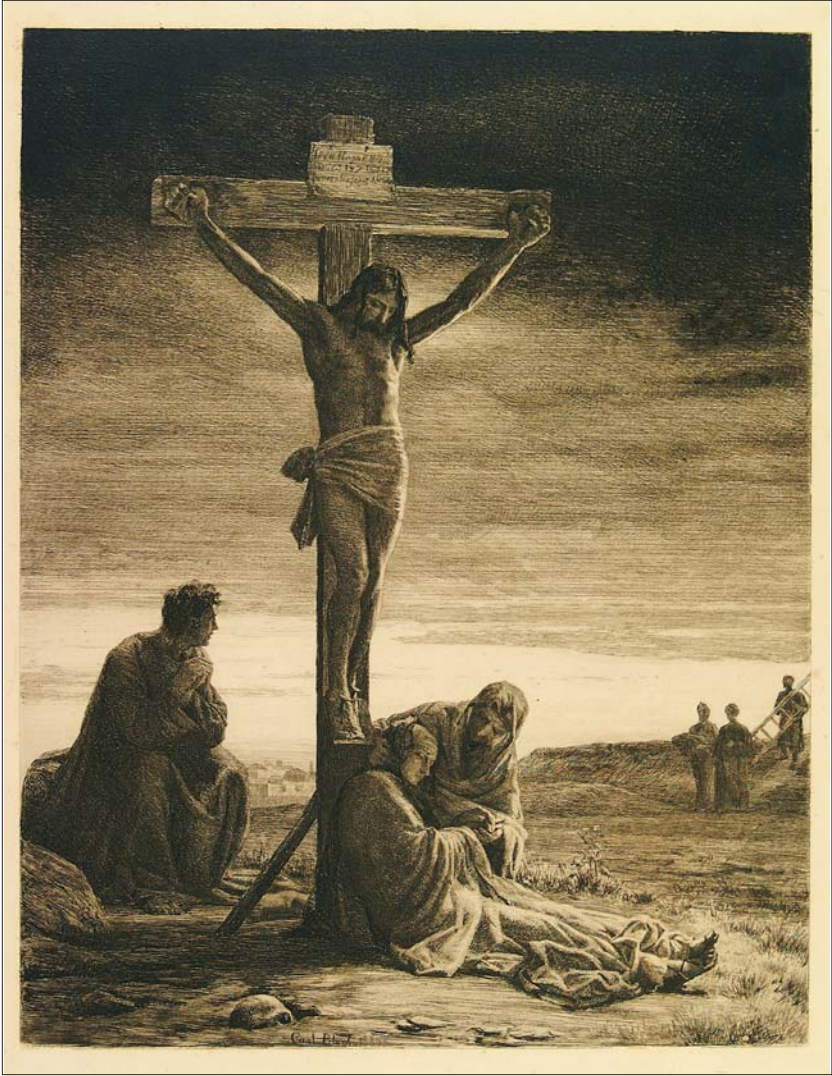
Moreover, the Bloch exhibit is of special interest because it integrates discourses of history and religion in an exhibit marketed primarily to appeal to Latter-day Saints in Utah. This interplay of history, art, and religious discourse gives rise to a number of potential encoding/decoding strategies because in some instances museums are empowered precisely because they are perceived in the public consciousness as a powerful means of understanding, organizing, and managing the world using an “object-based epistemology.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the accompaniment of the interactive iPad feature adds yet another facet to the rubric of potential influencers in this particular exhibit.

In this study we examine the role of religion in this rubric of meaning-making for museum patrons. This approach moves beyond a cultural studies approach that fetishizes the text by instead “locating both texts and audiences within broader contexts that articulate the identity and effects of [the] practice” of attending a museum.¹⁵

Museums as Media

The literature is replete with examples of how museums influence or reflect culture.¹⁶ Pearce suggests that museums are communicative venues in which diverse media coalesce to generate synergist effects.¹⁷ Museums also offer a representational narrative of *other* realities and at times create a sense of the numinous by fetishizing the objects they present.¹⁸

Museums are in many ways akin to churches or other religious monuments in the way they exhibit culture and artifacts. They are like religious shrines or temples in their role as repositories of knowledge; they also display objects that mimic the sacred in that they are beyond the gaze of patrons.¹⁹ Attending a museum exhibit has also been likened to participating in religious ritual practices.²⁰ The discourse is enhanced by layouts that invoke organized walking²¹ or designs that discourage interaction among vis-



The Crucifixion (1887); *etching* 12 1/8" x 9 1/2".

itors, often requiring of their patrons “respect for the collection” through their “do not touch” discourse.²² In this sense, museum attendance is identified as a ritualistic participatory experience akin to religious worship.²³

Only a handful of studies have examined museums in an effort to determine how meaning is contested when both encoding *and* decoding practices are considered. These studies focus primarily on the hegemonic nature of museums and the limited capacity of consumers to resist the “preferred” text. Bella Dicks’ analysis of a heritage museum in the United Kingdom suggests that the producers of the exhibit intentionally offered a “preferred” message that was ambiguous (and relatively open) in order to appeal to a collective memory of consumers.²⁴ Analysis of consumer readings of this site reflected that openness. However, visitors of the *Newseum* in Arlington, Virginia—the first “interactive museum of news”—negotiated through a relatively closed text. By drawing on the collective memory of major news events, and by equating the economic incentives of newspaper owners with freedom of the press, this exhibit effectively limited the capacity of attendees to resist the dominantly pro-newspaper industry message.²⁵

How patrons define and practice religion is also key to understanding the communicative strategies of museums. Patrons are increasingly willing to have religious-like experiences within museum walls. We have previously demonstrated that the scientific elements of a Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit in North Carolina were co-opted by the religious discourse prevalent in the exhibit’s public relations strategy and the religiosity of its guests.²⁶ Visitors typically expressed religious sentiment accompanying their visit to the museum—especially when they saw actual scroll fragments.

In this case, the objects themselves were fetishized as a means of bringing museum guests closer to the location of Jesus and biblical writers. For these guests, the experience of the numinous was enhanced primarily by their proximity to original scroll fragments rather than the presence of the exhibit’s interactive features.

This finding adds insight to the question of the empowering capacity of interactive and digital media features in traditional



The Doubting Thomas (1885); etching $4 \frac{3}{8}'' \times 2 \frac{1}{2}''$.

museum settings. However, Murray argues that allowing visitors merely to “push buttons” to move through a narrative is not especially empowering.²⁷ Furthermore, high-tech interactive features might not always add to the educational value of an exhibit. One study of an interactive Holocaust museum found that visitors were reluctant to engage with interactive features that offered information beyond what they “already knew.”²⁸

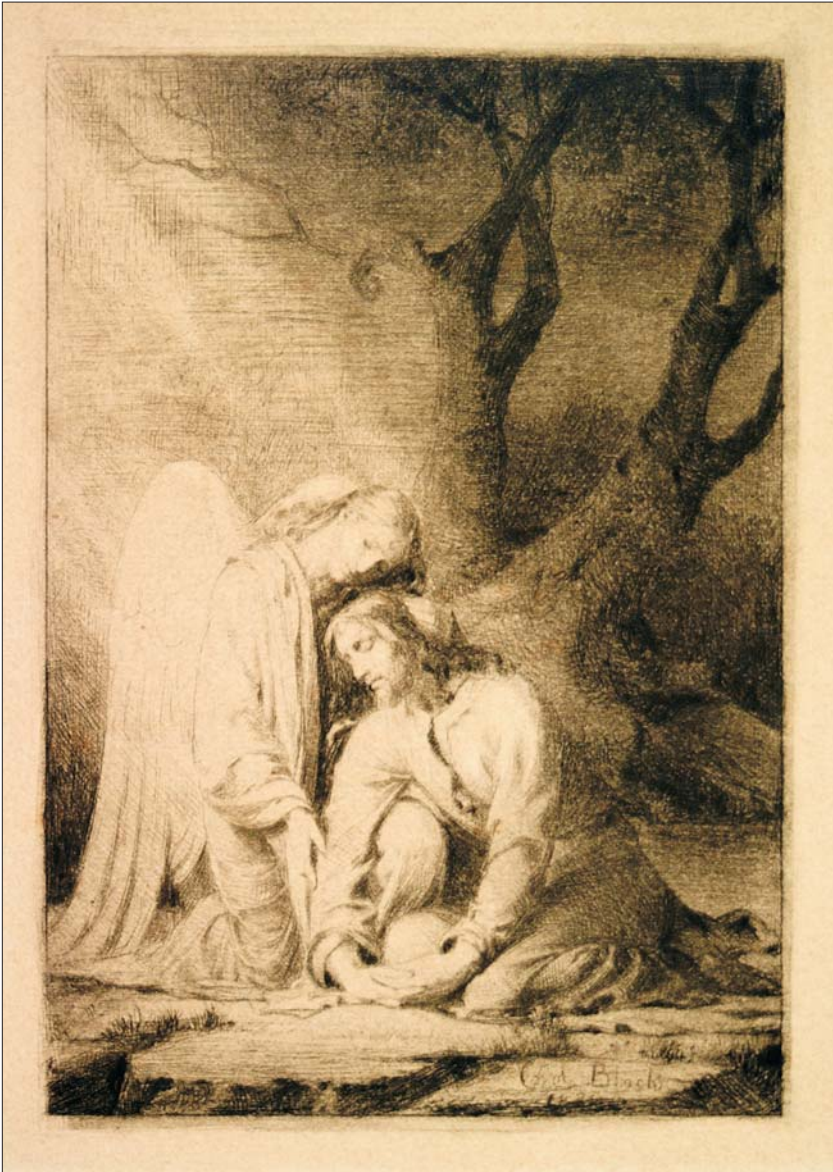
Religious Art and Worship

Of course, in an exhibit featuring religious art, the power of attendance as religious ritual increases. This is because art possesses the essential elements of religion (i.e., deep feeling, belief, ritual use, and the ability to create community).²⁹ Morgan and Promey trace a growing trend in the study of religion recognizing the contribution of cultural artifacts (art and objects) as elements of religious practice.³⁰ Quite a few scholars in recent years have suggested a need to better understand the interaction of religious identity and popular culture.³¹

Geertz maintains that a religion’s appeal “rests in turn upon the institutions which render these images and metaphors available to those who thus employ them.”³² Religious art has been used since the earliest days of Christian worship,³³ and in an era of mass-produced religious iconography, religious art can be reproduced to expand its sentimental impact,³⁴ while at the same time enhancing the mystical quality of the original.³⁵ As Kornegay argues:

Whether it be a statue of the Virgin Mary, a decorative passage of calligraphy from the Qur’an, or mass-produced plastic figurines of Hindu Gods, visual expression is a central element in virtually every religious belief system.³⁶

Religious representations are more persuasive when they appropriate cultural referents—culminating in a cyclical reproduction of religious images that are relevant to believers because they have “seen” similar representations elsewhere. Hence, Morgan’s conclusion that believers identified with Sallman’s *Head of Christ* painting because it assimilated a “long-standing paradigm of his physical appearance as a light-skinned Euro-American man.”³⁷ Subsequently, other renditions of Jesus continue the cycle—de-



Christ in Gethsemane (1880); etching 5 3/8" x 3 11/16"

parting little from Sallman's rendition, resulting in a culturally-bound Jesus who is "more archetypal, more transcendent, [and] less historical."³⁸

The LDS Church has contributed to re-presentations of an archetypal Jesus to be revered by congregants. Sallman's rendition of Christ was displayed in many LDS churches from the 1950s until, in the 1970s, the LDS hierarchy began regulating the art that might be hung in chapels.³⁹ Subsequently, in 1983, church leaders commissioned Utah artist Del Parson to paint a head of Christ. According to Parson, he was instructed to make his rendition more "masculine" than the Sallman image—and even his approved rendition was revised five times until it met the measure of masculinity required by LDS leaders.⁴⁰ Despite its emphasis on the "more masculine" Jesus, Parson's "approved" Euro-American Jesus reflects the archetype. More recently, however, the LDS leadership has been including Bloch's images of Christ in church buildings and publications.⁴¹ This ability to determine which Christ images are "acceptable" in LDS buildings serves to reinforce archetypal perception of Christ while at the same time imbuing those images with the stamp of the Church's approval. This, in turn, might add to their appeal as accurate representations of Christ among LDS congregants.

Research Questions and Procedures

Given the potential for contradictory discourses (art, history, science, religion) in an exhibit featuring historical paintings of a European Lutheran artist to be presented at a predominantly Mormon community, we first seek to determine the dominant narrative of the exhibit and its attending public relations campaign. Next, we seek to determine which subjectivity of the visitors is at play when attending the exhibit, as we address the following questions:

1. What is the dominant theme of the exhibit and the attending media campaign?
 - a. How is it expressed in both latent and manifest discourse?



The Resurrection (1881); etching 6 $\frac{3}{16}$ " x 4 $\frac{15}{16}$ ".

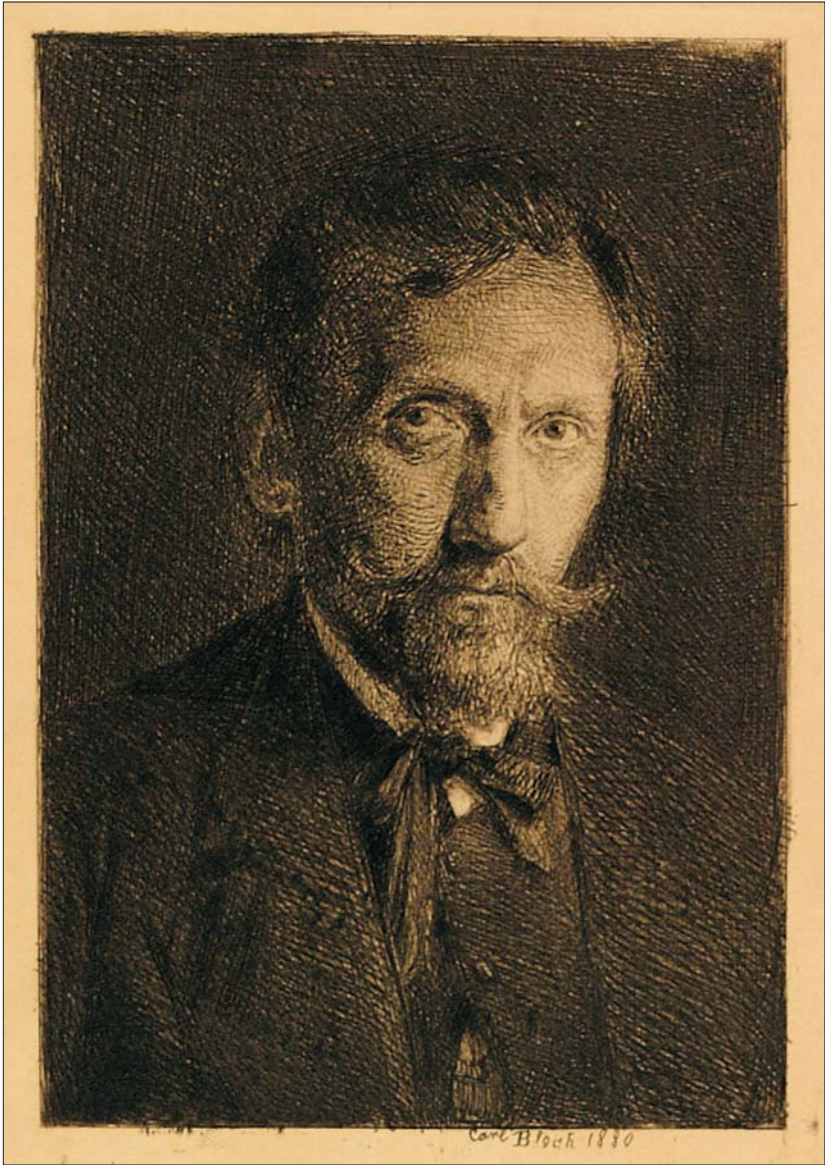
- b. How does it reflect cultural, religious, or historical subjectivities?
2. Is the dominant theme accepted or rejected by attendees (as noted in their blog entries)?
3. Does the public relations campaign promote numinous aspects of the paintings? Do patrons describe numinous experiences as they visit the exhibit?

In this paper, we address these questions with a close reading of the Bloch exhibit patterned after Stuart Hall's introduction in *Paper Voices*. This approach requires that we read the museum as a "visual construct, employing symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions, and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in the widest sense."⁴² We begin with a brief analysis of the public relations efforts preceding the exhibit in an effort to determine the larger narrative accompanying the exhibit. Next, we examine the exhibit itself before grounding that analysis in a reading of guest comments dated from the opening of the exhibit on November 20, 2010 until January 10, 2011. These comments were read and sorted in systematic fashion to identify categories of dominant themes.

Given the polysemic nature of mediated events, it is not our intent to suggest that our reading represents the only plausible interpretation. Certainly, attendees bring with them many subjective positions (e.g., self, gender, age group, family, class, nation, ethnicity, etc.). We also recognize that this study is premised on observations in a fixed time and place, so it cannot make a full assessment of the fluidity of cultural boundaries.⁴³ Finally, we admit that the encoding process is impacted by many factors (e.g., budgets, time constraints, curators' interests and expertise, availability of specific documents and experts, corporate culture). Hence, as is the case with other mediated texts, we do not claim that the preferred text necessarily reflects the intent of the exhibit's curators or staff.

Findings

The dominant theme of the public relations campaign and the exhibit itself centers on the religious, rather than the artistic



Carl Bloch, Self-portrait (1880); etching, 4 9/16" x 3 1/8".

or historical, value of the paintings. The public relations campaign and interactive iPad features work together to embed Bloch's art within cultural and religious referents of the LDS Church. Moreover, the exhibit itself crafts a sense of the numinous by recreating the experience of visiting a church (through both the layout and design of the exhibit and interactive features of the iPad) and injecting theology into discussion of the paintings. Bloch's artistic ability, when it is expressed, is also embedded in religious discourse. Furthermore, both the museum and public relations messages frequently distinguish Bloch's art from that of other artists—creating a latent theme that suggests his work is more inspired than other depictions of Jesus. The guest diary entries affirm this narrative with comments typically highlighting religious sentiment accompanying the museum visit.

Public Relations and the LDS Experience

The public relations campaign offers a narrative that highlights the religious power of the paintings and the spiritual message of the LDS Church. Prior to the launch of the campaign, numerous articles and reprints of Bloch's work had been distributed in official LDS publications (*New Era*, *Ensign*, *Liahona*) that are typically aimed at indoctrinating and enhancing the faith of Church members.⁴⁴ The media campaign takes advantage of these same sources, and additional articles and reprints of Bloch's art are featured in articles and on the cover of *Ensign* just prior to the exhibit's opening. Furthermore, the media blitz targets LDS-owned publications in Utah (KSL television, the *Deseret News*, *Church News*, *BYU Magazine*, and *Mormon Times*). Given the context of these news media, emphasis on the coming exhibit in these publications adds to the religious draw of the work. The message among these church-owned publications emphasizes the power of Bloch's work to inspire people and also that God inspired Bloch's art. Bloch is quoted to have said, "God helps me, that's what I think, and then I'm calm," in the initial MoA press release—a statement that is reiterated frequently in advertising, newspaper stories, magazine articles, newscasts, a BYU documentary program aired on the local PBS station, and even in the Church's ecclesiastical monthly periodical, *Ensign*.

Additionally, the media campaign frequently celebrates the

numinous value of Bloch's paintings as particularly important to Mormons. News releases note that Bloch's work was not appreciated in much of the art world after the rise of modernism, while at the same time noting that it *has* been venerated by Latter-day Saints since the middle of the twentieth century after his works were introduced into LDS publications.⁴⁵ This observation serves not only as a critique of modernism, but also as a defense of kitschy LDS and other overly sentimental religious art popular in LDS culture.⁴⁶ The *Church News* asserts that Bloch's work is "beloved by Latter-day Saints worldwide" before quoting museum curator Dawn Pheysey saying of Bloch's work, "they are powerful, powerful paintings. Bloch's depictions of a masculine, compassionate Christ is very appealing to members of the Church."⁴⁷ This construct of Christ being uniquely masculine in Bloch's images bifurcates his "inspired" art from those "effeminate" representations of Jesus found in much of the Renaissance era, while at the same time affirming the LDS Church's visual construct of masculinity.⁴⁸ This construct, while not uniquely Mormon, has special significance given the hyper-masculinity of Book of Mormon men portrayed at Temple Square in Salt Lake City⁴⁹ and the Church's "Proclamation on the Family,"⁵⁰ an official statement from the First Presidency of the Church that emphasizes traditional gender roles and reinforces the construct of masculinity as central to LDS theology.⁵¹

Additionally, we learned that public references to Bloch's talent serve primarily as a means of celebrating the spiritual nature of his paintings. *Meridian Magazine* cites curator Pheysey as saying, "... it was [Bloch's] tender and sensitive soul that defined his ability to portray the plights of others with kind consideration, and his deep-seated faith that enabled him to render compelling images of the Savior with devotion and love."⁵² Pheysey is also cited in the *Salt Lake Tribune* (the competitor of the LDS-owned *Deseret News*), a newspaper more popular in Salt Lake City among non-Mormon residents, noting that Bloch "presented a Christ that is divine but approachable."⁵³ This "approachable" interpretation of the Bloch painting contrasts with that of MoA director Campbell Gray, who is quoted in a BYU magazine: "[Bloch] employs visual devices to engage the viewer in a direct moral conversation about the personal choices proposed by a painting's story."

Gray then concludes that the exhibit will “. . . affirm Christ’s mission of salvation and, at the same time, challenge the viewer to make tough choices that bespeak living faith.”⁵⁴ Despite the heaviness of this latter statement when contrasted with Pheysey’s more approachable account, both agree on the spiritual nature and force of Bloch’s work—a message repeated throughout the public relations campaign. Even the *Standard-Examiner*, an independently-owned newspaper in Ogden, Utah (a predominantly LDS town) draws from this perspective, adding after commentary on the brush-strokes of the artist that “what draws viewers to Bloch’s paintings . . . is the artist’s sensitivity and compassion.”⁵⁵

These and similar statements throughout the public relations campaign coalesce with an approving nod of LDS leaders in Church publications to generate an expectation among the faithful Latter-day Saints of experiencing the numinous when visiting the museum. The taken-for-granted message throughout the campaign advances a latent discourse that distinguishes Bloch from less-approved artists, elevates his work, and occasionally suggests a particular “Mormon” orthodoxy regarding which forms of religious art or representations of Jesus are inspirational or “correct.”

The Exhibit: Centering on Christ and the Sacred

The exhibit highlights the numinous in three ways: 1) by constructing Bloch as uniquely special to Latter-day Saints, 2) by recreating the experience of attending a church (in both physical and virtual space), and 3) by offering interactive features that integrate LDS doctrinal or spiritual messages (rather than emphasizing the historic or artistic) when describing Bloch’s work.

The exhibit itself is consistent with the media narrative—often emphasizing the “unique” appreciation among Latter-day Saints of Bloch’s work. Additionally, the layout and design join interactive features that highlight the sentimental and religious experience. The dominant text also presents Bloch’s religious art as consistent with Latter-day Saint views of Jesus. The latent theme not only attributes Mormon views of Christ to Bloch’s art, but it also conflates his unique representations of Jesus (much is said in the exhibit to differentiate his work from that of other artists) as peripheral in the world of religious art in much the same way that the LDS Church is viewed by many non-Mormons as an outlier (at

best) among Christian churches. As such, Mormons are presented as more highly sensitive to (and perhaps appreciative of) Bloch's work than other Christians or art critics. In this way, Bloch's life and work resonate with the Mormon experience of practicing faith outside the mainstream culture. Furthermore, the interactive features and layout of the exhibit integrate LDS sermons and commentary that further embed the discourse within the Latter-day Saint experience.

Upon entering, guests are introduced to Bloch's native county in a room that is offset from the remainder of the exhibit. Here, a panoramic display of Denmark, Sweden, and several cathedrals is projected onto the walls surrounding seated guests as classical music plays. The narrator informs visitors that Bloch's art is unappreciated in much of the world (since modernism), despite being revered by Latter-day Saints. This narrative, combined with music and scenery, evokes feelings of awe as majestic scenes from a bygone era in Europe surround guests.

The remainder of the exhibit is structured to recreate the experience of visiting the cathedrals where the paintings usually hang. The five altarpieces⁵⁶ hang in recessed archways much as they did in their original churches. The strategic use of museum lighting and recessed archways enhance Bloch's use of light and shadow, making these particular pieces appear three-dimensional—a quality that enhances a sense of “being there” in the presence of Christ.

The interactive features of the iPad enhance this experience by recreating panoramic views of the cathedrals from where the paintings were borrowed. These features allow guests to virtually visit the paintings in their original setting, while viewing the cathedral space, altars, stained glass windows, domed ceilings, and even the church grounds in Europe. This creates an immersive atmosphere that equates visiting the MoA in Provo, Utah, with touring the sacred spaces in Europe where these paintings are used in conjunction with worship services.

The placards accompanying the paintings also reinforce the religious message of the art, with emphasis on the New Testament and additional information about the history of the particular piece at hand.

Similarly, the iPad narrative emphasizes the sacred over the

historical or artistic nature of the exhibit. There are three primary interactive features on the iPad which accompany each of the five altar pieces: the first offers commentaries about the message/painting itself (with audio, print, and/or video segments), the second link offers explanations of the artistic nuances of the paintings (allowing visitors to choose a particular element of a painting to activate another narration), and the third recreates panoramic views of the paintings hanging in the churches (many in the sanctuary) from which they came.

In our interaction with the first two features, we discovered that the religious message of the paintings was almost always central—even when the touch screen icon promised to link patrons to a detailed analysis of the Bloch's artistic approach. For example, the information for *Christ and the Young Child* offered three interactive links titled, "Who is this child?" "Why does Christ command us to become as a child?" and "How should we behold our little ones?" These links feature a video of Hanne Korsbey (parish council president, Sankt Nikolai Kirk, Holbaek, Denmark, from where the painting was loaned) noting that all of us are *children of God*; another video featuring Jared Ludlow, a BYU professor of ancient scripture, sharing his witness of the need to become like a child to enter heaven; and finally, an audio clip of an LDS general conference talk by Jeffrey R. Holland (one of the twelve apostles of the LDS Church) referring to children entering the kingdom of heaven (accompanied by a reference to Luke 18). Similarly, the interactive feature for *Christ in Gethsemane* offers three links that also emphasize the religious ("Biblical Context," "The Divinity and Humanity of Christ," and "Understanding Christ's Sufferings") rather than the artistic merit of the painting. The accompanying interactive narrative features LDS scriptural references about the suffering of Christ, quotes from the New Testament, a video of a BYU professor sharing his witness of Christ's atonement while contrasting the LDS belief about the atonement with what may be portrayed in Bloch's image, and also an audio track of another LDS Church apostle (Neal A. Maxwell) giving a sermon on the power of redemption through Jesus Christ. These interactive features—despite drawing from a variety of sources (scriptures, scholars,

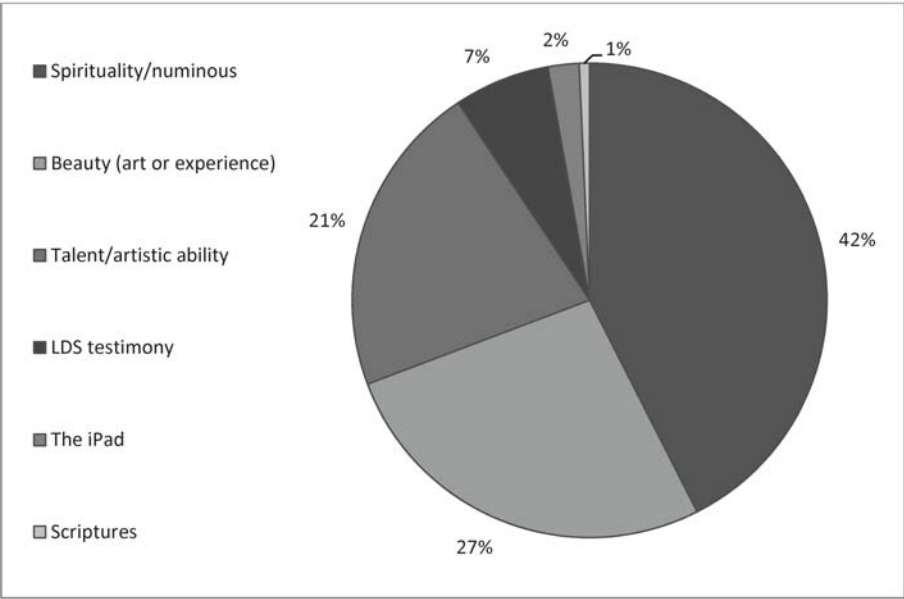


Figure 1. Prevalent Themes in Museum Guest Entries (995 Total)

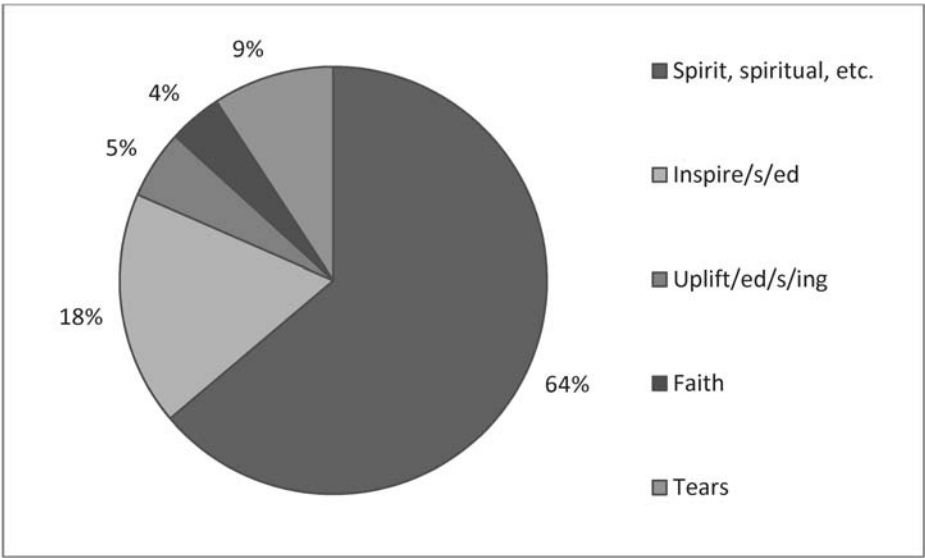


Figure 2. Guest Comments Related to the Numinous Nature of the Exhibit (423 Total)

non-Mormon clergy, and LDS leaders)—all deliver a similar message emphasizing the divinity of Christ.

We learned that even interactive features promising to explain the artistic attributes of the paintings typically addressed the dominant religious narrative instead. For example, in an iPad link promising to offer insight into the artistic methods of Bloch, we found six references to *Christ in Gethsemane*, all of which emphasized the religious. These included an audio narrative explaining that the painting serves as “a vital reminder of the atonement,” Pheysey explaining the LDS belief that the atonement happened both on the cross and in the Garden of Gethsemane, Ludlow contrasting Bloch’s winged angel with non-winged angels in LDS art (and also testifying of the eternal nature of Christ’s suffering), two references to Hebrews 12:12, and a cursive script that reads, “wherefore lift up the hands which hang down.” The only reference specifying Bloch’s artistic ability on this page was titled “Dark Background,” where the narrative explained that Bloch used shadows in this painting to emphasize the heaviness of the moment for Christ in Gethsemane. However, this solitary reference to the artist’s method is still embedded with a religious message, this time from LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson, in a video capture saying, “No mere mortal can conceive the full import of what Christ did for us in Gethsemane.”

Diary Entries: A Sense of the Numinous

We examined 1,000 comments in the diaries. These diary entries generally mirror the dominant religious theme presented in the public discourse about the exhibit. The majority of comments emphasize either the sacred experience of participating, or the beauty of the art (which typically overlaps with a sense of the numinous). Secondary were references to Bloch’s artistic ability.

References to deity (God, Christ, etc.) were dominant (955 references), but this was expected given that Christ was the subject of each painting in the exhibit. Beyond that, we discovered five major themes in the comments, some of which overlapped: those highlighting the numinous (423) and the beauty of the art (266)—accounting for 70 percent of the major themes—followed by comments about the artistic ability/talent of Bloch (213), the exhibit

as a testimonial or referent specifically to doctrinal statements unique to the LDS Church (65), and a small number of references to scripture (7). Only 21 references were made about the iPad; most were positive, focusing on how it gave them more information. Only one guest expressed disappointment that the interactive features highlighted the “sugar-coated” kitsch of Mormon culture, rather than a more in-depth analysis of the corresponding works of art.

In terms of the numinous, patrons most often expressed feeling God’s spirit attending their visit, followed by comments indicating they were inspired, uplifted, moved to tears, and that their faith was strengthened as a result of the experience (Figure 2).

For these patrons, attending the exhibit was akin to walking in sacred space. Patrons’ comments make evident the numinous nature of their visits:

There is a reverence and power in Bloch’s work that truly touched me. The spirit of this exhibition is exquisitely moving. I can honestly say I feel closer to my Savior as I learn more of His life and message through these depictions.

I was overcome with emotion as I walked through the exhibit and looked at the art and thought of my Savior Jesus Christ. It was truly moving and beautiful!

As I viewed one of the large paintings, I closed my eyes and said a prayer, receiving some direction in my life. The spirit is present in these halls.

My first view of the exhibit was a spiritual moment I will long remember. It brought tears to my eyes and love to my heart for this dear mans [sic] work and talent.

Our second key finding was that the conversations about the artistic abilities of Bloch were framed within the context of the religious. The emotional/spiritual relevance of the experience was prevalent in comments about the beauty of the art and the abilities of Bloch as an artist. Typical were comments framing Bloch’s talent and ability as evidence that God inspired him:

The art of Bloch was amazing to me. His brushwork, his scope, his unfailing concentration on every detail, his ability to portray the range of human emotion, his use of color and light, and so much more all broadened and enriched the spiritual dimension. Truly, he knew the Savior.

Surely his talent which he worked on for very many years was God-given.

These remarks are not only illustrative of the link between talent and religion for these guests, but are also reflective of the taken-for-granted appeal of archetypal renditions of Christ re-presented by the LDS Church in meetinghouses, temples, tourist destinations, and church literature or media venues.

Numinous sentiment was enhanced by the experience of standing before the originals (or “actual” paintings, to use the term of many patrons), rather than because of the virtual experience offered by the iPad. This sentiment is summarized by an anonymous entry stating, “I really like these paintings because they are so often seen at church buildings, but being able to come here and actually see them in real life is a completely different experience,” or, as noted by another observer, “Christ’s power is evident in these paintings.” To some guests, this inspiration was indicative of Bloch’s link to the faithful Latter-day Saints, even though he was not himself a Mormon:

I was really amazed by how when [sic] Carl Bloch wasn’t even LDS, he made a gigantic difference in the church with his talents in art.

Bloch depicts the facial expressions very well, explaining the feelings of the people and the mood of the painting. . . . Even though he was Lutheran, I feel he was inspired by God to paint and etch these for us so we can draw closer to Christ.

These comments are among the many that coalesce to demonstrate how the experience of the visitors is one that integrates spirituality and the talent of the artist within the framework of LDS theology and culture. Taken for granted is the archetypal Jesus portrayed by Bloch in his work—one that the patrons identify with because they have already familiarized themselves with Bloch images hanging in LDS churches or reprinted in LDS publications. In this context, Bloch himself is appropriated by the Church, the museum, and its guests as “one of their own.”

Discussion

In this study, we see the power of merging cultural referents of Jesus with the authority of the LDS Church in a museum setting that itself recreates a sense of religious ritual. Despite the possibility of a number of subjective readings of the exhibit, the vast majority of visitors accepted the preferred reading of the exhibit that ap-

propriated the images of Christ and works of Bloch as sacred. By framing the exhibit as more religious than artistic, LDS patrons are given an instructive frame within which to experience and discuss the exhibit. From the data collected here, we learn more about the strategic nature of campaigns in accomplishing these goals. In this case, positioning the display within the context of Mormon theology is a key finding; endorsement from Church leaders was implicit from the outset. Given that hierarchy is fundamental in Mormon theology, the promotional frame is seen as trustworthy. Something is also learned about tactics in this regard. Placing the exhibit in an LDS framework was done through authoritative media (i.e., trusted sources within the religious culture). A communication strategy of the museum itself (and LDS sources) created a religious frame from which to subsequently view the originals when later attending the museum. Analysis of the campaign reveals meticulous strategizing about the main things visitors should glean before their actual visit. Although we cannot draw conclusions as to whether the public relations strategy and museum display emphasized the sacred because it was endorsed by LDS leaders, or because such an approach would likely draw a larger crowd to the exhibit, we do come to realize how intricately planned and sophisticated Church museum display can be.

Much is also learned about the effectiveness of the campaign, although there is always some space for independent thinking. Patrons' experiences were more numinous than critical/analytical; the great majority were deeply affected at the level of deep feeling in a way that unified them with LDS beliefs. Not only is the museum a source of the numinous, but it can also reinforce commitments within the context of a specific denomination. It is possible that after seeing the promotions, adherents attended hoping to strengthen devotion to the Church in a pre-planned way.

Although less the case, artistic critique also occurred despite the fact that it was deemphasized in the campaign. That is, many patrons also discussed the quality and nature of the artwork. This underscores the aesthetic power of art to elicit aesthetic commentary, although this was not the dominant experience. Critical discussion may be difficult given the public framing and packaging of the exhibit as upholding Mormon doctrine and theology. It is justifiable to conclude that museums can be a source of signifi-

cant religious experience, but the nature of that experience can be affected through promotional efforts. These findings suggest that the museum is and will continue to be an important subject for researchers of media and religion.

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America and the One True Church: What My Church Taught Me about My Country

Richard T. Hughes

Precious few Americans outside the South know much about my church—the Church of Christ—and that’s a shame, since it illumines so well the character of the American nation. Because my church is relatively small (c. 1 million members) and relatively regional with most of its members in four southern states—Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas—some will doubtless scoff at my claim that it illumines the character of the larger nation. And who can blame them? After all, one eminent historian, David Edwin Harrell Jr., wrote some fifty years ago that my church was filled with “the spirited offspring of the religious red necks of the post-bellum South.”

He might well have added that, until the 1970s, members of this largely white church were a provincial people, deeply committed to the values of the plain folk (read: white, lower-middle class Protestants) of the American South. They therefore harbored deep suspicions of northerners, Catholics, and liberals, not to mention Communists, until long after the death of the former Soviet Union. When I was in graduate school, for example, doing master’s level work at one of the schools related to my church in the mid-1960s, and considering doctoral work at Penn, Princeton, Columbia, or Iowa, many in my church told me that if I went to one of those northern schools to do my Ph.D., I would no doubt lose my faith.

The undergraduate institution I attended—also related to my church—was academically strong in many respects but also widely

noted for the constant stream of anti-Communist propaganda manufactured by its president and a satellite organization that he headed. During my sophomore year, I grew convinced that the Kremlin had my college on its radar screen and had planted a spy on its faculty. I finally concluded that a history professor known for his moderately Democratic politics was doubtless a Communist double agent.

By the 1970s, the Church of Christ was breaking out of its provincial cocoon, thanks in part to the power of the cultural revolution of the 1960s, but thanks as well to the love of biblical learning so deeply rooted in this church—a love that prompted scores of young people in the Church of Christ to complete doctorates in biblical studies at places like Harvard, Yale, and Chicago in the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond. The extent to which this church has shattered its cultural cocoon can be illustrated by Max Lucado, a Church of Christ preacher who has become America's best known evangelical author of inspirational literature; by Jack Scott, who recently retired as chancellor of the California Community College System, the largest higher-education system in the world; by Robert M. Randolph, chaplain at MIT who regularly works with students from Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and other traditions; by Larry James, CEO of CitySquare in Dallas, Texas, one of America's most vibrant and ecumenically supported inner-city missions; by Shaun Casey, professor of ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary, who in 2008 coordinated President Obama's outreach to evangelical voters; or by Greg Sterling, newly installed dean of the Yale Divinity School.

Restoring the One True Church

And yet this church, so regional and so parochial in so many ways for so many years, also typically claimed for most of those years that it was the one true and universal church outside of which there could be no salvation. Outsiders quickly discern the irony when a culturally-bound religious organization like mine makes such a universal—and utterly fantastic—claim. But insiders virtually never perceive that irony, and their failure of perception is crucial to maintaining the myth.

My experience as a teenager in the Church of Christ beautifully illustrates how completely the myth of the one true church

can swallow its adherents and dull their critical sensibilities. In the late 1950s, I seriously wondered why the major television networks devoted so much coverage to what the Vatican said about this or that global crisis, but never covered the perspectives of the leading preachers in the Church of Christ. After all, if we were the one true church, our preachers deserved fully as much coverage as the networks gave the Vatican, and probably even more.

I should add that growing up in Texas helped to sustain my provincial view of the world and therefore my true-church mentality. My parents, eager for my brother and me to know something about our state, took us each spring to some important Texas destination—the Alamo in San Antonio, for example, or the battleship *Texas* in LaPorte, or Big Bend National Park. But for all our travel in the Lone Star State, I had never been outside of Texas until I was eighteen years old, except for a brief family trip to New Mexico.

In the spring of my senior year in high school, my parents and I visited St. Louis, where we stayed in a large downtown hotel. The first morning there my dad asked if I would like to take a walk, just to see the sights in downtown St. Louis. I shall never forget my shock when I saw people—hundreds of them—walking down those sidewalks. Intellectually I suppose I knew that there were people in St. Louis. But at a deep, emotional level, I had never really considered the fact that there were people outside of Texas. Nor had any adult I knew encouraged me to consider that possibility. Instead, most Texans believed at a basic, primal level that our state was the center of the universe—a conviction that I absorbed by osmosis. The fact that I lived at the *axis mundi*—at the world's center point—sustained my true-church mentality.

The very first crack in my true-church armor came during my college years when I no longer lived at the center of the universe but in an outlying wasteland that bordered on the *axis mundi*—the state of Arkansas. And my remove from the *axis mundi* allowed me to consider for the very first time a profoundly subversive truth. One day a college friend told me that our church was essentially confined to four southern states—Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. As insular as I was, it still made no sense to me that all God's children—all the saved from throughout the

earth—were essentially confined to four states in the American South.

But what does any of this have to do with the character of the American nation? The answer to that question begins to emerge when we consider the one crucial factor that is common to virtually all true-church movements—their denial of history, or at least their rejection of any history except their own. And sometimes, as was the case with my church, they deny even *their own* history, fearful that admitting to their status as historical actors might relativize their identity as the one true church.

In the case of our church, one single concept both defined us and provided the reason for our existence, and that was the concept of “*restoration*.” We believed that soon after the days of Jesus and the apostles—and certainly with the emergence of the pope in Rome—corruption had so completely invaded the church that the true church of Jesus Christ had been lost to the earth.

We also believed that our forebears on the nineteenth-century American frontier had restored the one true church.

We weren’t the only ones embracing that conviction; Mormons, who grew up alongside Churches of Christ on the nineteenth-century American frontier, made the very same claim. And though Mormons and Churches of Christ quarreled with each other over which tradition had restored the one true church, the restorationist agenda comprised the heart and soul of both traditions.

For our part, we finally came to believe that the Church of Christ in remote and God-forsaken places like Muleshoe or Cut and Shoot, Texas, was identical in every essential detail with the churches the apostles established in places like Jerusalem or Corinth or Rome some 2,000 years ago. Further, we believed that the intervening history of the church from that time to this—the history of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, for example—was inconsequential at best, and dangerous at worst, and therefore better ignored.

The American Nation: Restoring Nature’s “Self-Evident Truths”

Thus it was with the larger nation as well. Patriots in this Republic firmly believed that the new American nation had restored to the earth the virtues that had prevailed in the Garden of Eden

at the beginning of time, but had been lost, obscured, and corrupted, thanks to a succession of totalitarian regimes and, yes, thanks to the Roman Church as well. We catch a glimpse of the way those earliest patriots heralded this new nation as a restoration of Eden when we hear Thomas Paine, perhaps the chief propagandist for the American Revolution, exult that “the case and circumstance of America present themselves as in the beginning of the world.” Of the new American government, Paine concluded that “we are brought at once to the point of seeing government begin, as if we had lived in the beginning of time.” John Adams added that “the United States of America have exhibited, perhaps, the first example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature.”

If we wish to see this vision portrayed in graphic form, we need only consult the back side of the Great Seal of the United States. There we encounter an unfinished pyramid bearing the date of 1776—an image that clearly represents the United States. That pyramid grows from an arid and barren landscape that represents the failures of virtually all of human history prior to the founding of America. Above the pyramid we find the eye of God looking down with approval on this restoration of the virtues of Eden. Above the eye of God is the Latin phrase *annuit coeptis*, “He has smiled on our beginnings,” and beneath the pyramid is the phrase that explains the meaning of America: *novus ordo seclorum*, or “a new order of the ages.”

Here was a nation, therefore, untouched by the hand of human tradition, a nation unformed by the molding power of history, a nation that had sprung, as it were, directly from the hand of God, just as the Church of Christ in Little Rock, Memphis, or Dallas had sprung directly from that very first church, established by Jesus’ apostles in the ancient city of Jerusalem. This was a utopian vision on steroids—a vision informed by that golden age that stood at the dawn of time. Further, the utopian impulse that drove the nation also helped create both the Mormon church and the Church of Christ. Indeed, one could make a convincing case that apart from the restorationist agenda of the American nation, these two churches might never have emerged.

The difference, of course, was that the Church of Christ—and

Mormons, too, for that matter—operated in a specifically Christian arena, appealing to Christian scripture and to Jesus and the apostles. On the other hand, the earliest American patriots grounded the nation's identity not in the Bible or Jesus and the apostles, but in "Nature and Nature's God," to borrow Jefferson's phrase from the Declaration of Independence. In truth, Jefferson's appeal to "nature" was clearly an appeal to the birth of the world and the creation of the human race, and on that restorationist agenda the Founders built the American nation.

In spite of their differences, therefore, both the Church of Christ and the larger American nation constructed their respective identities from that time-before-time, that golden age that thrived before the Fall. Further, the American nation, like the Church of Christ, has never had much use for history. Most Americans live their lives in the eternal now and view history as irrelevant to anything that really matters. Henry Ford summarized the American bias against history when he famously proclaimed that "history is bunk."

And that perspective—"history is bunk"—always stands at the heart of the true-church mentality. It also stands at the heart of the terrible irony that finally came to define both the Church of Christ and the larger American nation. For both the church and the nation imagined themselves the universal ark of salvation for all humankind, but finally rejected—sometimes with violence—some of those they once had hoped to save.

In its earliest years, the Church of Christ actively promoted an ecumenical vision. The restored Church of Jesus Christ, it firmly believed, would provide the basis for the unity of all Christians. But when other Christians resisted that vision and refused to flow into the ecumenical ark the Church of Christ had provided, that church—against all empirical evidence to the contrary—slowly began to transform itself from its original ecumenical posture into the one true church outside of which there could be no salvation. In this scenario, other so-called Christians—Presbyterians, Baptists, Catholics, and the lot—would simply be damned to the fires of eternal hell.

Likewise, the American nation imagined itself from an early date as the beacon of hope for the world. That vision explains why the pyramid on the Great Seal of the United States remains unfin-

ished. The pyramid would be completed only when other nations around the globe would emulate the American example, throw off the yoke of dictatorial regimes, and claim for themselves the divine gift of freedom. Thus the famous minister Lyman Beecher proclaimed in 1835 that “nation after nation cheered by our example, will follow in our footsteps, till the whole earth is free.” But when nation after nation refused to follow in our footsteps, the United States exchanged the power of example for the power of the sword, thereby embracing the terribly ironic posture of compelling others to be free—a phenomenon the world has witnessed time and again, first in the Philippines but more recently in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Further, when the nation judged others incapable of freedom on American terms, it enslaved them. And when it determined that some of those “others” were impediments to the American march toward freedom, it launched a war of extermination and eradicated the vast majority of native people from the face of the continent. In this way, “the nation with the soul of a church,” as Sidney E. Mead so aptly expressed it, transformed itself into the nation with the soul of a sect, or perhaps more appropriately phrased, the nation with the soul of the one true church.

In the face of such devastating ironies, one question begs to be answered: how could all this be? How could a provincial church from the American South seriously imagine itself the one true church outside of which there could be no salvation? And how could a provincial nation, global in some respects but severely constrained by geography, language, culture, religion, and political commitments—how could such a nation seriously imagine itself the ark of redemption for all the world? Part of the answer surely lies—as we have seen—in the way both church and nation grounded their identities in a mythic golden age before the Fall and thereby refused to view themselves as the products of history.

The other part of the answer lies in a philosophical perspective that seized the popular imagination in America during the time of the nation’s founding—a perspective known as Scottish Common Sense Realism. Human beings quite naturally view the world through provincial eyes, and therefore typically place themselves at the center of the universe. Common Sense Realism rein-

forced that tendency by denying that history and culture shape our perceptions of the world in which we live. We therefore know the world as it really is and not the world filtered through our own unique perceptions. The obvious upshot of that conviction is that we all can see the world alike, a notion reflected in that pregnant phrase in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” What seemed “self-evident” to Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration, was that all white (not black or red or brown) men (not women) with property (not the poor) were “created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”

Armed with the conviction that we can all see the world alike, both the Church of Christ and the American nation saw their provincial experiences as universal norms. And they did that in spite of the fact that they genuinely sought to conform themselves, not to the corrupted, fallen world of their own time and place, but to the world as it was in that first golden age—Eden in the case of America and the primitive church in the case of the Church of Christ. To discern the shape of that ideal world, the nation peered deeply into the well of nature, even as the Church of Christ peered deeply into the well of Christian scripture and antiquity.

Ironically, however, both nation and church found themselves seduced by what they saw at the bottom of their respective wells, namely, their own reflections. And mistaking those reflections for universal norms, they consigned all those who refused to see the world in the very same way to the fires of hell, in the case of the church, or to slavery, extermination, or coercion, in the case of the nation.

The fact of the matter is this—that the United States, like my own Church of Christ, brings to the table of the world some extraordinary gifts. But to share these gifts with others, both must take some important steps. In recent years, my church has begun to renounce its long-standing claim that it alone is the one true church, recognize the legitimacy of other Christian traditions, and join hands with other Christians to do the work the church was called to do. But to make meaningful progress on all these fronts, the Church of Christ must take seriously its distinctly American history and confess that it is not a one-to-one re-cre-

ation of the church that Jesus' apostles established some 2,000 years ago.

Likewise, for the American nation to realize its potential to bless the world in incalculable ways, this nation must abandon the myth of American exceptionalism and begin to take seriously its status as a nation among nations, created not by the hand of God but by the trajectory of history. It must exchange the power of the sword for the power of example and embrace the fact that freedom in its fullest sense finally means freedom for all human beings to be true to themselves, true to their cultures, and true to the arc of their own particular histories.

But that is a point forever lost on any religion that imagines itself "the one true church," and a point that will be lost on this nation as well, so long as Americans imagine that their country simply reflects those "self-evident truths" that point to the way God meant for things to be.

POETRY

Easter

Robert Rees

My grandson, ten,
hates the rain,
as he does this Sunday morning
when dark clouds bring the sky down.
He announces that he is not going to church:
“I’m anti-Christian.”
His mom says,
“Nevertheless, get dressed.
It’s Easter.”
“You know I don’t believe
all that gobbledygook,”
he replies.
“Don’t forget to tie your shoes,”
she says.

Later at church I see him play
with the baby
in the next row, then snuggle
against his pro-Christian mother.
At times during the hymns
and the sermon,
he listens
while pretending not to.

In the foyer following church he
bends to touch the face of a
Down's Syndrome toddler, echoing
her small slow vowels.

On the way home,
we see a dead raccoon
on the road.
He asks to stop
so we can bury it.
The rest of the way home, he is quiet, then
as we turn the last corner, he says,
"I hope it gets resurrected."

Melancholia

Robert Rees

*Watch what happens sometimes when a young child is allowed
to just have his or her feelings. The feelings usually run their
course and the child comes full circle.*

—Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*

“I’m sad.
It feels like the whole world
is inside me,” says
my five-year-old grandson, naming,
as well as any poet or philosopher,
the invisible darkness
of heart,
the black bile
of soul,
that oppresses
like an anvil sky.

This ancient affliction,
grief gathering to greatness,
anomie the enemy
of King Saul and Jeremiah,
Hamlet and Camus,
Woolf and Styron,
among so many.

Dowland sang it darkly
and Dickinson,
oppressed by winter light,
felt a funeral in her brain:
countless generations
descending to darkness.

Such sadness of soul reaches
even the heavens, as shown
in Dürer's drawing
where the despondent angel,
ungladdened by rainbow or sunburst,
broods with alchemical lassitude
amid symbols of falling time
and empty scales.

Even God,
who sang the whole world into being,
must feel it himself
when the weight of history
presses down, when
sequestered hates
and serial annihilations
lean everything backward to chaos
and no flood or fire
can extinguish
the blackness.

For some it seems an eternity.
For others, it passes
like the going of a great storm,
as with my grandson,
who says,
hours later,
"I'm okay now—
the whole world
is outside me."

Sabbath Baptism

Robert Rees

In 1886, Sister Sallie Stephensen
of Fairview, Idaho, was possessed
of an evil spirit for a sabbath of weeks.
The congregation fasted and prayed, but
the sprit persisted, so the elders
were called—and came—eleven in all.
Pouring a goodly portion of olive oil
on her head from a little blue vial
that had crossed the ocean,
plains, and mountains,
they commanded the spirit out—
but still it wouldn't come, so
after consulting with the bishop,
they baptized her once a day for seven days.

At the Sabbath meeting eleven elders stood
and bore witness to the power of the priesthood,
after which Sallie stood and testified
that the spirit was still in her.
When the benediction was over,
they took her to the river
and baptized her seven times in a row.
It took four of them to put her struggling
body under each time. The remaining seven
stood by to witness that no hem of her
blue muslin dress nor tress of her long red hair
remained unimmersed.

When they brought her up the seventh time,
gasping, water spewing from her mouth, she exclaimed,
whether from exhaustion or actual relief,
“Enough! It has gone from me.”
She lived to be ninety-two and was present
at the baptism of all her children, her grand-children,
and her great-grand children,
but she never once stood again in testimony meeting.

The Hosanna Shout

R. A. Christmas

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

—Luke 8:8

When the Mormons asked sculptor Cyrus Dallin for a statue of their Angel Moroni to top the Salt Lake Temple, initially he refused by saying he didn't believe in angels.

Dallin was a Utahn, born in Springville—but he wasn't Mormon. His parents were converted from Mormonism to Presbyterianism by missionaries from the east.

Dallin's mother, however, urged him to take the commission, which he later said brought him "closer to God" than anything he ever did. The face on his angel was hers.

At noon, on April 6, 1892, when the capstone of the temple was placed, over 50,000 Mormons shouted, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna," three times at the top of their lungs.

The effect, according to witnesses, was deafening, electrifying, astounding—the ground shook. A protestant missionary in the crowd wrote this to her friends in the east:

“It made one realize, very strongly, that Mormonism is yet a great force, that it is by no means ‘dying out.’” Dallin’s twelve-foot, gold-leafed Moroni was set later in the

day—but he died a Unitarian, one of America’s greatest sculptors. (Google him; then re-read this poem, thoughtfully—prayerfully, if you can. Imagine those shouts.)

Beyond (on the Beach)

Brian Brown

Somewhere beyond our fire's glow,
beyond the pops and hisses of the wood,

somewhere beyond the cool sand
covering my feet as I curl and uncurl my toes,

somewhere beyond my grandfather's arms
encircling me as I stand, elbows on his knees,

somewhere beyond my mother's laughter,
beyond my father's voice

another voice rolls and rolls with deafening
softness, rolling from the mouth of a body

lying spread in starless blackness beyond
our small circle, calling, beckoning

with long-reaching arms, inviting us, as it has
for millennia, for however long circles like ours

have gathered on this shoulder of earth,
backs to the dark created by our kindled sparks,

ignoring the infinite waves, turning instead
to one another.

Emptying Pockets

Brian Brown

Unload on the dresser top
black brick cell phone, keys,
waxy-wrapped cough drops,
two mechanical pencils, Hertz
ball point pen, and wallet
from the back, its collected
plastic cards and long fold, empty
but for a few faded receipts.
What else? Paperclip.
Pinch of lint. And
a hazelnut.

Fish it up
from the bottom
corner, slide a thumb
over its ridged curves. Solid,
it was immense between
your daughter's finger and thumb
as, mid-birthday treasure hunt,
blond hair, half fallen, floating
around her head and face,
she stooped, lifted
from the grass
this talisman and,
in spite of everything,
held it up to you:
Look Daddy.

Puzzled

Brian Brown

Two thousand pieces, but who
counts them? Each a puzzle
unto itself, a question of interlocking
limbs and sockets. Each a question
of dependencies, neighbors, rows, and columns.
Colors, shadows, lines, printed hints of a great
whole each piece should fit into—they must fit,
must have a place. But it's too easy
to mistake ground for sky, cloud for castle
wall, and how do you find one bare branch's
place in a stretch of winter forest?
Until the right pieces find their places
these will rattle around the box,
passed over again and again as fingers
comb through, dig in, turn over,
select, inspect, reject.
Start again.
The patience of the piece
rivals the patience of the puzzler, trying
one by one, head to hole, around the
edges of what is already known.

Singing in the Easter Choir beside My Enemy

Michael Hicks

A sustained tone, our conductor says,
must narrate our belief: begin, develop,
then patiently subside. That's what she
learned in the Welsh choirs of her
youth, whose memory lifts and lowers
her arms today. And memory
is what music is, after all, braiding
strands of tone into a language
we almost understand, mistaking it,
perhaps, for the Orient or an inland sea.
Beyond that, she says, is a moment,
one drop on a page
that could land anywhere in the story
of a voice. And that's the instant that
scares me, startles my tongue:
that wire of unison, of tuning my throat
to another's for fellowship. Like the pulse
of crickets at night: they might know better
but can't find a syllable worthier
to plant in their wings. They sing that a night
has many lives, and vice versa, and no
one voice will do for all of them.

Outside the chapel, the aspens rise up,
shaking their best music from the branches.
Inside, I and the man beside me tune our voices
into the cadence, which ends in silence,
which is the sound of forgetting,
the sound of grief cancelled.

Personal Revelation Narratives: An Interview with Tom Mould

Note: Shawn R. Tucker conducted this interview with Tom Mould in April, 2013, in Elon, North Carolina. In 2011, Utah State University Press published Tom's book Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition. Shawn is Tom's colleague at Elon University, and Tom interviewed Shawn as part of his fieldwork. A brief excerpt of the book follows the interview (reprinted with the kind permission of the Utah State University Press).

Tucker: Can you give us a sense of how you got interested in folklore?

Mould: I became interested in Native American narrative, especially in the archetypal figure of the trickster, as an undergraduate student. I studied this figure among the Winnebago with a teacher who was Ponca, and I just couldn't get my mind around it. I couldn't understand a culture that could conceive of a being that was on one side revered as a creator and deity but on the other side was so rude and lascivious. It plagued me to such a degree that I went to graduate school to figure it out. The study of Native American narrative and imagery is in folklore, so that's where I ended up. This study led to years of work among the Choctaw in Mississippi. I wrote a number of things from my work among the Choctaw, which led me to an interest in sacred narrative. I found that these narratives were told over and over again among the Choctaw, and they became the basis for how the Choctaw would think about the present and future. That led me to an interest in sacred narrative and prophecy.

Tucker: How did you encounter Mormonism?

Mould: Growing up as a Catholic in South Carolina, I knew some people who were Mormon but I don't remember there being any-

thing particularly remarkable about them. Then, when I was in Mississippi, one of the Choctaw elders that I worked with told me she was a converted Mormon. Some years later I found myself working on what I hoped would be a comprehensive volume on prophetic narrative. I wanted to add to the fieldwork I had done on the Choctaw, so I was compiling as much material as possible. I noticed that I was getting a lot on Mormon prophetic narrative. This coincided with when you and I were working together, so I started to ask you about it. We had the long van ride from North Carolina to Washington, D.C., where I had questions for you about Mormon apocalyptic narrative. You recommended that examining narratives about the Second Coming would probably prove less useful than narratives of personal prophecy or revelation, and as I started to do the fieldwork it was clear that that was the case.

Tucker: How did your fieldwork start here in North Carolina?

Mould: After we had some initial conversations, you invited me to church, and I remember that you introduced me to the whole ward in Sunday School on that first day. I wasn't quite ready to be thrown into that, but it worked out well. For the next few weeks I would introduce myself until it was pretty clear that everyone knew who I was. Right from the start I wanted everybody to know why I was there. I also spoke with the bishop of the ward, Bishop Doyle. I met quite a few people in the ward from you, but then just being there from week to week I got to know many, many different members of the Burlington Ward. It turned out that all of my real fieldwork was here in North Carolina. When I would travel outside of the state or out of the country, I would attend LDS meetings as often as possible, but the relationships that were most important to the work were formed here. Those visits were helpful for comparing the Burlington Ward with other congregations. Besides this fieldwork, I was also able to do archival work in Utah. This work was also a really important aspect, because it allowed me to bring together the archival work with the fieldwork to create a project that was much more comprehensive than it would have been otherwise. In fact, I would say that the combination of the fieldwork and the archival work is one of the strengths of this study.

Tucker: As you started to look at the narratives that were emerging from your work, what were some of the patterns that you started to see?

Mould: One of the first things I noticed was that people were not particularly interested in prophecies about the Second Coming or the Apocalypse. Once I shifted over to looking at personal revelation, I found that I could sit in meetings and regularly hear those types of narratives. Those narratives were much more in line with everyday practice. One of the next things that I noticed was how pervasive these narratives were. I could hear them during fast and testimony meetings, during Sunday School, and at father-son campouts. There were so many places where these narratives were just an assumption of any given discussion. I would say that I was also surprised to see how open people were, how willing to share such personal accounts they were. It struck me, for example, to see men in priesthood meeting willing to share their spiritual growth and their spiritual obstacles and to even shed tears.

When I started to look at the narratives themselves, I noticed that they tended to show a strong connection between the temporal and spiritual. When people told the stories, they often combined the spiritual and temporal. The questions that people were asking were tinged by theology for issues that ranged from small to very large.

Tucker: By the end, what were some of the larger patterns that you saw?

Mould: This is a group where story is at the forefront of their religious practice. And I would add that story is so important that people are conscious of what they tell and how they tell it. There's a concern about telling stories properly and understanding the social and the persuasive power of the stories. Part of that is an awareness of sharing things that are too private or too sacred, but another part is the concern about how these stories might be compelling or even manipulative. I found that some people were wary of how a story might attempt to emotionally maneuver or compel an audience to a particular conclusion. There was a conscious effort on the part of some people to not do that.

But another part of this concern about storytelling is a concern with self and how one might be seen as a spiritual authority

or great person. In this respect I noticed different rhetorical strategies that people used to make a space to mitigate the claims of social prestige that could come with these narratives in an effort to maintain a sense of humility on the part of the narrator. This effort is important to me, because of the research on *communitas*, or the idea that when one worships one sheds the skin of secular life in such a way that people come together without those trappings. What most scholars have found is that this is really difficult to do. Even within rituals there are hierarchies that are established. These hierarchies make the ideal of *communitas* difficult, if not impossible. In the LDS Church, it is true that you can have a bishop who also works third shift, but there can still be hierarchies within the ward. So it was interesting to see how an individual might navigate the desire to seem credible and genuine on one side against the fear of seeming proud or showy on the other side.

There were also some topical patterns. I noticed that women more often than men would receive personal revelation about the emotional well-being of their children, where men might tell narratives about receiving a prompting to look out for the physical well-being of children. Women's narratives tended to be closer to home, where men's narratives were more often outside or away from the home. I found lots of narratives about marriage and missions and about difficult questions surrounding those decisions. I noticed that it was very rare to have the failed revelation story. Most of those narratives would be about someone's failure to act upon a prompting or about someone's failure to properly understand that prompting. I found it interesting to see how people dealt with revelations that didn't turn out as they expected.

From a wider, anthropological angle, one of the conclusions that also struck me was about the oral versus the written. When I started I would have assumed that the written version would be more accurate, since the oral version could be changed over time and could reflect the needs of the narrator at that particular moment. In fact it was a conversation with someone here in Burlington that helped me see that the opposite is probably true. He said that he would trust the oral over the written, since the written might have some of the more colorful and accurate details elimi-

nated. If you think about the reasons why people write these down and why they write personal histories, those histories are written for posterity versus an audience of one or two in an oral performance or sharing of the story. Elements that could be shared with a few family members may have details that one would not want to share with outsiders or would not want passed down as a family heritage.

And I would add that a final pattern is the difference between descriptive and prescriptive narratives. There are a number of stories that are prescriptive, where the present is clear but the future is unclear. An example is someone getting a prompting to get off of a particular train or turn the car around and go check on a child. The narrator sets up how the presently prescribed activity is more or less clear but the outcome is not. Such narratives often continue with an account of why that action was important. The other type are narratives where the future is more or less clear but the present is not. Someone may see a dream of a particular person who will help out, but cannot, in the present, identify that person. Patriarchal blessings are often part of descriptive revelation narratives.

Tucker: What has the book's reception been like?

Mould: I have been really pleased with how well the book has been received. It's gratifying for me that it is been reviewed more than any of my previous works combined. And frankly these have been the strongest reviews as well. The book has been reviewed by scholars inside the church and outside the church, but most have been inside. I was also really gratified by reviewers who, by their own admission, were ready to dislike the book and were hesitant about a dissection of their spirituality. To see those reviewers find the book helpful is something that really made me happy. I was also pleased with how some of those reviews were by non-academics who found the book accessible, and that is something that's important to me.

I think my biggest concern was the reception on the part of the community. It's one thing to fail among other folklorists or anthropologists, but it is quite another thing to let down or to feel like you have betrayed the people that you worked with in the field. So I'm really happy with the positive response from the peo-

ple that I worked with here in North Carolina. Beyond that I have been able to give some interviews and talks, and it's great when people have good questions and engage with the material in a thoughtful manner. There was also a panel dedicated to the book at the recent conference of the American Folklore Society, and it was great to be part of that.

Tom Mould, *Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2011), 197–201.

from Chapter 4: The Building Blocks
of a Narrative Tradition

[197] Ignoring Initial Promptings

Promptings can be subtle and therefore easily dismissed. They can also be inconvenient to follow and therefore ignored. Stories of ignoring revelation only to realize the harm that followed or the blessing forsaken are common in the narrative tradition. Such stories remind individuals and their audiences of the importance of listening and acting on personal revelation. The experience is common, the message useful, and such stories fit neatly within the narrative tradition (see chapter 3).

Stories where people initially ignore the prompting only to finally listen are also common. This pattern emerges not as a distinct type of experience or story but rather as a motif, a distinct narrative element that recurs frequently. Keith Stanley initially ignores the prompting to take a different route home but finally listens and avoids a car accident (see chapter 2 for complete narrative). Shawn Tucker ignores the Holy Ghost three times before finally pulling over, thereby protecting a mother and child from a runaway trailer (see chapter 3 for complete narrative). Elder Aaron Chavez ignores a prompting to tract in a particular trailer park; when he finally acts on it, he finds a woman eager to learn

more about the church. A young mother working on her parents' farm gets a feeling to stop filling the gas tank and check on her father but dismisses it. The feeling persists and she finally goes and discovers her father trapped under the combine.¹ In a more common experience, the roles are reversed and parents are prompted to save their children: [198]

So there was this woman, and she was in her room doing something, and her little child was having a bath in the other room, and she just heard this voice that said: "Go check on him. Go check on him." And she thought, "No, no, no." And she heard it again and again. And so finally she went into the bathroom, and he had gone and plugged in the hair dryer and he was just about to climb back into the tub and she grabbed it from him and saved his life.²

The choice to include an aspect of the revelatory experience that shows human weakness is not only honest but humble, and humility is vitally important in sharing personal revelation (see chapter 2). The result of being both common to experience and socially useful in performance is that hesitating before acting has become a recognizable motif in personal revelation narratives.

As a motif, such hesitation can shift from a simple element of one's experience to a narrative feature common to a particular genre. While narrators would not include hesitation where there was none in sharing stories of their own experience, they may do so when narrating other people's stories. Without personal memory to fall back on, motifs can emerge as useful narrative resources.

One of the most well-known stories of an unsolicited prompting by the Holy Ghost is the story of Wilford Woodruff, who is prompted to move his wagon just before lightning strikes. Woodruff, president of the church from 1889 to 1898, shared this story often. He published it in the *Millennial Star* newspaper twice, the *Deseret Weekly* newspaper, and in the Faith Promoting Series published by the Juvenile Instructor Office. In 1898, he shared the story orally during general conference. Since then, the story has appeared in church magazines, newspapers, and teaching manuals. LDS authors from both the General Authorities and the lay membership have also picked up the story, publishing it in books intended for faith promotion, historical survey, religious instruction, and scholarly analysis.³

Versions of Woodruff's story are similar but not identical. The most frequently cited version is the one from the *Millennial Star* on October 12, 1891:

After I came to these valleys and returned to Winter Quarters, I was sent to Boston by President Young. He wanted me to take my family there and gather all the Saints of God in New England, in Canada, and in the surrounding regions, and stay there until I gathered them all. I was there about two years. While on the road there, I drove my carriage one evening into the yard of Brother Williams. Brother Orson Hyde drove a wagon by the side of [199] mine.⁴ I had my wife and children in the carriage. After I turned out my team and had my supper, I went to bed in the carriage. I had not been there but a few minutes when the Spirit said to me, "Get up and move that carriage." I told my wife I had to get up and move the carriage.

She said, "What for?" I said, "I don't know."

That is all she asked me on such occasions; when I told her I did not know, that was enough. I got up and moved my carriage four or five rods, and put the off fore wheel against the corner of the house. I then looked around me and went to bed. The same Spirit said, "Go and move your animals from that oak tree." They were two hundred yards from where my carriage was. I went and moved my horses and put them in a little hickory grove. I again went to bed.

In thirty minutes a whirlwind came up and broke that oak tree off within two feet from the ground. It swept over three or four fences and fell square in that dooryard, near Brother Orson Hyde's wagon, and right where mine had stood. What would have been the consequences if I had not listened to that Spirit? Why, myself and wife and children doubtless would have been killed. That was the still, small voice to me— no earthquake, no thunder, no lightning; but the still, small voice of the Spirit of God. It saved my life. It was the spirit of revelation to me.

The second most common version comes straight from Woodruff's journals, published in *Leaves from My Journal*. In this version, only his wife and one child are with him in the wagon; the other children are in Brother Williams's house. Also, he mentions mules rather than horses. The major plot elements and much of the language, however, are the same.

The third version is less common but is the one example of an oral rather than written narrative. Woodruff told this story during general conference and it is recorded in the conference report. Again, the story is virtually identical. However, one addition is noteworthy. After tying up his animals and getting ready for

bed, Woodruff says: "As I laid down, the Spirit of the Lord told me to get up and move my carriage. I did not ask the Lord what He meant. I did as I was told."

In none of these versions does Woodruff hesitate, and in his one existing oral account, he explicitly points this out. Nor does Woodruff hesitate in the comic strip version of this experience printed in the August 2006 editions of both the *Liahona* (F6–F7) and *The Friend* magazines (28–9) of the church. The version is adapted from the most common one in the *Millennial Star*.

Wilford: I think we should sleep here tonight. I know of some brethren who will let us stay with them.

Wilford, his wife, and one of their children decided to sleep in the carriage.

[200] Wife: It looks like all of the other children are settled down in the house for the night. Good night, Wilford.

Wilford: Good night.

Not long after getting in bed, Wilford heard a voice tell him to move his carriage.

Wilford: I have to move the carriage.

Wife: What for?

Wilford: I do not know. But I do recognize the voice of the Spirit, and it's telling me to move.

Wilford moved the carriage forward. About 30 minutes later a sudden whirlwind blew a nearby oak tree over. The huge tree was snapped into pieces and crushed two fences.

When the Woodruffs' hosts and children came out to look at the damage, they noticed that the tree had landed right where Wilford's carriage was parked before he moved it.

In the morning the Woodruffs were able to safely continue their journey, and they went on their way rejoicing.

Wilford: By obeying the revelation of the Spirit of God to me, I saved my life as well as the lives of my wife and child.

This version had been rewritten to accompany cartoon pictures for the youth but remains faithful to the original in all plot *elements*. As in all the versions, Woodruff tells his wife what he is doing, but he does not delay or wait for further promptings. It was this comic version that Sandy Johnson had read just days before

she retold the story around her kitchen table. She and her husband had been sharing stories of their own personal revelation when we began to talk about the different types of revelation: those that come in answer to prayer and those that come to protect yourself or other people.

Sandy: And there are numerous stories of the protection ones. I mean, I've heard multiple, multiple stories. There was one instance in particular, this lady was driving and she was driving in this one lane of the road, and she got the feeling that she needed to move over. It was a two-lane road, and she needed to move over. And there was a curve coming up. And she didn't know why, because there was nobody there, but she moved over. Well, a few minutes later, this truck comes barreling around the curve and had actually come over into that lane and if she'd have been there, she would have been toast. But because she was over a lane, she was OK. And there's a story about Wilford Woodruff . . . yeah, it was Wilford Woodruff. He had driven his carriage and parked it under this tree, and he was staying with—I'm not sure if it was [201] family or friends, I don't remember that part—but he had parked the wagon carriage under this tree.

And in the middle of the night, this voice comes out in the middle of the night and says, "Get up and move your carriage to the other side of the field."

And he's like, "Unh. It's the middle of the night." And he's just kind of ignoring it, saying, "Unh."

And then it comes again [*thumping the table*]: "Get up and move your carriage to the other side of the field." So he's like, "I guess I'd better go do it" [*laugh*]. So he gets up, moves his carriage to the other side of the field, and then goes back to bed, not knowing why.

Well, some time early in the morning they got a thunderstorm and this lightning bolt comes out of the sky, hit the tree, and knocked it over, right where the carriage had been [*laugh*].

So you *know*, there's another story.

And actually, I think they were sleeping in the wagon.

George: Yeah, they were sleeping in the wagon.

Sandy: Yeah, they stopped at this house, they were staying with friends, but they were sleeping in the wagon, because there wasn't room in the house. And so he got the feeling that he needed to move the wagon. Saved his whole family because of it. But there's all kinds of stories of things like that.⁵

Sandy is not consciously altering the story. Rather, in an effort to recall a story she read a few days earlier, she narrates using pat-

terns common to the genre. The result is that genres self-replicate. Common motifs can be used as a resource for the narration of other people's stories, filling in gaps in memory and ensuring a degree of familiarity, even conformity, to genre norms.

The adoption of patterns common to the *experience* of personal revelation may also reveal ways in which narrators personalize a story by imagining themselves in place of the protagonist. In many of her own experiences, Sandy mentions the difficulty of heeding the Spirit when it runs counter to her own thoughts or desires. For one prompting, she admits that she continues to resist for personal reasons. Recounting the story of Wilford Woodruff's revelation, she places herself in his shoes. She imagines being woken up in the middle of the night to go through the arduous task of moving a wagon and team of horses. The result is a dramatization of a bleary, begrudging, but eventual acquiescence to the voice of the Spirit, a scene reflective more of Sandy's humble character than of Wilford Woodruff's.

Notes

1. This story was collected by USU student Elise Alder from her "adopted Grandma," a woman who served in this role for many of the neighborhood children. Elise prefaced the story by noting: "While I listened to this story, I could feel the deep faith that Opal has carried throughout her life. She stresses to me through this story the importance of being in tune with the spirit, especially when someone else is depending on you. As you read this story, you will also recognize testimony" (1984: 12–13, Wilson Archives). The other stories mentioned are from my own fieldwork.

2. Camille Allen recorded this story from a fellow BYU student, who heard it from her Merrie Miss teacher, the woman in the story. After telling the story, the student added that she believes people do receive promptings, even though she has not received one: "I like stories like that even though I've never had one because it makes me believe that I could have one" (Allen 1996, Wilson Archives).

3. Wilford Woodruff published the story in the *Millennial Star* newspaper twice (first on December 12, 1881, and again on October 12, 1891), in the *Deseret Weekly* (September 5, 1891), and in his journal, parts of which were published by the Juvenile Instructor Office as *Leaves from My Journal* (1881a:89). He also told the story during a general conference in 1898 (*Conference Reports* 1898: 30–31). Since then, other leaders

have retold the story, resulting in its republication in church magazines (see, for example, G. Hinckley 1982) and church newspapers (see “Withstanding Life’s Storms” in *Church News* [Hyde 2001]). Church teaching manuals have also picked up the story for use in their Primary lesson books (“The Holy Ghost Helps Me,” lesson 7 in *Primary 1: I Am a Child of God*, 1994: 19–21) and in the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series, a kind of greatest hits of past church presidents, one volume of which is devoted to Wilford Woodruff (2004:46–7). Finally, the story has been reprinted in faith-promoting books such as Preston Nibley’s *Faith Promoting Stories* (1943: 24), the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers’ book *Heart Throbs of the West*, Vol. 3 (1941: 339–40), church histories such as *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (Durham 1946:295–6), and church-sponsored books such as General Authority Gerald N. Lund’s *Hearing the Voice of the Lord* (2007:108–9), as well as scholarly works such as Austin and Alta Fife’s *Saints of Sage and Saddle* (1956: 211–212) and Austin Fife’s “Popular Legends of the Mormons” (1942: 111–112).

4. Brother Williams was a local member of the church. Orson Hyde was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

5. Sandy Johnson told this story on August 6, 2006, just days after having read the Wilford Woodruff story in the August *Friend* magazine with her children. See chapter 5 for additional discussion of the Wilford Woodruff story as a specific tale type.

What It Means

Reed Richards

I was looking at the morning through the window in the front room like a bear in a cage remembering somewhere there are meadows, and I noticed how much water was running down the gutter from the spot where the sprinkler was sprinkling. It made me sigh. At six o'clock Dad had set the sprinkler there and turned it on and instructed Odell and Charles to move it at intervals. He opened both bedroom doors and stood back so they both could see him. He said, "If you start now you'll be done by eight." But they had gotten up at eight-thirty, eaten cold cereal and run off in different directions knowing, I'm sure, what they were running away from. Now it was ten.

When I asked Mother whether my afternoon would be free she said we would have to see how things went, and I asked if she would like me to take crying Klayne outside for some fresh air. "It might do him some good," I said. Mother said he was too sick just then, and maybe in a day or two. I made up a poem that I liked to tell him for times when we I took him outside:

*Peonies are pretty as ponies,
And roses, the redder the better.
The marigolds can make you sneeze.
But the snapdragons, oh! watch out for the bees!*

He couldn't hear it, but he could see it. When you put a lively look on your face it often made him smile.

I heard Mother singing "Danny Boy" to poor young Klayne. She said as long as he was crying and fussy to stay in and do some household chores, make the beds and were there any dirty dishes in the sink? "If there's anything else I need I'll tell you," she said. "When Klayne settles down you can go play with your friends." I said, "What if he never settles down?" and she said, "Your friends

will be around all day and every day. It won't be hard to find them."

The lawn must have been ready to float away. I decided I would have to move the sprinkler and had barely come out on the porch when I saw Mrs. Caldwell, dressed in brown, just turning the corner of State Street a block away and starting down our direction, drunk and all out of adjustment, making her way toward home. I decided to wait until she had passed.

* * *

People could talk the worst scandal about Mrs. Caldwell, but at the end they would add, "Well, she is quite different" like they were excusing themselves for talking about her by excusing her for giving them things to talk about. Before she went downhill, before the façade began to crumble like Uncle Leo said, she had been as flashy as a movie actress—not the star of the movie but the brazen woman who gets in her way, like Joan Crawford got in Norma Shearer's way in *The Women*. Some of the details in that gossipy movie were lost to me, but I knew Norma Shearer's husband liked Joan Crawford, who sold perfume, better than he liked Norma Shearer, who stayed home all day and had servants. Mrs. Caldwell, dulled looks and heavier figure, didn't match that image anymore, but she still seemed to have that sense of herself in the evenings, walking downtown with her nose in the air somewhere between the horizon and midnight. I imagined Miss Crawford would have been the same, putting on airs and acting like she was the pageant everybody wanted to see.

I was weeding the rose garden in front late one afternoon and saw Mrs. C. walking smartly up the sidewalk dressed in a silky blue outfit with a little white tam on her head cocked forward and to the side and keeping the sun out of her right eye but not her left. She wore crimson lipstick and more mascara than I'd ever seen outside of the movies and had on heels. Some ladies wore heels to the movies and some wore them to church, but she was going to the pool hall, I think, though if she was trying to catch someone's attention she could have caught it anywhere dressed and made up like that. She spied two of the neighbor ladies, Mrs. Moser and Hilda Fellows, talking in the garden of the yard of the corner

house next door to ours, Mrs. Moser's house. In the late sunlight they were examining a hydrangea bush whose leaves had spots on them. Mrs. Caldwell approached them, smiling aggressively and confidently and with a look in her eye that suggested she was about to privilege them with the gift of her experience and expertise. The ladies weren't arguing or trying to figure out any problem, they were only tisk-tisking about what they saw. When they saw Mrs. C. they stopped their conversation and greeted her politely. She looked at a leaf. "Bugs," she stated. "Oh no, not bugs," Hilda Fellows said. Mrs. Caldwell, who probably knew nothing but rumors about gardening, suggested it was over-fertilized, and they said, "No, it's . . ." Mrs. C. interrupted and said it must not be getting enough water, and they said, "No, no, it's just sun scald." Well, anyone who doesn't know what sun scald is should probably not be giving advice about gardening. Hilda Fellows started to remind Mrs. Caldwell how two days previous, a very hot day, it had rained while the sun was shining, a donkey's wedding, but Mrs. Caldwell interrupted her and said, "Then if there's nothing that can be done you will have to pull it out and burn it so it doesn't spread." Mrs. Moser feigned surprise and gratitude. "Mrs. Caldwell, it is so kind of you to give your attention to my little garden!" she said. "But sun scald, you know, doesn't spread." The two ladies looked at each other and couldn't help grinning. In a huff, Mrs. Caldwell said, "Never mind, it's not my garden, so why should I bother?" When she passed me, walking more quickly than before, with a blush and a frown on her face and her chin a little higher, she glanced at me and whispered, "Biddies!" I could see she felt insulted and thought that Mrs. Moser had half-intended to insult her for being intrusive and knowing nothing. I smiled a sympathetic smile.

Mrs. C. deserved no more of my sympathy after the day I was out in front with Mother and she came along holding Till by the hand. Till was my and Charles's age, and a pleasant though not a close friend. His mother was dressed up in a pale yellow suit with the top two buttons of her blouse undone. Her lips and fingernails were scarlet. And again high heels.

"Hello, Bertha," she said, "isn't this a nice day for a trip to the dentist?"

"Is that where you're going?" Mother said.

"It's Till," she said, "with an abscess that needs to be lanced." (At "lanced" my stomach fell a little.) "A nice way to spend a morning, isn't it? With a good long hot pointy needle." (Her eyes narrowed at Till.) "I could do it myself and save myself some money!" She laughed.

"Poor Tillery!" Mother said. "Let me see, Till." She took his chin and turned his head to the left. She knew where the abscess was—he'd had it already at least three days. His jaw was swollen and red and he looked miserable. She felt his forehead for fever. She had told Dad the day before that if Till's mother didn't take him to the dentist she would take him and pay for it herself. ("You won't pay for it," Dad said. "You'll give her the bill.")

Mother was saying, "You look very nice for the dentist," and Mrs. C. was saying, "He's a good-looking man. I always dress for good-looking men." Till took a small polished stone out of his pocket and held it out to show me. It was spotted black and white and gray like granite with a black vein through the middle.

"Pretty," I said. "Can I see it?"

He handed it to me. "Where did you get it?" I said. "What kind of rock is it?" Just then Mrs. Caldwell put her hand like a big spider over Till's face. It was awkward and cruel—I've never seen anything like it. "Tillery," she said, "what are children supposed to be when grownups are talking? Quiet? What grownups have to say is more important than what children have to say. Mrs. Hobbs must think I am raising a little animal! I don't know where Till gets his manners, Bertha. Where do you get your manners, Till? Probably your father." She had touched his swollen jaw and made him cry out loud, and one of her fingernails actually left a small scratch in front of Till's right ear. She let go of his face and patted his head. She looked at Till, who was whimpering. "Shut up, Till," she said, "or you're going to get it when we get home." Till rubbed his face. His mother bent over him. "Come on. You know I wuv you," she said in a sarcastic baby-talk voice. "You're lucky your own kids are so well-behaved," she said to Mother, who had gone a little pale with anger and an effort not to say anything.

As Till and his mother went on up the street, Mother looked at me and rolled her eyes heavenward. I felt guilty. I had spoken and

Till had caught heck. *Were* kids only supposed to be quiet around grownups? Till's mother was just showing off.

But Till never complained about his mother and he loved to brag about his dad. His dad had been in the Army and could do twenty-five one-arm pushups with either arm. He had done wrestling. His dad knew lots of jokes, and were they funny! His dad, Till said, never met a man he couldn't make his friend. It may have been true. Mr. Caldwell was tall and broad-shouldered, with a very short haircut. He seemed to laugh a lot. He could have been a high school coach or a boxer but was actually an accountant. In his way he was no better a parent than his wife was, but he didn't make a spectacle of it the way his wife did. Other kids complained about their parents because their parents made them do things they didn't want to do. But their parents didn't put themselves in front of their kids, didn't aggrandize themselves at their children's expense, didn't leave damage when they touched them. Other parents didn't lock their kids out of their house and throw parties with lots of drinking. Not until the last guest had gone could Till get back in, and that was only if the last guest hadn't locked the door going out, because Till didn't have a key and by then Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell would usually have been in no state to get up and open it. If you had set fire to their house they'd have died in their sleep and not known they were dead until the devil snuck up behind and said, "Gotcha!"

They might have thought that making Till stay outside was the best thing to do as parents, not exposing him to the raucous and profane chaos of their social life, but it was really rotten, pretty sad and outrageous. As soon as Mother found out Till was being locked out she told Till to come to our house and sleep on the couch, just ring our doorbell any time, even the middle of the night. Dad eventually bought a second-hand roll-away bed for him to sleep on. We gave him dinner if he hadn't eaten or hadn't eaten well, and Mother got him a toothbrush and taught him to say his prayers before he went to bed. Charles especially became his friend and took Till everywhere with him. I liked him too. He had the same sandy bruiser haircut as his dad, a crew cut, and it made him stand out. I thought Till was handsome with his brown eyes. I thought maybe after a few years I should fall in love with him and

marry him. Odell wasn't enthusiastic about him. The one time he tried to play a mean trick on Till like he always did on Charles and me he got into big trouble with Dad. As far as Odell was concerned Till wasn't family unless he could be mean to him. But Till *was* a member of the family, a special one, but more ours than his parents'. All the same, I had to admit that he was never happier than on mornings when his parents had gone to bed early, without any drinking, and woke up early and his mom made breakfast. He always told us all about it, and we were always glad for him. It was fair enough. I wanted to keep Till with us, but it was right to hope his parents would straighten up and be good parents all the time.

Late one night, when Till had been locked out and we were fast asleep in our beds, we were woken up by pounding on our back door and hysterical shouting, like a bat had got tangled in someone's hair. It was Mrs. Caldwell demanding that Till be given back so she could take him home. We weren't hiding him from her. We assumed he had told her where he stayed. But she wasn't entirely oriented to the sober world and she had pounded on several doors, knowing she was looking for us, but the wrong people kept answering.

This time it was Dad, and she shrieked, "Is my blankety-blank boy in here?" (The blankety-blank was profane.) "Give him the blankety-blank back!" (The blankety-blank was vulgar.)

"Yes," Dad said. "He's not going home with you."

"He's mine!" she shouted. "He's my property! I'll call the . . ."
"Cops," Dad said. "I'll call them for you."

She quieted down. Dad had a talk with her. He told her that she was never to do this again, never to come shouting through the neighborhood in the middle of the night. For Till's safety he was staying with us that night and any other night we thought it was necessary. I was standing on the basement landing in my pj's and slippers and heard this. Dad made very sure Mrs. C. understood him. Till was still asleep. Dad told Mrs. C. to straighten out.

She didn't do it, though. What happened instead was that for a time the parties just got more frequent and louder. At night on the Caldwell's block their house was like the one jumping bean in the box still jumping and laughing and shouting and breaking bot-

ties. There were lots of complaints from neighbors and visits from the police. But then quite suddenly there were no more parties. Instead, on most evenings Mr. Caldwell would be seen getting in his car and driving southward out of town and staying away all night. After no more than a week or two of this Mrs. C. started coming out shortly after he left. She would be dolled up and would walk past our house to town. It was said Mr. C. was seeing another woman, spending time with her in other words, like Norma Shearer's husband spent time with Joan Crawford—some said in Lewiston and some said in Smithfield or even Logan—and that he had started doing this after he had found Mrs. Caldwell in a drunken situation with another man at one of his own parties. He was so mad he gave them both a black eye, one by one, and was still so mad at her and ashamed of himself that he couldn't stay at home with her any more. But it was only a big guess that he was seeing another woman—I mean, I don't think anyone followed him, though I suppose someone might have come across him in one of those towns. Then after a while it was rumored that it wasn't just one other woman, that if the Caldwells weren't faithful to each other, neither were they faithful more than once in a row to anybody else. They changed company as often as you might change radio stations. But Preston was just a small place—all the towns were except Logan. Very occasionally, news would break over the back fences of violent jealousies and scandals, always prompting Uncle Leo, when he heard of them, to say, "Not enough ponies on the merry-go-round."

I didn't really know what any of this meant. Soon enough Till was staying at our house every night, and even though he seemed happy, and I was very pleased to be able to do good for him as Jesus taught, I was curious to know the truth—what brought all this about? I asked Till: "Where does your dad go every night? Does he have some friends somewhere? Where does your mother go? Why don't they ever take you with them?" He said he didn't know. I said, "Poor Till! We are very kind to you." I told Mother that Till didn't know where his parents went at night, so should we try to find out for him? Mother said, "Oh, Charlene, you didn't ask him that! It's not nice! It's a heartbreaking situation!" I felt very bad, and when I saw him later on I said I was sorry. "Sorry about what?" he said. "For breaking your heart," I said. He looked at me

like I had him mixed up with someone else. "I didn't mean to," I said.

When I was around six I had a notion, showing what elaborate lengths children can go to to explain the world, that when people got married they had to sleep in the same house unless one of them was away on business or visiting relatives, and when they slept in the same house they slept in the same room and the same bed or in beds next to each other, as in the movies. When they did that and because they were married, God made them dream the same dreams, which showed that they were one, like the Bible said they were supposed to be, so if they do all this according to that commandment and hold hands and kiss, God makes them have babies. A natural law of creation that only applied to married people, which I knew because with the one baby doll I ever had (I never really cared for dolls) I told everybody I was its mother and Charles was the father, and Mother explained to me that brothers and sisters can't have babies together. But with married people, when a married person slept in the same bed or in the next bed with someone they weren't married to, that was when they were being unfaithful because it showed they didn't have faith in God.

By the time I was nine, I looked back at those notions as fanciful and childish. I had found out that people who are not married can and do have babies, though it was not something often spoken about. Knowing this raised more questions and made me feel frustrated and ignorant. One momentous thing I knew, because I was told by Odell, who was three years older than Charles and me and already a scientist, was that what husbands and wives did in their beds at night was make babies. "All night long?" I asked him. He said, "Of course." "Every night?" I asked. "Absolutely," he said. "Then why don't they have babies all the time?" "I can't tell you," he said. "You're too young." It was something to think about.

So the older I got the more mysterious it seemed. I knew Mrs. C. did things wrong that were somehow involved with this, things that sent her home still drunk and with tousled hair, her lipstick smeared and misapplied, her blouse buttoned wrong—a funhouse mirror version of herself—and not just from drinking but from drunken situations like the one Mr. Caldwell found her

in, whatever it may have been. But she didn't ever come home with any new babies or a rise in her belly.

* * *

I had a cousin by marriage and an uncle, both, who drank. By the end the cousin could actually be seen to drink, which explained a lot of strange and obnoxious behavior, and the uncle, who never drank in front of us, never tried to keep it secret in the first place. Why people do it I have never yet solved, and I wouldn't be in the least tempted to do it myself just to see. You drink something—beer, wine, spirits—and it makes you dizzy and goofy. People giving talks in church have said that even just a thimbleful could make you an alcoholic, and, while that sounds farfetched, I would never be the one to try to prove them wrong. We might play games in the yard and twirl around and get dizzy and shout, “Look! I'm drunk! Carry me home!” but can someone sober really wish to make herself so dizzy that she stumbles around and falls down and then wakes up feeling sick? I knew that some people it made exuberant and hilarious until they went too far, some it made cruel, and some it made sleepy. In the summertime you could walk past the city park on any Saturday afternoon or evening, and see migrant farm workers around the picnic tables and in the shade of the elms and cottonwoods, marking the end of a work week and getting their Friday night cash pay, much of which they had already drunk off the night before. From the middle of the afternoon on, men with sun-browed arms and ropey muscles would be slumbering under the tables and the trees, even the bumpy shade of the big oak. On Sunday morning you couldn't walk through the park, if you were out for a stroll, without having to go around a dozen or more empty and mostly empty bottles of something usually called Tokay or Muscatel, some only partially exposed from the tops of brown paper bags, and if you accidentally kicked a bottle it might send a pink spray of what remained in it on your shoes. The odor was, as I would have put it, pointy, and made a sharp little pain in your sinuses that could bring tears. It was not altogether bad. It smelled like rotting fruit, which is what Odell said it pretty much was. “Rotgut,” he called it, “bum wine.” It attracted yellowjackets.

It seemed like my grownup cousin Audra's husband, Kenneth Howard, who would never have been found lying down in the city park, was born to give offense. Before he came to be known as a drunk he was known as a teller of off-color jokes, none of which I ever understood, and before that he was known as a boaster. He gained reputations for being obnoxious and doing bad as he went, like a boulder gathers rocks in a rockslide. He was someone who was bound eventually to lose control of himself. Kenneth Howard was a dentist and a good-looking man, very tall and broad-shouldered. He reminded me of Mr. Caldwell, only a little bit taller and more broad-shouldered and a little better looking. He liked to brag about how excellent he was at everything. He bragged about how being the Sunday School Superintendent made him a bigwig in his ward. He bragged about how he helped teachers who weren't cutting the mustard by taking over their class in the middle and teaching the gospel principles with more force and vividness. "The gospel is really true when I teach it," he said, as if he'd invented the Church. "They'll never forget it," he said. He bragged about how he dealt with rowdy teenage boys, including the ones who were giving a "sly eye" to girls, by taking them out of class by the collar or by their ear and reading them the riot act in the hall or, better, outside where every class could look out the window and see him and know how seriously he took his calling and how much business he meant. "They'll never forget it," he said. He used Odell to demonstrate his stern lectures once, and when his face got close to Odell's Odell held his nose not to smell Kenneth Howard's breath, which made Kenneth Howard furious—you could see it in his eyes—but everyone was laughing, so he had to laugh too. "Kenneth," said Uncle Leo, putting his arm around Kenneth Howard and squeezing his shoulder, "we'll never forget it!" And we all laughed even harder.

At about the time that Kenneth Howard added teller of dirty jokes to his reputation as a glad hander and a bragger and a bully, and before all this turned into outright abominable behavior, it began to be noted at these family birthday and holiday festivities that he paid frequent visits to the bathroom or to his car. Every time, he came back acting a little bit sillier—braggier, jokier, and louder, more demanding of everyone's attention. Eyebrows were

raised. He grew more unsteady, gave offense, told his off-color jokes and claimed they didn't mean a thing because, you see, they were only jokes. I remember the beginning of one, or possibly several, of them having to do with a farmer's wife and a traveling salesman. Since several there, including Uncle Leo and Aunt Peggy, were farmers and their wives, those jokes were the ones that caused the most frowning and grumbling and were most frequently interrupted by protests and refusals to let him finish, so I think I only ever heard the first halves of any of them. He began telling one joke concerning a farmer's wife and a gypsy, and Uncle Leo turned bright red. If he'd been in a comic strip three lines would have been coming out of each ear and his head would have spouted a tornado-shaped spiral. Every August Uncle Leo let a caravan of gypsies camp on his farm down in the bottoms by the Bear River for a couple of weeks. Everybody knew this, Kenneth Howard as well as anyone, since he and Audra once or twice a summer brought Alice, their little girl, to see the chickens and cows and ride the mare (who happened to be gray) with her daddy. The gypsies helped Uncle Leo where he needed it and he shared vegetables from his garden with them. They tried to teach him how to listen to the wind, but he said all he ever heard the wind say was "Whoosh!" The gypsies were pretty much nice people, not thieves as people would say, and they once gave Uncle Leo a puppy, which ended up our dog, the famous Louie. Before Kenneth Howard got further than mentioning the gypsy and the farmer's plump wife, Uncle Leo stepped in front of him, and loudly said, "Kenneth, that is the last joke you will ever tell us. And if you ever think of sneaking in another one I hope you can see that I am big enough to toss you through the door without opening it." Kenneth Howard laughed and said he hadn't meant anything by it, it was only a joke and no reason for getting all hackled up about it. But he didn't try to finish it.

Later in the year, when, in a moment of high spirits, he tried to kiss my cousin, his sister-in-law Alberta, who was nineteen and very pretty, and she shouted and struggled and gave him a slap, and a couple of uncles got up and moved forward like they would have to separate them, Kenneth Howard turned himself into the insulted one: a harmless joke! Why, wasn't it obvious he hadn't meant anything by it? If she didn't want attention, she shouldn't

be so damned pretty. But as time passed there were more and more things he didn't mean anything by. The aspersions and disparagements began to be spoken out loud by the other adults and not hidden from the kids. Someone had told Kenneth Howard a lie—that gin could not be smelled on the breath. Kenneth Howard the dentist.

At the bottom of this downhill path was a crisis that was strange and frightening, but even then funny. It was at our house, Dad's birthday, and the party had moved into our crowded front room after croquet and games in the backyard because evening and a wet summer had brought out unbearable throngs of midges and mosquitos and after them the bats. And it was Alberta again, still blossoming and more than ever trying to stay on the opposite side of the room from Kenneth Howard. Unfortunately, when she wasn't looking he caught her up from behind and clasped his hands in front of her stomach and put his lips and tongue on her neck, and she was so surprised and upset she screamed and jumped as if a mouse had run across her shoes, in the process giving Kenneth Howard a bloody lip and making him bite his tongue. Literally, I mean. Mother lost her temper, one of the only times I saw her do that, and gave Kenneth Howard a piece of her mind, shouting, "Kenneth! For shame! You are drunk! Don't you think we all know that? You are always drunk at every party, and it's not a secret! Shame, shame, shame on you! You go home right now!" It *was* a shame, the shame of having exposed yourself to shame and the shame of discovering that the cloud of shame had been over you for some time without your thinking so. The person most ashamed was his wife, my poor cousin Audra, who was less pretty than her sister Alberta. Her face went red and she covered it with her hands. And her parents, Aunt Delphia and Uncle Ed, were angrier than anyone else. They looked daggers at Kenneth Howard, which between them made a pair of scissors that would have liked to cut off their son-in-law's head and hands. As to Kenneth Howard, he cried and roared, with blood and saliva sliding from his mouth: "Hypocrites! Mormon hypocrites! You can't judge me! How can you judge me?! Thou shalt not judge!" He took a small flat metal bottle out of his blazer pocket and opened it and drank what was left and wiped his bloody mouth with his

sleeve. He roared again. People got out of his way as he lurched about and struck out with his fists, which, because he was so tall and so drunk, were slow and high up and easy for anyone but the wall and a painting by Grandpa Skidmore, which got knocked down, to avoid. He was like a big bear in a little chicken coop, Uncle Leo said afterward. You couldn't tell if he wanted to eat chickens or get out of there. Suddenly the roaring stopped and Kenneth Howard, the entire length of him, fell down on the floor with a big *thump!* and just lay there on his back stretched full out. I thought he must be dead until he started to snore. And cry. He snored very loudly with tears running from his eyes into his ears. Uncle Leo said, "Dolt!"

After Kenneth Howard was gone, carried out, and after Aunt Delphia and Uncle Ed and Audra and Alice and Alberta had also left, which was soon, with their heads down in spite of the hugs and words of comfort everyone tried to give them, one of the aunts said there was the story around that Kenneth Howard had fallen in with a female patient, who was leading him down the garden path. Whatever or whoever it was that made him drink, it was surely his overbearing self-confidence that made him think he could get away with it. With us maybe for a while, but with God too? The King of England wouldn't get into Heaven drunk, so "I'm Superintendent of the Sunday School" was no password to Paradise, even if it *was* a Mormon Sunday School.

I thought about the story later that night. I knew the garden path was an idea and not a real garden path, but I pictured a real one, like one of the four we had in our back garden that went straight back and separated the peonies and dahlias from the gladioli and those from the vegetables. They were bordered with moss roses and alyssum and pansies, and I saw Kenneth Howard being led down one of those paths by a patient, and the patient was Mrs. Caldwell in heels and her pale yellow suit with the top two buttons of the blouse unbuttoned. They held each other and kissed each other and shared liquor from a flat metal bottle and stumbled around drunk, like they were dancing and had lost the beat. Maybe the patient in question wasn't Mrs. C., but it fit with the things I had seen and heard.

Uncle Hugh, in contrast with Kenneth Howard, really was, without trying, the life of a party, and he always came sober, even

when the party was at night, and straight up as a pin and not even smoking. He would never have tried to claim that he wasn't a drunk, but he knew how to behave at family parties, and it was never an issue whether he cared who judged him. He had gone to the Great War never having tasted a drop, and he came back, Uncle Leo said, as horizontal as the killed, a breathing stiff. So he drank, they said, from shell shock, and to feel calm and at peace, to still his fears, he drank because of going through the War. I never heard anyone say he drank because it felt good and he liked it. But who but he would know? I never saw him acting calm and at peace when he was more than half drunk. His wife, Aunt Thelma, and his children suffered the shame of his reputation and the hardship of his irresponsibility and often enough the impact of his hands. They lived in a house that Uncle Hugh was hardly ever able to pay the rent on. The rent was mostly paid by relatives, those being Dad, his brothers, and the husbands of their sisters. Uncle Hugh accepted this charity with good grace and without bearing them any ill will. He even paid his own tithing whenever he had some money of his own left over from what he spent on destroying himself and those he loved. I think Aunt Thelma made him pay it.

Uncle Hugh, I said, always sober at a party, was often the life of it, but not by trying. He was a little man and almost everything he did or said when he was sober was cute. He was fun to play practical jokes on. A loud handclap at the back of his head would raise him straight up out of his seat and send him running into the yard, laughing uproariously by the time he stopped. Place a whoopee cushion under him and he would shout with laughter, re-inflate it and sit on it again and again, and it got funnier every time because of his delight.

Dad was the baby of his family, but Uncle Hugh was the smallest—and baldest too, I should add, without even the fringe allowed the other brothers. He also had the biggest and, as you might expect, the reddest nose. On his own he would drink himself senseless if he had the money, and it became a family responsibility for Dad or Uncle Leo or Uncle Sam or Uncle John or Uncle Will Shumway to hunt him down when Aunt Thelma called or fetch him home from the saloon when the bartender called, and do it

before he got knocked out cold in a fight or reached the point where he was legless and had to be carried.

When he was drunk and still on his feet he could be ugly and cruel and violent. One time he came to our house at night when he was only three-quarters drunk according to him and still standing and very angry about it, and he shouted and shouted like Mrs. Caldwell did the one time but even louder, for all the neighborhood to hear. For some reason he had decided to go door to door starting on our street (we weren't more than three blocks from the closest pool hall), but everyone knew him for the town drunk and no one would give him a single dime for drink. When he got to our house Dad went to the door and wouldn't let him in. "I'm not giving you money to shut you up," he said to Uncle Hugh. "Yell all you want, and when you're done think if tonight isn't a good time for you to start to reform." Uncle Hugh set up a caterwaul about sending his own brother out on the street with nothing but the clothes on his back and would have taken those away if they'd've fit him. I think it amused and embarrassed Dad about equally. "All right, come back," he called to Uncle Hugh. "Stay on the porch," he said, and he went back to his office while Uncle Hugh stood on the porch and smirked. Dad came back with a handful of change. "This is the only time I'm doing this," he said. "Next time I'm tying you up, putting you in a trunk and sending you off to Boise to dry out." He put two dollars in coins in Uncle Hugh's outstretched hands. Uncle Hugh turned away without thanking him, and Dad said, "Hold on a second. Are you going to tithe this?" Uncle Hugh turned around but before he could reply, Dad said, "Never mind, I'll tithe it for you," and he took back two dimes, which made Uncle Hugh laugh. And Dad tithed it too. He put the dimes in an envelope with a note stating it was from Uncle Hugh for tithing and mailed it to Uncle Hugh's bishop.

Another time, Uncle Hugh showed up at the back, and since he was quiet and polite at the door, he was allowed into the kitchen. Mother was washing dishes and I was drying, and before I knew anything, Uncle Hugh grabbed on to me and held me to him and I smelled the unwashable odor of burnt tobacco on his hands and the terrible, stale smell of cigarettes and, I guess, whiskey on his breath and up from his crotch a strong hint of old urine. He held me to him so long and so tight and it hurt so bad

that I screamed, and he still wouldn't let go, singing a loud song that was supposed to be in French but sounded more like cannibal talk in a cartoon, and I cried and Mother yelled and tried to pry me loose, and Dad finally took a big steel pot and banged loudly on it behind Uncle Hugh's head with a big spoon, which made Uncle Hugh jump and let go of me, and I felt a trickle on my temple where it had been jammed up to the middle button of Uncle Hugh's shirt. I touched the little trickle and the sight of the blood on my fingers made me cry even harder, more from the cruelty than from the pain, because I had no doubt Uncle Hugh had done it to be cruel. Uncle Hugh laughed at Dad's trick, but also at my tears. There is still a little scar.

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I never stole, and I lied only under threat, usually from Odell. I never killed anyone and always made my bed when Mother nagged, was kind to animals, kept the Sabbath Day holy according to my lights and did not worship any graven images. I didn't smoke or drink and had never slept in the same bed with anyone since Charles and I had gotten too old to. I only disobeyed the unpunishable part of "Do as your mother says, and be happy about it." Once in Sunday School the teacher asked me to name one of the Ten Commandments and I said, "Early to bed, early to rise." She said it was good advice but not one of the Ten Commandments, and I said, "Are you sure?" It was one at our house, and I hated it but kept it because no one in our house was allowed to sleep past six on school days and seven at the latest during the summer, though when Dad wasn't there to enforce it that commandment often got broken, and when he was there sometimes Dad got us up much earlier to work in the gardens. Of course, sin crept into our world, and none of us was without it. We kids fought and complained and were lazy and didn't do all our chores. We could be mean to each other, and, truth be told, the gossip some of the grownups did and that we learned from them was a sin too, and every gossip agreed about that and was happy to name at least three terrible gossips who should repent. I would have to say that in the balance I was good, but for a while, as I tried to understand what I wouldn't be told and was told not to ask

about, I had my eyes turned, from a distance, to the blurry side in hopes of finding my own explanations. What grownups disapproved of that they wouldn't talk about to children. What, for instance, Mrs. Caldwell did besides getting stinking drunk, I wanted to know. I'd already heard how dreadful it was, so I was sure to deplore it, but when it finally came to the big discovery, how mortifying my curiosity turned out to be! I wanted the illustrated version of capital B Bad and not just the word. In Sunday School Cain killed Abel and that was bad, and Saul was jealous of David and tried to kill him, and that was also very bad. They didn't tell that Noah got drunk and had his clothes off and they didn't tell us the terrible thing Lot's daughters did. They would never have told us that. They told us in a most general way about virtue. They told us that to be unvirtuous was to fall into Satan's temptations. And in the neighborhood Mrs. Caldwell, besides being called "quite different," was sometimes called "unvirtuous," so now that word "unvirtuous" was the veil that hid the truth. I knew a clue though—I knew Mrs. Caldwell went to bars, which were for getting drunk, but also for something else, whatever it may have been. One day my nosiness took me to a bar too, and got what I deserved. I only looked in from the street side of the doorway, but the angels watching over me had decided it was time for me to learn a lesson.

My cousin Marlee and I were walking arm in arm down the west side of State Street at noon. When we came to the Night Owl I saw the door was propped open—probably to air it out—and I saw a chance to satisfy some of my curiosity from the bright side of the entrance. Marlee pulled my arm and said, "Charlene! Charlene! Come on!" and I said, "Wait just a minute." Marlee let go of me and kept walking while I was wondering how people inside could find their way through those dark mazes with very little light and no Jesus. In the darkness, what was exact did stand out: the bar immediately to the right, which I'd seen passing; a few shaded wall fixtures that sent a dull yellow light oozing a few inches up the wall; a dim three-headed globe lamp on the far end of the bar that gave barely enough light to count your change or find your glass when you reached for it, definitely not so much light that the red tips of the cigarettes didn't glow brighter than the light when

the two men sitting halfway down the bar sucked in on them. They were in their shirtsleeves, talking and drinking glasses of amber beer that did happen to catch the daylight from the doorway. They didn't look like terrible people. They may easily have been men who came to Dad's store on Saturday morning with their wives to buy groceries. What was left to see was the icy glitter of reflected light on the glasses and in the mirror behind the bar and the glow of reflected light running down the curved surface of the bar and outlining the shapes of the backs of wooden chairs at scattered tables. The odors that came toward me were almost exactly the smells of Uncle Hugh, his beery breath and his sweaty, smoky shirt. It was also the smell times ten but minus the popcorn, the cotton candy, and the manure of some of the breezes of the July rodeo, where farmhands and farm boys came every year already drunk and making nuisances of themselves to girls. I couldn't see all the way to the back of the room, but I knew it was a pool hall, so there must have been some pool tables.

Besides the two men with their cigarettes and beers sitting at the bar in quiet conversation and the man in an apron behind the bar not paying attention to anyone, I heard some chatter and a sudden raucous laugh from a group I hadn't seen. I had to peer to find them, which I did, on the other side of the room, closer to the front. That laugh coming up from behind me in the tall weeds of an empty lot would have terrified me home. But here, if I was aware of myself at all I was aware of the border between light and darkness that stood between us like a fence, and that I was on the safe side of, the noon side, while they were on the midnight side. Why the boisterous magpie laugh? What was there to be amused about in this place? But then my curiosity all at once disappeared along with my safety when a big male voice boomed out: "Ya comin' in or goin' out? Make up ya mind!" Then the first raucous screech repeated itself and invented at the end of it a woman to have screeched it, who then screeched: "Come on in a pull up a chair, Charlene, and we'll get you a beer! Come on, Charlene, don't be scared! I'll teach ya how to smoke!" How she laughed the laugh of a demon, and all the people in the place laughed a laugh that was neither gay nor kind! My feet dissolved and my knees trembled. I was at the end of the block where Marlee was waiting,

and I was sitting at the curb with my arms wrapped around my knees before I could even consider where I was or how I had got there or where I had been and what I had seen. I was gasping and nearly in tears. It was like a terrible destiny had called to me from inside the bar. "They knew who I was!" I said. "How did they know?" Marlee laughed at me—it was my day to get laughed at, and to deserve it. "I said your name when you stopped at the door," she said. "Remember?" I still felt upset and all the more foolish. Their voices, before the big insult, had helped me locate them. There were two men and one woman, and she had been on the lap of one of the men, and he had his hand somewhere hidden under her skirt, where it definitely hadn't ought to have been. What a dreary, blind place to look for pleasure! What a wicked place to be unfaithful to your husband and your child!

* * *

I had postponed my plan to move the sprinkler until Mrs. Caldwell passed, which I knew she must do, but after a minute or two of being lost in my thoughts, I realized that she still hadn't reached our house, let alone her own, which was across the next street and a half a block farther down. So I went through the foyer again and opened the door, staying behind the screen door, and peeked, to check her progress, toward where I had seen her coming. She was still some ways up the street, and had stopped in the shade of an ash tree and was hiking up her satiny brown dress to straighten her stockings. But she kept stumbling backwards when she did this and having to start over. She was wearing heels, but they were wide and not very tall and couldn't be blamed for her unsteadiness. A flicker with its polka-dotted belly and funny red moustache landed just above her on a limb of the tree she was under and started drumming rat-a-tat-tat, and she looked up, startled, and stumbled backwards again. Directly across from us on our wide First North, shaded by tall cottonwoods, was the little white house with blue trim and blue door where Hilda Fellows lived. Hilda was a widow who always did good and had good done to, like the widows in storybooks, the ones that weren't witches. She was standing on her blue porch. She was watching Mrs. Caldwell too. We saw each other at the same time and she waved

to me and smiled. Hilda put her finger to her lips and turned and tiptoed back into her house. I saw her front window curtain part slightly and her nose touch the pane and a tiny bit of light glint from the wire rims of her glasses as she peered out. I went inside again too and stood at the front window with the curtains wide open and waited for the wandering Mrs. Caldwell finally to make her way slowly forward as through a dim corridor, past the cut and carefully edged lawns, to a place waiting for her, her home, which may have seemed many weary miles ahead. How many more dangers would there be? What challenges and how would they be overcome? The chaos in her way, of which no sense could be made, would have felt like doom to me. But she needed home. She needed a place to lie down alone and sleep it off.

This was not the Mrs. Caldwell who went to the dentist in heels and lipstick and an unbuttoned blouse, not the sturdy but buoyant, keen-featured but attractive woman from not so long ago. Not the Mrs. Caldwell who reminded me of a woman in a detective movie I'd seen, described by a man in the movie as "bullet-proof and built for high-speed cruising." She'd smoked cigarettes brazenly and said things that made people blush but were, some admitted, often funny and true. By now her brown hair had dulled some. Strands of it had fallen out of the carefully dressed wave that must have held them at the start. She is at a mid-point in the transition to who-knows-what?—something not so buoyant, not so bulletproof.

Watching her on the sidewalk, I remembered the woman in the Night Owl who laughed at me. I remembered the man's hand and where it was placed. It's more than alcohol that has kept Mrs. Caldwell away from her own house. If alcohol makes ladies sit in men's laps, especially, as the gossip suggests, men who aren't their husbands, then this is something I imagine having happened to Mrs. C. There is something men do to women that women assist them with. The maddening Sunday School word "virtue" is in danger from the gossip word "unvirtuous." I was taken away for a moment by all these thoughts, and I closed my eyes and saw, quite involuntarily, Mrs. Caldwell, her hair gone wild, sitting on Kenneth Howard's lap and wiggling and laughing and planting big red kisses all over his face, and Kenneth Howard laughing too,

with one arm around her waist and the other hand somewhere un-virtuous—on her belly where the baby would be. I opened my eyes to get rid of all this and was resolved to stay virtuous always—until I knew what it meant and forever beyond.

I opened the door again, wide this time, and saw Mrs. Caldwell, still one house up, come to a stop and pull her dress around from the high waist that no longer flattered her figure as it might have done last year. She let the waist fall, having adjusted her underwear, something other grown-up ladies would only do in private. She started to walk, pulling at her waist again, causing herself to list to the side, almost spilling off the sidewalk. She appeared to regard the edge of it with alarm, as if it were a high cliff she were teetering on the end of. Mrs. Caldwell, who was rather tall, bent dangerously forward and threw out her arms and rowed them backwards to regain her balance, which she did sideways with her arms still extended, like a duck landing in a pond. She then navigated back to the center of the sidewalk before moving forward again, though not exactly in a beeline. I've never seen someone make such a winding path out of such a straight one.

Her progress fascinated me, and, unless I were to be called to some task, once she had passed our yard I would probably step off the porch and not move the sprinkler until I saw her turn up the walk to her own house. Was this the same blatant, insensible nosiness that made me stop in front of the pool hall? Was there a kernel of scorn in my interest, an ounce of disgust? If any other person was observing this perilous journey, she (or he) would probably discreetly stay inside like Hilda Fellows was doing, and not act, as I did, as if it were a county fair sideshow, like the three-legged horse. She (or he) may have talked about it later in whispers but would be watching now mainly to ensure that Mrs. Caldwell stayed safe.

I'm coming to the great, epic event—the crossing of the garden hose—at about the same rate at which she came to it. That was where the fun took place. The sprinkler, as I said, had been in one place watering the strip of lawn between the sidewalk and the curb for hours when Mrs. Caldwell came wandering homeward at mid-morning after a mystery night of what the ladies called catting and carousing, when, crossing in front of our house, she discovered an impediment: a green garden hose across her way as

imposing as a serpent and more insurmountable than a castle rampart in the scale she perceived. Her effort was heroic, and more so for having to struggle with her own unsteady limbs and unruly balance. Her long march brought her finally to this important test, and she stopped short to review the circumstances, scouting the obstacle with her eye from one edge of the sidewalk to the other. She turned facing the street and swayed a little, like a ship, blowsy Mrs. Caldwell, and, either thinking she'd solved the problem or that she could meet it head on, lifted her right leg way up with her back to my view, as if she were about to straddle a fence. Either she couldn't lift her leg as high as she thought she had to, or once she had it lifted she couldn't launch herself forward, so she had to lower it in order not to fall down backwards.

Facing the garden hose again, foiled by it, she looked surprised and crestfallen. Disappointed, perplexed, determined, Mrs. Caldwell raised her hand and drew back a strand of hair that had fallen in front of her eyes and walked the length of the part of the hose that lay across the sidewalk, about four feet, looking, I imagine, for a passage, a gap she might go through. Finding none, she devised another tactic, and craftily decided to turn the other way and go over left foot first. She was facing the house this time, and I was able to observe her concentration, her knit brow, and, yes, her tongue, like that of a performer in a farce, thrust between her teeth to the right, like some kind of ballast. I noticed her brown shoes had peep toes, which I liked, and her toenails, like her chipped fingernails, were blood red. She raised her left leg higher and higher, as high as her right knee, giving a long glimpse of her white undergarments, but again not high enough to clear the two inch garden hose, and she was forced to retreat again.

Watching all this, I was as astonished as I was amused. I was pushing back worries, but there would always be plenty of time for those—about Mrs. Caldwell, about Till, and about—I should be honest—myself, the worry that had started with my peering into the bar. But the story was a merry one, and the retelling was even merrier, though I had to be careful who I told it to, not wanting to embarrass Till, and I suppose not even wanting to embarrass his mother. I told Charles in secret. The only friend I told was Marlee because she didn't live in the neighborhood. I told Mother while

she tended Klayne. I told Dad in his office after he came home from the store.

“Know how she finally got across it?” I said.

“No. How?” he said.

“She didn’t. She decided to go around it. She went across the squishy lawn to the curb and back up. She didn’t pay any attention to the sprinkler, and her skirt got all wet. It was clinging to her legs the rest of the way home.”

How he laughed!

It was and still is a funny story, worth laughing about.

* * *

The rest of it was that when she got to the corner, all wet, and had to cross First East, which was very wide, she stopped and leaned forward, holding on to the signpost, and looked up and down, up and down the street. There were no stop signs on any of the corners, so certainly it was a risk for anyone to cross drunk, especially at Mrs. Caldwell’s distracted rate of progress. She waited and waited, turned this way and that, peering as far as she could in every direction. No cars came, but she could not go. I had stepped out on the porch to see if she would make it home and thought of offering to help her across, but was afraid that if any car did come she would end up getting us both knocked over and killed. So I watched her spend nearly five minutes ensuring her safety while no cars came until finally, finally a car passed going north. It was the green Packard of Uncle Will Shumway, a famously bad driver, who did not even slow down or look to see if any other cars were crossing east and west. I understood immediately it was what Mrs. Caldwell had been waiting for. There had to be a car, any car, coming eventually, and once it had passed it could not run her down, and she felt safe to cross. All that was left on the other side was just a little uneventful ways more to her house. No more garden hoses.

* * *

By November, when the bare trees were drifting in the gray, windy sky, that midsummer caper had changed to think about it. For the Caldwells the situation made its onward and downward

progress. Mr. Caldwell had said he didn't love Mrs. Caldwell anymore and had moved out and was living in a basement apartment on the west side of town. People said Mrs. Caldwell was about to be evicted. The time most recently I had seen her in the street again and in the same state as on that summer day, her confused march had declined to an unconscious shuffle. If she'd encountered another garden hose she would have stumbled across it without seeing it and probably have fallen down and hurt herself. No one else I knew of had come down so low, not even Uncle Hugh. Mrs. Caldwell, I was told, had gone to Sunday School when she was a little girl. Then maybe we need bad examples as much as good examples, maybe we need examples of what not to become, and she had never had one and how she had ended up was just a bad accident, like being hit by a car. I decided I would never grow drab and numb like that. I imagined Jesus pitied her and thought then I should too. For Mrs. Caldwell, slovenly and disgraceful, repelled by everything that should have attracted her and held her, maybe there was some kind of virtue in her efforts, at least the virtue of coming home in the morning, but also some kind of love for her to exert herself as she did in the evening and then to suffer as she did afterwards, some kind of desire for something beyond herself and her hideous misery that she failed, always, to reach.

I don't know what became of her, whether she reformed and went back to her vain but generally sober ways or whether she kept drinking until it destroyed her. Uncle Hugh went to Boise for a year and when he came back he was dried up and a non-smoker and stayed that way and lived to be very old going to church and staying home weeknights and not, as would always be part of our memory of him, drinking himself to the floor at every opportunity. A couple of years after the garden hose incident, Mrs. Caldwell moved to Salt Lake and took Till with her. It was a great sadness to our family to lose him. He wrote to us for a while, as we did to him. And then years later, after I was married and living in Salt Lake, I ran across him at Albertson's and we had a nice talk and stayed in touch after that by Christmas card. I was curious about his mother but didn't want to embarrass him, so I kept mum about it.

REVIEWS

“An Icon of White Supremacy”?

Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. 340 pp. Hardcover: \$32.50. ISBN: 978-0-8078-3572-2.

Reviewed by John G. Turner

Jesus and I were the only white people in the sanctuary. One summer, while outside Washington, D.C., on a college internship, I walked across the street to church. When I opened the door and went inside, I saw only black people—with one prominent exception: Above a side door, the church displayed a picture of Jesus. It was Warner Sallman’s *Head of Christ*. I wasn’t sure how church members felt about white visitors, but I didn’t think it appropriate to leave a church simply because of race. So I sat down. In this church, the deacons sat at the front and looked out at the congregation during the service. I wondered what they thought about a twenty-year-old white kid sitting in their church. It turns out they were extremely welcoming. I also wondered why a group of African American Baptists had a picture of a white Jesus.

Ed Blum and Paul Harvey’s *The Color of Christ* would have helped me answer that question. This black church had a white Jesus because previously iconoclastic American Protestants began mass-marketing images of a white Christ in the 1840s. In the early 1800s, American Protestants, including a young Joseph Smith, described visions of Jesus in terms of blinding light. They did not often reflect on his skin color, and they did not depict him in artwork. By the mid-nineteenth century, Americans—white, black, and Indian as well as Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon—almost universally thought about Jesus as having white skin.

In telling their story, Blum and Harvey counter several “myths” about the American Jesus. The first is that “racial and ethnic groups necessarily create God or gods in their own image.” Puritans, Indians, and African Americans for the most part did not depict Jesus in their own image. The American Puritans, grandchildren and cousins of those iconoclastic European Prot-

estants who had stripped altars and destroyed roadside crosses considered it idolatrous to depict Jesus in artwork or in illustrations. "They did not know what Jesus looked like," write Blum and Harvey. "They did not want to know. And they celebrated not knowing" (40). Many non-Puritan American Protestants inherited a general suspicion of religious images from their iconoclastic ancestors. As late as the middle of the nineteenth century, many Protestants would not suffer crosses to adorn their churches, considering the cross a sign of "popery." Those who question the Christianity of the Latter-day Saints because of the absence of cross on their meeting houses and temples would do well to consider how most Protestant churches looked in antebellum America.

Gradually, however, Protestants set those iconoclastic concerns aside. As roads and canals coupled with new publishing houses made the mass distribution of educational and evangelistic tracts possible, Protestants came to realize the evangelistic and pedagogic power of imagery. This brings us to the second "myth" countered by the authors, that "Americans inherited iconography through European artwork and merely replicated it" (20). Americans, the authors contend, did not primarily draw on European artwork once they decided to depict the savior. Instead, they modeled their Christs on the description in the "Publius Lentulus letter," a fraudulent document claiming to come from a Judean governor during the lifetime of Jesus. The letter describes Jesus as having hair "the color of the ripe hazel nut, straight down to the ears, but below the ears wavy and curled . . . parted in two on the top of the head, after the pattern of the Nazarenes. His brow is smooth and very cheerful, with a face without a wrinkle or spot, embellished by a slightly ruddy complexion. His nose and mouth are faultless. His beard is abundant, of the color of his hair, not long, but divided at the chin" (20–21). Earlier generations of Protestants knew the letter was a fake, and most nineteenth-century Protestants did as well. Still, in the minds of many white Americans and English, the letter's description of Jesus seemed right. "[W]hile we believe it to be false," wrote one English author, "we perhaps wish that it were true" (83). Depictions of Jesus Christ

based on the Publius Lentulus Letter circulated broadly around the United States and, increasingly, the world.

By the early 1900s, images of Jesus more often included blond hair, in keeping with the heyday of Anglo-Saxonism, and Jesus often became more muscular in appearance. Beginning in the 1920s, Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* became the dominant image of Jesus, not only in the United States but around the world. "This new Jesus," Blum and Harvey explain, "had smooth white skin, long flowing brown hair, a full beard, and blue eyes" (208). Many Christians recognized their image of Jesus when they gazed upon Sallman's painting. "I have had visions of our Lord Jesus Christ and his painting is a very close resemblance," one letter writer informed the flagship evangelical periodical *Christianity Today* (209). Eventually, Sallman's painting found its way into the black Baptist church I visited twenty years ago.

Not all Americans, of course, imagined and depicted Jesus in the way that white Protestants advised. From the earliest years of colonial settlement, Catholic missionaries showed crucifixes to Native Americans. Both Indians and African Americans, moreover, continually refashioned Jesus, though not typically in their own image. Black slaves turned the faithfully suffering Jesus "into a trickster of the Trinity," white as snow but small in stature (9). This Jesus tricked white masters into thinking their slaves were quiescent, all the while teaching the enslaved to maintain their dignity and prepare for freedom under the reign of "King Jesus." Both white abolitionists and African-Americans saw the Son of God in the cabins of the enslaved descendants of Africans. As early as the 1830s, some Americans explicitly rejected a white-skinned Jesus. William Apess, a Pequot born to a slave, informed his readers "that you are not indebted to a principle beneath a white skin for your religious services but to a colored one." Jesus was not white, Apess insisted. "Christ as Jew is recalled as a man of color," he explained. These early reactions to the increasing whiteness of Jesus in antebellum America serve to introduce the final myth that Blum and Harvey engage, the idea that "black liberation theology was born in the 1960s" (21). Instead, they contend, "marginalized peoples" (and certain white Protestant allies) consistently conceived and depicted Jesus in ways that served their own purposes.

What do all of these various images of Jesus mean? Blum and Harvey identify their subject as “the creation and exercise of racial and religious power through images of Jesus and how that power has been experienced by everyday people” (13). What is the connection between white images of Jesus and white supremacy? This remains unclear by the end of the book. In only the first two pages of the introduction, the authors identify the white American Jesus as “a conflicted icon of white supremacy,” a “shape-shifting totem of white supremacy,” and “never a stable or completely unifying symbol of white power” (7–8). That the whiteness of Jesus both reflected and contributed to white supremacy seems unobjectionable. But exactly how? Certainly, associating a white Jesus with the Ku Klux Klan, as did the 1915 blockbuster *Birth of a Nation*, attempted to sacralize the Klan’s mission and its members. The black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier concluded that in displaying blue-eyed, brown-haired, white-skinned Christs, the black church “does little to give Negroes a sense of personal worth and dignity in a world where everything tends to disparage the Negro. . . . The religious ideology of the Negro church tends to perpetuate such notions as a white God and white angels, conceptions which tend toward the disparagement of things black” (182). Blum and Harvey could do more, however, to explain the connections between white Christs and white power more clearly.

Over the last two-thirds of the book, Blum and Harvey periodically discuss how Latter-day Saints imagined and depicted Jesus. At times, their findings provide a fresh examination of the Mormon Jesus; at other times, they work too hard to fit Mormonism into their thesis. In keeping with the way that other Americans described their visions of Jesus, Joseph Smith initially described Jesus in terms of blinding light. Smith’s 1832 account informs that he saw a “a pillar of fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day.” The crucified-but-resurrected Jesus informed Joseph that his sins were forgiven. Throughout the 1830s, Smith never described Jesus’s appearance. Perhaps reflecting the greater willingness of American Protestants to imagine and depict a white-skinned Christ, Smith in 1844 described Jesus as having “light complexion [and] blue eyes.” “In less than twenty years,” Blum

and Harvey conclude, “Smith’s account of seeing Jesus had shifted from one of lightness to one of whiteness” (76–77).

So far, so good. This conclusion, however, seems more tenuous: “No new American religion was as successful, as reliant upon sacred interventions, or as committed to a white Jesus as Mormonism” (84). The Book of Mormon strongly associates dark skin with God’s curse, and it identifies Mary, the mother of Jesus, as “exceedingly fair and white” (1 Nephi 11:13). The latter reference certainly suggests that Jesus shared his mother’s complexion, but very little about early Mormonism illustrates any sort of commitment to a white Jesus. Brigham Young insisted in 1852 that “this people commonly called Negroes are the children of old Cain . . . [and] cannot bear rule in the Priesthood, for the curse on them was to remain upon them until the residue of the posterity of Michael and his wife receive the blessings.” Young predicted on a number of occasions that someday the natives of Utah would become a “white and delightful people.” Even Young, however, did not place any emphasis on the whiteness of Jesus. Instead, in the above-quoted 1852 speech, he joked that he “never saw a white man on earth. I have seen persons whose hair came pretty nigh being white, but to talk about white skins, it is something entirely unknown.” “We are the children of Adam,” Young added, “who receive the blessings, and that is enough for us if we are not quite white.”¹ What is missing from Blum and Harvey’s discussion of the Mormon Jesus is any sense of when Latter-day Saints became committed to describing and depicting Jesus with white skin.

At some point, however, that commitment did develop. After a mention of the fairness of Jesus in a 1913 stained-glass depiction of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, Blum and Harvey briefly return to Mormon artwork in the 1960s. They reference John Scott’s *Jesus Christ Visits the Americas*, which features Jesus with fair skin and light-brown hair. Then, they devote one paragraph to the placing of a replica *Christus* statue in a Temple Square visitors’ center. “Mormons resurrected an old Danish statue,” write Blum and Harvey, “to affirm their commitment to Jesus, whiteness, and power” (254). Certainly, the replica of *Christus* is made out of white marble. And in the context of the civil rights movement, the color of Jesus took on a greater importance across the country, as did the exclusion of black men from the LDS priesthood. How-

ever, it seems likely that LDS leaders welcomed the *Christus* statue only in order to “affirm their commitment to Jesus.” They probably did not stop to think about “whiteness and power.” Perhaps that was the problem. Still, *Christus* is a symbol of Mormon christocentricity, not—at least not in any simple, straightforward sense—Mormon racism.

Blum and Harvey cover a tremendous amount of ground in their provocative book, and they raise important questions for all Christians, Mormon and otherwise. Depictions of Jesus as white have both reinforced and contributed to white supremacy in the United States—sometimes. How are we to make sense of it all? When is a white Christ “an icon of white supremacy,” and when does Jesus just happen to have white skin or white marble? Even setting aside “white and delightful,” have other references to skin color in Mormon scriptures made it more difficult for Latter-day Saints to paint, draw, or sculpt Christs with darker skin? Does Mormon scripture contribute to notions of white superiority? Do those scriptures produce feelings of inferiority in non-white church members?

Blum and Harvey note that because depicting Jesus in human form inevitably raises uncomfortable questions of race, most evangelical megachurches have removed all images of Jesus from their sanctuaries. Crosses, yes. Visual depictions of Jesus, no. That is a simple solution, but it is a troubling solution for believers in an incarnate Christ. Blum and Harvey quote Mormon artist J. Leo Fairbanks about the connections between artwork and the doctrine of the incarnation: “Art causes us to feel that Christ was a man, that he lived a physical existence, that He was mortal, sympathized with sinners, moved among beggars, helped the infirm, ate with publicans and counseled with human beings for their immediate as well as their future spiritual welfare. It is to art that we turn for help in seeing the reality of the facts of the religious teachings of this divine human” (147–148). Can you imagine a children’s Bible without pictures of Jesus? Perhaps the best solution is for Christians to produce and utilize a multiplicity of Jesus images. If we can only summon up in our minds Warner Sallman’s *Head of Christ* or the *Christus* statue, we could stand to broaden our image of Jesus Christ, maintain the power of the incarnation,

and help all human beings to grasp that they are a reflection of God's image.

Note

1. Brigham Young discourse of January 5, 1852, George D. Watt transcript, Box 1, Folder 17, CR 100 317, Church History Library.

Anti-Mormon Moment

J. Spencer Fluhman. *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. 256 pp. Hardcover: \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0807835715.

Reviewed by Cristine Hutchison-Jones

With Mitt Romney's loss and the end of the 2012 campaign season, many have declared an end to our current Mormon Moment. But while America's recent attention to the Mormons may have been unusually focused—particularly on exploring the actual beliefs and experiences the Latter-day Saints—it was hardly new. In fact, Mormonism has been a staple of popular culture and discourse about religion in the United States since it first appeared in upstate New York nearly two centuries ago, and popular depictions haven't always painted a pretty (or realistic) picture. In *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America*, J. Spencer Fluhman, Assistant Professor of History at Brigham Young University, explores the roots and development of the American fascination with and antipathy toward the Saints. He also demonstrates that the nation's long, troubled relationship with its most successful homegrown religion is illustrative of Americans' complicated and fluid understanding of what makes a "real" religion: "through public condemnation of what Mormonism was, Protestants defined just what American religion could be" (9).

Fluhman's book contributes to the growing body of literature on anti-Mormonism in American history. His approach, however, differs from that of many of his predecessors. Whereas *"A Peculiar*

People” examines responses to the Saints throughout the nineteenth century, many earlier treatments focused more narrowly on the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These decades were marked by major accommodations on the part of the Saints to the demands of non-Mormon American society in the form of the end of polygamy and the discontinuation of theocratic governance in Utah. This “Americanization,” in turn, inspired significant change in non-Mormon perceptions of the Latter-day Saints in the United States. Earlier examinations of the turn of the twentieth century are also more focused in their subject matter. Sarah Barringer Gordon examined American legal responses to plural marriage in *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (2001). Kathleen Flake chose a specific political conflict to guide her exploration of this transitional period in her book *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (2003). Patrick Mason focused on anti-Mormon violence in a specific region in his *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Antebellum South* (2011). Jan Shipps, in her classic essay “From Satyr to Saint: American Attitudes toward the Mormons, 1860–1960” (published in *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Saints*, 2000), and Megan Sanborn Jones, in her book *Performing Identity in Anti-Mormon Melodrama* (2009), both chose to limit their inquiries to a specific genre of writing about the Latter-day Saints.

Fluhman’s book more closely follows the model of Terryl Givens’s *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (1997) by examining anti-Mormonism writ large across the nineteenth century. Like Givens, Fluhman steps back to examine the bigger picture of anti-Mormonism’s origins and early development as they appeared in a variety of media. Rather than focusing on a single theme within anti-Mormon sentiment, a specific high-profile incident, or a particular genre of anti-Mormon writing, Fluhman sifts through newspapers, political discourse, religious screeds, and fiction and nonfiction books in an effort to show the broader contours of nineteenth-century American responses to the Latter-day Saints. In so doing, he uses anti-Mormonism as a window onto larger American

understandings of religion and of the proper relationship between religion and society.

Fluhman describes four major periods of nineteenth-century American anti-Mormonism: Mormonism's origins and development in the 1820s and '30s; the Nauvoo period of the late '30s and early '40s; the removal to Utah and subsequent open practice of polygamy and experimentation with theocracy and economic communalism from the 1840s through the 1890s; and finally the "Americanization" of Mormonism (and its image) in the decades immediately after the 1890 Manifesto. This first period lasted from the religion's origins in the 1820s through its early development in the 1830s under Joseph Smith. As Americans struggled with both religious and political disestablishment, having to decide for themselves who could best lead them politically and religiously, evangelical revivals and new religious movements flourished. During this period, Americans not only dismissed the Latter-day Saints' most unique beliefs, including their prophet's receipt of ongoing revelation and his most significant work, *The Book of Mormon*. They also condemned the religious enthusiasms the Saints shared with many evangelicals: physical demonstrations of the Spirit like glossolalia (speaking in tongues), bodily manifestations (the quaking and shaking that came to define other religious minorities), and faith healings were not regarded as appropriate religious behavior in post-Enlightenment America. Many Americans viewed the Mormons as practicing superstitious magic rather than authentic religion—with potentially dangerous consequences. Fluhman shows that Mormonism and other minority religions were regularly cited as the root cause of insanity among patients admitted to the nation's asylums (61–66). In short, Mormonism was dismissed as an imposture and not a "real" religion at all.

When Smith ordered the Mormons to gather at Nauvoo to build an earthly Kingdom of God, anti-Mormon rhetoric shifted dramatically. This apparent nation-building was characterized by the Saints' growing economic and political power and their acceptance of the theocratic blending of religious, political, and military institutions and leadership. Their neighbors feared that the Mormon prophet would come to control the economic and political lives of not only his followers, but also their non-Mormon

neighbors. Fluhman argues that Mormonism was imagined not primarily as a religious threat, but as “an ideology inherently at odds with republicanism.” Many Americans believed that it was “unassimilable within American society” (82). Rumors of Smith’s theological innovations, which carried Mormonism ever further beyond the bounds of what most Americans thought of as acceptable religion, reinforced these fears. Many believed that the Saints had to be driven out or destroyed before they overwhelmed surrounding non-Mormon communities, and in 1844 mobs in Illinois murdered Smith and eventually forced his followers to move west.

But the destruction of Nauvoo didn’t kill Mormonism or its dreams of establishing God’s kingdom. Rather, the removal to the intermountain West gave the Mormons a new kingdom where their unique beliefs and practices and their theocracy blossomed. After Brigham Young brought Smith’s most radical—to the minds of most non-Mormon Americans—innovation, polygamy, out into the open, Americans reimagined Mormonism not just as a threat but as a *foreign* threat. Protestant Americans regarded Mormon women as enslaved in polygamy, and all Mormons as enslaved under the theocracy that allowed Young to be both president of the Church *and* governor of the territory. Images of Joseph Smith as an American Mohammed, which had been in vogue since before Smith’s death, were embellished, and the Mormon leaders in Utah were depicted as Eastern potentates reigning supreme over their extensive harems. Fluhman describes how such practices made the Mormons themselves seem alien, and, as Terryl Givens has also noted, images of the Saints began to illustrate what one nineteenth-century writer referred to as Mormonism’s “impress upon the countenance” (113). Mormons didn’t just act and look the part—in the popular imagination they came to physically embody it. Perceived political and cultural differences combined to construct Mormon individuals and their community as truly foreign bodies.

The final phase of nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism took shape at the century’s close, in the period that many previous studies of Mormonism and anti-Mormonism examine. Once the Civil War ostensibly eliminated the evil of slavery, the nation

turned its attention to the relic of barbarism flourishing beyond the Rocky Mountains. After decades of federal crackdowns on polygamy and demands for a clear separation of church and state in Utah, in 1890 the Church finally agreed to discontinue the practice of plural marriage and give up the reins of the state. At the same time, Fluhman shows, popular thinking about religion was changing. The 1893 World's Fair in Chicago hosted a Parliament of Religions that admitted not only Protestants and other acknowledged Christians, but also groups as foreign to the average American concept of religion as Hindus. While Protestants still dominated the interreligious conversation at the Parliament—Mormons were, in fact, excluded—the event demonstrated Americans' expansion of the category of religion to include groups that had long been denied the label. During the same period, history was developing as a discipline and the writing of history became professionalized. Scholars were reframing the story of American religion, and in a way that finally admitted Mormonism to the ranks. But while these new approaches claimed to present factual accounts of American religious history, the "earlier master accounts" continued to drive the narrative (137). Mormonism was now acknowledged as a religion—but a false one. This ambivalence toward the Saints took root, Fluhman argues, and continues to characterize America's relationship to the Latter-day Saints today. Where Mormonism has found acceptance, it has been through non-Mormon Americans' ability to "imagin[e] its people apart from their religion" (144).

Key to Fluhman's argument about the nature of nineteenth-century American anti-Mormonism—and American responses to other minority religions in the period as well—is his claim that religion and politics were not confined to separate spheres in nineteenth-century America. Nineteenth-century Mormons and their critics—and, he maintains, their recent chroniclers—too often focus their discussions of the American treatment of Mormonism on a false dichotomy between the religious and the political in the United States. Mormons and their supporters, then and now, argue that Americans' responses to the Saints were driven by religious intolerance, and thus betrayed both the nation's laws and the spirit behind them. Critics of the Mormons, on the other hand, have argued that American actions against the Saints were

political or social in nature, and therefore not restricted by the First Amendment. But, as Fluhman convincingly argues, “by drawing too stark a line between the secular and the religious in the nineteenth century, one risks clarifying with contemporary lenses what was muddled for historical subjects” (54). He consciously situates himself between these extremes, thus distancing himself on the one hand from arguments like Givens’s in *Viper on the Hearth* that nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism was essentially religious, and on the other hand Kenneth Winn’s assertion in *Exiles in a Land of Liberty* that the conflict was political in nature (53–54, 160 n. 21). Rather than being *either* a religious *or* a political problem, Fluhman shows us that “Mormonism exposed the American fantasy that religion and politics could be easily defined and separated” (95).

While these arguments are convincing, they would be more effective if bolstered by more specific evidence and broader historical context. Fluhman packs the book into a compact 147 pages, and he does an excellent job of providing signposts to guide those knowledgeable about Mormon history. This is not, however, a book for newcomers to the subject, as it gives only an outline of key events and those that are discussed are largely internal to Mormonism. Somewhat surprisingly, many events that put Mormons and non-Mormons in direct contact and conflict are little discussed. Fluhman notes the “richness and comprehensiveness of modern accounts of Mormon theocracy, polygamy, and the Mountain Meadows massacre,” and explains that he, therefore, “makes no attempt to replow those fields” (12). But events like the failure of the Mormons’ Kirtland Safety Society (1837), the Utah War (1857–1858), and the Mountain Meadows massacre (1857) and eventual conviction and execution of John D. Lee for his part in it (1877), all provided significant grist for the mill in both nineteenth-century and later American portrayals of Mormonism. The Mountain Meadows massacre alone has remained a staple of American popular culture, from Jack London’s 1915 science fiction novel *Star Rover* to the 2007 film *September Dawn* starring Oscar-winner Jon Voight. Not to discuss the origins—both real and imagined—and development of a representation of Mormonism that has been continuously recycled in American culture across three centuries not only ignores the sig-

nificance of Mountain Meadows in shaping American opinion about the Saints in the historical period that Fluhman is exploring, but also the contemporary relevance of his study. By avoiding Mountain Meadows Fluhman also misses an opportunity to contribute to a discussion, most notably engaged in R. Laurence Moore's seminal *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (1986), of the ways in which Mormons contributed to both the conflicts that sparked anti-Mormon representations and to the shape of the resulting images. While there is no need to discuss these events in minute detail, some engagement with them would have enhanced his analysis of discourse about Mormonism in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Greater attention to how other minority groups in the United States were treated during the same time period also would have enriched the study. While Fluhman mentions tensions between American Protestants and other minorities including Shakers, Jews, and particularly Roman Catholics, he does not delve into the parallels and differences between anti-Mormonism and the specific forms of intolerance aimed at these other groups. Fluhman's project is not intended to be a comparative one, but he does set out to describe not just Mormonism but American religion more broadly. Exploring American prejudice against other religious minorities would have strengthened his claims that the understandings of religion and its place in American society he sees illuminated by anti-Mormonism are, in fact, more universal. Such comparison could have demonstrated further that the ideas about religion articulated by anti-Mormon writers were not simply the rhetoric deployed against the Latter-day Saints, but in fact illustrate nineteenth-century Americans' ideas about religion more generally.

As we begin to imagine the shape that America's relationship with the Latter-day Saints will take after this Mormon Moment, we need to understand the history behind that relationship. J. Spencer Fluhman's "*A Peculiar People*" is a useful introduction to the origins, development, and complicated causes of America's ambivalence toward the Saints, and a valuable contribution to the historiography on anti-Mormonism in American religious history.

God as Engineer

A. Scott Howe and Richard L. Bushman, eds. *Parallels and Convergences: Mormon Thought and Engineering Vision*. Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2012. 226 pp. Introduction by Terryl L. Givens. Paperback: \$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-58958-187-6.

Reviewed by Carl Glen Henshaw

Albert Einstein famously wrote: “I want to know how God created this world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know his thoughts. The rest are details.” Einstein did not believe in a personal God, of course, but A. Scott Howe and Richard L. Bushman do, and ask the same questions in their book, *Parallels and Convergences: Mormon Thought and Engineering Vision*. Written from the point of view of faithful LDS scientists and engineers, Bushman and Howe (an aerospace engineer at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Lab) attempt to tackle a question that has long fascinated me: what can we learn if we analyze God’s creations as the master work of the master Engineer? To the believer, after all, the universe is a grand tapestry attesting to God’s majesty and shows evidence of His existence in as direct a manner as any scripture, to which scriptures themselves testify:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.
(Job 12:7–10 [New International Version])

The book comprises eleven essays written by LDS scientists and engineers and broadly examines parallels between LDS theology and new findings in science, parallels between LDS theology and transhumanism, and the spiritual implications of our increasing abilities in and reliance upon engineering. The first sec-

tion, "Physics and Engineering," attempts to reconcile some of the most speculative teachings of early Mormon leaders, including the nature of spirit and intelligence, the equation of light with truth, and free will and materialism, with our current understanding of physics. The second, "Philosophy and Engineering," details the parallels between LDS teachings on eternal progression with those of transhumanism, the idea that the human race is on a course of technical progress that will ultimately lead to unlimited lifespans, the technical solutions to virtually all of our current economic and social problems, and the fusion of ourselves and our machines. The third, "Practice and Engineering," examines the moral and spiritual implications of our increasing abilities in and reliance on engineering.

This is not a book for the faint of heart. It is densely packed with speculative theology, and requires careful consideration to fully appreciate. It also helps if the reader already has a background in the scientific and philosophical subject matter. Those who are already interested in transhumanism will find the discussion of its parallels with the idea of eternal progression fascinating, but non-experts may not find the introductory material sufficient. Similarly, those with some familiarity with quantum physics, software engineering, and scientific computing will find the discussion of possible physics or computational models of spirit matter interesting, but those without such a background may find them impenetrable.

Ultimately, I found the book both frustrating and fascinating. My frustration with the book includes the topics the editors choose to cover. For instance, two different essays are devoted to examining Joseph Smith's teaching that spirits consist of "more refined matter." Various scientific hypotheses are proposed for the nature of spirit matter, including the possibility that spirits reside in alternate mirror universes, that spirits are essentially data structures, or that spirits may reside remotely from physical bodies and communicate via a nearly instantaneous communications system. As an engineer and a believing Latter-day Saint, I believe that at some point our understanding of God will merge with our understanding of science and engineering. But in my opinion, in most areas our knowledge of both science and theology is too tenuous to make any reliable connections. While it may be interesting

to try to come up with a scientifically valid explanation for the nature of spirit matter, ultimately I do not have any confidence in the reliability of such arguments; we simply do not know enough, either about physics or spirits. And I do not find such speculation spiritually rewarding either; it does not tell me anything I can use about the nature of God or how I should live.

On the other hand, I found the sections of the book dealing with the parallels between transhumanism and the doctrine of eternal progression fascinating. Transhumanists believe that humanity is on the verge of almost inconceivable technological change. To different transhumanist thinkers the specific nature of these changes vary, but typically include the idea that in the near future we may achieve immortality, or at least vastly extended lifespans, due to advances in medical technology; that we may soon understand the structure of the brain well enough that we may be able to upload our memories and thought processes to computers, thus living indefinitely as simulations of our original selves; and/or that we may be able to replace our bodies with longer-lived, more capable robotic bodies. Some transhumanists also believe that technology will soon allow us to solve major problems confronting the human race, including climate change, clean energy generation, access to vastly increased resources via asteroid mining, and greatly improved agriculture due to genetic engineering. At first blush, transhumanism and Mormonism do not seem to have much in common. But transhumanism, in essence, is the belief that human beings and human society advance through gaining knowledge, and that those with sufficient knowledge will appear to be gods—or, if you are a transhumanist, a being indistinguishable from a god—to those who do not have such knowledge. Put this way, there is an obvious parallel to the doctrine of eternal progression. However, unlike LDS theology, transhumanism does not necessarily have a moral imperative and does not include the need for an atonement. The primary contribution of the book is the proposal that LDS doctrine and transhumanism are compatible, and that LDS thinkers have much to add to the transhumanist movement about the moral implications and requirements of humans gaining godlike power.

As much as I was intrigued by what was in the book, though, I

was equally disappointed by what was left out. In particular, modern science has led to findings that pose an apparently severe challenge for traditional Christian ideas about the nature of man and the universe. The most well-known of these, of course, is the theory of evolution, but they also include theories about the creation of the universe and about its possible ends, about whether omniscience and omnipotence are theoretically possible, and about the possibility of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Modern science is often understood to lead us away from God by showing that the universe is self-governing¹ and that our place in it is not privileged. Modern *engineering*, on the other hand, offers the potential of leading us back to God. Regarding evolution, for example, engineers have recently discovered that quasi-random processes can be harnessed as a very powerful tool for designing complicated systems, and have in fact openly borrowed from the theory of evolution to develop computer algorithms that are now used to design bridges, buildings, airplanes, and many other systems.² If we view God as the greatest engineer, it certainly should not be surprising that He would know about and use these techniques, and in fact engineers using evolutionary techniques might be seen by the believer as cribbing from God's best work. Furthermore, the fact that engineers find these techniques useful in designing what are clearly manmade structures should—to someone striving to reconcile the teachings of the scriptures with the findings of science—lead to an understanding of how the universe can appear to be self-governing yet still be created.

The idea that while science seems to be leading us away from God, engineering may lead us back is, unfortunately—and rather strangely—an idea that is mostly absent from the book. In the final section, however, William Pickett, Scott Howe, and James Young give a moving account of the spiritual experiences they have had in the course of their professions. As JPL aerospace engineers, Pickett, Howe, and Young have worked on several planetary exploration missions. They see this work as being intimately involved with man's quest for knowledge, and hence a spiritually rewarding and, in fact, a spiritually vital activity. They relate that they have seen inspiration strike many of their coworkers, most of whom are of different faiths, or of no religion at all. They inter-

pret this inspiration as God's hand helping those engineers who have prepared for it through "study and preparation." Thus, while they do not directly address the idea that we can see "God as Engineer" in the processes that shape our universe, they strongly believe that in trying to understand and apply the laws that govern the universe we emulate God—and, hence, help fulfill His work in bringing to pass the eternal life of man.

This book is fascinating, frustrating, but ultimately worthwhile; it should find its way onto many LDS bookshelves (and especially that of every LDS engineer). There is a great need for scientists and engineers to engage with, instead of criticize, the faith community. *Parallels and Convergences* might have been a groundbreaking work that greatly contributed to that engagement. It is not. But it is a very useful attempt.

Notes

1. Although Sir Francis Bacon would doubtless disagree, having been credited with the well-known saying: "A little science estranges a man from God. A lot of science brings him back."

2. See Mitsuo Gen and Runwei Cheng, *Genetic Algorithms and Engineering Optimization* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 2000); John R. Koza, et al., *Genetic Programming III: Darwinian Invention and Problem Solving* (San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Inc., 1999); Singiresu S. Rao, *Engineering Optimization: Theory and Practice* (New York: Wiley, 2009) and Aimin Zhou, et al. "Multiobjective Evolutionary Algorithms: A Survey of the State of the Art." *Swarm and Evolutionary Computation* 1:1 (March 2011): 32–49.

Rethinking the LDS Aversion to the Cross

Michael G. Reed. *Banishing the Cross: The Emergence of a Mormon Taboo*. Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2012. 171 pp. Appendix ("Early Christians and the Cross"), index. Paper: \$19.95. ISBN: 978–1934901359.

Reviewed by Boyd Jay Petersen

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are often perplexed when they are accused of not being Christian. We

worship Christ, acknowledge him as the divine Son of God, and believe our hope for salvation centers on the atonement made possible by his sacrifice. Christ is central in Mormon scripture: his birth, death, and atonement are foretold by Book of Mormon prophets, revealed through terrestrial signs, and revealed in the flesh in Christ's ministry to his "lost sheep" of the New World. Mormons celebrate Christian holy days such as Easter and Christmas. The very name of the Church points to Christ as our center. As Nephi says, "we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ" (2 Ne. 2:26). Those who reject Mormonism as Christian typically cite the significant theological differences between LDS theology and creedal Christianity (e.g., rejection of the Trinity, belief in an embodied God, a theology of deification, etc.) and our acceptance of additional scripture and a living prophet. While Latter-day Saints intently seek to counter these objections, quite often subtle, subliminal messages speak louder than our words. As Robert Rees has argued, one of the "very large stumbling blocks" keeping other Christians from accepting Mormons as Christian is our rejection of the central symbol of Christianity: the cross.¹ The symbol is not found on Mormon places of worship, on LDS hymnals or scripture, or on jewelry worn by members of the Church. In fact it is often viewed with suspicion, as a sign of apostasy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley repeatedly emphasized his respect for other churches that use the cross, but emphasized that "for us, the cross is the symbol of the dying Christ, while our message is a declaration of the Living Christ."² Unfortunately, this argument rings hollow, perhaps even condescending, to other Christians, since they too worship the Living Christ. The cross reminds them not only of Christ's death, but of his atoning sacrifice—his life, death, and resurrection—and of their complete dependence on that expiating force. In short, the cross represents not Christ's death, but his *overcoming* death. This symbolic force of the cross is lost on Latter-day Saints. The cross's absence leads creedal Christians to suspect that Latter-day Saints are not, indeed, Christians. Yet for the average Mormon, LDS antipathy to the cross may seem doctrinal, perhaps foundational, dating back to teachings from Joseph Smith. However, as Michael Reed aptly demonstrates in his new book *Banishing the*

Cross: The Emergence of a Mormon Taboo, this history is much more recent and quite complex.

In the early years of American society, contempt for Catholicism was rampant. As immigration to the United States from Catholic nations rapidly increased in the first half of the nineteenth century, Catholicism was seen as a threat to both democracy and true Christianity, and tensions between Protestants and Catholics grew. With titles like *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery* (1836), *Rosamond; or, A Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of an American Female under the Popish Priests, in the Island of Cuba* (1836), or *Six Hours in a Convent: or The Stolen Nuns!* (1854), Anti-Catholic tracts of the nineteenth century recall those of anti-Mormon writers of the period. Female captivity narratives proliferated around Catholicism just as they did around the Mormon practice of plural marriage. Likewise, Catholic rituals, thought strange and secret, inspired the same dread that Mormon temple rituals did.³ The cross, seen as the central symbol of Catholicism, was regarded as papist, un-American, and idolatrous. This prejudice gave birth to iconoclasm, as Reed points out, which focused on the cross as a symbol of popish sentiment: a church in Philadelphia was destroyed by arson; a cross was torn down from the steeple of a Boston chapel (29).

As Reed documents, many early Mormons shared their neighbors' anti-Catholic sentiments, identifying the Catholic Church as the "mother of harlots and abominations" spoken of in the book of Revelation (17:5). Reed notes, however, that "despite [Mormons'] employment of Protestant anti-Catholic rhetoric, the condemnation of the cross is noticeably absent in the writings of early Mormonism" (33). Reed offers three explanations for why early Mormons embraced the cross: their involvement with folk magic, their connections with Freemasonry, and their interest in pre-Columbian archaeology that they believed confirmed the veracity of the Book of Mormon.

One of the most interesting chapters of Reed's book focuses on the influences of folk magic and Masonry on Mormon views of the cross. Following the work of historians such as D. Michael Quinn and Richard Bushman, who document the impact of folk magic in early Mormonism, Reed notes the centrality of the cross

in folk magic symbolism and identifies crosses on several magical parchments belonging to the Smith family. He goes on to show that the cross was also a part of Christianized Masonry, where the pentagram, for example, symbolizes the five wounds of Christ and the Masonic five points of fellowship. Likely influenced by Masonic symbolism, Reed argues, the decorative cruciform stonework surrounding the pentagram windows in the Nauvoo temple brings together the shape of the cross and the pentagram, directly alluding to Christ's crucifixion. He further notes the decorative cross emblazoned on Joseph Smith's walking cane. Reed shows that the cross is found in both magic and masonry, and that early Mormons were comfortable and conversant in both.

Reed next shows how pre-Columbian discoveries supported Mormon acceptance of the cross. Beginning with the *LDS Times and Seasons*' publication of excerpts from John L. Stephens and Fredrick Catherwood's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* in 1841, Mormons have looked to Mesoamerican discoveries for proof of the Book of Mormon's authenticity. The discovery of cross symbols in Mayan carvings was greeted by many Mormons as proof that Christ had visited the New World, just as the Book of Mormon declared. As Reed puts it, "Mormons perceived pre-Columbian crosses as evidence vindicating the Book of Mormon narrative that Christianity was practiced among native Americans in ancient times" (66).

One of the most wonderful aspects of Reed's book is its bountiful supply of illustrations, and chapter five, "Mormon Crosses before the Institutionalized Taboo," provides plentiful documentation that Mormons once embraced the cross as a symbol of faith. Reed provides photos of crosses in quilts, in the stained glass in LDS chapels, in funeral arrangements (at John Taylor's funeral, no less!), and in jewelry worn by prominent Mormons (one of Brigham Young's wives and two daughters). It was even emblazoned on the spine of an 1852 European edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. The images throughout the book, especially in this chapter, were so good, so important to Reed's thesis, I wished for better production values. I would love to have an over-size coffee table edition of this book. Any reader unconvinced by Reed's argument would find it difficult to remain unconvinced when confronted with his visual evidence.

Clearly demonstrating that the official Church openly accepted the cross is Reed's discussion of a proposal in the early twentieth century to erect a cross on top of Ensign Peak as a tribute to the Mormon pioneers. The proposal was put forward by B. H. Roberts at a Pioneer Day commemoration in 1915, when he noted that the "ensign which shall yet float from yonder peak is the ensign of humanity; the ensign of Christ in which every nation shall have part" (87). A year later the Church petitioned the Salt Lake City council for permission to erect the monument. Opposition to the plan came initially from a non-Mormon state legislator who thought it was disingenuous for the LDS Church to portray itself as Christian. "It is evident that the oriental crescent of the Mohomedan is a better exhibit for the Pioneer as a monument," he argued (89). The first documented instance of anti-cross sentiment from within the Mormon community emerged at this time too, as some members felt that a cross was not an appropriate tribute to their pioneer ancestors. One of the Mormons who protested the monument wrote that that cross was a symbol of the Catholic church which "seeks to dominate every institution in the City, State and Nation" (90). While LDS Church leaders eventually abandoned their efforts to erect the monument on Ensign Peak, in 1917 they instead erected a wooden cross at the mouth of Emigration Canyon to commemorate the place where Brigham Young first viewed the valley.

The taboo against the cross likely crept into Mormonism as later generations lost touch with the symbols of folk magic and masonry and as Mormons began to assimilate into larger American culture. Reed also documents growing tension between Mormons and Catholics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a series of missteps and miscommunication: In 1916, the Catholic bishop of the Utah diocese criticized Mormons for holding dances on Good Friday. In 1930, Catholics aired a series of radio shows on LDS Church-owned KSL to strengthen their parishioners' faith, which was misinterpreted by the Mormon leadership as an attempt to convert Mormons. And in 1948, Catholics published a tract entitled "A Foreign Mission Close to Home" and Mormons misunderstood the use of the word "mission" as an effort to proselyte rather than to designate a small, underfunded

parish. This increasing tension combined with some anti-Catholic prejudices of some Church leaders led to an official antipathy toward the symbol of the cross. Mark E. Petersen saw it as nothing but a cruel form of torture, Joseph Fielding Smith saw it as “repugnant and contrary to the true worship of our Redeemer,” and Bruce R. McConkie called it the “mark of the beast” (118–20). The taboo against the cross became solidified as President McKay warned of the “two great anti-Christes in the world: Communism and that [Catholic] Church” (115).

Reed’s penultimate chapter briefly documents the status of the cross in both the Community of Christ (formerly RLDS), where leaders have worked to embrace the symbol, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangites), where it has not been banned but is not fully embraced. Finally, in an appendix, he discusses the use of the cross in early Christianity. These sections of the book, though less detailed, add depth to his argument.

While many Mormon historians have noted correctly that early Mormons echoed the anti-Catholic attitudes and polemics of their nineteenth-century neighbors, Reed conclusively shows that early Mormons had no aversion to the cross. He persuasively demonstrates that the taboo against the cross arose as Mormons lost their connection with folk magic and masonry, as anti-Catholic bias grew within both the membership and leadership of the Church, and as relations between Church leaders and Salt Lake area Catholics grew more tense. What is fascinating about Reed’s analysis is that the institutionalization of the taboo occurred quite late in Mormon history and is not based on any strong theological reasoning. With contemporary Mormonism’s more ecumenical focus, a tremendous lessening of anti-Catholic rhetoric, and greatly improved relations between all denominations of Christianity and the LDS Church, it is not hard to imagine a world where Mormons can once again embrace the symbolic power of the cross. Reed’s book is a wonderful addition to Mormon history and a helpful guide in rethinking our contemporary aversion to the central symbol of Christianity.

Notes

1. Lynn Arave, “Cross Called a ‘Stumbling Block’ for Mormonism,”

Deseret News, August 11, 2008, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705381404/Cross-called-a-stumbling-block-for-Mormonism.html?pg=all>.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Symbol of Our Faith" *Ensign*, April 2005, 2. President Hinckley made similar comments in messages delivered as early as 1975.

3. Compare, for example, Susan M. Griffin's *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) with Terryl Givens' *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Toward a Mormon Culinary History

Brock Cheney. *Plain but Wholesome: Foodways of the Mormon Pioneers*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012. Paper: \$19.95. ISBN: 978-1607812081.

Reviewed by Christy Spackman

Brock Cheney's history of Mormon food, *Plain but Wholesome: Foodways of the Mormon Pioneers* does much to fill a surprising lacuna in Mormon history. Although a number of books on food and religion exist,¹ there is little academic exploration of the role that food played in the shaping and development of Latter-day Saint culture. While Cheney's work reads a bit like a church potluck, lacking the unity of a well-constructed menu, it nonetheless provides interested readers and academics alike with a variety of tempting morsels to inspire further exploration.

Plain but Wholesome explores a variety of culinary-related tropes. The book begins with the material artifacts and culinary memorabilia that allow one to peer back in time, and then travels through the practices of searching for, gathering, planting, harvesting, preserving, and producing food. Structurally, each of the main chapters begins with an anecdote or story, and then builds off one of the themes previously mentioned. These vignettes seek to situate readers in the time period and topic to be explored, and are followed by an interesting collection of historical facts, photographs, and recipes, drawing extensively from the archival resources of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

Cheney deserves accolades for re-examining this underutilized resource, and for recognizing that much of culinary history, as women's work, is found not necessarily in written record but more often in the historical silence created when tacit knowledge is passed from mother to daughter. He deftly justifies his source selection, and quite aptly demonstrates the worth of re-examining partial or provenance-less records.

Unfortunately, *Plain but Wholesome* stumbles in its attempts to combine interesting tidbits with larger "so-whats." Cheney is not an academic historian, as the book demonstrates by a lack of historiography or extensive theoretical engagement. For non-academics, this will be refreshing. For academic readers, this lack will occasionally frustrate, especially as powerful opportunities for linking this research with non-Mormon scholarship are missed. The framing themes of "geographical isolation, poverty, and ethnic tradition" (170) that the author sees as central to the Mormon food experience both on the trail and once settled in Utah fade under the shower of interesting facts provided. A stricter editorial hand could have easily effaced this final critique.

Similarly, certain concepts, potentially quite interesting, are glossed over in the rush to get to the next fact or idea. For example, in speaking of baking and sweets, Cheney notes that Christiana Thompson Galli's "Sweet Cream Cake" provided her with a "distinct identity, separate from the younger second wife" when her husband entered into a polygamous marriage (147). Given the well-established explorations of food and identity already present in both lay and academic work, further examination of how Christiana's cake allowed her to create a distinct identity would have allowed Cheney to direct novice readers to already existing works while also providing a unique contribution to the much smaller literature on Mormon women and identity.

However, Cheney's failure to adequately engage with the many opportunities to "go deeper" in favor of "go broader" provide other researchers with a treasure trove of new research directions. His discussion of the proactive role Mormon pioneers, primarily women, played in collecting and promoting the growth of wild yeast (61–73) becomes especially interesting when juxtaposed with accounts about the viticulture and beer brewing that characterized early pioneer life (160–69). One can

easily imagine a variety of research questions growing out of that juxtaposition alone: what role did gender play in the “shepherding” of yeast cultures? How did culinary discourse on the Mormon frontier change as church leaders increasingly codified the Word of Wisdom?

Despite the minor failings of *Plain but Wholesome*, the book is well worth reading on a chapter-by-chapter basis. I personally envision a few groups that would especially benefit from this book. First, *Plain but Wholesome* would work well in an undergraduate or advanced high-school course examining historical research in general or the history of Utah in particular. The introduction nicely demonstrates the need for primary source materials, and does not shy away from showing the difficulties of putting together a historical narrative—both useful but often overlooked starting points for teaching history to novices. Additionally, the anecdotes that head each chapter allow younger readers to easily enter the drier historical materials. Second, *Plain but Wholesome* should appeal to a variety of scholarly fields, primarily for the number of interesting questions it raises. Finally, the book should appeal to a much wider readership just interested in learning more about the pioneer experience or in understanding the ways that early Saints did and did not interact with the wider world. From the opportunity to try one’s hand at creating a bit of living history through the recipes scattered throughout the book to the site-specific histories that may encourage a bit of personal sleuthing, *Plain but Wholesome* provides a wide range of ways to personally engage with history.

Notes

1. Starting with Claude Levi-Strauss’s and Mary Douglas’s highly differing explorations of Jewish food taboos, and moving to more recent works such as Chirita Banerji, *Feeding the Gods: Memories of Food and Culture in Bengal* (New York: Seagull, 2006); Daniel Sack, *White Bread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); and Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

2. A few useful examples for interested readers could include *Food and Identity: Gender and Power*, edited by Carole Counih and Steven Kaplan (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Press, 2008); Marion Bishop, “Speaking Sisters: Relief Society Cookbooks and Mormon Culture,” in

Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories, edited by Anne L. Bower (Boston, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Sarah Barringer Gordon, "The Liberty of Self-Degradation: Polygamy, Woman Suffrage, and Consent in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* (December 1996): 815–47.

What If Mickey Mouse *Isn't* Mormon?

Floyd Gottfredson. *Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse: "Race to Death Valley."* Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2011. 286 pp. Introductory and supplementary materials by Warren Spector, Thomas Andrae, Floyd Norman, David Gerstein, Giorgio Scudellari, Alberto Becattini, Frank Behmak, Mortimer Franklin, R. M. Finch, Ub Iwerks, Win Smith and Floyd Gottfredson. Hardcover: \$29.99. ISBN 978-1-60699-441-2.

Reviewed by Theric Jepson

[*Editor's note*—Please see the full-color web version of this issue at dialoguejournal.com for examples of the referenced cartoons.]

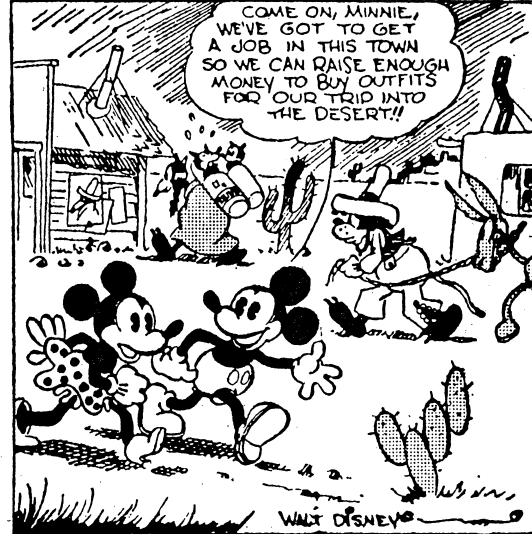
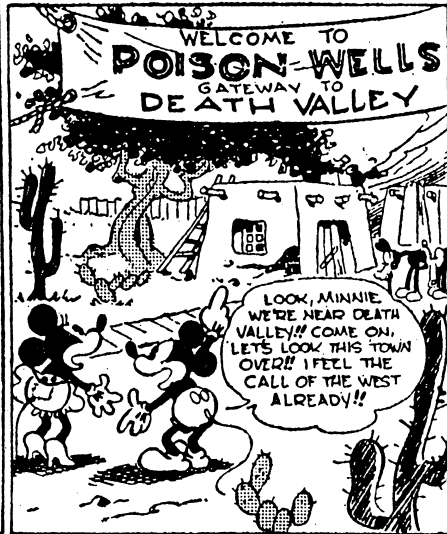
The 2010 videogame *Epic Mickey*, before its release, was looking to be one of the more controversial games of the year. And that's without any sex or decapitation. What made it so controversial? Because its Mickey was a bit more adventurous and scrappy and *dangerous* than the carefully controlled Mickey Mouse that developed in the animated cartoons. But that Mickey was never the only Mickey—or even the original Mickey.

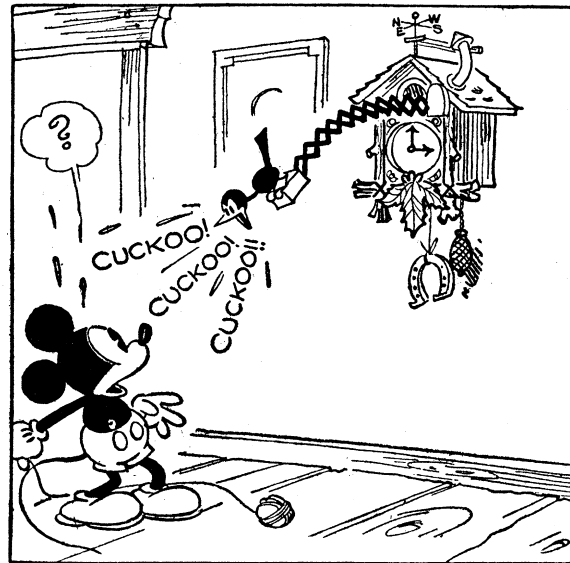
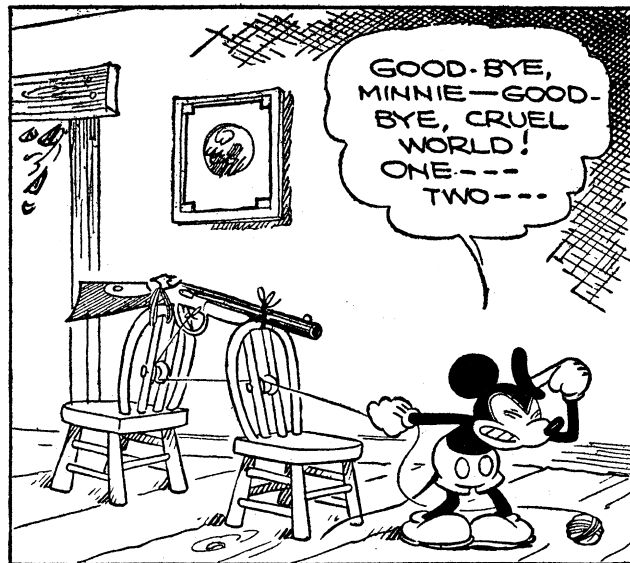
Floyd Gottfredson was a Mormon kid born in Utah who started selling cartoons to local papers before moving to Los Angeles and getting a job with the Disney Studio. Though hired as an inbetweener, he soon found himself assigned to the new *Mickey Mouse* newspaper strip. The creative director of *Epic Mickey* writes that Gottfredson's "strips feel like what Walt [Disney] and Ub [Iwerks, Mickey's creators] would have done if they'd pioneered a medium of still images rather than one of images in motion, a medium where readers would return reliably, for weeks, even months on end."¹

It was Gottfredson's Mickey that could inspire those looking to recreate the character for a videogame-playing generation.

When I first approached *Dialogue* about reviewing the first

MIKEY AND MINNIE ARE NEAR THEIR GOAL! MAKING THE LAST LEG OF THEIR TRIP ON A FREIGHT TRAIN - MIKEY AND MINNIE LAND IN POISON WELLS - JUST A SHORT TRIP NOW TO DEATH VALLEY AND THE GOLD MINE!



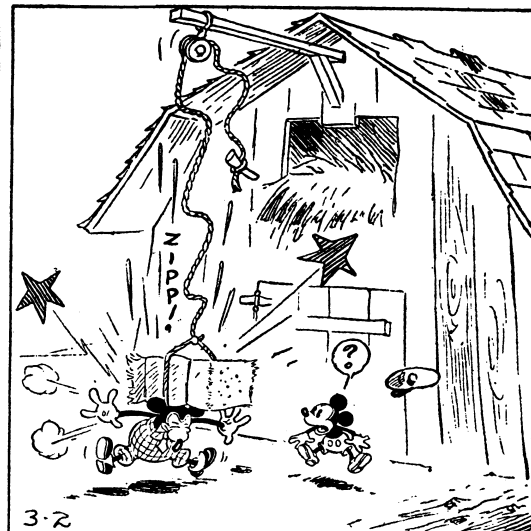
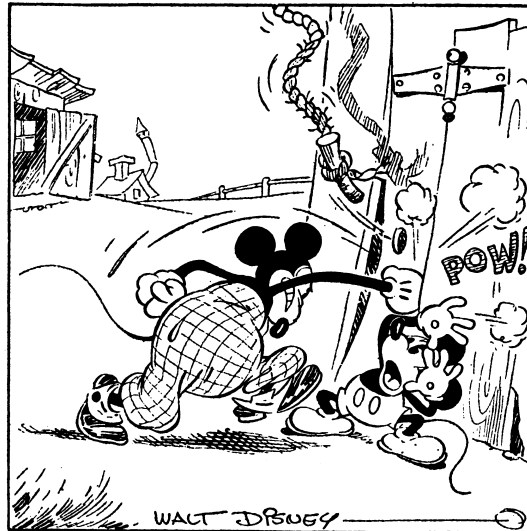
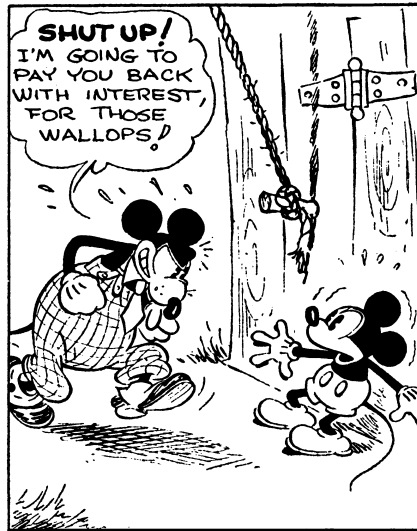
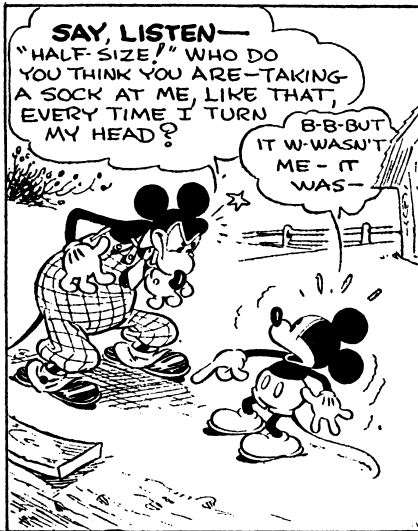


MICKEY IS LIKE A HOUSE-FLY, OUT OF ONE JAM AND INTO ANOTHER—

MINNIE'S COUSIN, "RUFFHOUSE RAT," HEAVY-LIGHT WEIGHT CHAMP, WHILE TAKING MICKEY

TO THE WOODSHED TO RECIPROCATATE FOR THE PUNCH IN THE NOSE MICKEY HANDED HIM, STEPS ON A PLANK AND KNOCKS HIMSELF HORIZONTAL AGAIN!

MICKEY IS SCARED STIFF!



WALT DISNEY

3-2

volume of Fantagraphics's beautiful new series of books collecting all the Gottfredson strips from April 1, 1930 to November 19, 1976, it was with the intention of bringing a hearty Mormon reading to his comics work. I figured that the first story (which provides the book's title), "Race to Death Valley," would surrender all sorts of pioneery motifs easily applicable to Mormon Experience.

In fact, the book surrendered nothing of the kind.

Now, it may be that later volumes covering later years, in which Gottfredson's autonomy grew, may prove more amenable to saintly readings, but this volume did not. In fact, I realized a certain sense of irony when the editorial comments engaged in embarrassing PC readings similar to what I had intended. Example: in the introduction to "Mickey Mouse and the Ransom Plot" (July 20, 1931 to November 7, 1931) the editors feel a need to apologize for the story "as a relic of its time," making Gypsies into Gypsy stereotypes, and reading into the narrative a "Gottfredson [who] doesn't seem to have been truly comfortable with the melodramatic tropes he was invoking."²

Seeing another modern reader twisting the text into something closer to their own worldview repented me of my own desire to do the same. And I decided to just read the strips as a serial comedy-adventure and judge them on that basis.

Unfortunately, I don't think the strips have aged that well. Gottfredson fans insist that the first few years (as covered in this volume) are not his best work, but I'm not sure I'm even intrigued enough to give Mickey another shot. I don't, in other words, want to drop the money to purchase them myself now that I am no longer likely to receive free review copies in the mail.

However, I must remember that I am an adult, jaded and picky and well-read in modern comics. So, although Gottfredson's early *Mickey Mouse* strips did not win my love, I do recognize his skill and potential, and I look forward to passing the book on to my kids and hearing them laugh their heads off in the back of the car at jokes I could only roll my eyes at, hearing them chatter about thrills and plot twists I found tedious.

And maybe, just maybe, if they love it enough, I'll feel obliged to buy volume two, *Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse: "Trapped on Treasure Island,"* which came out in October.

And maybe, if I'm lucky, Treasure Island will be a clear metaphor for Adam-on-di-Ahman.

Notes

1. Warren Spector, "The Master of Mickey Epics," introduction to *Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse: "Race to Death Valley,"* 8.
2. "Middle-Euro Mouse," 168.

Woodruff's Private Mindset

Reid L. Neilson, ed., *In the Whirlpool: The Pre-Manifesto Letters of President Wilford Woodruff to the William Atkin Family, 1885–1890*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. 232 pp. Notes, illustrations, index, appendices. Hardcover: \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-87062-390-5.

Reviewed by Stephen C. Taysom

When I first learned that Reid L. Neilson, the managing director of the LDS Church Historical Department and an old friend from BYU days, was planning to publish a few dozen letters from Wilford Woodruff to Neilson's ancestors in southern Utah, I was a bit skeptical. The life of Wilford Woodruff is among the most well-documented of any Latter-day Saint's. Woodruff left behind an archive that includes thousands of sermons and more than six decades' worth of daily journal entries. Many of the sermons and all of the journals have been published and are relatively easy for researchers to access. Woodruff is also among the very few LDS presidents who have enjoyed the attention of a scholarly biographer. All of this led me to wonder why a collection of forty-six letters from Woodruff to a relatively obscure, if unflinchingly stalwart, southern Utah pioneer family was worth publishing. Before I was finished reading the first letter in the collection, I was adequately convinced of the book's value.

Woodruff's life during the years between 1885 and 1890 were difficult ones. He was advancing in age and he lamented the gradual erosion of the physical capacities that he had relied upon for recreation and survival for his entire life. Moreover, Woodruff

was a fugitive and, like other church leaders, moved from place to place along the “polygamy underground” to avoid arrest and prosecution for plural marriage. It was at one stop on the underground that he came to know and love the Atkin family. The Atkins provided Woodruff with a relatively comfortable hideout in the small settlement of Atkinville, just a few miles south of St. George, Utah. Here, Woodruff could indulge his love of hunting and fishing with relatively little fear of being discovered by the U. S. Marshals who were on his trail. Also during this period, Woodruff became the *de facto* head of the LDS Church upon the death of John Taylor in 1887, and was sustained as president of the Church in 1889.

Woodruff’s letters to the various members of the Atkin family are valuable in part because they provide references to these various large-scale issues with which he was dealing. He mentioned, for example, that he “did not sleep much” on the night he learned of Taylor’s death. But that is perhaps the least useful dimension of these letters. More significant is that the letters provide a glimpse of Woodruff without the public posturing that he assumed in his sermons as well as in his journals. Both the journals and the sermons were crafted for public consumption and thus required a certain level of rhetorical posturing. Woodruff was performing in both of those genres as his social persona. In the letters, by contrast, Woodruff appeared more relaxed, and seemed to express himself with less self-consciousness. He mixed his well-known penchant for eschatological rhetoric with the banal tasks of daily life. Consider, for example, a letter written by Woodruff on December 28, 1885. In a single letter, he mentioned watching the “signs of the times,” said that he was “too old to go to prison or hide in the mountains,” expressed in one sentence his theodical notion that God was allowing the polygamy prosecutions as a way both to “cleanse Zion” and to allow the “nations” to prove their wickedness, attested to the reality of a personal devil, mentioned plowing and pleasant weather, and lamented that he “cannot be seen openly, go nowhere only in the night, but it is a prisoner’s life but better than to be in the pen for obeying the Lord for he is as unpopular today as he was in Jerusalem but he will not be so when he comes again.” This single letter represents, in miniature, a

good many of the important facets of Woodruff's personality and worldview. Other letters bear witness to supernatural concerns, such as Woodruff's firm belief in an afterlife. In fact, he recounted in one letter that during his final minutes with his dying first wife, he instructed her (rather matter-of-factly) to "send my love to my friends in the spirit world" (128). Much detail is given in the letters regarding the heavy press of church business that constantly occupied Woodruff when he was in Salt Lake City. In the fall of 1887, for example, he complained in a letter that "we are in council for days at a time and a flood of business and have 10 to 40 letters in a day on private and public business, and from 20 to 50 [temple] recommends to sign daily" (142). Woodruff freely admitted in these letters that he "has never been in deeper water in church matters in my life," and that he was "nervous" about what the future might hold (165).

Woodruff also demonstrated in these letters a wry sense of humor and a capacity for playfulness. After visiting the newly completed Manti Temple, he wrote that it was "the most beautiful building we have ever built—cost over \$1,000,000—it ought to be good" (157). In another letter written to Nellie Atkin, one of the family's young children who had apparently offered to serve as Woodruff's bodyguard, he wrote that while he appreciated the offer, he wouldn't need Nellie's protection because "I have a large and stout man who goes with me everywhere day and night. Carries 2 pistols and a double barrel shotgun and says he will shoot the Marshals if they come to take me." Woodruff then added, conspiratorially, "don't tell anybody of this" (143).

It should be clear from the few examples I have cited above that the letters provide valuable insight into Woodruff's private mindset during what he believed to be the most important and difficult period of his life. Neilson must have been presented with something of a dilemma, however, when it came to deciding how best to publish the letters. There is insufficient material in the letters themselves to justify an entire book. So he includes several other contributions that help to contextualize the letters and provide heft to the volume. Neilson provides a fine introduction to the Atkin family and discusses at some length the history and dynamics of the family's relationship with Woodruff. Neilson identifies himself as an Atkin descendant, and this connection allows

him to provide unique insights into the relationship between Woodruff and the Atkin family. Less useful is Neilson's lengthy discussion of his editorial method and a preface that might better have been folded in with his general introduction. Also included are essays by Thomas G. Alexander and Jan Shipps. No one can question the colossal stature of these two figures in the world of Mormon scholarship. However, I was somewhat disappointed to see that Neilson chose to reprint essays that, while valuable and insightful, are each more than twenty years old (Alexander's was first published in 1991, Shipps's in 1984) rather than commissioning new essays, perhaps even work based upon the letters themselves. Those minor issues aside, I highly recommend that anyone interested in Woodruff, or late nineteenth-century LDS history, spend some time with these letters. They do not disappoint.

Our Bickering Founding Fathers and Their Messy, Flawed, Divinely Inspired Constitution

Michael Austin

Note: This sermon was originally delivered at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Wichita on March 3, 2013.

I consent . . . to this Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure, that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors, I sacrifice to the public good.—Benjamin Franklin in his final speech to the Constitutional Convention (September 17, 1787).

Americans are well advised to support the best that can be obtained in the circumstances that prevail. That is sound advice not only for the drafting of a constitution but also for the adoption and administration of laws under it.—Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “The Divinely Inspired Constitution” (February 1992).

We like to pretend that things were different back then, back when gods and giants roamed the earth. What would the likes of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson need with thirty-second attack ads? Would Alexander Hamilton haggle over a top marginal tax rate? Or would Benjamin Franklin try to filibuster a Supreme Court

nominee? Certainly the idols of our tribe were above such nonsense.

And what would they say if they could see us today? They would be so disappointed, we imagine, at what we have done to their country and their Constitution. In less than 250 years, we have descended from their Olympian heights to become a nation of petty, intolerant, partisan squabblers—a bunch of satyrs who can't even recognize Hyperion. Obviously, they would find our political process disturbing, and perhaps they would also scold us for abandoning their clear instructions about things such as taxation, the national debt, federal power, state's rights, military readiness, and religion in the public square.

That is the common view of most Americans in the twenty-first century, but it is also—and please excuse my strong language here—*utter nonsense and complete piffle*. The men we revere as “Founding Fathers” were not the sort of men who agreed with each other about much of anything. Nor were they shy about discussing their disagreements in public or occasionally spitting on (or shooting at) each other in response to political insults.

And what did they fight about? Well, as it turns out, they fought about many of the same things that we fight about today, such as taxation, the national debt, federal power, states' rights, military readiness, and religion in the public square. We need only to look at the election of 1800—which pitted Federalist John Adams against Republican Thomas Jefferson—to get a sense of the ferocity of their politics (which most Americans today would find shocking) and the topics of their debates (which many of us would find strangely familiar). Among the most important issues in the election of 1800 were the following:

- **Deeply unpopular and possibly unconstitutional laws passed by one side without any support from the other:** The Alien and Sedition Acts (1798), among other things, made it a crime to criticize the government in print. After this law was passed, anti-government writers and newspapermen were rounded up and herded into jail. This was roundly condemned by Jeffersonian Republicans as a violation of fundamental freedoms. And Jefferson himself, as Vice President of the United States, secretly wrote the 1798

Kentucky Resolution authorizing the state government to nullify, and refuse to enforce, the federal law.

- **Disagreement about the duty of the government to control immigration:** Through the Alien Acts, the Federalists required a fourteen-year waiting period for immigrants to become citizens. Republicans, who received nearly all of the votes of recent immigrants, wanted the period to be as short as possible and accused the Federalists of depriving people of their voting rights for crass political gain.
- **The unmanageable national debt:** The Revolutionary War had saddled America with a huge national debt, and the two parties disagreed strongly about whether it should be retired with tax increases (specifically the “Whiskey Tax”) or fiscal austerity.
- **The importance of a strong military:** Adams and the Federalists wanted to raise an army and a navy to protect the country from both French and British aggression. Republicans believed that standing armies were instruments of tyranny.
- **The role of religion in the public square:** Jefferson was widely suspected of atheism and was seen by Federalists as theologically and morally unfit for office. Once in office, he refused to proclaim “days of fasting and Thanksgiving,” as his predecessors had done, lending credence to the campaign charges of atheism.

And the election was about as nasty as they come. Each side accused the other of betraying the Revolution, trashing the Constitution, and secretly planning to hand America over to France or Britain. Federalists branded Jefferson a Jacobite who would soon set up guillotines on the banks of the Potomac. And Republicans portrayed Adams as a secret monarchist who would seize power for life and install his son, John Quincy, as his successor. Both sides believed that there was no way that the United States could possibly survive if the other guys won. It was, in other words, a fairly typical American election.

Somehow, though, America survived the presidencies of both

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson—and most of us now believe that the men who lived at this time were wiser and more patriotic than our current crop of politicians. They weren't, of course, as two of the participants in that election—Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr—would prove four years later on an open field in Weehawken, New Jersey. (Say what you may about politicians today, but it has been more than two hundred years since a sitting Vice President of the United States has shot anybody on purpose).

And yet we still cling to the mythology that things were better back then. And, in doing so, we have inadvertently combined “the Founding Fathers” and “the Framers of the Constitution” into something like a collective hive mind. In my recent book *That's Not What They Meant!* I call this mythical collective “Founderstein,” a monstrous creature made up of the bits and pieces of patriots long and safely dead. In contemporary debates, the Founderstein monster usually goes by names like “the intention of the Framers.” Nobody, of course, wants to be on the wrong side of history by opposing the collective weight of all of our political deities. And those who invoke The Framers in their debates do so precisely because they know that, in doing so, they are painting their opponents as bad Americans.

All of this rhetorical force disappears, however, when we simply acknowledge that the Framers were actual individuals rather than a single hive mind. One cannot humiliate one's enemies by saying that their positions would be opposed by some of the Framers, supported by others, and probably not even understood by the rest. But say “advocating X means trashing the Constitution and spitting on the grave of the Founding Fathers,” and all of a sudden you are a patriot and your opponent is a pig.

The problem is that the only proposition that we can substitute for X with any kind of historical coherence is that the Thirteen Colonies should not be ruled by the British. Beyond that, we get disagreement everywhere we look—especially when we look at the creation of the Constitution. The fifty-five men who gathered in Philadelphia to draft the Constitution were as diverse a group of human beings as could have been assembled in 1787. Their ranks included anarchists, monarchists, nationalists, anti-nation-

alists, slave owners, abolitionists, Christians, atheists, and everything in between.

In the end, only thirty-nine of the delegates signed the Constitution. Some of the non-signers—such as Robert Yates, Luther Martin, and George Mason—went to their home states to fight against ratification. Even among the signers, there was not a single man who approved of everything in the final product. Some found the national government under the Constitution overwhelmingly strong, while others found it insufferably weak. Nearly every delegate at the convention rejected Alexander Hamilton's plan for an executive with lifetime tenure. And James Madison tried repeatedly to approve a federal veto on all state legislation, which was rejected each time he brought it up. By the end of the convention both Hamilton and Madison felt that the document had serious and perhaps fatal flaws. However, they went on to become unqualified supporters of the Constitution and the principal authors of the *Federalist Papers* which supported its ratification.

The Constitution that emerged out of this squabbling was a deeply-flawed document. The government it created was clunky. The division of power between the states and the federal government was inconsistent. And, in order to produce a working compromise, the convention had to concede almost every contested point to the Southern slave states, embedding the protection of slavery into the Constitution and guaranteeing that this cancer could only be removed from the body politic with a lengthy and bloody civil war.

And yet I believe, as a matter of deep faith, that a divine hand guided the Framers of the Constitution. We can easily get so caught up in its flaws that we forget what a remarkable thing it was in 1787 for a continent-sized country to try to govern itself. It was an unheard-of proposition. Nearly everybody in the world at the time believed that social order required a functioning aristocracy and that political stability required a hereditary monarchy. If there were exceptions, wrote the great French theorist Montesquieu, they could only come in small states no larger than cities. Large republics just couldn't work.

George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and others begged to differ, and they created the first stable, large democracy in history—thus proving to everybody else that such a

thing was possible. Much remained (and remains) to be done, but the creation of a democratic government in the New World in the late eighteenth century advanced the cause of freedom in unprecedented ways.

As I said, I believe that a divine hand was at work in the creation of the American Constitution. I do not suggest that America enjoys unique divine favor, or that the same divine hand has not been at work in the histories of many other countries. But what happened in Philadelphia in 1787 was so unprecedented for its time, and did so much to move the cause of freedom forward, that I choose to regard it—for all of its messiness and imperfection—as an expression of divine grace.

And this leads me to my concluding point, which is that imperfection and inspiration are not the least bit incompatible—something that I first began to suspect years ago while reading the story of Balaam's ass in the twenty-second chapter of Numbers.

As you may recall, Balaam was a Moabite prophet whose king wanted him to curse the Israelites. He refused, but the king was insistent and willing to offer bribes, so Balaam mounted his donkey and went to see the king—thus earning the wrath of God, who sent a destroying angel out to deal with him. Balaam did not see the angel, but his donkey did and refused to advance. After Balaam beat his donkey three times to get him to move forward, the donkey spoke, and Balaam saw the danger that he was in.

In other words, the Lord finally got through to Balaam, but he had to speak through a jackass to do it.

I frequently reflect on this story as a way to remind myself not to ignore jackasses completely, as they may very well be speaking for the Lord. And this thought supports me as I read the debates and deliberations surrounding the American Constitution. The Constitution of the United States of America was not quite produced by talking jackasses, of course, but it was created by flawed and broken human beings bickering with each other in a messy process that produced a fractured, imperfect, compromise-driven consensus.

So here is the big question: what if this is the way that divine inspiration works? What if revelation is not a matter of transferring a thought or intention directly from God to the mind of a

prophet, but a proposition that involves discussion, debate, negotiation, and compromise among imperfect human beings? What if, in other words, revelation is a messy, communal, and participatory affair in which we have to negotiate with each other to reach an imperfect conclusion that will nonetheless merit God's stamp of approval because it is, in Elder Oaks' words, "the best that can be obtained in the circumstances that prevail?"

Such an understanding of divine inspiration runs counter to the way that people of faith often understand God's voice. We want our revelations to be clear, absolute, and otherworldly—perfect in the same way that God is perfect. But life is not a series of choices between the perfectly good and the irredeemably evil. It is a game of negotiations, tradeoffs, partial goods, lesser evils, and messiness.

Life is a mess. Human beings are flawed. And thus, a messy, flawed revelation—one that takes into account our own strengths and weaknesses and our willingness to act—will often be much more valuable to us than a thin sliver of absolute truth. This, I believe, is what the Framers of the Constitution discovered in the sweltering summer of 1787.

Understanding America's founding as an act of divine inspiration does not require us to whitewash and homogenize our understanding of the Founding Fathers. It may, though, require us to stop whitewashing and homogenizing our understanding of divine inspiration. It may be, in fact, that inspiration is always (or at least often) a matter of debate, discussion, and compromise among flawed human beings who are doing the best that they can in unbearably difficult situations—and who, guided by a divine master, can accomplish marvelous works and wonders that future generations will understand, correctly, as miracles.

CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL AUSTIN {austinm@newman.edu} is Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Professor of English at Newman University. He lives in Wichita, Kansas, with his wife, Karen, and his children, Porter and Clarissa.

CHRISTOPHER JAMES BLYTHE {cjb10e@fsu.edu} is a PhD candidate in American religious history at Florida State University. Recently he has taught courses in colonial witchcraft and politics and religion in United States history. Blythe also serves as a board member for the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has co-edited a volume with his wife, Christine Elyse Blythe, entitled *Mormonisms (1844–1860): A Documentary History*, which is scheduled to be published with Greg Kofford Books this year.

BRIAN BROWN {bbmarrone@gmail.com} lives in Utah Valley and works for a scrapbooking company to support his wife and four small children. He earned an MA in literature and writing from Utah State University, where his poetry placed first in the graduate level of the school's creative writing contest. He is currently working on finding that balance between writing and living while also trying to squeeze in some music.

R. A. CHRISTMAS (rachristmas@gmail.com) has been a contributor of poetry, fiction, and criticism to *Dialogue* since the first issue. He has degrees from Stanford, UC Berkeley, and USC (PhD 1968, medieval English literature). He is the author of seven books of verse, a novel, and a collection of songwriting, all of which can be found at www.lulu.com/spotlight/rachristmas.

CARL GLEN HENSHAW {glen@toadhill.net} received a BS degree in computer science from BYU and his MS and PhD in aerospace engineering from the University of Maryland. He currently works as a roboticist at the U. S. Naval Research Laboratory. He lives on a small farm in southern Maryland with his wife, Angela, two children, a flock of conceited chickens, six gentle sheep, and one cranky goat.

Composer, performer, scholar, and poet MICHAEL HICKS {michael_hicks@byu.edu} teaches in the School of Music at BYU. He is the author of five books, the latest of which is *The Street-Legal Version of Mormon's Book* (2012).

BLAIR DEE HODGES {blairhodes@byu.edu} received a BA in

mass communication with a minor in religious studies at the University of Utah in 2010 and a master's degree in religious studies from Georgetown University in 2013. He is the public communications specialist for the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University.

RICHARD T. HUGHES is Distinguished Professor of Religion at Messiah College and is author or editor of seventeen books including *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, *Myths America Lives By*, and *Christian America and the Kingdom of God*.

CRISTINE HUTCHISON-JONES {cristine.hutchison.jones@gmail.com} received her BA in American studies and religion from Florida State University in 2001, and her PhD in religious and theological studies from Boston University in 2011. She is a cultural and intellectual historian of religion in the United States with a focus on religious intolerance and representations of minorities. Her dissertation, "Reviling and Revering the Mormons: Defining American Values, 1890–2008," explored images of the Mormons in American news, fiction and non-fiction writing, and television and film.

THERIC JEPSON {theric@thmazing.com} has written about Mormon comics for *A Motley Vision*, *Sunstone* (for which he received an AML Award), and the new ABC-CLIO publication *Mormons and Popular Culture: The Global Influence of an American Phenomenon*. He is also the co-editor of *Monsters & Mormons* from Peculiar Pages, and author of the novel *Byuck*, now available from Strange Violin Editions.

BOYD JAY PETERSEN {boyd.petersen@comcast.net} is the program coordinator for Mormon studies at Utah Valley University and the author of *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*. He is the book review editor for the *Journal of Mormon History* and the past president of the Association for Mormon Letters. His book *Dead Wood and Rushing Water: Essays on Mormon Faith, Politics, and Family* is forthcoming from Greg Kofford Books.

ROBERT A. REES {bobrees2@gmail.com} teaches Mormon studies at Graduate Theological Union and UC Berkeley. Previously he taught at UCLA and UC Santa Cruz and was a Fulbright Professor of American Studies in the Baltics. He is the editor of *Proving by Contraries* (2005), *The Reader's Book of Mormon* (2008), and *Why I*

Stay: The Challenge of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons (2011). He has just completed *American Dreams*, a play about the American Renaissance, and is editing a second volume of *Why I Stay*.

REED RICHARDS {evan.richards@vanderbilt.edu} lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he is the organist in the Cumberland Branch, pianist for the Primary, and a dedicated home teacher. He attended BYU and Vanderbilt. His poems and stories have appeared in *Dialogue* and *Nashville Scene*. He is moving to Murray, Utah, in August and will miss his branch.

DAVID W. SCOTT {scottdw@uvu.edu} is associate professor and chair of the Department of Communications at Utah Valley University in Orem. He teaches a class on Mormon culture when he isn't teaching media law. He also serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Religion and Media*. His research includes analyses of religion, culture, and Mormon studies.

CHRISTY SPACKMAN {ccs316@nyu.edu} is an adjunct professor and PhD candidate in food studies at New York University. She holds degrees in molecular biology, food chemistry, and a certificate in culinary arts, and writes about all three at balancefood.blogspot.com.

DANIEL A. STOUT is the Director of the Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies. His research interests are in audience analysis and particularly the interface between media and religion. His books with Judith Buddenbaum, *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations* (Sage) and *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies on the Interaction of Worldviews* (Iowa State University Press) are considered foundational works in the field. He is also founding co-editor of the *Journal of Media and Religion* (Erlbaum) as well as the recent *Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication, and Media* (Routledge).

STEVEN C. TAYSOM {s.taysom@csuohio.edu} is a professor of the history of religion at Cleveland State University. His published works include *Shakers, Mormons and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), and an edited collection titled *Dimensions of Faith: A Mormon Studies Reader* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011).

SHAWN R. TUCKER {stucker@elon.edu} is an associate professor of fine arts at Elon University in Elon, North Carolina. He

teaches courses that introduce the humanities, as well as seminars on the virtues and vices and the nature of pride and humility as they contribute to the good life. Beyond these topics, his research also explores laughter, humor, and humility.

JOHN G. TURNER {jgturner52@gmail.com} is assistant professor of religious studies at George Mason University and the author of *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Harvard University Press, 2012).

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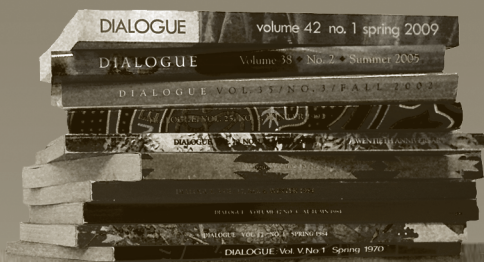
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