

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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“Apostates,” “Anti-Mormons,” and Other Problems in Seth Payne’s “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics”

I am a former Mormon.¹ I was raised in a very devout LDS family in one of the most Mormon counties in all of Utah, Morgan County. I was extremely devoted as a youth, missing church rarely. I served a mission in Costa Rica from 1996–1998. My mission convinced me of the importance of religion. Before my mission, I planned on becoming a medical doctor. After my mission, I decided I had to figure religion out. I completed my BA in Psychology at the University of Utah in 2000 and started graduate work in Sociology at the University of Cincinnati in 2001. I left the LDS Church in the summer of 2002 (for reasons I will detail below). Today, I am not religious. I am an atheist and humanist. I am also, occasionally, a *vocal critic* of the LDS Church. I am not, however, an “apostate” or an “anti-Mormon,” for reasons I will detail below.

I provided this background not because I am offering an “apostate” narrative but rather because there are several theo-

retical approaches in the social sciences that suggest it is important for readers to understand the perspective of the author. This view originated in feminist theory, but has since become common in symbolic interactionism, conflict and critical theory, postmodernism, post-structuralism, and many other fields.² Knowing the perspective of the author helps reveal the biases in what the author has written. I included my background so readers will know my perspective, but also to illustrate one of the first shortcomings of an article recently published in *Dialogue*, Seth Payne’s “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics.”³ While the author’s perspective was ultimately implied at the end of the article, had the article begun with a similar delineation of the author’s personal background and perspective, it is likely I would have read the article quite differently. I would have known ahead of time that the article was written by a “pastoral apologist,” whose methodology and interpretation were colored by his perspective. Because I do not want to be criticized for critiquing Seth Payne, whom I do not know and who, for all I know,

is a very nice, well-intentioned individual, I will instead repeatedly refer to his article, the title of which I have shortened to save space: “Pastoral Apologetics.” The first topic I want to discuss is the importance of language. Terminology matters. Language can be used as a tool to further the aims of a dominant, hegemonic group.⁴ While I lean more toward quantitative research and consider myself an empiricist, I see the utility in perspectives like critical theory. I also see the importance of understanding those ideas as they relate to how biases can enter into the work of scholars. As a sociologist who has published qualitative work before, I will also examine the methodology and interpretations in “Pastoral Apologetics” based on common standards for qualitative work.⁵ I conclude with some thoughts on the broader implications of “Pastoral Apologetics.”

Oppressive Discourse

“Apostates”

“Pastoral Apologetics” draws heavily on David Bromley’s work,⁶ but misuses Bromley’s definition of the term

“apostate.” People who leave religions—I have argued elsewhere that they should be called “religious exiters”⁷—are primarily called apostates by those who remain in the religion they left.⁸ This is, in fact, one of the important insights in Bromley’s edited volume, which is not coincidentally called *The Politics of Religious Apostasy*. Occasionally, those who leave a religion may call themselves “apostates,” often for lack of a better or more well-known term, but rarely is “apostate” their key identity marker.⁹ Instead, they typically develop a new identity.¹⁰ If their new identity is secular, then they likely will choose one of the many labels available to nonreligious and nontheistic individuals, like atheist, agnostic, humanist, or freethinker. If the new identity is religious, then they will likely adopt terminology that corresponds to that new religious identity (e.g., Evangelical Christian, Buddhist, etc.). Apostate is a pejorative term used by those who feel betrayed by the person leaving the religion to denigrate that individual.¹¹ It is oppressive discourse.¹²

Bromley lays out three criteria for an individual to be labeled

an apostate. First, the person has to have been a member of a “subversive” organization. Second, the person has to join an oppositional group after leaving. Third, the person has to actively work to destroy the subversive organization, which he/she left.

“Pastoral Apologetics” describes the three types of organizations Bromley discusses in his chapter—allegiant, contestant, and subversive—in a largely accurate way. Allegiant organizations align with prevailing cultural norms and values; contestant organizations are moderately in tension with prevailing cultural norms; subversive organizations are in high tension with cultural norms and are considered illegitimate.¹³ However, “Pastoral Apologetics” then twists Bromley’s definition, suggesting that the classification of an organization as subversive is based on how those who leave the religion see it, “It is from these groups who, broadly speaking and to varying degrees, view the modern LDS Church as subversive that LDS sociological apostates emerge” (97). But Bromley

offers static criteria that can be used by social scientists to classify an organization into one of his three types. Nowhere in his chapter does he suggest that the classification of an organization as allegiant, contestant, or subversive is based on the relative perspective of the individual who left it.

Without going into all the characteristics of the different types of organizations, the most obvious classification for the LDS Church today is as a contestant organization, not a subversive organization. Given the first criteria for someone to be an apostate using Bromley’s three criteria above is that he/she has to leave a subversive organization, it can be definitively said that *there are no Mormon apostates today!* In the early days of the LDS Church, perhaps even up until the end of polygamy in 1890 or shortly thereafter, the LDS Church would probably have qualified as a subversive religion.¹⁴ There could, then, have been Mormon apostates prior to 1890 (and obviously were). But, if we use Bromley’s definitional criteria, there are no Mormon apostates today.

Some readers may be wondering if there are apostates by other

definitions. Of course, though it depends on the definition. If an “apostate” is anyone who leaves a religion, then there are millions of Mormon apostates.¹⁵ However, that seems like a very weighty label to describe individuals like the roughly one million Brazilians who were baptized as members of the LDS Church but no longer consider themselves LDS. Unless most such individuals become vocal critics when they leave the LDS Church, labeling them “apostates” seems very pejorative and biased.

Other definitions aside, “Pastoral Apologetics” specifically draws on Bromley’s work to define apostates and, as a result, sets itself up to be unable to analyze apostate narratives unless they are from individuals who left the LDS Church in the nineteenth century. Why, then, does “Pastoral Apologetics” argue that it is analyzing “apostate” narratives when it cannot be doing anything of the sort? I will return to this question below.

“Anti-Mormons”

“Anti” is a prefix meaning “opposition to” something. When “anti-” is added to the

word “war,” the meaning is clear: someone who is anti-war does not want war to exist. Someone who is anti-gay does not want gays to exist. Someone who is anti-Semitic does not want Jews to exist. But what does “anti-Mormon” mean? If someone is “anti-Mormon,” does that mean they do not want “Mormons” to exist?

Yes.

I think it is fair to say that there were anti-Mormons in the nineteenth century. People like Lilburn Boggs wanted to exterminate Mormons, and anti-Mormons killed Joseph Smith Jr.¹⁶ But are there any anti-Mormons in existence today? Other than perhaps the most extreme factions of fundamentalist religious groups, who want to exterminate everyone unlike them, to my knowledge there are no organized, openly anti-Mormon groups in existence.

There are, however, critics of Mormonism. But criticizing the LDS Church or other variants of Mormonism does not make someone anti-Mormon. If that were the case, then any Mormons who are not also Jews because they disagree (which is a form of critique) with some aspect of Judaism are also anti-

Semitic. Disagreeing with Jewish doctrine does not make someone anti-Semitic; wanting to exterminate Jews does. Being a critic of Mormonism does not make someone anti-Mormon any more than being a critic of the federal government makes someone anti-American. Criticizing the excesses of Wall Street does not make someone anti-capitalism. Criticizing the education system does not make someone anti-education. Criticizing your meal at a restaurant does not make you anti-food. Criticizing a scientific study does not make you anti-science. Criticizing the LDS Church does not make you anti-Mormon. It makes you a critic.

“Pastoral Apologetics” uses the label “anti-Mormon” nine times in reference to a variety of groups, as in this passage:

These groups are diverse with conservative Evangelical anti-Mormons at one end of the spectrum and radical “New Atheist” secular critics at the other. Even amongst these various anti-Mormon groups it is important to make a distinction between

theologically conservative anti-Mormons, radical theological conservatives, and secular anti-Mormons (who may take an antagonistic stand against the LDS Church similar to the antagonism seen in certain “New Atheist” circles). Conservative anti-Mormons find the modern LDS Church subversive on mostly theological grounds.¹⁷

By calling these groups “anti-Mormons,” what does “Pastoral Apologetics” accomplish?

Oppressive Othering

I do not know Seth Payne’s motivations for writing “Pastoral Apologetics,” nor in calling some former Mormons “apostates” and/or “anti-Mormons.” I also do not care to speculate as to what his motivations are. But I think it is quite clear what is accomplished when such terms are used, regardless of who uses them. Both terms are rhetorical devices used to “poison the well,” which is a form of logical fallacy in the family of *argumentum ad hominem*. Poisoning the well is used to introduce negative information about someone with the aim of discrediting that

individual and anything he/she says.¹⁸ By labeling someone an “apostate” or “anti-Mormon” before considering what the individual has to say, one makes whatever they then say suspect. It is an indirect form of attacking the person rather than critiquing their argument.

Language matters.¹⁹ There are clear power differentials between the LDS Church and its former members. Given the resources the LDS Church has to influence public opinion versus those of former members, who have, at best, a handful of semi-organized institutions with meager resources, the LDS Church is in a much stronger position to dictate public discourse (which is another reason why it does not qualify as a subversive organization). Just as religious scholars in the social sciences have largely controlled the discourse and terminology used to describe individuals who leave religions (e.g., defector, apostate, dropout, etc.),²⁰ when members of the LDS Church use derogatory and inflammatory terminology to describe those who leave or critique the religion, the effect is similar: it marginalizes and

oppresses the targeted groups. This is a form of oppressive othering. Once their deviant and marginal status has been constructed,²¹ anything “apostates” and “anti-Mormons” say can be dismissed on the grounds that they are “apostates” and “anti-Mormons.” This reinforces the power differential between the two groups and allows one group to control the cultural milieu.

In addition to poisoning the well with terminology, “Pastoral Apologetics” also explicitly discredits everything these former Mormons said: “Several researchers have pointed out the inherent unreliability of apostate narratives in establishing fact. Daniel Johnson goes so far as to say, ‘Substantial portions of apostate accounts—indeed, perhaps even entire accounts—have nothing to do with real-world happenings or experiences’” (98). In other words, not only are the accounts analyzed in “Pastoral Apologetics” the accounts of “apostates” and “anti-Mormons,” but they cannot be trusted at all. If this is the case, then the only utility in analyzing such narratives is in trying to understand what lies dissenters make up to justify their disillusion. This is oppressive

othering based on the dismissal of decades of scholarship concerning narratives.²²

There are other examples in “Pastoral Apologetics” that illustrate the importance of language. For instance, “Pastoral Apologetics” characterizes former Mormons as “radical,” “vitriolic,” and “irrational.” Using these terms to describe the narratives of former Mormons does not suggest reasonable analyses.²³ It is judgmental, controlling, manipulative, and oppressive.

Methodological Problems

“Pastoral Apologetics” draws on a sample of 137 exit narratives found on three websites. The first forum is erroneously labeled—perhaps due to an issue with typesetting—as coming from www.postmormon.org, which is a website run by Jeff Ricks, who is characterized in “Pastoral Apologetics” as not being an “apostate,” as he and his organization are not explicitly antagonistic toward the LDS Church. But it is then stated that the narratives come from www.exmormon.org, which “Pastoral Apologetics” labels Recovery from Mormonism or RFM and considers

an “apostate” website. That is the source for 111 of the 137 exit narratives. The remaining exit narratives come from two explicitly evangelical Christian websites.

While there are some characteristics of these narratives presented in “Pastoral Apologetics,” two important details are omitted. The first is that these narratives are by no means a representative sample of such narratives. I have long been involved with the many and varied blogs and forums that cater to former Mormons. There are literally hundreds of websites (if not thousands) produced by former Mormons, many of them containing exit narratives. One website, www.outerblogness.org, serves as an aggregator for former Mormon websites and it lists hundreds of them. Many of those websites include exit narratives. Even www.exmormon.org now reports having close to 700 exit narratives, but it appears that “Pastoral Apologetics” examined those listed on this specific page: <http://www.exmormon.org/stories.htm>, which lists just 105 of the close to 700 exit narratives available on the website. Why were the narratives that were used chosen?

There was no discussion of the sampling frame for the study.

Another serious concern I have with the sample, particularly the sample from www.exmormon.org, is that no dates were provided. At one point, “Pastoral Apologetics” noted that some of the narratives were from the 1990s (100). But what is not explicitly mentioned in “Pastoral Apologetics” is that almost all of the narratives listed on that first page are from the mid 1990s. In other words, over 80 percent of the narratives analyzed in “Pastoral Apologetics” are close to twenty years old. While there is nothing inherently wrong with analyzing data from a specific time period, the time period should be noted, particularly since narratives from the mid 1990s may not be like more recent narratives. There is reason to believe that is the case. Even a cursory glance at some of the more recent narratives finds concerns that are not included in the tables in “Pastoral Apologetics,” issues like LDS Church finances and the LDS Church’s positions on homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and gender inequality. Given the serious problems

with the sampling frame used to find exit narratives, I am reticent to consider the conclusions in “Pastoral Apologetics” to be generalizable beyond a specific subset of former Mormons who frequented one or two online forums in the mid 1990s.

The lack of generalizability is particularly noteworthy, since “Pastoral Apologetics” levels similar criticism at a survey John Dehlin and colleagues conducted in 2012: “Understanding Mormon Disbelief.”²⁴ Here is what “Pastoral Apologetics” says of the study:

While Dehlin’s study is incredibly valuable in many ways, it has methodological constraints that prevent me from drawing sweeping conclusions about ex-Mormons generally. The biggest methodological problem of the study is that survey participants were self-selected via the Internet. Without question, such self-selection reinforces the most commonly discussed reasons Mormons begin to doubt their faith. In order to formulate conclusions beyond the limited population of those who participated in

Dehlin's survey, it would be necessary to conduct a decades-long study that tracks the beliefs, activities, and attitudes of randomly selected individual Mormons over time.

I have the same concerns with the study, but these concerns also apply to "Pastoral Apologetics." More importantly, the "Understanding Mormon Disbelief" study contradicts almost all of the findings of "Pastoral Apologetics." On page 8 of the "Understanding Mormon Disbelief" study, the factors that contribute to people no longer believing in Mormonism are listed. Of the top ten reasons given for no longer believing, just one is similar to those highlighted in "Pastoral Apologetics": "not feeling spiritually edified at church." The remaining nine are doctrinal, historical, or political reasons. I am not trying to suggest that we actually know the primary reasons why people leave the LDS Church. Neither the "Pastoral Apologetics" study nor the "Understanding Mormon Disbelief" study has random, representative samples of

former Mormons. But contrasting the two studies calls into question the conclusions from "Pastoral Apologetics," especially given that most of the narratives are from close to twenty years ago.

This also raises another concern with the study's generalizability. Kirk Hadaway, a well-known sociologist, gave a presentation in 2006 in which he estimated that close to 250,000 people left the LDS Church in the U.S. between 1999 and 2004, which translates into about 50,000 people leaving the LDS Church every year.²⁵ Assuming Hadaway's estimate is accurate and if we extend it from 1999 to 2013, that would suggest about 700,000 Americans left the LDS Church during that time. If we total all of the participants in various former Mormon forums and all of those who run websites or blogs, a reasonable estimate would be between 10,000 and 20,000 active to semi-active participants. These would be *vocal critics* of Mormonism (not "apostates" or "anti-Mormons"). *Vocal critics* of the LDS Church would therefore make up between 1.4 percent and 2.9 percent of former Mormons. What are the rest of the former Mormons?

I fully understand the problems with using anecdotes as evidence. But if there are not 700,000 vocal critics of Mormonism, the evidence would suggest that there are far more former Mormons like my wife than like me. My wife is completely disinterested in Mormonism. The only times she thinks about the LDS Church are when it figures very prominently in the news or when I raise issues related to my research. Otherwise, it is a non-issue for her. Does my wife warrant the label “apostate” or “anti-Mormon” because she is trying to live her life outside the religion she was raised in without criticizing or even thinking about it? If the majority of former Mormons are more like my wife than the *vocal critics* whose exit narratives were analyzed in “Pastoral Apologetics,” then what does “Pastoral Apologetics” really tell us about the reasons why people leave the LDS Church?

I have three additional criticisms of the methodology in “Pastoral Apologetics.” First, for a qualitative study of narratives, I was surprised that it did not include a single quote from the narratives. At best we

had summations of ideas from the narratives in the voice of the article’s author. That is not common practice in qualitative research.²⁶

What is also not common practice in qualitative research is to critique the narratives being analyzed, at least not without beginning the article with a note about the author’s subjective biases.²⁷ Yet, throughout “Pastoral Apologetics,” the arguments included in the narratives are dismissed and critiqued, often unfairly. For instance, on page 105, “Pastoral Apologetics” says, “No author reports being *completely* comfortable with Mormonism and subsequently deciding to cut ties for *purely* doctrinal reasons” (emphasis mine). These two adjectives are intriguing. They set an impossibly high bar. “Pastoral Apologetics” seems to be suggesting that the only way someone could claim to have left the LDS Church on doctrinal grounds is if they were *completely* comfortable with every aspect of Mormonism and then had *purely* doctrinal objections. If there was any other reason for leaving—moving, changing jobs, political disagreements, problems with patriarchy, problems with sexual discrimination,

etc.—then that individual left for some other reason, but not doctrinal issues.

A similar dismissal of doctrinal issues in the exit narratives is apparent in this quote as well: “The discussion of doctrinal issues and specific LDS truth claims is present in nearly all of the narratives but is generally proffered as an after-thought recitation without evidence of a *deep grasp* of the historical or theological questions at hand” (emphasis mine; 105). In this passage, “Pastoral Apologetics” demeans the authors of the exit narratives under analysis by claiming they do not understand historical or theological issues in Mormon thought. This claim seems to suggest that the only people who truly understand the historical or theological issues are those who are aware of them but reconcile these issues with their faith and remain members of the religion. That is remarkably judgmental. Similar normative evaluations of objections surrounding Joseph Smith’s polygamous and sexual relationships can be observed on pages 106 and 107.

Finally, “Pastoral Apologetics” repeatedly claims to know

what the authors of these narratives meant, thought, or want, as in this quote: “Authors want to illustrate how they were once fully Mormon, yet they also want to provide an explanation for why they once accepted beliefs they now deem utterly ridiculous” (102). If the author of a narrative explicitly states his or her intentions, thoughts, or wants, then those can be noted. But qualitative researchers should not impute motive, intention, or thoughts when such are not expressly stated in the narratives.²⁸

Methodologically, “Pastoral Apologetics” is extremely problematic. The sample of exit narratives is far from representative of former Mormons from the last fifteen years, and it is by no means representative of the motivations for the majority of people who leave the LDS Church as most do not become *vocal critics* of the religion. No quotes from the narratives are included, and the contents of the narratives are regularly and repeatedly critiqued from an apologetic perspective. This leads me to the final issue I want to discuss: why “pastoral apologetics” will be misguided so long as those attempting it refuse to

accept the stated reasons why people actually leave the LDS Church.

Conclusion

When I decided to leave the LDS Church in the summer of 2002, it was not because I was offended by anyone in my ward. On the contrary, about half of my closest friends were members of the ward—other young couples with whom my wife and I got together at least once a month, if not more often. We spent a lot of time with members of the ward and I remain in contact with some of them today. In fact, if anyone was worried about someone being offended, it was the bishop of my ward worrying about me offending the other members. As I began studying Mormon history and the sociology of Mormonism in graduate school, I began to raise some issues, perhaps naively, in Sunday School. It quickly became apparent that the questions I was asking bothered some people. My bishop did not know what to do with me, but he knew he couldn't let me stay in the adult Sunday School class. He called me to be the primary chorister.²⁹

I do not consider myself particularly gifted when it comes to music, but I can play the piano competently and I can more or less carry a tune, so the assignment was not entirely unreasonable. But it was also clear why I was called to be primary chorister—because even I could not bring myself to do anything but indoctrinate those little kids. I was not going to introduce controversial issues like polygamy, different versions of the First Vision, and the fraudulent nature of the Book of Abraham in primary.

Yet, this assignment ultimately backfired. When I was six, I loved singing “Book of Mormon Stories” because the rhythm and movements that went with it were fun. At twenty-five, the song really disturbed me. I no longer believed the Book of Mormon was historically accurate or even inspired; I believed it was a nineteenth century work of fiction. Yet, there I was teaching those kids to sing about the book as though it was literal history. Yet, “Book of Mormon Stories” was not the worst song I had to teach those kids: that honor goes to “Follow the Prophet,” which advocates blind obedience to the leadership of the religion. Knowing what I

did even then, I could not bring myself to teach those innocent children to believe that prophets “know the way.” I eventually decided I could no longer take part in the indoctrination of those children.

There are many reasons why I left the LDS Church, not all of them doctrinal.³⁰ But doctrinal reasons were important, as was the history of the religion and its politics. Until members of the LDS Church can grasp that the history of the religion, the doctrine of the religion, the politics of the religion, and even the oppressive othering that the religion employs all play a role in why people reject the religion, they will not understand why people leave. But those are not the only reasons.

The conclusion of “Pastoral Apologetics” focuses on the idea that those who understand and have reconciled the problematic elements of the LDS Church such that they remain members can help those who are questioning. The approach suggested is to emphasize not truth, but how Mormonism as a culture is important to people. There are a number of problems with this idea, not the least of which is that

“Pastoral Apologetics” suggests there are many people in the LDS Church who can engage in pastoral apologetics.

The limited data we have on this suggests that is probably not the case. In Pew’s 2012 survey of Mormons,³¹ they asked the following question: “Is believing that Joseph Smith actually saw God the Father and Jesus Christ essential for being a good Mormon, important but not essential, not too important, or not at all important for being a good Mormon?” When weighted, 80 percent of Mormons say that it is essential; another 13 percent say that it is important but not essential. Just 6 percent of Mormons say that it is not too important or not at all important. I cannot say for certain, but it seems like the 6 percent of Mormons who say the First Vision is not that important are those who could engage in pastoral apologetics.

Additional evidence for the small number of Mormons who could engage in pastoral apologetics can be found in other surveys. In the Pew Religious Landscape Survey,³² which includes a sample of 1,407 Mormons, 95.7 percent say the Bible is the word of God; 4.3

percent say it is a book written by men. Modern Bible scholarship using the historical/critical method clearly illustrates that the Bible is a book written by men.³³ The percentage of Mormons who know about all of the problematic issues in Mormonism and remain members is likely a tiny percentage of all Mormons—maybe 4 percent to 6 percent. Based on this data, the assertion in “Pastoral Apologetics” that there are many Mormons who can be pastoral apologists does not seem accurate. Most Mormons—by these measures more than 80 percent—have accepted the literalistic teachings of LDS leaders and are okay letting their kids sing songs like “Book of Mormon Stories” and “Follow the Prophet.”

For those who are sympathetic to the ideas in “Pastoral Apologetics” about trying to keep people in the religion, I understand what you are trying to do and I am sympathetic to it. If the LDS Church was made up of people like Seth Payne, I am guessing I would have a much harder time criticizing it, just like I find it next to impossible to criticize Unitarian Universalists. But pastoral apologists are

not running the church. They are not the majority in the Church. They are a small minority. The LDS Church continues to be led by fundamentalist-minded³⁴ men who believe that the best way to run the religion is to indoctrinate kids into blind obedience.

The idea that Mormons who have reconciled the religion’s problems with their faith must help everyone else do this (i.e., pastoral apologetics) is based on the erroneous assumptions that this will work for everyone and that everyone should be Mormon. Mormonism is not Catholicism; it is not the universal faith. The LDS Church is a tiny religion with declining growth rates.³⁵ It is a marginal religion with niche appeal.³⁶ Pastoral apologetics is guaranteed to be unsuccessful so long as it fails to realize some people do not want to be Mormon and Mormonism doesn’t matter for lots of people.

Even more importantly, I hope this response to “Pastoral Apologetics” serves as a catalyst for changing the discourse surrounding Mormonism—in the pews, online, and in Mormon Studies more broadly. Calling people who leave the LDS Church “apostates” says more about the

people doing the labeling than it does about those who are labeled “apostates.” It suggests both that the LDS Church is more subversive than it actually is and that people who leave are a threat to the LDS Church. I may be a “threat” to hegemonic discourse in the LDS Church, but my wife (and the millions like her around the world) is not. Calling her an “apostate” reinforces in her mind all the reasons why she left and alienates her further from the religion.

Likewise, calling everyone who says something critical of the LDS Church “anti-Mormon” works against the interests of the religion. Apologists for and members of the LDS Church both take a great deal of pride in the fact that the leadership receives revelation that can change the Church. Yet, every time revelation has been claimed as the catalyst for introducing significant changes in the LDS Church—e.g., the ending of polygyny, giving blacks the priesthood, changing temple rituals, changing attitudes toward women and sexual minorities—that revelation has resulted from internal and external criticism. I

understand why I am labeled an “anti-Mormon” by conservative members of the LDS Church who are resistant to change. I am a “threat” to their status quo. But I really do not understand why progressive members of the LDS Church would label someone like me “anti-Mormon,” as “Pastoral Apologetics” did. Doing so undermines and alienates your strongest and most effective external allies. If you want the LDS Church to change, you need people like me to criticize it.

Ryan T. Cragun

Notes

1. I would like to thank J. Edward Sumerau, Kristine Haglund, and the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful feedback on this letter.

2. Sherryl Kleinman, *Feminist Fieldwork Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007); Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

3. Seth Payne, “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 4 (2013): 85–121.

4. Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Ryan T. Cragun and Joseph H. Hammer, “‘One Person’s Apostate Is Another Person’s Convert’:

Reflections on Pro-Religious Hegemony in the Sociology of Religion,” *Humanity & Society* 35 (2011): 149–75; Kleinman, *Feminist Fieldwork Analysis*.

5. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 2003).

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28. Denzin and Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*.
29. That bishop was one of the best bishops I've ever had. He was a *Dialogue* subscribing member who was familiar with many of the problematic issues in Mormonism. He also told me why he wanted me to be the primary chorister, so I am not imputing motive here without actually knowing it.
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Response

I would like to thank Ryan Cragun for his insightful and poignant critique of my recent *Dialogue* article, "Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics." Cragun has done an admirable job of identifying areas of my presented argument that are perhaps faulty or could benefit from additional clarification or an improved methodology. There are several criticisms presented by Cragun, however, which I feel to be a result of either a misunderstanding of the argument or lack of clarity on my part.

I will address three areas of concern discussed by Cragun. First, I will look at his claim that I "poison the well" against ex-Mormons through the use of "oppressive discourse," as Cragun claims I "misuse Bromley's definition of the term 'apostate'." Second, I will address the critique of the methodology employed to analyze the set of ex-Mormon narratives utilized for the article. Third, I will counter what I see as an unduly narrow interpretation of the pastoral apologetics which I advocated in the article.

Cragun takes issue with my use of the term "apostate," as he feels

my use is too broadly applied to ex-Mormons generally. In writing this paper I feared the use of the term apostate and stated “I hesitate to employ this label (apostate) due to the extremely negative connotations this word has within the LDS community.” Further I state “the use of a word such as apostate in light of its significance and meaning in LDS culture may oversimplify what appear to be complex notions” found within the ex-Mormon narratives I studied. Therefore, I made it clear that “[my] article will examine the ex-Mormon narrative *as narrative* and will attempt to glean insights into the culture of ex-Mormonism and its relationship to the modern LDS Church from this very specific literary form.” It is important to note that these comments were made within the context of a discussion of the *ex-Mormon movement*, and not ex-Mormons generally. Without question I could have made this point more clearly and so I understand Cragun’s concerns based on his reading. Indeed, I do not make this distinction clearly enough in several places throughout my article. Nevertheless, it is essen-

tial to understand that my use of the word apostate is used only in the context of oppositional coalitions generally, and the relationship of contemporary ex-Mormon oppositional coalitions and the LDS Church specifically. Nowhere do I claim, nor do I believe, that all ex-Mormons are members of an oppositional coalition. Indeed, in speaking of those narratives borne out of oppositional coalitions, I state “[the importance of appreciating] that these narratives are the words of real Latter-day Saints expressing genuine feelings of anger, frustration, and hurt caused by their encounter with troubling aspects of LDS culture, doctrine, and history” (85–86). I hardly think this qualifies as “oppressive discourse.”

Given that my discussion of apostates is within the context of oppositional coalitions my analysis is true to the typology provided by Bromley. Oddly, Cragun argues that if we were to follow Bromley strictly we are forced to conclude that no such thing as Mormon apostates have existed since 1890. According to the Bromley’s typology, clearly this is not the case. There are both individuals and organizations dedicated to negatively

impacting Mormonism and the LDS Church in one way or another. Organizations like the Ex-Mormon Foundation—at least in its pre-2007 years—and the Utah Lighthouse Ministry are, without question, oppositional coalitions to the LDS Church. But this raises an interesting question. If the LDS Church is to be considered a “contestant” organization, how can such oppositional coalitions exist, since they, according to Bromley, only operate in opposition to “subversive” organizations? I attempt to resolve the question and apparent problem by employing Bromley in two very distinct ways, as described on pages 91–92. Therein, I argue for the use of what I term a “societal segment analysis.” The societal segment analysis, when used within the context of Bromley’s typology, allows us to “evaluate the varying levels of tension that exist between the LDS Church and divergent societal segments to gain a more nuanced understanding of both the modern LDS Church, its apostates, and whistleblowers.” Given my explicit description of how I use both Bromley’s (and

Mauss’) “static” analysis as well as this segment analysis, I think it is inaccurate to state that I “misuse” Bromley and that in today’s world Mormon apostates do not exist. Using this societal segment analysis I identify contemporary groups who “view the modern LDS Church as subversive” and it is from these groups that “sociological apostates” emerge. I make a clear distinction from this very specific sociological use and other terms commonly heard in LDS culture, namely, inactive or less-active members and even those who leave the LDS Church as “religious leave-takers.”

Similarly, Cragun disapproves of my use of the term “anti-Mormon,” a term that I believe to be overused and often misapplied. Had I used the term as Cragun describes, I would agree wholeheartedly with his objection. However, I make it very clear that discussion of anti-Mormonism applies to contemporary oppositional coalitions. At no point do I apply the term broadly to ex-Mormons. Cragun makes specific mention of Jeff Ricks, the founder of the Post Mormon Foundation. Cragun incorrectly states that I label Ricks an “apostate.” In fact, I argue that

“Jeff Ricks, founder of the Post Mormon Foundation—while certainly no fan nor proponent of the LDS Church—has focused his efforts from the beginning (2002) on forming meaningful and supportive community for those who leave Mormonism and has never established foundation goals specifically meant to ‘counter’ the LDS Church” (97). On this specific point, then, I have been misunderstood and, given the statement’s placement, could have been more explicit or clear.

Simply stated, I believe Cragun’s claim that I misuse Bromley to be both inaccurate and unfair. I agree with Cragun that “language matters” and as such was very precise in my employment of these emotionally-packed terms.

Cragun is very critical of my methodology and, in many respects, I agree with his assessment. Cragun’s first criticism regards how I employ the narratives studied. In short, I believe he misstates my position on the use and usefulness of narratives generally. On pages 98–99 I am quite explicit in defining the very limited scope of my use of these narratives. Cragun accuses me of trying

to delegitimize ex-Mormon experience generally (again, as part of “oppressive discourse”) by highlighting the fact that ex-Mormon, or narrative recitations generally, are—by their very nature—an unreliable source of establishing actual “real-world happenings.” LDS testimonies borne each month are equally unreliable. On this point I rely on Lewis Carter, who observes that believers are likely to highlight the positive while avoiding the negative, and ex-believers tend to highlight the negative and ignore the positive. Thus, within the study, “I am looking to these ex-Mormon narratives as cultural signposts that provide insight into aspects of ex-Mormonism itself, rather than as definitive indicators of specific ‘problems’ that lead people out of Mormonism.” To be fair, I should have been more explicit here in stating *ex-Mormon movement culture* so as to avoid any implication my remarks applied to ex-Mormons generally.

My point, of course, is that we simply must remain skeptical of any narrative recitation due to its inherent bias and selective presentation. However, researchers such as Heikkinen, Huttenen, and Kakkori (a

source that probably should have been cited in my original article) have, like Carter, shown that narrative recitation is problematic in establishing actual fact.¹ However, narratives are now being used in psychotherapy, not because they establish fact, but rather because they allow therapists and patients to address root causes, as brought out by narrative recitation.² This is why I made clear, “while these narratives may be unreliable in establishing ‘facts’ of personal history, they accurately convey the feelings, attitudes, mindset, and worldview of the author.” I even speak anecdotally that as I have spoken with many ex-Mormons over the years “it is my view that authors made a concerted and sincere effort to produce a story that was as truthful and accurate as possible.” Again, I would not classify this approach as “oppressive discourse” wherein I attempt to marginalize the experience of ex-Mormons. Just the opposite, in fact.

Cragun also notes the small sample size and the small number of sites online chosen for this analysis. He states “two

important details are missing” from my analysis. First, “is that these narratives are, by no means, representative sample of such narratives.” Second, that the conclusions drawn are not “to be generalizable beyond a specific subset of former Mormons.” I am in full agreement, which is why I begin my discussion of methodology thusly:

This study should be considered a preliminary or pilot study. The data presented here represent only the narratives directly considered by the study. Therefore, the data is not meant to apply to all ex-Mormon narratives. The sources used in this study were neither selected randomly nor screened for bias.

As can be seen, these two “important details” are not missing from the analysis. Rather, they are central to it.

As stated above, this study was constrained to a subset of opposition coalitions that seek to counter the LDS Church. I make no claims for generalizability and I would strongly caution anyone from using the data presented to draw any conclusions, whatsoever, about the reasons people leave the LDS Church. Rather,

these narratives should help us recognize serious cultural and social aspects of Mormonism that make the exit process so painful for so many. Of course many, and even perhaps most, former Mormons don't align with oppositional coalitions, and thus produce no narratives whatsoever, or narratives altogether different from the ones considered in my article. This is one reason I point readers to Rosemary Avance's excellent study of former Mormons in all their varieties.³

Another criticism is that I attempt to minimize or marginalize ex-Mormons by observing that the narratives examined do not show a deep grasp of some of the issues at hand. I stand by this assertion, because again, this comment relates only to the narratives considered, as well as observations of ex-Mormon oppositional coalitions (conferences, message boards, etc.) and in no way represents ex-Mormons generally. And, as these narratives tended to focus on the cultural difficulties of their personal exits and discussions of historical and/or doctrinal points, they did not, necessarily, demonstrate a strong grasp of the issues

mentioned. Given the focus of these narratives, one would not expect to see such historical or doctrinal exposition. On this point I should have been more clear and explicit.

Also, it is unclear why Cragun contends all narratives in the study are over twenty years old. This simply is not the case, as some were written as recently as 2006/2007.

Finally I wish to counter Cragun's claim that there are very few LDS people who can practice pastoral apologetics. He has fundamentally misunderstood my definition of pastoral apologetics:

Pastoral apologetics may be succinctly defined as a response to doubt that focuses primarily on the spiritual, social, and psychological desire for meaning, purpose and mysticism. It is an awareness of, and effort to support individuals as they process new information and adjust existing pragmatic truth narratives.⁴

I mention theologically liberal Latter-day Saints as *one* group who may be especially well-equipped for pastoral apologetics, but in no way do I

confine the pastoral apologetic role to one group, or even those who have struggled with difficult questions. A believer in the reality of the first vision can be an excellent pastoral apologist.

I understand why Cragun takes exception to my embrace of instrumental or pragmatic truth, but I maintain that for some who wishes to remain LDS, instrumental truth, as opposed to a correspondence view of truth, is a viable approach to some of the more difficult questions Latter-day Saints may struggle with as they encounter new and challenging information.

To conclude, I would again like to thank Ryan Cragun for his thoughtful analysis of my *Dialogue* article. He raises some excellent points and identifies areas where my thinking and primary thesis could have been made more clear. However, I take strong exception to my work being classified as “oppressive discourse,” especially since there are major sections of the article dealing explicitly with how the concerns of former Latter-day Saints—especially during their exit process—should be treated not only as legitimate, but

also as important examples of how separating from the LDS Church can be a difficult and even painful process. Indeed, I stressed, in introducing my discussion of pastoral apologetics:

I must preface what follows with a clear and unequivocal statement that the abandonment of Mormonism may be the most appropriate and rational choice for many individuals depending on their own unique circumstances, beliefs, and preferences. No individual who has invested significant amounts of time and effort in the LDS Church takes the choice to leave or stay lightly. Likewise, the choice to stay connected to the Church even in light of difficult questions and doubts is not one made hastily without considerable reflection. Both those who leave and those who stay would do well to develop empathy for others who have made a different choice. Incessant finger wagging on both sides of this question is as useless as it is obnoxious.⁵

Seth Payne

Notes

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2. Alphones J. Richert, *Integrating Existential and Narrative Therapy: A Theoretical Base for Eclectic Practice* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2010).

3. Rosemary Avance, “Seeing the Light: Mormon Conversion and Deconversion Narratives in Off- and Online Worlds,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 12, no. 1 (2013): 16–24.

4. Seth Payne, “Ex-Mormon Narratives and Pastoral Apologetics,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 4 (2013): 114.

5. *Ibid.*, 110.

What Shall We Do with *Thou*? Modern Mormonism's Unruly Usage of Archaic English Pronouns

Roger Terry

This article is the first of a two-part series. The second article will examine what the usage of archaic pronouns can tell us about Book of Mormon translation theories.

What shall we do with *thou*? If this question grates on your ear, it may be because you recognize that *thou* is a nominative pronoun (a subject) and therefore never follows a preposition. If it doesn't grate, then you are living, breathing evidence of the difficulties presented by archaic second-person pronouns in twenty-first-century Mormonism.

English-speaking Latter-day Saints have an uneasy relationship with archaic pronouns. Although we do not use *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, *thyself*, and *ye* in everyday speech, we encounter them frequently in three very different contexts in our religious communication. First, we read them in scripture, both ancient and modern. Second, we encounter them somewhat randomly, in other religious texts—hymns, histories, and patriarchal blessings, for instance. Third, we employ them in prayer. In the second of these three contexts, we expect to see inconsistency. But if we look at the first and third carefully, we may be surprised to find that our usage of these archaic terms is not just uneven; it is problematic on multiple levels—enough to give a professional editor like me serious syntactic dyspepsia.

Given the lay of this particular linguistic land, let me offer a quick disclaimer. The purpose of the ensuing analysis is not to

offer suggestions on how we should solve these usage inconsistencies. In some ways, we have quite effectively painted ourselves into a perplexing grammatical corner. Rather, my intent is to begin an exploration of certain trouble spots, so that Latter-day Saints become more aware of how the English language is used in the Church, and so that those whose responsibility it is to make far-reaching decisions regarding language issues have more information to work with.

For readers who wish for more detail regarding the early evolution of English second-person pronouns, I have included a brief appendix. At this point, however, suffice it to say that Old English morphed into Middle English by about AD 1100, Middle English gave way to Early Modern English in about AD 1500, and by this time second-person pronouns had settled into the pattern we see in the King James Bible—the singular forms *thou* and *thee*, and the plural forms *ye* and *you*. A few centuries earlier, however, second-person pronouns in many languages, including English, began a rather odd semantic shift that would complicate their usage and that would, in time, set English apart in this regard from the family of Indo-European languages and lead to the difficulties that Latter-day Saints experience today.

In about the thirteenth century, the singular second-person pronouns became a familiar form of address, used with children or persons of inferior rank, while the plural forms began to signify respect in addressing superiors.”¹ However, “by the sixteenth century the singular forms [*thou, thee, thy, thine, thyself*] had all but disappeared from polite speech.”² It is important for us to understand how this development came about, because it leaves English in a unique and awkward relationship with other languages, explains why LDS usage of archaic pronouns is so problematic (particularly in prayer), and raises significant policy questions for an expanding multilingual church.

The T-V Distinction

In their 1960 paper “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity,” Roger Brown and Albert Gilman identified a distinction between second-

person pronouns signifying either familiarity or formality. Although they focused on this distinction in English, French, Italian, Spanish, and German, it occurs in many other Indo-European languages as well. “The European development of two singular pronouns of address begins with the Latin *tu* and *vos*. . . . In the Latin of antiquity there was only *tu* in the singular. The plural *vos* as a form of address to one person was first directed to the emperor and there are several theories about how this may have come about.”³

“Eventually the Latin plural was extended from the emperor to other power figures.”⁴ This created a dual means of addressing others, and in time *tu* was used primarily with intimates, peers, or those of lesser station and *vos* with those of a superior rank or social standing or with those who were socially distant though equal in rank. In order to speak of this distinction in a uniform way, regardless of language, Brown and Gilman used the first letter of the relevant Latin pronouns and thus referred to the informal or familiar form as the T form and the formal, respectful form as the V form. Later this dual pattern of address came to be known as the T-V distinction. Not only was this power semantic rather complex in how it determined which form was used in various situations, but it also evolved over time and was applied somewhat differently in each language and culture. In modern German, for instance, the informal singular pronoun is *du*, with a corresponding informal plural of *ihr*. The formal pronoun, however, which is both singular and plural, is *Sie*, and it is not derived from the plural second-person pronoun but is instead identical in pronunciation and verb conjugation to the plural third-person pronoun *sie* (they). In spoken German, context alone specifies whether the speaker is addressing someone (second person) or speaking about others (third person).

In earlier times, parents addressed children with the T form while children addressed their parents with the V form. The nobility likewise used *T* with the common people, but the people used *V* in addressing the noble class. “In later years similar asymmetrical power relations and similar norms of address develop[ed] between employer and employee, soldier and officer, subject and monarch.”⁵

In relationships of relatively equal power, where there was no superior or inferior, speakers generally used the same form with each other. “During the medieval period, and for varying times beyond, equals of the upper classes exchanged the mutual *V* and equals of the lower classes exchanged *T* . . . For many centuries French, English, Italian, Spanish, and German pronoun usage followed the rule of nonreciprocal *T-V* between persons of unequal power and the rule of mutual *V* or *T* (according to social-class membership) between persons of roughly equivalent power.”⁶ Eventually, Brown and Gilman maintain, the power semantic that determined which pronoun was appropriate came into conflict with another semantic. They call this the *solidarity* semantic. Although two people may be unequal in power, they may, however, be from the same family, the same school, the same profession, the same military unit, the same employer, or the same political party. If the feelings of solidarity outweigh the sense of superiority and inferiority, then the mutual *T* or *V* is used. For instance, although in earlier times parents used *T* with their children and the children responded with *V*, members of the same family now address each other with *T* in almost all cultures and languages. And since World War II, the French Army has “adopted regulations requiring officers to say *V* to enlisted men.”⁷

These subtle shades of usage vary from culture to culture and shift over time within a given culture. For instance, when my wife and I visited Germany in 2006 to pick up our son from the same LDS mission where I had served thirty years earlier, I noticed a distinct shift to a generally more frequent use of the *T* form (*du*) among people of the same age than had prevailed when I was a missionary.⁸ This personal observation supports the assertion of Brown and Gilman that the solidarity semantic is gaining supremacy over the power semantic.⁹

In terms of English linguistic history, three overlapping developments gradually unfolded. First, the nominative plural *ye* was replaced by the objective *you*. Second, *you* became the formal singular nominative pronoun (the *V* form), while *thou* was the corresponding informal (*T*) form. Finally, for various reasons, *thou* slowly vanished from everyday speech, leaving *you* as the only

second-person pronoun for either subject or object, a development unique to English. For several centuries, the usage of *thou* and *you* as singular pronouns was governed by shifting conventions and became rather complex. A short summary of this evolving usage appears in the appendix.

Shakespeare, the King James Bible, and the Quakers

By Shakespeare's day,¹⁰ the usage of *thou*, *ye*, and *you* was sometimes indistinct. While *thou* was gradually falling out of everyday usage, the distinction between *ye* and *you* was becoming increasingly ambiguous. "Ascham and Sir Thomas Elyot appear to make no distinction in the nominative, while Shakespeare says *A southwest wind blow on ye And blister you all over!*"¹¹

In Shakespeare's works we find a variety of usages in the second person between characters of different rank. Some have claimed that this is an indication of the ambiguities that had entered the language by the sixteenth century, but *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* points out that "if we adopt a sociolinguistic perspective, readings of considerable interest can result," including the dialogue between King Lear and his daughters. "In the opening scene . . . Lear's daughters address him as *you*, and he addresses Goneril and Regan as *thou* (as would be expected); but his opening remark to his 'best' daughter, Cordelia, conveys special respect: 'what can you say.'" But when Cordelia's response displeases her father, he addresses her with an angry "But goes thy heart with this?"¹² Similar intentional shifts in usage in *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, and *Henry VI* suggest that Shakespeare was keenly aware of the subtle shades of meaning that could be created with the skillful use of pronouns.

Perhaps the most in-depth examination of second-person pronoun usage in Shakespeare was conducted in 1936 by Sister St. Geraldine Byrne.¹³ She interprets the usage of second-person pronouns in Shakespeare's plays in chronological order, scene by scene, and concludes that Shakespeare's treatment of these pronouns is "Elizabethan usage at its height," when *you* "had become the ordinary form in the average speech of the higher

and middle classes, while *thou* generally endured in the speech of the lower ranks with no claim to refinement. Moreover, *you* had become the tranquil form prevalent in polite conversation, in cool, unimpassioned intercourse, whereas *thou* had come to connote an emotional content. Finally, *you* had become the accepted pronoun of compliment and honor; *thou* had persisted as the accepted pronoun of intimacy and ease.” Considering these intricacies in the Elizabethan usage of second-person pronouns, Byrne argues that “Shakespeare uses the Pronoun of Address with the acme of consistency.”¹⁴ The purpose behind his usage “was that general desire to indicate grades of social position,” which in Elizabethan society included “the King and his court, the nobility and their retinue, the smaller country gentlemen, the professionals, the commercial classes, and the servant class.”¹⁵ Shakespeare’s kings, Byrne observes, shift between *thou* and *you* to portray subtle shades of social interaction and circumstance. “No ordinary men seem to have quite the same liberty of pronoun usage.”¹⁶ While Byrne asserts that Shakespeare’s usage is impeccable, it is also “in keeping with dramatic and artistic truth. . . . Sometimes, indeed, Shakespeare is primarily concerned with character qualities rather than social position,” and he “misses no opportunity to call the pronoun [*thou*] to his aid in the depiction of certain character qualities.”¹⁷

Terry Walker has examined the usage of second-person pronouns in Early Modern English using three primary sources: drama comedy and transcriptions of both trials and depositions. While none of these sources can be said to represent real extemporaneous speech, transcriptions of legal proceedings or depositions come closest to giving us a picture of how people actually spoke. The primary problem with using drama as an indicator of actual impromptu speech is that it is a creation of the author. “Drama Comedy,” writes Walker, “is often seen as bearing a close similarity to everyday speech, and as a result has been the focus of many previous studies of thou and you. However, it has to be kept in mind that the dialogue is fictional: the text is constructed by an author. Moreover, the intention of the author is presumably to entertain, and the language is often manipulated, for example, for purposes of characterization and/or humour.”¹⁸ Thus, the

usage of *thou* and *you* by Shakespeare and others may have been exaggerated or manipulated in other ways to enhance dramatic effect. Still, these studies do reflect in some way the patterns of usage that prevailed in earlier times and are useful to us as we seek to understand how our language has evolved.

As mentioned above, the subtle shades of meaning achieved by Shakespeare in his dramatic works were already being abandoned in his day in common speech and writing as *thou* gradually slipped from everyday usage and as *you* replaced *ye* in the nominative. This trend continued until *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, *thysself*, and *ye* had virtually vanished from common speech. Thus, in today's vernacular, the only usage of *thou/thee* is found in certain fixed phrases such as "holier than thou" or "fare thee well" that have come to us from our distant past, and certain biblical phrases that are quoted in appropriate circumstances ("Get thee behind me, Satan").

Linguists do not agree on an exact time frame when the now-archaic forms dropped from common usage, but Oswald T. Allis suggests that the King James (or Authorized) Version employs them not because they were still in common use in 1611 but for the simple reason that they accurately reflect distinctions the translators found in the original Greek and Hebrew texts:

It is incorrect to claim that . . . "thou" represents the usage of the 1611 period when the AV [Authorized Version] was prepared The AV usage is not Jacobean or 17th century English. *It is biblical English*. The Greek of the New Testament like the Hebrew of the Old Testament distinguishes between the singular and the plural forms of the second person. The AV makes this distinction simply because NT Greek does so, and because that is the only way to translate the Bible correctly.¹⁹

Allis makes a significant point here. Some modern translations of the Bible have dropped the distinction between second-person singular and plural to reflect a more contemporary vernacular. But in doing so, they have also erased subtle but important shades of meaning in some rather notable Bible passages. For instance, when the Savior says to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to *have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat" (Luke 22:31),

it is possible he is referring not just to Peter, since the pronoun is plural. (The italicized words in the King James Version, of course, indicate words that were not in the original manuscripts but were added by the translators to clarify meaning.) Interestingly, Joseph Smith, in his translation of the Bible, rendered this verse, “Satan hath desired you, that he may sift the children of the kingdom as wheat,” indicating the plural, albeit in the third person, and also removing or replacing the italicized words, as he often did. Likewise, when Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7), he was perhaps referring to the fact that all people must be born again, not just Nicodemus.

Pronoun usage in the King James Version, however, does not always follow the straightforward singular/plural or subject/object distinctions we may expect. Sometimes, particularly in the Old Testament, pronoun shifts occur, not because the translators were careless, but because the original Hebrew mixed singular and plural pronouns. Lyle Fletcher points out that pronoun shifts were sometimes intentional, such as when a speaker to a large group suddenly shifted from the plural to the singular. This shift had the effect of making the listeners feel that the speaker was addressing them individually.²⁰ A significant example of this is Exodus 19:4–6, where the Lord speaks to Israel with *ye*, reminding them of how he delivered them from the Egyptians and wishes to make them a covenant people. But these verses are prelude to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, which are delivered using *thou*, as if the Lord is addressing each individual Israelite. A similar shift occurs several times in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Savior says, for instance, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:38–39). Fletcher correctly points out that although we cannot know whether these are accurate quotations from the Savior and from Moses, the ancient Hebrew and Greek texts did allow for this sort of pronoun shifting.

Fletcher also discusses at length the fact that there were over 300 instances of a nominative *you* in the 1611 Authorized Version, which may have been a reflection of the vernacular of the day.

In an attempt to create a grammatically consistent King James Bible, however, most of these instances of the nominative *you* were replaced with *ye* by 1762. Interestingly, William Tyndale's translation (created nearly a century before the AV, in the mid-1520s) contained no instances of the nominative *you*, although his personal writings contain frequent usage of this form. The reason for this may have been Tyndale's emphasis on preserving clear lines between nominative and objective forms, as well as between singular and plural forms.²¹

Of course, the King James translators drew heavily upon William Tyndale's translation, including Tyndale's use of *thou* and *ye* to distinguish between singular and plural in the second person. According to Frank Nolen Jones, *thou* and *ye* had already fallen from the everyday vernacular at that early date: "Tyndale knew of such subtleties, and he deliberately revived words that had already passed from common usage to handle faithfully the translating into English. In doing so, he actually *created* a special variety of English—a Bible English—for the purpose of clearly conveying the precise meaning. Tyndale thereby *elevated* the English usage *by Scripture* rather than *accommodating* Scripture to the English vernacular."²² By replacing several hundred of Tyndale's nominative *yes* with *yous*, however, the King James translators diluted that precision. While Byrne would dispute Jones's assertion that Tyndale had to revive "words that had already passed from common usage," the decision by Tyndale did create a scriptural dialect, which also had the effect of establishing a form of general religious usage that mirrored biblical English (though not precisely)²³ and would persist for centuries. The use of *thou* in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, adopted by many churches in the Anglican Communion, likely added to the practice of addressing God with *thou*, even after the pronoun had passed out of the everyday vernacular.

If *thou* had not totally vanished from common usage by Tyndale's day, or by 1611 when the KJV was completed, the beleaguered pronoun suffered yet another setback in the late 1640s with the rise of the Quakers. According to Brown and Gilman, "In the seventeenth century 'thou' and 'you' became explicitly involved in a social controversy. The Religious Society

of Friends (or Quakers) was founded in the middle of this century by George Fox. One of the practices setting off this rebellious group from larger society was the use of Plain Speech, and this entailed saying ‘thou’ to everyone.”²⁴ To the Quakers, using *you* with another person was both a religious and social corruption. They “disapproved of the way singular *you* had come to be part of social etiquette, and [they] accordingly used *thou* forms to everyone. This usage, it was felt, was closer to the way Christ and his disciples spoke, avoided unnecessary distinction, and was grammatically more exact.”²⁵ Ironically, in the countries where English is spoken today, society has achieved the leveling and uniform informality the Quakers desired, but it has occurred with the formal, objective *you* replacing the other three second-person forms. Meanwhile, some contemporary Quakers choose to cling to an archaic nominative *thee* that sets them apart as both peculiar and ungrammatical (*thee is, thee were*).²⁶

In summary, the disappearance of *thou* from everyday usage is not easily explained, but several factors seem relevant. First was “a general trend in English toward simplified verbal inflection.”²⁷ Second may have been “a popular reaction against the radicalism of Quakers,”²⁸ although it appears *thou* had already largely vanished from common speech by the 1640s. A third possible factor was the rise of the middle class and a general leveling of the classes as the Industrial Revolution displaced aristocratic institutions and relationships. A fourth factor may have been the evolving usage of *thou* to show contempt toward superiors or even equals.²⁹ “The ‘thou’ of contempt was so familiar that a verbal form was created to name this expressive use. Shakespeare gives it to Sir Toby Belch (*Twelfth Night*) . . . : ‘Taunt him with the license of ink, if thou thou’st him some thrice, it shall not be amiss.’ In life the verb turned up in Sir Edward Coke’s attack on Raleigh at the latter’s trial in 1603: ‘. . . for I thou thee, thou traitor.’”³⁰

The relevant point for Latter-day Saints in this brief recounting of linguistic history is that *thou* was never used in everyday English to signify respect or honor. Quite the contrary, *thou* was actually abandoned partly because it had become a term of disrespect or contempt. Initially, *thou* signified only number (singular) and

was used to address every individual, regardless of rank, until with the rise of the formal *you* it became the familiar or informal form. Finally, *thou* was abandoned altogether and replaced in the nominative by *you*, formerly an objective plural pronoun.

***Thou* in Religious Communication**

Interestingly, in its entry on “Thou,” Wikipedia singles out the Latter-day Saint prayer tradition, which uses *Thou* to signify respect for deity. Grant Hardy points out that the reason Wikipedia singles out the LDS prayer tradition may be that we are the last major denomination to use the King James Version exclusively. “Archaic prayer language and the KJV—both of which make us different from most other English-speaking Christians—are intimately related.”³¹ Of course, some other Christian denominations still recognize the reverential *Thou* that is used in prayer, although its usage is gradually losing out to the more common *You*. One Baptist website, for instance, makes this statement about the use of reverential pronouns:

We who are familiar with, and use these pronouns in speaking to God, certainly should not be too critical of those, who, because of a limited exposure to traditional language and the widespread use of modern translations have difficulty in using such terms. But, if we understand the terms and appreciate the significance of using them in prayer to God, we should use them and encourage their use by others. We should treasure these special terms of reverence as part of the rich heritage we enjoy in the English language and not let them fade out of use. To do so will not only impoverish the English language, but also the prayers of God’s people.”³²

Other Christian websites are less conservative in their views, and some point out that people using these archaic pronouns can sound pompous, pretentious, or even irritating, especially if they mangle the grammar.³³

Bible translations have also become less conservative over time. The Revised Standard Version (1946), for instance, uses *you* almost

exclusively, retaining *thou* only for addressing God (see John 17). This is an unusual pattern, since it reflects neither the uniform treatment of pronouns in the original manuscripts nor modern usage; it introduces instead a form of usage in which *thou* occurs only in prayer, but in no other instances, mirroring, interestingly, current Latter-day Saint practice. The translators of the New American Standard Bible (1971) made a similar decision, but in 1995 reversed course and have now eliminated all instances of *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, *thyselves*, and *ye*, as have the translators of the New International Version, the Good News Translation, the Common English Bible, the Contemporary English Version, the New Century Version, the New Living Translation, Today's New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the New King James Version, and others. What this indicates is that Tyndale's singular-plural distinction in the second person, which the King James translators preserved, has now been almost completely removed from recent versions of the Bible. With this shift, *thou* is becoming ever more scarce, even in prayers, and its correct usage therefore becomes ever more difficult, even for enthusiastic students of the Bible, unless they are using the King James Version. But most Christians today do not use the KJV, which places Latter-day Saints and particularly LDS missionaries in the awkward position of not speaking the same biblical language that their friends and investigators are accustomed to.³⁴

As pointed out above, during the period when *thou* was common in everyday usage, it was never used to signify respect or reverence. This meaning developed later, after *thou* had dropped from the common vernacular. Since it was preserved in the Bible, it thus became associated with religious speech rather than a mere signifier of either singular or familiar address. Eventually, as *thou* dropped even from other forms of religious speech, its use in prayer persisted; and this is likely the reason Latter-day Saints sometimes refer to it today as "prayer language" or "the language of prayer." That *thou* has come to connote reverence, however, is purely an accident of English linguistic history. It is certainly not something God ever required, as evidenced by all the languages that do not have an archaic reverential pronoun and in which God is addressed in the familiar.

Joseph Smith's Use of King James English

Even though many Latter-day Saints may think “the language of prayer” is in some way a revealed part of the Restoration, Joseph Smith would not have even been familiar with the term. It can be fairly easily argued that to Joseph the use of *thou* was not “prayer language”—it was simply religious language. Joseph did not use *thou* exclusively for prayers; he used it for religious speech in general. *Thou* appears frequently (although not consistently or exclusively) in the revelations he dictated and similarly in the Book of Mormon, in blessings, and in certain religious declarations and teachings (“Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God”).³⁵ To Joseph, and to others of his generation, this was merely the form religious speech assumed, presumably because it was the pattern preserved in the King James Version.

But Joseph was not well-educated. He was certainly no grammarian. Consequently, his use of these forms was uneven or (pun intended) unruly. For example, in the revelation that is now section 28 in the Doctrine and Covenants—a revelation to Oliver Cowdery—the second-person pronouns switch back and forth between singular and plural forms, even though the Lord is addressing only Oliver. Verse 1, for instance, which has been corrected in the current edition, originally read: “Behold I say unto you Oliver that it shall be given unto thee that thou shalt be heard by the Church in all things Whatsoever thou shalt teach them by the Comforter concerning the Revelations & commandments which I have given.”³⁶ The initial “you” was later changed to “thee.” But even in the current version of D&C 28, the usage is inconsistent. Verses 1 through 6 use *thou*. Verses 8 and 9 use *you*. Verses 10, 11, and 14–16 revert to *thou*. This inconsistent usage appears in other early revelations that were directed to particular individuals.³⁷

What can we conclude from this? First, that Joseph was evidently not receiving these revelations verbatim from the Lord. More likely, concepts were revealed to him, and he was then obliged to find suitable language to express these ideas. Doctrine

& Covenants 1:24 supports this assumption: “Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.” At least early in his prophetic career, Joseph expressed frustration over his inability to articulate in words the ideas that filled his mind. In a letter to William W. Phelps, Joseph lamented, “Oh Lord God deliver us in thy due time from the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”³⁸ In essence, Joseph was doing his best to frame in his own language the inspired concepts he was receiving. But he was attempting to do more than just render these ideas in nineteenth-century American English; he had the added challenge of trying to express inspired communications from God in what to him was the already archaic religious terminology of his day, patterned after the King James Version.

Yet, as has already been discussed, neither Tyndale nor the King James translators attempted to introduce into their translations any sort of distinction between familiar or formal address, because the T-V distinction was not present in either ancient Hebrew or ancient Greek. So, in the King James Version, Jesus addressed the leper (“be thou clean”) with the same pronoun he used to address the Roman prefect (“Thou sayest it”) or his Father (“glorify thou me”). These three persons were equal in the Savior’s eyes in the only way that mattered linguistically: they were each one single individual. When he spoke to more than one person, he used the appropriate plural form (“Whom seek ye?”) except in certain instances, such as the Sermon on the Mount, where singular and plural pronouns shift in some sentences, possibly as an oratorical device to single out each individual listener in the group. But there was no special pronoun in the KJV that signified either respect or familiarity.

And this is the language Joseph Smith was trying to mimic in his religious writings. To Joseph, then, *thou* was not a formal, reverential form of address reserved only for prayer. It was simply the singular pronoun in the second person, and the fact that he used it unevenly is probably an indication of his lack of formal education, nothing more.

Book of Mormon Pronoun Usage

Perhaps the most persistent grammatical inconsistencies in the Book of Mormon revolve around the use of second-person pronouns, which is markedly erratic (but not uniformly so) throughout the book. Consider, for instance, Alma's individual instructions to his sons, recorded in Alma 36 to 42—seven chapters of text abounding in second-person pronouns. Alma starts chapter 36 by addressing Helaman in the plural: "My son, give ear to my words; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land" (1). Two verses later, Alma switches to the singular: "And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth" (3). The next verse switches back to the plural, and Alma uses the plural pronouns *ye* and *you* throughout the rest of chapter 36 and most of chapter 37. Then, in verse 35 of chapter 37, he switches again to the singular: "O, remember my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth." He stays with the singular in verse 36 and most of verse 37, but it concludes with "And if ye always do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day." After a few verses of commentary, Alma resumes addressing Helaman in verse 43 with the plural: "And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow." The final verse of Alma's instructions to Helaman is likewise plural.

Chapter 38 contains Alma's brief commandments to Shiblon. Verse 1 starts in the plural: "I say unto you, even as I said unto Helaman, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments." But two verses later, in the middle of a sentence, he switches to the singular forms: "I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering" (3). Verse 4 then continues with the singular: "For I know that thou wast in bonds." But verse 5 reverts to the plural: "And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember." The remainder of the chapter employs the plural.

But chapter 39, addressed to Corianton, begins with the singular, switches briefly to the plural, then returns to the singular:

“And now, my son, I have somewhat more to say unto thee than what I said unto thy brother; for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness in keeping the commandments of God? Behold has he not set a good example for thee?” (1). The next three verses employ the singular forms. But verse 5 switches to the plural: “Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord.” The next four verses are exclusively plural, but in verse 10, Alma again mixes pronouns within the same sentence: “And I command you to take it upon you to counsel with your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers.” The same pattern, if we can call it that, holds throughout the rest of Alma’s instructions to Corianton; he switches back and forth seemingly at random between singular and plural, concluding chapter 42 with a final verse in which the two are again mixed: “And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen” (31).

These seven chapters are unusual in the Book of Mormon, because they are instructions given to individual sons by Alma and are, therefore, all in second-person discourse. Most of the book, being a history, is related in the third person, with occasional quotations or snippets of dialogue in the second person. By my count, these seven chapters contain 81 of the 207 instances in the Book of Mormon where *ye* steps in inappropriately for *thou*, 46 of the 110 instances where *you* appears instead of *thee*, and 32 of the 58 instances where *your* replaces *thy* or *thine*.

The most comprehensive analysis of second-person pronoun usage in the Book of Mormon is Lyle Fletcher’s 1988 BYU master’s thesis, “Pronouns of Address in the Book of Mormon.” Fletcher not only analyzes all instances of pronominal shifting in the Book of Mormon, he also addresses pronoun usage in the Bible, the Doctrine and Covenants, and other writings of Joseph Smith. This comparison is valuable, for it enables Fletcher to compare

pronoun shifts in the Bible due to Hebrew or Greek patterns with shifts in Joseph Smith's scriptural and other documents. Fletcher's final conclusion is that inconsistent usage of pronouns in the Book of Mormon is most likely a product of Joseph Smith's linguistic tendencies rather than Hebraisms or other patterns that occurred in the original plate text.³⁹

An indication that these inconsistencies may have been a product of Joseph Smith or at least the translation process and not the Nephite record is that Joseph himself corrected several of these grammatical errors in subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon. The Church has continued to follow Joseph's lead in this, although very conservatively. Indeed, Fletcher enumerates the types of changes that have been made since the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon involving second-person pronouns. These include:

Ye changed to *you* 5 times

You changed to *ye* 1 time

You added 3 times

Ye deleted 5 times

Thee changed to *you* 2 times

Thine changed to *your* 1 time

Thy added 3 times

Thy deleted 1 time

Ye added 3 times

Your added 1 time

Your deleted 1 time

Thou changed to *ye* 11 times⁴⁰

"With regard to pronouns of address," explains Fletcher, "most revisions in the texts have tended to consistency and modernization in usage of pronouns rather than inconsistent and archaic usage."⁴¹

While some pronoun shifting in the Book of Mormon may be a reflection of similar patterns in the Nephite language, of which

we know little,⁴² most of these shifts are so random and erratic that they are more easily explained by looking to the translator's lack of education or at least lack of familiarity with the intricacies of King James English. Indeed, the Book of Mormon usage of second-person pronouns is quite similar to usage in the Doctrine and Covenants. It is therefore tempting to conclude that the English text of the Book of Mormon originated with Joseph Smith, a largely uneducated translator who attempted to mimic King James language and who was only marginally successful since his own contemporary idiom did not employ the distinction between the singular and plural forms in the second person. Because this distinction had dropped from the English language, Joseph may have simply been unaware of what in earlier centuries had been standard usage. Indeed, in five instances, the word *yourself* appears in the Book of Mormon (Alma 39:9, twice; Alma 39:11; Alma 42:30; Mormon 1:4), a form that, technically, is impossible in a linguistic system that distinguishes between the singular *thou/thee* and the plural *ye/you* (it would be similar to *themselves*).

In Joseph's defense, Fletcher points out that some of the Prophet's better-educated contemporaries (such as Tennyson, Melville, and Scott) were also inconsistent in their use of the pronouns of address.⁴³ In their day, as in ours, using archaic pronouns was no simple matter, even for well-educated writers. As I indicated above, it is tempting to conclude that Joseph Smith was responsible for the inconsistent pronoun usage in the Book of Mormon, but after looking at the text editorially and considering accounts of those who observed the translation process, I have come to a different conclusion. This will be the topic of the brief companion article to the present study.

For now, let me merely observe that if Joseph recognized that the text was imperfect and needed some corrections, the question might well be asked whether the Church should perhaps, in the spirit of improving the clarity of the text, correct obvious grammatical errors involving the use of second-person pronouns (and perhaps some verb conjugations) in a future edition of the Book of Mormon. The fact that Joseph himself made editorial corrections in later editions of the book and that the Church has followed his example by making

additional editorial changes over the years suggests that such edits are theoretically acceptable. Elder B. H. Roberts, operating on the perhaps mistaken assumption that Joseph formulated the English text, offered an argument for such corrections, which the Church appears to have followed, albeit conservatively:

There can be no reasonable doubt that had Joseph Smith been a finished English scholar and the facts and ideas represented by the Nephite characters upon the plates had been given him by the inspiration of God through the Urim and Thummim, those ideas would have been expressed in correct English; but as he was not a finished English scholar, he had to give expression to those facts and ideas in such language as he could command, and that was faulty English, which the Prophet himself and those who have succeeded him as custodian of the word of God have had, and now have, a perfect right to correct.⁴³

Following Roberts's reasoning, those who are called in our day as custodians of the word of God have "a perfect right to correct" grammatical errors in the Book of Mormon, and it could be argued that achieving a grammatical consistency in the use of second-person pronouns would not only provide greater clarity in the scriptures, but would also simplify the work of Church translators whose task it is to transfer the meaning (and where possible the form) of these sacred works into languages that maintain a distinction between second-person singular and plural pronouns. For whatever reason, the Church has chosen a very conservative approach in correcting grammatical errors in the English text, although, as Lyle Fletcher indicated, several second-person pronouns have been corrected over the years. Yet scores of such errors still remain, and my understanding of Church translation procedures is that scripture translators are instructed to retain these grammatical errors in the various target languages, where possible. How well the translators follow this instruction would make a fascinating and useful study, though well beyond the scope of this paper. I did, however, perform a computer search in the German Book of Mormon of Alma's instructions to his sons (Alma 36–42), which was examined above for inconsistencies in

the English usage of second-person pronouns. Interestingly, in every instance where Joseph Smith dictated the plural *ye* but the context required *thou*, the German translators have corrected the grammatical mistake. Not once did Alma, in the German text, address one of his sons as *ihr* (plural); he consistently addressed each of them with *du* (the singular). A similar search of section 28 in the German Doctrine and Covenants shows the same result: the German translators have corrected every instance where Joseph Smith dictated a plural pronoun instead of singular in the Lord's message to Oliver Cowdery. This raises the natural question of why the Church would correct pronoun inconsistencies in a foreign translation but retain them in the English original.

When considering the challenge of translating the English Book of Mormon into some 180 languages, another question arises: whether the Church should not only correct all the instances of incorrect pronoun usage in the book, but perhaps go one step further and follow the lead of modern Bible translations in changing all second-person pronouns in the Book of Mormon to *you*, thus simultaneously eliminating the inconsistencies and archaisms and in the process making this book of scripture more accessible to English speakers who are investigating the Church or who are newly baptized members. Fortunately, that is a decision I am not responsible for. So let us leave this topic and consider LDS usage of *thou* in nonscriptural settings.

“Solemn Language” and the Rise of the International Church

It appears that while *thou* gradually vanished from the common language, it survived in “sublime” or “solemn” language, including prayer. This is likely due to the predominance of the King James Bible. But as the Authorized Version has given ground to newer translations that do not use *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, *thysself*, or *ye*, and as these archaic forms retreat ever further from the everyday vernacular, they are being replaced in many Christian denominations by the ubiquitous *you* even in prayer. It should be noted, however, that although *thou* may have been used for a time in

religious or “sublime” contexts, until recently it never really carried the reverential connotation that Latter-day Saints and others have assigned to it. It became a formal pronoun for solemn occasions or contexts, but its religious usage was based largely on its prominence in the KJV, and in both the Bible and other religious contexts it was never an honorific or reverential pronoun. It was simply the singular second-person pronoun.

An example of this “sublime” but nonreverential use of *thou* as a singular pronoun of address in LDS religious speech can be seen in its somewhat random persistence in patriarchal blessings. While an examination of the use of second-person pronouns in such blessings over the history of the Church would be a fascinating study, it is well beyond the scope of this paper. I will therefore offer just a few examples to shed light on its usage over time. The first patriarch of the Church was Joseph Smith Sr., the prophet’s father. With very few exceptions, the elder Smith used archaic pronouns in his blessings and, I might add, used them rather well, perhaps indicating that he possessed a better formal education in this regard than his better-known son. Now and then a stray *you* would creep into his blessings, occasionally he would misconjugate a verb, and, for some reason, a handful of his blessings used *you* exclusively, but for the most part he was very consistent in his usage.⁴⁴ Interestingly, in the handful of blessings given by Joseph Smith of which we have record, the Prophet used neither *thou* nor *you*. He began his blessings with a statement such as “Blessed of the Lord is my brother Hyrum” and then proceeded to use third-person pronouns. Hyrum Smith, who succeeded his father as patriarch, was almost his exact opposite in pronoun usage. In his first blessing, to John Bennett, Hyrum used primarily *thou* and its various siblings, but in all subsequent blessings he used *you* exclusively. William Smith, who succeeded his brother Hyrum after the martyrdom, was very consistent in his inconsistency. He began almost every blessing with a statement such as “I lay my hands on your head and give you a blessing” but then switched immediately to *thou*, often within the same sentence, and retained the archaic forms throughout the blessing. I have seen only one blessing given by John Smith, Joseph Sr.’s brother, who succeeded

William Smith. On August 12, 1853, Rebecca Williams, wife of the deceased Frederick G. Williams, received a second patriarchal blessing (the first had been given by Joseph Sr.). In this blessing, John Smith's usage is the exact reverse of William Smith's. He begins by saying, "I place my hands upon *thy* head," but then switches to *you* immediately and never uses any form of *thou* again.⁴⁵

As these examples illustrate, there was no consistent practice among patriarchs in the earliest days of the Church, and usage certainly varied for many years thereafter until, in recent times, *thou* has likely vanished from patriarchal blessing vocabulary. A personal example may illustrate this general trend. My grandfather (born in 1899) was addressed in the first part of his blessing (given in 1919) with *thou*, but the patriarch suddenly shifted over to *you* and never returned to the more archaic (and likely less comfortable) form. By the time my grandfather became a stake patriarch himself, in 1966, *thou* was not part of his blessing vernacular. My own blessing, which I received from him in 1974, employs *you* exclusively. I should note, however, that Eldred G. Smith, the last patriarch to the Church, seems to have used *thou* in the blessings he gave and appears to have used it impeccably.⁴⁶ The important point here, though, is that when *thou* has been used in patriarchal blessings, it has followed the scriptural pattern rather than our current reverential usage of the pronoun in prayer. It simply signifies the singular, but in a solemn or "sublime" setting.

All of this merely reinforces the idea that *thou* in English has a complicated and unique history, which makes its persistent prevalence in prayer troublesome in an increasingly international Church. For in most Indo-European languages, there is still a definite distinction between the formal, respect-laden second-person pronoun (the V form) and the informal or familiar pronoun (the T form). Thus, for example, in Germany children address their fathers with *du* (the T form) but address adults outside of their family with *Sie* (the V form). Significantly, however, they address God in prayer with *du*, the familiar form, not with *Sie*, the formal or respectful form. And so it is in almost every language that retains the T-V distinction. In English, had we not lost the familiar *thou* (the T form) in everyday usage, people

would have still addressed God with *thou*—not because it would have signified formal or respectful speech (for this they would have had to use *you*), but because it would have denoted a familiar and familial relationship. The disappearance of the T form in English is the effect of the solidarity semantic prevailing over the power semantic. Indeed, the solidarity semantic prevailed so completely that today we have no power semantic.

When the T-V distinction vanished from English centuries ago, it left us without a distinction between formal and informal in second-person pronouns and, similarly, without a distinction between singular and plural. We have only *you*, which first displaced *ye* as the nominative second-person plural and then displaced *thou* and *thee* as the nominative and objective forms of second-person singular. In English, all speech has been flattened so that there is no power semantic at all. There is only solidarity. So, if we wish to address God in either a familiar manner (as do speakers of most other languages) or even in a formal manner, the only pronoun available to us, in a practical, everyday sense, is *you*.

Apparently, though, at some point during the period when *thou* was falling out of even common religious speech but was still employed in prayer, the notion gained popularity that *thou* was a reverential form of second-person address, perhaps because of Jesus's pronouncement in the Sermon on the Mount, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10). But, as already indicated, this was simply the singular form of the pronoun, and Jesus used it with ordinary mortals three verses prior to the Lord's Prayer: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet" (Matt. 6:6). *Thou* is not reverential in the King James Version. It is merely singular. But because these singular pronouns dropped out of common speech, including religious or "sublime" speech, and appeared almost exclusively in biblical passages, they retained a *religious* connotation, and any *reverential* meaning they subsequently assumed went far beyond the intent of the King James translators or, especially, of the initial authors of the books in the Bible. Indeed, we might well ask, if Jesus did not address his Father with special reverential

pronouns and did not teach his disciples to do so, why should we? John W. Welch observed of the Savior's prayers, "Where he found people calling upon God with abstract, distant titles, Jesus introduced a homely, personal word, *Abba*. This word, important to the earliest Christians (see Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15), translates simply as *father*; but it is actually slightly less formal than that and contains a flavor of familiarity and trust."⁴⁸ If we, by contrast, persist in using the archaic second-person-singular pronoun to address deity because we believe it signifies respect and honor, there is no historical or linguistic or even scriptural backing for this practice, and most Church members who are native speakers of other languages simply cannot conform, because they do not have archaic forms that signify respect and honor. Indeed, the evolution of the reverential *thou* in English is not a manifestation of the T-V distinction. It is instead the exact opposite of the T-V distinction, which places English in an awkward and irreconcilable relationship with every language that retains the distinction between the formal and informal second-person address.⁴⁹

The Difficulty Factor

Because of its uniqueness in the family of languages, this odd English linguistic development, complicated by Joseph Smith's uneven use of singular and plural pronouns, creates myriad translation difficulties in the Church. Translation challenges, however, pale in comparison to the confusion *thou* produces in non-English speakers when instructed to use a special "language of prayer," a directive they cannot comply with. But perhaps the most significant drawback to our use of *thou* is practical. To put it bluntly, the biggest problem with using *Thou* in prayer is that almost no one in the Church gets it right consistently, and the Church does not seem inclined to teach correct usage. While Church leaders admonish members occasionally to use the language of prayer, none of them ever offer any specific instruction on *how* to do this. From time to time, an adventurous scholar or editor has undertaken such a task, but always with negligible effect. I speak from experience here.

Several years ago, while working as an editor at Church magazines, I wrote an article explaining how to use “prayer language” correctly. It covered such topics as the difference between *thou* and *thee*, regular verb conjugations with the pronoun *thou*, irregular verb conjugations (“thou art,” “thou shalt,” “thou wilt”), when to use *thy* and *thine*, and the difference between *dost* and *doest*. The need for this article was widely acknowledged among the editorial staff, but in the end it was deemed by Correlation to be unpublishable because terms such as *conjugation* were considered too technical for *Ensign* readers.⁵⁰ The article was later published by BYU’s Religious Studies Center in *The Religious Educator*,⁵¹ and I hope it has been somewhat helpful to seminary and institute teachers as they try to help young people learn the prescribed language of prayer in the English-speaking Church. But Correlation’s point is worth considering. If “prayer language” is so complex to English speakers, who encounter it primarily (and somewhat erratically) in scripture, that even a straightforward how-to article explaining its proper usage is deemed too technical for an audience of adult, educated readers, then perhaps we ought to consider joining the majority of non-English-speaking Church members in addressing our Father in Heaven in more familiar, familial, and grammatically uncomplicated terms.

I am sympathetic with Correlation’s concern. Because archaic pronouns and verb conjugations are so difficult to master, almost no one in the English-speaking Church uses “prayer language” correctly. Joseph Smith was not alone in his struggles to accurately mimic the language used in the King James Version. Modern Mormon usage is as unruly as anything Joseph ever dictated. Listen carefully to any prayer in any LDS meeting, and you will probably hear misconjugated verbs or mixed pronouns. Prayer language is certainly a stumbling block for new converts, who have not grown up hearing King James English, but even General Authorities routinely make grammatical errors in opening and closing general conference sessions with prayer. And prophets also sometimes struggle with these archaic forms in temple dedicatory prayers, even though they have the added advantage of writing these prayers out beforehand.⁵²

But this is an issue that reaches beyond obvious grammatical difficulties or usage inconsistencies. It involves questions more vital than whether our missionaries are able to teach people in a vernacular they are comfortable with. There are ethical dimensions to this matter of archaic pronouns that touch upon the central tenets of the gospel. Using archaic pronouns correctly, or even mostly so, can create a mark of distinction for members who were raised in the English-speaking Church (and, likely, in middle-class, educated environments), setting them apart from converts, members who are less educated or less materially successful, and, of course, native speakers of other languages. This is an issue that can divide the Church into subtle classes, a social condition the Book of Mormon warns against repeatedly.

A Dual Dilemma

So, what shall we do with *thou*? This is not an easy question, but *thou* is becoming an increasingly troublesome matter in an increasingly modern, multinational, multilingual church. This question is made more difficult by the fact that we use *thou*, basically, in two different contexts, and we use it not only incongruently *between* those contexts, but we also use it inconsistently *within* each of the contexts. In scripture, we use *thou* merely to signify singular, as opposed to the plural *ye*, and yet in our uniquely LDS books of scripture, this usage is grammatically uneven. In the nonscriptural context, we use *thou* primarily in prayer, and we use it in a highly specialized way, to denote respect for deity, a convention that does not even exist in scripture. Unfortunately, because this specialized speech employs archaic forms, our usage is grammatically chaotic here too. Additionally, this specialized usage is unique to English and comes trailing clouds of historical ambiguity.

Generally speaking, there are two opposing ways of looking at language usage. The *linguist* is interested primarily in *how* language is used and is not really concerned with correcting that usage. Indeed, to the linguist, there is often no correct or incorrect usage. There is just language and the way people speak it. The linguist,

for example, would find Joseph Smith's shifting pronouns in the Doctrine and Covenants fascinating but not disconcerting. The editor, by contrast, is concerned with correct or at least effective usage. In order to communicate ideas effectively, the tool of language must be used according to certain rules and conventions. If it is not, then meaning is compromised. In the spirit of full disclosure, as a professional editor, my own bias should be obvious. I understand quite well that inconsistent language usage handicaps communication. I believe that our inconsistent usage of *thou*, in two different ways, hampers our ability to communicate and understand truth effectively.

That said, I must admit that bringing grammatical consistency and linguistic congruity to the two contexts in which we currently employ archaic pronouns would be a monumental project, somewhat akin to enforcing the adoption of the Deseret Alphabet. So, how can we possibly make sense of this peculiar linguistic inheritance the English language and our own history have bequeathed to us? I don't pretend to have the answer to this question. But leaving things as they are certainly makes as little sense as any other option.

Appendix

The Etymology of Thou

English is a Germanic language, related to German, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Gothic, Frisian, Afrikaans, Yiddish, and a variety of lesser-known languages and dialects. According to Stephen Howe, "The oldest surviving records in English date from about [AD] 700, and the end of the Old English period is usually put at approximately 1100."⁵³ Of the four Old English dialects, West Saxon was the most important. Old English evolved eventually into Middle English, which was spoken in five main dialectal areas. And Middle English gave way to Modern English in about 1500.⁵⁴

In Old English, as with other Germanic languages, in addition to making a distinction between pronouns used as subjects

(nominative case) and those used as objects (accusative and dative cases), speakers also made a distinction between the second-person singular⁵⁵ (the antecedents of *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, and *thyself*) and the second-person plural (antecedents of *ye*, *you*, *your*, and *yourselves*). Indeed, in West Saxon a different pronoun⁵⁶ was even used to address two people (the “dual” form) than was used to address three or more (plural).

These distinctions of case and number were preserved in the early Middle English era in some areas. “In the North the dual had already disappeared in Old English times,” writes Howe. “In West Midland we still find duals in the first half of the thirteenth century. . . . In Southern Middle English some duals are found in *The Owl and the Nightingale* from the first half of the thirteenth century,” but scholars “conclude that in the West and the South the dual seems not to have survived much beyond the early part of the thirteenth century.”⁵⁷

Pronouns changed significantly over time in both form and usage. For instance, the Old English *ðu* evolved into *þu*, *pou*, *thou*, *yu*, or *you*⁵⁸ in written Middle English (depending on time and location), and this form became standardized as *thou* in Early Modern English. According to Baugh and Cable, “In the earliest period of English the distinction between *thou* [*u*] and *ye* [*ge*] was simply one of number; *thou* was the singular and *ye* the plural form for the second person pronoun. In time, however, a quite different distinction grew up. In the thirteenth century the singular forms (*thou*, *thy*, *thee*) were used among familiars and in addressing children or persons of inferior rank, while the plural forms (*ye*, *your*, *you*) began to be used as a mark of respect in addressing a superior.”⁵⁹ This distinction based on rank or formality came to be labeled the “T-V distinction” in consequence of the work of Roger Brown and Albert Gilman in 1960. This particular shift in the usage of pronouns of address in English can probably be attributed to the Norman invasion (AD 1066) and the increasing prevalence of French in English governing and aristocratic circles. But this distinction did not persist in English, as it did in most other Western languages. “By the sixteenth century the singular forms [*thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, *thyself*] had all but disappeared from polite speech.”⁶⁰

Evolution of Second-Person Pronouns, Thirteenth through Sixteenth Centuries

In *Thou and You in Early Modern English Dialogues: Trials, Depositions, and Drama Comedy*, Terry Walker gives a brief summary of research on the usage of *thou* and *you* in the singular in Early Modern English. Citing Byrne (who, in turn, relies on Oliphant, Spies, Kennedy, and Stidston), Walker offers the following:

- In the thirteenth century, *you* was used in courtly literature by inferiors to superiors, but the number of literary compositions that used *you* was very small. *Thou* was used by superiors to inferiors, between equals, or to show contempt or defiance.
- In the fourteenth century, *thou* was still more common, even among the upper class. *You* was used more by the upper ranks than by either the middle or lower classes, who still used *thou* even when addressing a superior. *You* was used by the upper ranks to flatter their superiors or “to display their knowledge of good form, and cultured speech.”
- In the fifteenth century, *you* became well established. It was used by members of all classes to address their superiors. Superiors used *thou* in return. The derisive verb “to thou” appeared. *Thou* was used to express “equality, familiarity, or intimacy, superiority on the part of the speaker, and contempt or scorn for the person addressed.”
- In the sixteenth century, *you* had established itself as the “pattern for polite conversation” among the upper class. Using *thou* with a “nonintimate of equal rank was considered rude.” *You* had become the ordinary form used by middle and upper classes, but the lower classes still used *thou*. Walker adds, however, that research subsequent to Byrne suggests that even the lower ranks used *you* “to a greater extent than previously supposed.”⁶¹

Walker also looks at contemporaneous grammars for clues regarding the shifting usage of *thou* and *you*. His survey arrives at similar conclusions, noting also that three of the later grammars (Duncan, 1731; Johnson, 1755; and Lowth, 1762) indicate *thou* was sometimes used in the “sublime” or “Solemn Style.” Duncan

specifically mentions that *thou* was used in prayer.⁶² Of course, *thou* had probably been used in prayer for centuries, since prayer in most languages used the familiar forms, and before the T-V distinction developed, prayers used *thou* because it was the singular.

Notes

1. See Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 242.

2. Baugh and Cable, *History of the English Language*, 242.

3. Roger Brown and Albert Gilman, "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity," *Language and Social Context*, edited by Pier Paolo Giglioli (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Education, 1972), 254. The theories about how the plural came to be used as a formal pronoun include (1) the idea that by the fourth century, when this form of address arose, there were actually two emperors, one in Constantinople and one in Rome; (2) the notion that an emperor is plural because "he is the summation of his people and can speak as their representative"; and (3) the fact that royalty often referred to themselves in the plural, employing the "royal we" or "majestic plural" (*pluralis maiestatis* in Latin).

4. Brown and Gilman, "Pronouns of Power," 254–55.

5. *Ibid.*, 256.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 257.

8. The only exception to this observation is that missionaries in 2006 (and, presumably, still) were required to use the V form with each other, while thirty years earlier we always used the T form. This practice, intended no doubt to show respect for the missionary calling, moves against linguistic trends and probably causes investigators to scratch their heads over the artificial formality evidenced in the conversations of missionaries with each other. My son reports having investigators comment, "Don't you two know each other?" The practice of using the formal in conversation with each other also hampers the missionaries in learning the correct verb conjugations for the informal, and so less-experienced missionaries may more easily fall into the socially embarrassing practice of using the formal *Sie* with little children, pets, and inanimate objects. This emphasis on the formal *Sie* spreads to the German members as well. All Germans, from little children to elderly brothers and sisters, address the young missionaries with the formal *Sie*.

9. Since the 1960 publication of “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity,” some scholars have argued that the theory put forth by Brown and Gilman is an oversimplification and is too binary, with its two poles of familiar and polite pronoun usage. Some have concluded that the distinction is less between polite and familiar than it is between “marked” and “unmarked” usages. The unmarked form is the common form in any situation and the marked form signifies a departure from the norm. For instance, a person of lower station during Shakespeare’s time would have normally used *you* with a superior; but if the speaker were intending insult, his use of *thou* would mark a departure from social protocol. Similarly, a superior might have addressed an inferior sarcastically with *you*. The sarcasm here would cause *you* to be the marked form. These are subtle distinctions, but useful, and even Brown and Gilman, in a 1989 study, acknowledge these critiques with a revision to their earlier work, proposing that “in cases where *you* is expected, the occurrence of *thou* indicates that the speaker is emotionally aroused.” As quoted in Terry Walker, *Thou and You in Early Modern English Dialogues: Trials, Depositions, and Drama Comedy* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), 43. For a discussion of critiques of and refinements to the 1960 work of Brown and Gilman, see pages 42–48.

10. Most of Shakespeare’s works were written between 1589 and 1613.

11. Baugh and Cable, *History of the English Language*, 242.

12. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71.

13. See Sister St. Geraldine Byrne, *Shakespeare’s Use of the Pronoun of Address: Its Significance in Characterisation and Motivation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Haskell House, 1970), reprint of thesis, Catholic University of America, 1936.

14. Byrne, *Shakespeare’s Use of the Pronoun of Address*, 144.

15. *Ibid.*, 146.

16. *Ibid.*, 152.

17. *Ibid.*, 158–67.

18. Walker, *Thou and You in Early Modern English Dialogues*, 18.

19. Oswald T. Allis, *The New English Bible, The New Testament of 1961, A Comparative Study*. (n.p., 1963), 69, emphasis in original; cited in Frank Nolen Jones, *Which Version Is the Bible?* 12th ed., ch. 4, cited at http://av1611.com/kjbp/articles/jones-whynew.html#_ftnref1 (accessed June 4, 2014).

20. Lyle L. Fletcher, “Pronouns of Address in the Book of Mormon” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1988), 166–193.

21. Ibid., 179–81.

22. Jones, *Which Version Is the Bible?* emphasis in original. Jones cites Jacob Van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 48–49, and T. P. Letis, *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), 84–104.

23. General religious usage was largely confined to second-person singular pronouns and their associated verb conjugations. *Ye* was generally not part of this religious vernacular, nor were third-person forms that were common in the Bible, such as “he hath.”

24. Brown and Gilman, “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity,” 267.

25. *Cambridge Encyclopedia*, 71.

26. Heather Madrone, “Turning to Thee,” A Friend in Need, online at <http://friend-in-need.blogspot.com/2006/12/turning-to-thee.html> (accessed June 4, 2014).

27. Brown and Gilman, “Pronouns of Power,” 268.

28. Ibid.

29. *Cambridge Encyclopedia*, 71.

30. Brown and Gilman, “Pronouns of Power,” 278.

31. Grant Hardy, email to Roger Terry, January 3, 2014, printout in my possession.

32. “Thee and Thou,” http://www.baptistpillar.com/article_156.html, (accessed June 4, 2014).

33. See, for instance, “Thee and Thou,” Rev. Ken Collins’s Web Site, <http://www.kencollins.com/explanations/why-05.htm> (accessed June 4, 2014).

34. See Grant Hardy, “The King James Bible and the Future of Missionary Work,” *Dialogue* 46, no. 2 (2012): 1–44.

35. Here and elsewhere, the underlining does not appear in the original but is added to make the second-person pronouns easy to identify. Joseph Smith, et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971 printing), 3:295.

36. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds. *Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile edition, volume 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of The Joseph Smith Papers, Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, general eds. (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 50–51.

37. See, for instance, D&C 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 19, and 25.

38. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, July 31, 1832, in Joseph Smith Jr., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 287, original spelling and punctuation preserved.

39. Fletcher, “Pronouns of Address in the Book of Mormon,” 267.

40. Ibid., 246.

41. Ibid., 244.

42. Although many Latter-day Saints assume that the Book of Mormon was written in Hebrew, and some scholars delight in finding “Hebraisms” in the English text, Moroni assures us that this is not the case: “We have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfections in our record” (Mormon 9:32–33). What Moroni is saying is that during the thousand years of their sojourn in the promised land, the Nephites had altered the Hebrew they brought from Jerusalem—but that is irrelevant, for the plates were too small to contain even the altered Hebrew and thus had to be engraved with characters from a language they called “reformed Egyptian,” which was apparently a script that was more condensed, so that each symbol contained more information (and perhaps therefore less precision). Regardless of its exact nature, however, whether or not reformed Egyptian contained Hebraisms is a question no scholar, no matter how astute, can confidently answer.

43. Fletcher, “Pronouns of Address in the Book of Mormon,” 267.

44. Brigham H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God: The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1920), 145–46.

45. See transcripts in H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Smith-Petit Foundation, 2007). Transcripts of blessings by Hyrum Smith and William Smith are also included in this compilation. It should be noted that since these are all transcriptions taken by clerks who did not know shorthand, the text cannot be considered completely reliable, and some variations in usage may be due to clerical error.

46. See Frederick G. Williams, *The Life of Dr. Frederick G. Williams: Counselor to the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo: BYU Studies, 2012), 368–69.

47. See the substantial portion of a blessing given by Eldred G. Smith to Chieko N. Okazaki in Gregory A. Prince, “‘There Is Always a Struggle’: An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki,” *Dialogue* 45, no. 1 (2012): 118.

48. John W. Welch, “The Lord’s Prayers,” *Ensign*, January 1976, 15.

49. Oddly, German-speaking missionaries (and probably those speaking other Indo-European languages) find themselves using second-person pronouns in perfect opposition to the way they use corresponding English pronouns. As mentioned in note 8, missionaries in Germany pray to the Father using an informal *Du*, but they must address each other using the very formal *Sie*. If they were speaking English, however, their conversations with each other would be seen as informal (even though there is not T-V distinction in English anymore), while in their prayers to deity they would use the archaic form that has come to signify extreme formality and even reverence.

50. Perhaps they were right. Not long ago I attended an LDS funeral where the bishop announced that after the closing prayer the pallbearers were to “conjugate in the foyer.”

51. See Roger K. Terry, “Having Problems with Prayer Language?” *The Religious Educator* 10, no. 1 (2009): 131–35.

52. My purpose here is to point out the difficulty of using archaic pronouns correctly, not to embarrass any General Authorities, especially the presidents of the Church who generally compose the temple dedicatory prayers, so I will not cite specific errors. Let me just say that a random search of a handful of dedicatory prayers from recent years turned up such constructions as “Thou might,” “Thou did,” and “Thou sent.”

53. Stephen Howe, *The Personal Pronouns in the Germanic Languages* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 130.

54. *Ibid.*, 137.

55. See Howe, *Personal Pronouns*, 131. West Saxon second person singular forms were *ðu* (nom.), *ðe* (acc. and dat.), and *ðin* (gen.). Second person plural forms were *ge* (nom.), *iow* (acc. and dat.), and *iower* (gen.)

56. See Howe, *Personal Pronouns*, 131. This dual form was *git* (nom.), *inc* (acc. and dat.), and *incer* (gen.)

57. Howe, *Personal Pronouns*, 141.

58. Even though the pronunciation of these forms was roughly the same, the spelling varied, since in Middle English the dental fricative *þ* (thorn) could also be spelled *th* or *y*.

59. Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 242.

60. Ibid., 242.

61. Walker, *Thou and You in Early Modern English Dialogues*, 39–40.

62. Ibid., 59–61.

Another Look at Joseph Smith's First Vision

Stan Larson

The First Vision, that seminal event which has inspired and intrigued all of us for nearly two centuries, came into sharp focus again in 2012 when another volume of the prestigious *Joseph Smith Papers* was published. Highlighting the volume is the earliest known description of what transpired during the “boy’s first uttered prayer”¹ near his home in Palmyra in 1820. The narrative was written by Joseph Smith with his own pen in a ledger book in 1832. It is printed in the *Papers* volume under the title “History, Circa Summer 1832” and is especially interesting because the account was suppressed for about three decades. In the following transcription of the 1832 account, Joseph Smith’s words, spelling, and punctuation are retained and the entire block quote of the 1832 account is printed in **bold** (following the lead of the *Joseph Smith Papers* printing):

At about the the age of twelve years my mind become seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns of for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to searching the scriptures believeing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God thus applying myself to them and my intimate acquaintance with those of differant denominations led me to marvel excedingly for I discovered that <they did not adorn> instead of adorning their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the sittuation of the world

of mankind the contentions and divi[si]ons the wicke[d]ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the of the minds of mankind my mind become exceedingly distressed for I become convicted of my sins and by searching the scriptures I found that mand <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my own sins and for the sins of the world for I learned in the scriptures that God was the same yesterday to day and forever that he was no respecter to persons for he was God for I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their magesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in magesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intilgence in governing the things which are so exceding great and marvilous even in the likeness of him who created him <them> and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said the <it is a> fool <that> saith in his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipreasant power a being who makith Laws and decreeeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity and when <I> considered all these things and that <that> being seeketh such to worshep him as worship him in spirit and in truth therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and to obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in <the> attitude of calling upon the Lord <in the 16th year of my age>² a pillar of fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested

upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life <behold> the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them according to thir ungodliness and to bring to pass that which <hath> been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[o]stles behold and lo I come quickly as it [is] written of me in the cloud <clothed> in the glory of my Father and my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the hevnlly vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart.³

Immediately of interest to even the casual reader is the fact that Joseph never mentions seeing God the Father in his extraordinary vision. He says he “saw the Lord” and further affirms that this is Jesus Christ, since the personage tells him “I was crucified for the world.” While Joseph says he “was filled with the spirit of God,” he does not claim to have seen God as a separate personage introducing his Son. Additionally, there is no description here of Satan trying to bind him in darkness and prevent the prayer. Joseph makes no reference to his mission of restoration. His sins are forgiven, and the Lord announces that his anger is kindled against a wicked world, but there is no indication that Joseph can expect a prophetic calling.

This text of the Prophet's narration in the *Papers* volume is prefaced with a carefully detailed “Source Note,” which explains why this excerpt is so unfamiliar to the general members of the Church. The note provides the following information. The 1832 history was written on both sides of the first three leaves of a

new ledger book. The fourth leaf began with a new numbering system and the ledger book became a copybook for Joseph Smith's outgoing letters, as well as copies of Oliver Cowdery's 1829 letters. This volume was listed in an inventory made in Nauvoo, came across the plains to Utah, and ended up in the LDS Church archives—with impeccable “continuous institutional custody.” However, this six-page history was at some point excised from the letterbook. Fortuitously, one can actually date the time period when these leaves were removed, because the tearing of the last of the three leaves was done with such little care that a small triangular fragment (containing four words of the text) was initially left in the gutter of the letterbook and then removed and taped back onto the last leaf. The clear cellophane tape that was used for this repair was not invented until 1930, which supplies a *terminus a quo*. Furthermore, “the cut and tear marks, as well as the inscriptions in the gutters of the three excised leaves, match those of the remaining leaf stubs, confirming their original location” in the Joseph Smith letterbook. By 1965 these three leaves of the 1832 account were again “archived together with the letterbook.”⁴ Thus, the period when these three leaves were separated was approximately 1930 to 1965—or allowing a five-year period for the cellophane tape to come into common usage in America, the three decades from 1935 to 1965.

While the explanatory note adequately traces the physical journey of the three-leaf 1832 history, the four editors of this volume of the *Joseph Smith Papers*—Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen—leave the content of this significant 1832 narrative largely unaddressed. They use generic terms in their “Historical Introduction,” purposely and carefully referring to it as a “vision of Diety” and a “theophany.”⁵ This allows them to legitimately refer to a vision of God, a vision of Jesus, or a vision of both the Father and the Son, without drawing attention to the fact that the 1832 account mentions only a vision of Jesus. Later, in the reproduction of the actual text of the 1832 account of the First Vision, at the point where Joseph Smith states: “I saw the Lord,” the editors add a footnote: “JS later recounted that he saw two ‘personages,’ that one appeared after the other, and that ‘they did in reality speak unto

me, or one of them did.”⁶ However, what is completely omitted from both the “Source Note” and the “Historical Introduction” is any discussion as to *why* the three leaves were cut out and *who* it was that cut this history out of the letterbook.

Although the editors of the Histories volume of the *Joseph Smith Papers* do not discuss why the 1832 history was excised, we can speculate about who might have removed the leaves, and why. Because we know that the missing pages were kept in the office safe of Joseph Fielding Smith, it is unlikely that the leaves were removed simply in accordance with the archival practice of separating collections based on content. We can also surmise that one of the senior members of the Church Historian's Office would have been responsible for the decision to keep the pages separate; it was probably Joseph Fielding Smith himself, but could possibly have been Earl E. Olson or A. William Lund.⁷ There are no available records of the reasoning behind the decision to keep the 1832 account from becoming widely known, but the history of denying researchers access to the account suggests some uneasiness about its contents.

Some time during the 1940s or early 1950s, Joseph Fielding Smith⁸ showed Levi Edgar Young (who was then the senior president of the First Council of the Seventy) this 1832 account of the First Vision. LaMar Petersen, an organist and music teacher by profession but an amateur Mormon historian by avocation, had a meeting with Young on February 3, 1953, and took the following notes:

A list of 5 questions was presented. Bro. Young indicated some surprise at the nature of the questions but said he heartily approved of them being asked. Sa[i]d they were important, fundamental, were being asked more by members of the Church, and should be asked. Said the Church should have a committee available where answers to such questions could be obtained. He has quit going down with his own questions to Brother Joseph Fielding (Smith) because he was laughed at and put off.

His curiosity was excited when reading in Roberts' Doc. History reference to “documents from which these writings were compiled.” Asked to see them. TOLD TO GET HIGHER PERMISSION. Obtained that permission. Examined documents. Written, he thought, about 1837 or 1838. Was told NOT TO COPY OR TELL

WHAT THEY CONTAINED. Said it was a “STRANGE” account of the First Vision. Was put back in vault. REMAINS UNUSED, UNKNOWN.⁹

Thirty-four years later, Petersen wrote his memories of this same episode:

The most noteworthy [meetings with LDS General Authorities] were six sessions in which my wife and I spent with Levi Edgar Young in 1952. He was forthright in discussing Mormon problems in history and theology, but always in loyal church terms. He told us that he had been defended before the First Presidency by his “buffers”—Apostles [Joseph F.] Merrill, [Charles A.] Callis, and [John A.] Widtsoe. He told us of a “strange account” (Young’s own term) of the First Vision, which he thought was written in Joseph’s own hand and which had been concealed for 120 years in a locked vault. He declined to tell us details, but stated that it did not agree entirely with the official version. Jesus was the center of the vision, but God was not mentioned. I respected Young’s wish that the information be withheld until after his death.¹⁰

Even though Levi Edgar Young told LaMar Petersen that he had read the “strange account” of the First Vision, he had been instructed “not to copy or tell what they contained,” and accordingly did not divulge the contents to anyone. However, while not providing any detailed information about this “strange account” of the First Vision, Young did disclose that it described a vision of only Jesus, without any mention of God. Petersen kept this information confidential until Young’s death in December 1963. In early 1964, Petersen told Jerald and Sandra Tanner about this “strange account” of the First Vision. They wrote to Joseph Fielding Smith, asking for an opportunity to see this early account. Joseph Fielding Smith did not know exactly what Levi Edgar Young had told LaMar Petersen, and he refused to let the Tanners see the 1832 history. However, about this same time Joseph Fielding Smith relinquished the three leaves of the excised 1832 history from his private custody within his office safe and transferred it back to the regular Church Historian’s collection. Then he authorized Earl E. Olson, his Assistant Church Historian, to show the newly available leaves to Paul R. Cheesman, a BYU

graduate student working on his thesis. Cheesman explained that Olson demonstrated how the pages “matched with [the] edge of the journal to prove location” in the Joseph Smith letterbook.¹¹ As the result of this assistance, Cheesman prepared a typescript in his 1965 BYU master’s thesis on Joseph Smith’s visions.¹² Later that same year Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner were the first to publish the text of the 1832 account, using Cheesman’s imperfect transcript. Four years later Dean C. Jessee published his important article in *Brigham Young University Studies*, with an accurate transcript of the text.¹³

There are currently known to be ten contemporary accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, written and/or published from 1832 to 1844, given in chronological order: (1) the 1832 account, which is the only one written by Joseph Smith himself; (2) the 1835 account to Robert Matthias, which describes the appearance of one personage and then soon afterward another personage, who gives an awkward third-person testimony “that Jesus Christ is the son of God”; (3) the 1835 account to Erastus Holmes, which is not really an account but just a reference to “the first visitation of Angels”; (4) the 1838–39 account, which is now accepted as LDS scripture in the Pearl of Great Price; (5) the 1842 account to John Wentworth, which included at the end the Articles of Faith; (6) the Orson Pratt report in his 1840 pamphlet *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*, which adds the detail that when Joseph saw the light descending, “he expected to have seen the leaves and boughs of the trees consumed, as soon as the light came in contact with them”; (7) the Orson Hyde report in his 1842 German pamphlet *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* (A Cry from the Wilderness), which closely follows Pratt’s pamphlet; (8) the Levi Richards report in 1843, which states that the Lord told Joseph “that the Everlasting covenant was broken”; (9) the David Nye White report in 1843, which adds the detail that he “went out into the woods where my father had a clearing, and went to the stump where I had stuck my axe when I had quit work,” and then knelt down and prayed; and (10) the Alexander Neibaur report in 1844, which adds the detail that God had “blue eyes.”¹⁴

Marvin S. Hill, a BYU history professor, states the following about the best way to analyze accounts of the First Vision: “It seems to me that everybody has approached the issue from the

wrong end, by starting with the 1838 official version, when the account they should be considering is that of 1832. Merely on the face of it, the 1832 version stands a better chance of being more accurate and unembellished than the 1838 account which was intended as a public statement, streamlined for publication.”¹⁵ Accordingly, we will here focus this examination of the First Vision on those two accounts.

I. The 1832 history is the earliest known account of the First Vision. It is unique in that it is the *only* account that was written by Joseph Smith himself. This 1832 account was put down on paper a little more than two years after the organization of the Church. The presence of the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams at the very beginning and at the end of this account dates the text to after July 20, 1832.¹⁶ Notice that in this 1832 account, Joseph Smith makes clear that the Lord answered his prayer: “I cried unto the Lord for mercy . . . and the Lord heard my cry . . . and while in <the> attitude of calling upon the Lord . . . and the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord,” though he also acknowledges that the Spirit of God filled him. Also, in the 1832 account Joseph’s concern is not what church he should join, because he had already reached the conclusion that none was correct, saying “by searching the scriptures I found that mand <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.” There is also no mention of an evil power, as there is in several of the other accounts. This earliest account is similar to others in Methodist evangelism during the early nineteenth century, in which the individuals often had “Heavenly visions at the time of conviction and conversion.”¹⁷ The 1832 account ends with a promise of Jesus’ imminent Second Coming: “lo I come quickly as it [is] written of me in the cloud <clothed> in the glory of my Father.”

Concerning the 1832 account, Dan Vogel states that “the experience emerges as a personal epiphany in which Jesus appeared, forgave Joseph’s sins, and declared that the sinful world would soon be destroyed.”¹⁸ In a similar way, D. Michael Quinn, after quoting from the 1832 account, says the following:

This divine conferral of forgiveness was an immensely personal experience for young Smith, as were similar theophanies of other young seekers during the revivals in early America. . . .

Joseph Jr.'s conversion experience distanced him even farther from organized clergy, yet his vision of Deity did not propel him into a religious ministry of any kind. This theophany contained no command to preach repentance or tell anyone of the experience. As a young man, he confided the experience to a few, but Smith's first vision implied no divine calling, no church, no community of believers, and certainly no ecclesiastical hierarchy. He asked forgiveness of his youthful sins in 1820, which God granted in vision.¹⁹

Quinn's use of the generic phrase "vision of Deity"—once in his quotation and once in the unquoted ellipsis—is permissible since in the context it refers clearly to a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. However, we must take exception to Quinn's statement that Joseph "asked forgiveness . . . which God granted in vision," since he would have been more accurate to say one of the following: "which Jesus / Jesus Christ / the Lord / the Lord Jesus Christ granted in vision."

II. The "official" account was first written in 1838 and then re-copied into the history of Joseph Smith in 1839 (hence, often referred to as 1838–39). This official version of the First Vision was published in the *Times and Season* in Nauvoo in 1842. It was later included in the important missionary compilation known as *The Pearl of Great Price*, which was published by Apostle Franklin D. Richards in 1851.²⁰ At the 1880 suggestion by Joseph F. Smith of the LDS First Presidency, this book was voted upon and accepted in LDS General Conference as scripture.²¹ The earlier 1832 account does not appear to have been used to make the 1838–39 account, which follows:

Just at this moment of great alarm I saw a pillar <of> light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended ~~gracefully~~ gradually untill it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two personages <whose brightness and glory defy all description>

standing above me in the air. One of <them> spake unto me calling me by name and said (pointing to the other) “This is my beloved Son, Hear him.”²²

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner therefore did I get possession of myself so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)²³ and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors were all corrupt, that “they draw near to me to with their lips but their hearts are far from me, They teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.” He again forbade me to join with any of them and many other thing[s] did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time.²⁴

Clearly, being able to learn more of Jesus’ words spoken in the First Vision would be a real boon. First-person quotations of the words of Jesus in the 1832 account amount to 145 words, while in the 1838–39 account there are only thirty-five words. The part of the 1838–39 account that is a direct quotation of Jesus is as follows: “they draw near to me to with their lips but their hearts are far from me, They teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.” The wording “they draw near to me to with their lips but their hearts are far from me” is a loose quote from Isaiah 29:13, “this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.” The wording “They teach for doctrines the commandments of men” is a quote from Matthew 15:9.²⁵ The wording “having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof” is a quote from 2 Timothy 3:5. Thus, the 1838–39 account has a single first-person quotation consisting of three separate quotes from New Testament passages, which contrasts with the much longer 1832 quote of Jesus’ words. The only place where both accounts coincide is the 1838–39 quotation from

Isaiah, “they draw near to me to with their lips but their hearts are far from me,” which in the 1832 account is “they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me.” The 1832 account provides four times as many words from Jesus.²⁶ He tells the young Joseph Smith that his sins are forgiven and that he should keep his commandments; He is the Lord and was crucified for the people of the world, in order that those who believe in him may have everlasting life; the people of the world are in sin; they have turned away from the gospel and do not keep his commandments; the Lord is angry with the people of the world and will punish them for their wickedness; the Lord is coming soon—just as it is written—clothed in his Father’s glory.

However, despite the availability of this account, historians have generally elided the problem of how many personages appeared to Joseph.²⁷ Alexander L. Baugh refers to the 1820 theophany of the Father and the Son, and then adds that in the 1835 account there were also “many angels” during the First Vision, but does not refer to the 1832 account.²⁸ Richard N. Skousen and W. Cleon Skousen quote from the 1835 account, the 1838–39 account, and Orson Pratt’s 1840 report, but do not quote from the 1832 account.²⁹ Both J. Carr Smith³⁰ and Davis Bitton³¹ quote mostly from the official 1838–39 version, but each includes one quotation from the 1832 account—without mentioning that only Jesus is mentioned in the 1832 version.

In his biography of Joseph Smith, Richard Lloyd Dewey refers to the 1832 account in his preface and even makes one small quotation from the 1832 about “seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul.” However, in the discussion of the First Vision he only quotes from the official account of 1838–39. After the extended quotation Dewey provides the following summary: “Over the years Joseph would write about his experience on six different occasions. All six accounts reflect consistency on the major facts. One truly interesting additional fact in one of his accounts is that he saw many angels in addition to the Father and the Son.”³² However, one of the “major facts” that Dewey omits is that the 1832 account only has a vision of Jesus, while all the other accounts have two personages—the Father and the Son.

Richard E. Bennett, in his book *School of the Prophet*, focuses on the years from 1820 to 1830, through the four parts of the Fourth Article of Faith. All quotations are from the 1838–39 scriptural account and various LDS authors, with the single exception of a quote from the 1832 account in a footnote in the “Repentance” chapter, without giving any indication to the reader that only Jesus is mentioned in the 1832 account.³³

David Paulsen quotes twice from the official 1838–39 account, including the part in which God introduces Jesus with the words: “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him.” Paulsen continues: “In this revelation, Joseph conversed with God and Jesus Christ face to face as one man converses with another.” In the footnote at this point Paulsen cleverly reverses the focus by commenting only on Jesus: “All extent [extant] accounts of the vision (1832, 1835, 1838, 1842, 1840, 1869, 1871, 1874, 1842, 1843, and 1844) corroborate Joseph’s claim of both seeing and hearing Jesus Christ. While unified on this issue, the accounts vary in other ways.” The reader is given no indication at all as to how “the accounts vary,” but certainly a very important difference is that in the 1832 history Jesus is the only one mentioned.³⁴

In his article on the First Vision, Larry C. Porter quotes directly from the 1832 account four times: (1) how Joseph Smith felt from the age of twelve to fifteen *before* the First Vision; (2) he “felt to mourn for my own sins and for the sins of the world”; (3) the similar statement that “I become [became] convicted of my sins”; and finally, (4) some of the words actually spoken to him during the vision: “I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life.”³⁵ However, Porter immediately follows this last quotation from the 1832 account with the assertion that “As the manifestation of the Father and the Son closed before him,” and thus skirts any discussion of the 1832 account having only a mention of Jesus. Also, Porter states that: “These contemporary accounts were sometimes dictated to scribes, recorded by the press, or preserved in the writings of individuals who heard his recounting of the event,”³⁶ but omits

from his categories the one account that was actually penned by Joseph Smith himself.

Heidi S. Swinton, in the *American Prophet: Joseph Smith*, published by Deseret Book's imprint Shadow Mountain, quotes from the 1832 account two times, without a mention of the difference between the earliest account and all other accounts of the First Vision concerning how many people appeared to Joseph Smith.³⁷

In a similar way, consider how official LDS Church literature handles this earliest account. In the lesson manual for the priesthood and the Relief Society for the 2008–2009 year, which is entitled *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, there are four separate quotations made directly from the 1832 account of the First Vision: in the introductory “Life and Ministry of Joseph Smith” there are two short quotes about his early life *before* the First Vision; in chapter 1, which is entitled “The First Vision: The Father and the Son Appear to Joseph Smith,” there is one long quote of two paragraphs describing events immediately *before* the actual First Vision, followed by the summary statement that “in answer to his prayer, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him.”³⁸ In chapter 2, which is entitled “God the Eternal Father,” there is another long quote of two paragraphs, providing details leading up to just *before* the First Vision, followed by the assertion that “in the First Vision, Joseph learned for himself that the Father and the Son are individual beings.”³⁹ LDS readers of this manual are given absolutely no indication that the 1832 account only describes a vision of Jesus—not the Father and the Son together.

Discussion of the Number of People Appearing in the First Vision

Since the most serious historical problem with the 1832 account is the mention of only the Lord Jesus and not both the Father and the Son, this last category includes those who acknowledge the problem of the number of people seen in the vision, and sometimes offer an explanation out of the difficulty.

Hartt Wixom admits that a problem in the different accounts of the First Vision is that “only Christ is mentioned in the first account, while both Christ and God are referred to” in the other

accounts. He then offers the explanation that “it is possible Joseph focused in the initial version on the one person who talked to him, Christ, since it was he who told Joseph to ‘walk in my statutes’ and ‘keep my commandments.’ Joseph did not say that God didn’t appear to him.”⁴⁰ Wixom is correct that Jesus is “the one person who talked to him” and the 1832 account does not mention God the Father introducing his Son. However, it does not appear to be a very strong point for Wixom to state that “Joseph did not say that God didn’t appear to him,” since one would not expect Joseph to mention who was *not* seen in the vision.

Matthew B. Brown wrote a 268-page book on the various accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, but concerning the crucial question of whether Joseph saw one personage (as stated in the 1832 account) or two personages (as stated in the other accounts), Brown makes only the following formal statement: “The Most High God is not described as making an appearance alongside His Son in the theophany portion of the 1832 First Vision account.”⁴¹

Richard L. Bushman begins by simply asserting that in the First Vision Joseph saw “the Father and the Son” and then he quotes the 1832 account nine times concerning its unique information, intermixed with quotations from two other sources (the 1835 and the 1838–39 accounts). Bushman states that Joseph “had two questions on his mind: which church was right, and how to be saved,” but actually the 1832 account makes clear that Joseph had already concluded that “there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ,” and he was seeking forgiveness for his sins. With respect to the problem of the 1832 account mentioning only Jesus, Bushman says the following:

In his first narrative, Joseph said only that he saw the Lord in the light and heard His words of forgiveness. In 1835, he said that first one personage appeared and then another. In 1838, he reported that the first pointed to the other and said, “This is my beloved Son, Hear him.”⁴²

Bushman simply states the differences in the number of personages mentioned in the accounts, and provides no further help out of the difficulty.

Matthew Bowman mentions the three manuscript accounts of 1832, 1835, and 1838, and states that the First Vision “was a personal vision in a visionary age, the experience that confirmed to him that God was offering him salvation.” Bowman acknowledges that the earliest account has only one person that appeared to Joseph Smith and the later accounts have two personages. Bowman quotes a short section from the 1832 account: “I was filled with the spirit of god and the Lord opened the heavens . . . and he spake to me saying Joseph my Son thy sins are forgiven thee.” Inexplicably, Bowman writes that this is God the Father who appeared to the young Joseph Smith, and that in his later recounting of the vision, Joseph Smith “expanded his account” by introducing “the presence of Christ as well.”⁴³ Bowman’s error seems to have been caused either by his not having carefully read further in the 1832 account or the haste with which the book was written, because the Lord continues by saying: “I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life,” making clear that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is speaking.

James B. Allen and John W. Welch discuss the problem of why the 1832 account only mentions the Lord Jesus Christ, when they believe that Joseph saw both Jesus Christ and God the Father. They suggest that:

Because the 1832 account does not say that two beings were present in the vision, some people have wondered, Did Joseph Smith see two personages or one? Did he alter his story as time went on? . . . [the 1832 account] actually suggests that the vision progressed in two stages: first, Joseph “was filled with the spirit of god and the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me,” and second he “saw the Lord and he spake unto me.” The second stage clearly refers to Jesus Christ, who identifies himself as the one who was crucified. Though not explicitly stated, the initial mention of the Spirit of God and the Lord may have reference to the presence of God the Father and his opening of this vision, since it is clear in all the other accounts that the vision was opened by God who then introduced his Son.⁴⁴

However, there is nothing in the syntax of the statement “the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord” to suggest that two different individuals are being implied. *If* the statement had said “the Almighty opened the heavens upon me and I saw Jesus,” or “God opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Savior,” then we would have a real mention of the Father and the Son. Furthermore, the word “Lord” does not occur just these two times; there are eight instances of “Lord” in the 1832 account, and they all refer to Jesus Christ. Allen and Welch also state that “if David could use the word ‘Lord’ in Psalm 110:1, ‘The Lord said to my Lord,’ to refer first to the Father and then to the Son (see Mark 12:36), so could Joseph.”⁴⁵ However, when one examines the original Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1, it becomes clear that completely different words are used in the Hebrew text of this passage. Even the English translation of the King James Version for Psalms 110:1 provides a full-caps “LORD” for the first and a lower-case “Lord” for the second, which correctly translates the sacred Hebrew tetragrammaton “YHWH” or “YAHWEH” of the first and the Hebrew “Adonai” of the second. Thus, the Allen and Welch arguments fail on both counts.

Steven C. Harper provides the complete text of all ten of the contemporary accounts of the First Vision and he quotes eighteen times from the 1832 account. Concerning the question of how many people appeared in the First Vision, he makes the following statement, which is similar to the interpretation of Allen and Welch seven years earlier:

The distinction between the 1832 account’s apparent reference to only one being—the Lord—and the 1838’s unequivocal assertion of two beings has led some to wonder and others to criticize Joseph for changing his story. But it may be that we just need to listen more carefully to Joseph tell the story. It may be that we have assumed that we understood his meaning before we did.

... Moreover, because the 1835 account and two of the secondary statements assert that Joseph saw one being who then revealed the other, we could interpret the 1832 account to mean that Joseph saw one being who then revealed another while referring

to both beings as “the Lord”: “the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord.” We cannot be sure but it seems plausible that Joseph struggled in 1832 to know just what to call the divine personages.⁴⁶

Harper's effort to interpret the presence of two individuals in the vision of the 1832 account—when the text uses “Lord” twice—fails to convince for the same reasons as stated above concerning Allen and Welch's demonstrable misinterpretation of the 110th Psalm.

The most recent discussion of “First Vision Accounts” appeared on the LDS Church's website lds.org in December 2013, written by unnamed LDS scholars, with oversight from unspecified LDS general authorities. First of all, it must be acknowledged that this is an astonishing and refreshing display of openness and it is most commendable that the LDS Church has allowed this discussion. The LDS website states that “critics have argued that Joseph Smith started out reporting to have seen one being—‘the Lord’—and ended up claiming to have seen both the Father and the Son.” The website suggests that the 1832 account “can be read to refer to one or two personages.” I disagree that it can be understood to refer to either one or two individuals, but let's look at their argument. If it is only one person, then “it would likely be to the personage who forgave his sins.” That is correct, but the word “likely” should be strengthened to “certainly”—since the heavenly being described himself as follows: “behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world.” This is clearly Jesus Christ. Then, if the 1832 account is read in such a way as to refer to two individuals, the LDS website proposes the following: “Note that the two references to ‘Lord’ are separated in time; first ‘the Lord’ opens the heavens; then Joseph Smith sees ‘the Lord.’” This is the same interpretation suggested by Allen and Welch in 2005 and continued by Harper in 2012. The anonymous writers on the LDS website rightly dropped the misinterpretation of Psalms 110, but it is still a very strained interpretation to get two personages out of two occurrences of the word “Lord”—and it is rejected by Richard L. Bushman, Mike Quinn, Dan Vogel,

Matthew B. Brown, Hartt Wixom, and Matthew Bowman—all agreeing that the 1832 account has only one divine personage mentioned in the vision.

The Transformation of the First Vision in the Twentieth Century

During the nineteenth century, Joseph Smith's First Vision was not emphasized among either members or missionaries. The extensive diaries of Robert Harris Fife provide insight into an LDS missionary serving in the Southern States Mission during the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Certainly the most popular LDS missionary book that Fife lent, or sold, or discussed with people during his mission was Parley P. Pratt's *Voice of Warning*, which he mentions nine times. This was originally published by Parley in 1837. His brother and fellow apostle Orson Pratt was the first to publish in 1840 an account of Joseph Smith's First Vision. However, when Parley quoted from his brother's 1840 book in a later edition of his own *Voice of Warning*, he skipped the First Vision part and started with the angel of God revealing the whereabouts of the Book of Mormon plates in the Hill Cumorah near Palmyra, New York. Consequently, the very popular *Voice of Warning* contains nothing about the First Vision of Joseph Smith.⁴⁸ It was certainly read and understood by LDS missionaries in the 1890s, even if it was by modern standards somewhat neglected. Fife was conscientious in listing the actual subjects of the informal conversations in homes, in public sermons, and during missionary conferences, either given by Fife or by his fellow LDS missionaries. He recorded in his diaries some fifty-six topics of discussion, but never specifically the "First Vision."

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Joseph Smith story (which included the First Vision) began to be used in Sunday School texts, in priesthood manuals, in a separate missionary tract, and in B. H. Roberts's multi-volume *History of the Church*—all while Joseph F. Smith was president of the LDS Church.⁴⁹ As an added illustration of how drastically things have changed during the twentieth century, an analysis was made in

the late 1970s of LDS quotations of the four Mormon scriptural books—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—and the final list was limited to the 1,000 most popular verses among the Mormons. In this list the First Vision was the fourth-most-quoted passage.⁵⁰ During the last four decades of the twentieth century, all missionaries in every mission, in every language, were required to present the official version of Joseph Smith's First Vision, which would have certainly given a huge boost to members' familiarity with that version.

A typical modern testimony about the importance of Joseph Smith's First Vision was given by Gordon B. Hinckley, who was president of the LDS Church for almost thirteen years: "Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove where we stood yesterday. It happened. It was real. If the First Vision occurred, then everything else in connection with the restoration occurred also."⁵¹ The current president, Thomas S. Monson, has also said: "The Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, had appeared to Joseph Smith. The morning of the dispensation of the fulness of times had come, dispelling the darkness of the long generation of spiritual night."⁵²

That the earliest written account of the First Vision of Joseph Smith (and the *only* one in Joseph's own handwriting) records only the visit of the Lord Jesus is gradually entering into Mormons' awareness. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, who previously had been a traditional Mormon literalist, admitted in December 1970 that his faith was devastated when "the strange accounts" of the First Vision were published by Paul R. Cheesman and Dean C. Jessee, for "they had plucked all the feathers out of the bird and shot it, and there it lies 'dead and naked on the ground.'"⁵³

A very different reaction is provided by the liberal point of view that makes no distinction between actual fact and symbolic myth. This more optimistic approach was taken by Leonard J. Arrington, who said the following concerning the First Vision:

Because of my introduction to the concept of symbolism as a means of expressing religious truth, I was never preoccupied with the question of the historicity of the First Vision—though

the evidence is overwhelming that it did occur—or of the many reported epiphanies in Mormon, Christian, and Hebrew history, I am prepared to accept them as historical or metaphorical, as symbolical or as precisely what happened. That they convey religious truth is the essential issue, and of this I have never had any doubt.⁵⁴

Personal Epilogue

I, personally, like the approach of combining all the details of the various First Vision accounts into an interesting mosaic. However, that approach does not adequately address the question of whether one or two divine personages appeared. When I examined the Joseph Smith Papers Project volume containing the 1832 account, I was impressed by the care and detail of the preparation of the “Historical Introduction,” “Source Note,” and footnotes, but I was shocked by the absence of discussion of the problems introduced by the account with respect to the number of persons who appeared to Joseph, and the historical efforts to avoid those problems by suppressing the 1832 version. I talked on the phone to each of the editors, but none was willing to comment on *why* the leaves were excised from the 1830s ledger. Consequently, I felt the need to write this article. I was born a Mormon and I will die a Mormon. I was taught and believed—and still believe—that we should not be afraid of the truth, and always keep searching for the truth. Since the 1832 version is not only the earliest, but also the only one actually written by Joseph Smith, I regard it as the most reliable.

Notes

1. George Manwaring, “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer,” *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), hymn #26.

2. This later addition to the text is in the handwriting of the scribe, Frederick G. Williams.

3. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, first volume of the Histories series of THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPERS, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012) (*JSP*, H1), 11–13. The First Vision part of this early historical account (which is quoted here) is in the handwriting of Joseph Smith, but the material before and after this is in the handwriting of his scribe, Frederick G. Williams. As an indication of how valuable this 1832 account really is, a comparison could be made of the record of the visit of the angel who told Joseph Smith about the Book of Mormon plates. Early newspaper sources from 1829 to 1831 merely refer to an “angel,” an “angel of light,” a “spirit,” or a “ghost,” without any proper name being attached to the personage. Later LDS sources state either that the angel's name was Nephi (in earlier accounts) or Moroni (in later accounts). Joseph Smith in the 1832 account stated that the angel “revealed unto me that in the Town of Manchester Ontario County N.Y. there was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers”—thus “Maroni” is a third-person reference and not the name of the angel who was speaking to Joseph.

4. *JSP*, H1, 3–4.

5. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

6. *Ibid.*, 13.

7. Robin Jensen, lead archivist for The Joseph Smith Papers Project, confirmed in an informal telephone conversation on December 20, 2012, that this is a plausible scenario.

8. When Joseph Fielding Smith became president of the LDS Church in 1970, the personal safe in his office was moved into the First Presidency's walk-in vault. The exact time that the 1832 account was put into the Joseph Fielding Smith office safe and the date that he showed the history to Levi Edgar Young would probably be found in the Joseph Fielding Smith Collection, catalogued as Ms 4250 at the Church History Library Archives. On December 11, 2012 the writer sent to Richard E. Turley a written request for permission to read the diaries (either photocopies or microfilm) of Joseph Fielding Smith from 1930 to 1954, but this request was denied.

9. Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith's Strange Account of the First Vision; Also a Critical Study of the First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., [1965]), 4, with the quotation being based on notes made by Petersen of the interview with Levi Edgar Young. Emphasis is in the original, but that emphasis is probably due to the Tanners, who added the full caps and underlining.

Levi Edgar Young was wrong about the date of the “Strange” account of the First Vision, since we now know that it was written in 1832, not 1837 or 1838.

10. LaMar Petersen, *The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 2000), xii. Petersen gave the year as 1952, instead of February 3, 1953. Since he had six separate sessions with Levi Edgar Young, these meetings could have covered late 1952 as well as early 1953. The other option is that the 1952 date is an error in the memory of the nonagenarian Petersen.

11. Paul R. Cheesman, “An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith’s Early Visions” (unpublished M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965), 126. Cheesman thought that this six-page account was written about 1833. In a telephone conversation with the writer on December 15, 2012, his widow, Millie Foster Cheesman, stated that in contrast to the complete restriction placed on Fawn M. Brodie (a niece of President David O. McKay), Cheesman was given full access, allowing him to transcribe the 1832 account of the First Vision.

12. Two decades later Cheesman published his thesis as a hardback book, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo: Eagle Systems International, 1988).

13. Dean C. Jessee, “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 275–94.

14. Dean C. Jessee, “The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” in John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson, eds., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 1–33. See also James B. Allen, “Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision: What Do We Learn from Them?” *The Improvement Era* 73 (April 1970): 4–13; Allen had a total of eight accounts, because he was not aware of the report in the Levi Richards journal and he correctly ignored the short “account” to Erastus Holmes, which is really a one-sentence reference to the First Vision.

15. Marvin S. Hill, “The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Summer 1982): 39.

16. Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), stated that the 1832 account was in the handwriting of the scribe—not Joseph Smith. However, Dean C. Jessee, in “How Lovely Was the Morning,” review of *Joseph Smith’s First Vision* by Milton V. Backman, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 6 (Spring 1971): 86, pointed out Backman’s error, since Joseph Smith wrote the main part of this account. In the second edition of his book, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*:

Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts, 2nd ed. rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), unnumbered "Corrections" page after 227, Backman acknowledged this oversight.

17. Christopher C. Jones, "The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 90, citing a number of contemporary vision accounts.

18. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 30.

19. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2009), 137.

20. Franklin L. West, *Life of Franklin D. Richards: President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1924), 120.

21. From 1880 to 1902, the Pearl of Great Price also included the poem, "Truth," later entitled "O Say, What Is Truth?" which was written by John Jaques, an English convert who joined the LDS Church in 1845 and served as a young missionary at Stratford-upon-Avon, where he wrote the poem. He immigrated with his family to America in 1856 and crossed the plains with the ill-fated Martin Handcart Company, with his daughter being among those who died. Jaques returned to England as a missionary from 1869 to 1871, and then later worked at the Church Historian's Office. He must have felt proud that his poem "Truth" (which had appeared in the first edition of *The Pearl of Great Price* in 1851) became part of the official LDS scripture in 1880 and continued in that status for the last twenty years of his life. However, H. Donl Peterson, in *The Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1987), 23, points out that James E. Talmage "deleted" the poem from Mormon scripture in the 1902 edition of the Pearl of Great Price.

22. The words "This is my beloved Son, hear him" are an exact quotation of Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:35, when God spoke from heaven to Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration of Jesus.

23. Draft 3 of the history has the following parenthetical statement: "(for I supposed that one of them were so.)" See *JSP*, H1, 215.

24. Draft 2 of the same history in *JSP*, H1, 214. There are only minor changes to Joseph Smith—History 1:16–20, in the Pearl of Great Price.

25. Mark 7:7 has the same text.

26. For a modern study of the ancient sources about Jesus, see Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

27. This ignores the following individuals who in discussing the First Vision *only* quote or refer to the official account in the Pearl of Great Price: Leon R. Hartshorn, *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration* (Provo: Spring Creek Book Company, 2004), 5; W. Jeffrey Marsh, *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2005), 16, 44; Susan Easton Black, *Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, Setting the Record Straight Series (Orem, Utah: Millennial Press, 2007), 21–22; Scot Facer Proctor, *A Day Like No Other: Joseph Smith and the First Vision* (Fairfax Station, Va.: Meridian Publishing, 2009); and Christopher Kimball Bigelow and Jonathan Langford, *The Latter-day Saint Family Encyclopedia* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2010), 114.

28. Alexander L. Baugh, “Parting the Veil: Joseph Smith’s Seventy-six Documented Visionary Experiences,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 268, 279.

29. Richard N. Skousen and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brother Joseph: Seer of a New Dispensation* (Orem, Utah: Verity Publishing, 2004), 40–44.

30. J. Carr Smith, *A Grove of My Own: Understanding Your Life’s Mission* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2006), xi–xii, 1–3, 7.

31. Davis Bitton, *Knowing Brother Joseph Again: Perceptions and Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2011), 17–18, 33, and 61.

32. Richard Lloyd Dewey, *Joseph Smith: A Biography* (Arlington, Va.: Stratford Books, 2005), 12–16.

33. Richard E. Bennett, *School of the Prophet: Joseph Smith Learns the First Principles, 1820–1830* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 139n4, quoting Jesus’ statement “Joseph thy Sins are forgiven thee, go thy way [and] walk in my statutes and keep my commandments.”

34. David Paulsen, “Joseph Smith Challenges the Theological World,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, edited by John W. Welch (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 181, 205n18.

35. Larry C. Porter, “The Youth of the Grove and the Prophet of the Restoration,” in *Joseph: Exploring the Life and Ministry of the Prophet*, edited by Susan Easton Black and Andrew C. Skinner (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 36, 38, and 40.

36. *Ibid.*, 41.

37. Heidi S. Swinton, *American Prophet: The Story of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 1999), 36, footnotes 4 and 8.

38. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 2–3, 28. Stephen C. Taysom, in “Approaching the First Vision Saga,” *Sunstone* 163 (June 2011): 22, incorrectly states that the chapter of this manual on the First Vision “contains only material from the canonical 1838 version.”

39. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

40. Hartt Wixom, *Critiquing the Critics of Joseph Smith* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2005), 78–79. Wixom, in *Critiquing*, 76, states that Frederick G. Williams is the scribe of the earliest account, instead of Joseph Smith himself.

41. Matthew B. Brown, *A Pillar of Light: The History and Message of the First Vision* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, Inc., 2009), 92.

42. Richard Lyman Bushman, with the assistance of Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 35–40.

43. Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012), 13.

44. James B. Allen and John W. Welch, “The Appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820s,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 63–64. In the ellipsis Allen and Welch point out that eight of the accounts mention two personages, but it is not a question of counting the different accounts, but rather looking at them in chronological order—especially the earliest and the only one written by Joseph Smith himself.

45. *Ibid.*, 74n27.

46. Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith's First Vision: A Guide to the Historical Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 90–91. Later in his book (112), Harper refers again to his strained interpretation that these two occurrences of the word “Lord” in the same sentence might perhaps refer to “two separate heavenly beings.”

47. The three original diaries of Robert Harris Fife were lost for over fifty years, but fortunately found and donated to Utah State University in June 2009. See Mss 355, Box 1, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

48. James B. Allen, “The Significance of Joseph Smith's ‘First Vision’ in Mormon Thought,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 33.

49. Kathleen Flake, "Re-Placing Memory: Latter-day Saint Use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century," in Stephen C. Taysom, ed., *Dimensions of Faith: A Mormon Studies Reader* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), 231.

50. Kay Briggs, *Most Quoted Scriptures of the Standard Works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Orem, Utah: Raymont Publishers, 1980), 371, with the specific verse being Joseph Smith—History 1:17.

51. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), 227. President Hinckley also made the following statement in the October 2002 General Conference: "That is the way I feel about it. Our whole strength rests on the validity of that vision. It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then it is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens," *Ensign* 32 (November 2002).

52. Thomas S. Monson, *A Prophet's Voice: Messages from Thomas S. Monson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 477.

53. Jerald Tanner, Letter to Dee Jay Nelson, December 18, 1970, quoted in the writer's *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Quest for the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press in association with Smith Research Associates, 2004), 142.

54. Leonard J. Arrington, "Why I Am a Believer," in Philip L. Barlow, comp. and ed., *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars* (Centerville, Utah: Canon Press, 1986), 230.

Dialoguing Online: The Best of 10+ Years of Mormons Blogging

Emily W. Jensen

Over ten years ago, blogs changed the look, feel, and immediacy of Mormon discourse almost overnight. The ongoing lively conversations, brilliantly constructed posts, and sometimes even unruly debates have not stopped since. *Dialogue* both views and participates in this online dialogue, submitting archival references to current discussions and writing pieces in concert with the printed prose found within its present-day pages. With that in mind, *Dialogue* takes a look back at some of the best of the blogs from the past ten-plus years in an effort to more permanently cement these posts into the collection of Mormon thought. Post descriptions are arranged topically, then chronologically with the most recent posts first, in an effort to capture the change (or non-change) in conversations through the years. Full URLs for each post are listed in the notes at the end of this article; the digital version at dialoguejournal.com also contains live links.

Theology

March 3, 2014: “At some point, as we all sat there, Jane asked if I would give her a blessing. I was the only man in the room, so, for better or worse, I was her only option. I would have given anything not to have been there at that moment. I had no idea where Jim was, or what he was doing, or if Jane and her two small kids would ever see him again. I’m not one for spiritual experiences.” Stephen Taysom pens an incredibly powerful essay about a friend and how “He Will Find His Way Home.”¹

December 12, 2013: Not many could get away with titling a post “Advice for a Mormon Intellectual,”² but James Faulconer does—twice. Why? In part 1, he explains, “The only authority I have for giving this advice is age and interest: I’ve spent a lot of time engaged in intellectual pursuits, particularly philosophy and the close reading of scripture. In philosophy I’ve said, written, and done things that I later regretted. I’ve done the same with regard to religion. I hope I learned from all those mistakes.” In Part 2,³ he looks at truth claims of the LDS Church, testifying that

I believe in the truth of Mormonism in the straightforward, propositional sense: Joseph Smith was called by God to be a prophet. He did have plates of gold, and he translated a portion of those plates by the power of God, resulting in the Book of Mormon. And so on. But I am much more interested in, and even more firmly committed to belief in, the truth of the LDS Church in the second sense: through membership and life in Mormonism, a way of living is opened that gives me genuine relation to God and other people; the good news of Christ shows itself in and through the LDS Church. I am so much interested in this sense of truth that it shapes how I understand the first sense.

October 6, 2013: In an open and heartfelt blog letter titled “This Is an Hard Saying; Who Can Hear It?”⁴ Steve Evans writes to Elder Dallin H. Oaks in an effort to gain clarification regarding certain things he said his October 2013 General Conference talk:

I was particularly interested by (and agree with) your testimony that “unlike other organizations that can change their policies and even their doctrines, our policies are determined by the truths God has identified as unchangeable.” One of the best things about our Church, what I love, is that we start with fundamental truths revealed by God and use those as the basis for our policies and programs. But I have noticed that we have changed our policies several times in the Church on various matters. I don’t need to cite these; I’m not trying to build an evidence file to oppose your words. But you do seem to imply that these policies are forever unchangeable, and I wonder if this is truly the case. I believe that

our current policies are in place because of inspired leaders and I intend to obey those policies, but the bedrock of our Church is ongoing revelation and the certainty of your words seems (at least on the surface) to run contrary to that principle. Has God identified his standards against same-sex marriage, for example, as unchangeable? I know that I am under covenant to keep His commandments, and I agree wholeheartedly that “man’s laws cannot make moral what God has declared immoral,” regardless of whether the immoral behavior is popular or not. I guess I am asking the same question I asked above: how do I know which parts of the plan cannot change? How can anyone know? I suppose this does not affect my present duty very much, but I’d like to better understand how it works.

January 1, 2013: Kate Holbrook offers a beautiful essay on “Why I Pray”⁵:

I know that people have prayed that if it were God’s will, my eye would heal, cancer would leave, and I would orient to monocularity without too much struggle, and we seem to be realizing this good fortune. I suspect some have prayed that I would be receptive to whatever possible benefits could come from this period in my family’s life, and I’ve found the benefits have been many. At diagnosis and during later complications, I have been that “human being in fear and doubt.” But religion did not exploit my vulnerability. I have felt guided, enlightened, amplified, and accompanied. I have prayed and others have prayed not because we are gullible, stupid, or otherwise inferior to the atheist minds of the day. We pray because of what we find there.

October 4, 2011: As John Crawford said of *Dialogue* editor Kristine Haglund’s now-famous post, “Boyd K. Packer and Prophetic Despair,”⁶ “It is brilliant and beautiful, compassionate and clear-eyed, the very best of Moblogging.” Kristine begins, “I’m just going to say it. Please don’t throw things. I loved President Packer’s talk.”

September 29, 2011: “It seems to me that some willingness to bear each other’s joy as well as our burdens is a necessary lubricant to sociality in the church,” writes Kristine Haglund in “I Pray

You . . . Bear My Joy Awhile,”⁷ a must-read piece at By Common Consent. “If the fact of someone’s pain requires silence about our own joy, the bearing of one another’s burdens becomes grim duty indeed—those burdens, it seems to me, can be borne better as they are lightened by shared happiness. Being all members of one body cannot possibly provide relief if every part of the body must constantly suffer the affliction of all the other parts.”

April 28, 2011: Chelsea Shields Strayer does some digging around her foundational beliefs and uncovers “My Religious Manifesto.”⁸

As I’ve aged I realized that I actually built my house upon the sand. I founded my testimony on a rigid black and white understanding of the do’s and don’ts of the gospel that when held under the scrutiny of the wind, the rain, and the flood—which in this metaphor is historical reality, eternal principles, and critical thinking—washed away the house that I built. I had been taught and wanted to believe in such a whitewashed version of a complex gospel that I never had to dig through the earth to find the true foundation. Instead I just built right on top of the soil. Let me clarify that there is nothing wrong with soil. It is a wonderful thing that brings life and fecundity. But it also erodes through time and space. It changes with the seasons and when disaster strikes it cannot secure a foundationless house.

April 12, 2011: Adam Miller waxes philosophical in “Be Ye Perfect”⁹ at Times and Seasons.

If you want to be “perfect”—not in the abstract, not as some shiny, stainless steel composite of John Keats, Brad Pitt, Albert Einstein, and Gordon B. Hinckley, but *as* the Father is perfect—then you must be complete in the same way that the Father is complete. The Father is “complete” because he is not “partial.” To be like him, you must love completely. You must love not just your friends but even (especially) your enemies. You must love not just the just but the unjust. You must make your sun shine on *all*. You must make your skies rain on *everyone*. Perfection consists in being im/partial. It is equanimity.

June 15, 2008: In “Spoken Fatherhood: Communion and Community,”¹⁰ Samuel Brown speaks both philosophically and personally in his Fathers’ Day sermon.

Because I believe that life is lived in details, I would like to place these ideas within the concrete terms of my own experience. In my experience, the road to Communion can be long and hard. My own father was a complex and sad man. Driven by insanity and the chasm that yawned between who he hoped to be and who he remained, he was not available to his family. In a conversation I have never been proud of, I told him once, surveying the damage he had done to our family, that he was my biological father but had no claim on me beyond his genes. Diagnosed with profoundly bipolar depression and a narcissistic personality disorder, he limped from pathological melancholy so severe he disappeared into dark motel rooms for days at a time to sheer mania, when he spent towards bankruptcy and filled his young children with dreams of staggering wealth and comfort.

Homosexuality

April 1, 2014: “Drop the term ‘lifestyle’ as a description of gay relationships. Recognize that there is a difference between a promiscuous lifestyle (whether one is gay or straight), and a decision to be in a committed relationship, rather than assuming that all gay people, by virtue of being gay, fall into the former category if they aren’t celibate. Note that the lifestyle of gay couples is pretty much the same as the lifestyle of straight couples.” This and five other suggestions comprise Sheila Taylor’s “A Few Simple Ways to Talk More Constructively about Homosexuality (That Don’t Require Major Doctrinal Changes).”¹¹ Her follow-up post discusses “More on Being Gay and Mormon: Some Simple Ways People Have Been Supportive.”¹²

January 29, 2014: “One thing is clear: the international church is part of what is playing out in Utah. Whatever church authorities emphasize now or in the future, whatever they apply as policies dealing with legally married same-sex couples, whatever individual Mormons advocate in public fora and organizations,

it has worldwide resonance and implications.” In “Utah Same-Sex Marriage and the International Church,”¹³ Wilfried Decoo provides another thoughtful addition to the ongoing discussion about Mormonism and same-sex marriage, placing it into a more global perspective.

Feminism

May 8, 2014: Using probing questions, instructive graphs, and understandable explanations Andrea Radke-Moss provides a thorough background to “Mormon Studies in the Classroom: Mormon Women, Patriarchy and Equality” at the Juvenile Instructor.¹⁴

I hope that in laying out my teaching methodology, I have also reached beyond my student audience and the teachers/professors who will find usefulness in these ideas. I have had the opportunity to present this introduction to a handful of groups, including students, a Mormon intellectual/historian gathering, and my own department colleagues—all to very positive response; and I sincerely hope that these ideas will continue to find an audience among church members and leaders alike, who hope to understand the complexity and history of women’s roles, spheres, expectations, and rights in a more sophisticated manner. Mostly, a caution: Given this historical and theoretical context, we should avoid strong claims to Mormon women’s “**equality**,” when we might really mean that women are “**protected**” or cherished. There is a difference.

March 26, 2014: “These Are Our Sisters,”¹⁵ exclaim Cal Robinson and Juliann Reynolds, guest posting at the FAIR blog regarding the Ordain Woman movement. Of note, they dismantle a few of the oft-heard arguments hurled at Ordain Women supporters.

Of equal concern are those well-intentioned counter arguments to women’s ordination that not only diminish women in general, but the priesthood itself. Any defense that involves a refusal of the priesthood as if it was just one more thing to add to an already full schedule is no defense. Likewise, declaring that its primary purpose is to force men to be responsible is not consistent with

statements by church leaders that describe the role of the Priesthood with utmost reverence.

March 24, 2014: Melissa Inouye calls readers to re-examine the rhetoric regarding those with whom they may disagree within the Church in the provocative new post “No More Strangers.”¹⁶ She explains,

When we use such harshly judgmental rhetoric to suggest that active, contributing members of the Church should be excommunicated or otherwise expelled from our fellowship because we deeply disagree with their interpretation of doctrine, we are forgetting two things. In the first place, we are forgetting that a group of people that comprises at very most .002 percent of the world’s population cannot afford to excise entire sections of its membership.

February 20, 2014: April Bennett uses personal but anonymous examples to consider the problematic nature of “Church Discipline: Women Disciplined by Men,”¹⁷ and wonders, “When a man requires a woman to submit to an interrogation by a group of men about sensitive personal issues such as her sex life, does she feel love or shame? Does this process meet the criteria set forth in the Thirteenth Article of Faith: ‘virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy’?”

January 18, 2014: In “If Your Sexual Thoughts Were Like My Asthma,”¹⁸ Emily Belanger provides a fantastic comparison to explain why the modesty discourse toward women can be frustrating:

But I’m still affected by their actions, just as many faithful members feel impacted by how others dress. So I take responsibility for my own body and do what I need to in order to minimize the way others’ smoky attire impacts me: I take my allergy medication; I bring gum to church, which helps minimize mild allergy symptoms; I keep my inhaler on hand so that I can use it if I need to. And no, I don’t generally sit right next to someone who smells strongly of smoke. And if I really, truly need to, I leave the building for a bit to get some fresh air. But I do all of this without criticizing others, either to their face or behind their back.

October 8, 2013: In “Modesty and the Imaginary Me,”¹⁹ Rosalynde Welch adds to the modesty discourse by speaking of it in a more personal vein:

I want to write about how I have personally experienced modesty standards, and how they shape not only my behavior but my sense of self. I don’t expect to convert anybody to my point of view, but maybe I’ll begin to articulate how it can be that some women experience modesty as a kind of security and power. It feels risky to write this, because I will no doubt show myself to be not only flawed but flatly ridiculous in my vanity and delusion. But here goes. . . . Clothing and make-up were the most important ways I mediated my relationship to my body. Thus the act of choosing clothing, getting dressed, and surveying my reflection in the mirror was an unwholesome cocktail of dread, fantasy, desire, and despair. I loved my clothing, I wanted more of it and more fashionable styles. I fetishized my favorite outfits, the ones I believed made me look fashionable and skinny. The fantasy of recreating the outfits I saw in magazines, displaying myself in them, and attracting the envious gaze of other girls and desiring gaze of boys was powerful.

September 30, 2013: “So is there a way to preserve the fraternal character of existing priesthood quorums, and their motivating centrality to the workings of the church, while also involving women and girls in church governance, both to reinforce their connection to the institution and to raise the effectiveness of that governance at the ward level?” So wonders Rosalynde Welch in this post on “Thinkable Priesthoods, Usable Pasts”²⁰ that is full of introspective questions along with some interesting speculative answers.

June 18, 2013: Jacob Baker captures the importance of reframing the modesty discourse in the well-written post on “Men, Sex, and Modesty”²¹:

What was untrue, however (what remains untrue), and this is point number two, were the stories that had produced that anxiety and powerlessness in the first place. Stories about girls and women being centers of uncontrollable desire and lust that must look and act in particular ways in order to tame the beast

within me. Stories about learning to be strong and courageous while surrounded by frightening temptation everywhere I turned, thereby transforming women around me into either enemies or potential enemies (should they choose at some point to not dress according to current acceptable standards, on my behalf). Stories that metaphorically and realistically banish or exile women from thought and place so I could feel safe and powerful. Stories that divided not just women against men in significant ways, but also women against women, in which women saw other women as potential insidious bearers of the seeds of destruction sown in husbands, sons, and fathers.

May 15, 2013: In “*The Friend* and the Orange Tank Top: The Difference between Shaming and the Spirit,”²² Lisa Butterworth asks us to examine what we say to and about children:

But going with current usage for the sake of this conversation, when *The Friend* impresses upon little girls that That Orange Tank Top is immodest. What *The Friend* is really telling our babies is that they should not dress in such a way as to encourage sexual attraction in others. Stop and think about that for a minute. We are telling our babies to think about their bodies, and to think about covering them up, and to feel guilty for wanting to wear an Orange Tank Top because they might encourage sexual attention from others.

May 6, 2013: Melissa Inouye writes about her personal experience with Julie B. Beck’s “Mothers Who Know” talk in “Put Your Mormon Where Your Mouth Is: Gender, Sexuality, and the Second Great Commandment.”²³ She explains,

Somehow, I had drawn a battle line where one didn’t properly belong. Actually, I didn’t have a problem with most of the things that Sister Beck said in her talk. I absolutely believe that the mundane physical chores of parenthood are imbued with spiritual power. Now that I have children of my own, I truly appreciate the awesome investment of time, talent, and pure grit that my mother made in the process of raising my four brothers and me. Call it nurturing, homemaking, war, or Bob, it is definitely not for

the faint of heart. On this fundamental point my mother, Sister Beck, and I were all on the same side.

April 22, 2013: Joanna Brooks also wonders, “What Is Priesthood? What Is the Relationship of Gender to Priesthood?”²⁴ and writes,

What we have instead is an accretion of scriptures, historical events, personal experiences, and interpretive impulses—a chaotic body of data that is typically managed in order to tell the story the speaker wants it to tell. Every faith tradition has a theological history rich in chaos, and Mormonism is no exception. What we can see at best as we begin to piece together the history of thought on questions like “What is priesthood?” and “What is the relationship of gender to priesthood?” is the human outlines of our hunger for the truth and the way in which the terms of our search for the truth have evolved over time. Mormons call this process *continuing revelation*. The more we learn about change in Mormon history and doctrine and the more prepared we are to be candid, we must acknowledge that human dispositions and error play a vital role in shaping Mormon doctrinal history—especially on questions of power and its administration.

September 11, 2012: Angela Clayton provides some spot-on “Musings on Modesty”²⁵ over at Wheat & Tares:

But at the same time, we’ve got someone madly photoshopping cap sleeves on toddlers so that no shoulder is left exposed, no matter how young. According to Photo Standards²⁶ on lds.org: “Because of the **need** to present **women and girls** modestly, **regardless of age**, please avoid submitting photos of them in **sleeveless** tops and dresses or short skirts.” In case you are wondering, I am not making this up. Someone thinks there is a “need” to cover the shoulders of toddlers (if they are female) so that they are not immodest. Toddler girl #1 above was on lds.org up to very recently. Toddler girl #2 with magical appearing cap sleeves is there now. This happened.

June 20, 2012: In “Why Mormon Feminism Is True,”²⁷ Patrick Mason writes, “In sum, Mormon feminism manifests the redemption

of Eve and Adam (and all their sons and daughters), proclaims the literal deification of women, wrestles with the paradox of equality in difference, and insists on rooting the self in the bonds of human community and communion with God. And that, at least in part, is why Mormon feminism—the seeming ‘contrary’—is true.”

October 1, 2011: “Let My People Pray: It’s Time to Consider Having Women Give Opening/Closing Prayers in General Conference,”²⁸ says Cynthia Lee. She explains, “Perhaps the prayer restriction in General Conference has simply escaped notice. Whatever the reason, I think that the recent Handbook changes make this the time to consider including women in the offering of invocations and benedictions in a general session of General Conference.” Two years later, it happened.

September 15, 2010: Kathryn Soper looks at “Why Standards Night Is Substandard”²⁹ and laments,

Our standards nights and chastity lessons usually focus on the dangers of strong sexual desire. Predictably, we exhort young men to bridle their libidos, which we describe as wild beasts that must be restrained until domestication in marriage, and we caution young women to avoid arousing and indulging the young men—tempting the beast out of its cage, so to speak. It’s a troubling model for a number of reasons, but I’ll address just one: by focusing on physiological motivators for teenage sex, we completely overlook significant *psychological* motivators. This oversight shortchanges all youth, and exacerbates the risk of young women’s needs flying under the standards night radar completely. After dismissing libido as a serious issue for them (which may be a mistake in and of itself), we turn their attention to assisting their male peers without even considering other compelling reasons for sexual behavior. In our outreach we miss the mark by emphasizing virtue, modesty, and chastity without considering what might motivate a young woman to eschew the same.

September 1, 2008: Meghan Raynes pens a beautiful post titled “From Mother to Daughter”³⁰ on the eve of birthing her daughter and explains, “By choosing to stay, I am knowingly exposing my daughter to a church that proclaims equality but does nothing to demonstrate it in its structure. Because of my

choice, my daughter may come to know the pain of discovering that despite all the declarations of equality, the rhetoric and a good part of the theology does not support the notion that women are full participants in a spiritual life. By staying, I am left with the very real possibility of having to answer questions I have no answers for myself.”

November 11, 2007: “It’s high time I confess a heresy that may put me at odds both with many Mormons and with many feminists: I’m not really all that enamored of the idea of the divine feminine, of the doctrine that we have a Heavenly Mother,” says Sheila Taylor in the provocative post “Why I Don’t Want to Believe in Heavenly Mother.”³¹

I don’t recall when I first encountered the teaching that we have a Heavenly Mother as well as a Father—though I can say that the idea that Heavenly Father had multiple wives was one that rather horrified me (it still does). But even beyond the potential polygamy problem, the notion of an Eternal Mother was one that left me feeling a bit icky. I projected the kinds of saccharine rhetoric about women that I heard about church onto her, imagining a Mother who was always soft-spoken and dripping with sentimentality. I figured that if such a divine personage did indeed exist, I didn’t want anything to do with her.

Race

December 8, 2013: In “Bound Hand and Foot with Graveclothes,”³² Kristine Haglund provides a beautiful interpretation of the Lazurus story and how it can apply to the recent release of the “Race and the Priesthood” explanation in LDS Gospel Topics.

I think there might be something for us to learn from this story in figuring out how we ought to respond to the remarkable statement on race and priesthood posted at lds.org. Strangely (to me, at least) it has been my friends who consider themselves most progressive who have been a little bit like those who “went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done”—they’ve not wanted to let go of their idea of what rebirth ought to look

like, they've wanted the statement to emerge from the tomb of the COB (sorry, couldn't resist ;) without the graveclothes of institutional inertia and bureaucratic caution. They are eager (as I am) for the process of healing to be complete, the vision of a less racist future for the Church given to us in the form we would recognize most readily and celebrate most gladly. It seems to me, though, that it almost never works that way.

April 26, 2013: "The publication of (Elder John) Dickson's talk in the *Ensign*, LDS anti-racist advocates worry, will provide renewed cover for Mormons who would like to avoid reckoning with the human origins and harmful consequences of the faith's historic racism. And that, they say, is no cause for celebration." Joanna Brooks looks at the "Shifting Talk on Mormon Racism Reveals Divisions within LDS Church."³³

March 1, 2012: In "Professor Bott, Elijah Abel, and a Plea from the Past,"³⁴ Paul Reeve weighs in on Randy Bott's racist remarks:

Professor Bott's recent comments to the *Washington Post* again dishonor Abel's legacy. If even one black Mormon was eligible for the priesthood before 1978, then all blacks were. In Elijah Abel all of the hokey rationalizations and false justifications for a race based temple and priesthood ban fall by the wayside. If even one black Mormon was eligible for the priesthood before 1978, then all blacks were. Abel was not in need of white paternalism in 1883 when he served a third mission for Mormonism at the age of 75 and he certainly does not deserve it in 2012.

February 29, 2012: In a short but powerful guest post, Armand Mauss³⁵ outlines five reasons Professor Randy Bott was wrong in his reasoning about the priesthood ban:

Professor Bott seems to be a little behind in his reading on the history and doctrine regarding black members of the Church. He seems unaware of any of the scholarship on this topic during the past 45 years or more. Otherwise he would know that (1) the references that he cites from the Pearl of Great Price and other scriptures have the meaning he attributes to them ONLY if the reader already believes the folklore that Bott is proposing and elaborating—that is, only if one reads them through the lens of

that folklore; (2) numerous spokesmen from LDS Public Affairs, plus many other official statements in recent decades, have denied that such folklore was ever official doctrine; (3) despite such folklore (in versions common to American history more generally), Joseph Smith ordained at least a few African Americans to the priesthood; (4) there is no record of any revelation to any prophet denying the priesthood to people of black African ancestry; and last, but not least (5) this kind of armchair theologizing done by well-meaning, but ill-informed LDS religion teachers like Bott, does enormous damage to the public image of the Church in a time when the Church is trying hard to overcome its historic association with that very kind of folklore.

August 9, 2010: “We believe that there must and will be a significant future for those of African descent in the Church, and far greater prominence in the leadership than we see today,” write Margaret Blair Young and Darius Gray in “The Colorful LDS Future.”³⁶ “But it won’t come without full acknowledgment of the complexities that always attend race issues, and some bold approaches to the challenges before us.”

January 27, 2009: Brad Kramer looks at racism in the Church in “There is an End to Race”³⁷ on By Common Consent.

Racism is a problem in the Church. Whether it is a greater problem for Mormons than for anybody else is an open question (though not the subject of this thread), though I think we can all agree that, despite the fact that we are clearly better than we were in previous generations, it is still a problem. I think that it vexes us Mormons in unique ways, and I’d like to explore some of those in this discussion, paying particular attention to what light contemporary biology, anthropology, and epidemiology can shed on the question. You see, the real problem is *race*.

Mormon Studies

October 30, 2013: Jana Riess gets to the heart of the problems with divisive rhetoric in this piece on “How Not to Disagree with a Mormon Apostle.”³⁸ She says,

It's one thing to disagree with LDS leaders, and to speak plainly and pointedly about the reasons why. Such discussions can elevate our people's reflections about important issues. I have no problem with any Mormon writing an open letter expressing dissent on any topic; the more transparent our discourse, the better. Bring it on. But we do not call each other horrible names, or blame total strangers for the deaths of children. We focus on issues, not personal attacks. We behave like grown-ups"

September 1, 2013: "I don't understand much of the tensions that people see in the relationship between science and faith," says George Handley in "Science, Faith, and Policy."³⁹ "To me, it seems patently obvious that scriptural accounts of the origin of the world, for example, are not scientific texts. Nor for that matter are scientific explanations for the origins of life sufficient narratives of the reasons for our existence or for our moral self-understanding. Science tells us how things work and religion seeks to tell us why they exist."

August 16, 2013: "What is Mormon studies? Who is doing it, where and how is it being done? What is the relationship between Mormon studies and apologetics? Does Mormon studies exclude or necessarily bracket discussion about the fundamental truth claims of the religion? How are Mormon studies to be situated within the wider academy?" Blair Hodges compiles an impressive list of online articles and posts attempting to answer these very questions with "A Mormon Studies Bibliography"⁴⁰ on the Maxwell Institute Blog.

July 24, 2013: "In the beginning, Mormonism was a cult. Not in the vulgar sense often attributed to feared or misconstrued religious minorities, but in the way that earliest Christianity or nascent Islam was a cult: a group that forms around a charismatic figure coupled with radical new religious claims. Like these predecessors, Mormonism has long since grown from cult to culture. This is reflected in its fertile, distinctive parlance—by turns revealing, quaint, ingenious, paradoxical, and humorous." Philip Barlow stops by the Oxford University Press blog with some insightful thoughts "Of Mormonish and Saintspeak."⁴¹

July 15, 2014: Taylor Petrey offers some fascinating insights into “The Greater Apostasy? Responsibility and Falling Away in LDS Narratives.”⁴² He explains,

Over the course of the 20th century, LDS narratives about early Christianity shifted dramatically in one respect. While earlier accounts explained that the Great Apostasy occurred due to the failure of church leaders, by the 1980s, retellings of the Great Apostasy narrative blamed the general membership for going astray. LDS narratives about early Christianity, like most other Christians, have a great deal to do with constructing a meaningful identity. In this way, these narratives have a different goal than those of historians. Nevertheless, this shift in the LDS narrative reveals a great deal about how LDS identity is constructed and what values these stories seek to communicate.

August 10, 2010: Steve Evans muses on the “Future of Mormons on the Internet”⁴³ and writes,

LDS blogs exist for a number of identified reasons, but fundamentally a single reason predominates: *community*. Humans are social creatures, craving interconnectedness, and Mormons are especially social humans. This is partially attributable to Wasatch Front Western friendliness, I suppose, but I also view our society as a central feature of our faith: we are saved in great chains of family stretching back and forward through the eternities, and Joseph Smith wrote, “that same sociality which exists amongst us here will exist among us there only it will be coupled with eternal glory which glory we do not now enjoy.”

Public Conversations

October 22, 2012: Before one of the presidential debates between Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama, Patrick Mason looks at “The Politics of Jesus.”⁴⁴ He explains that

religion not only can, but must, take into account the political. This does not mean baptizing our secular political ideologies in religious warrants, essentially equating the kingdom of this world

with the kingdom of Christ. When that is the case, religion ceases to be prophetic and becomes culturally captive. The politics of Jesus are always in relationship with the politics of this world. The relationship, however, is never one of outright endorsement, but rather a prophetic witness aimed at reordering human societies so as to more fully approach Zion. . . . In listening to more than three decades' worth of church lessons, I don't think I've ever once heard this prophetic statement quoted—President Kimball's teachings on heavy petting, plenty of times; his teachings on rejecting the false god of militarism, never.

September 19, 2012: James Faulconer responds to Simon Critchley's New York Times piece about Mormons' belief in deification in "A Public Conversation about Mormonism."⁴⁵ He explains,

My view, a view that I think is shared by a number of other LDS thinkers, is that as a church we are not particularly hung up on theology. We can take it or leave it. . . . As a result, the decision to accept the belief as Joseph Smith taught it or to accept part or none of it has no official consequences. . . . Pick three Mormons: She straightforwardly believes what was taught in the 19th century. I believe that God was never a human being, but that we can become like him by receiving a fullness of his grace (as is suggested by passages such as John 17:20–23 and Romans 8:17). He believes neither that God was once a human being nor that we can become gods.

May 23, 2012: Taylor Petrey asks a provocative question: "Is Mormonism Ridiculous?"⁴⁶ He explains,

Like Elder Price and Mitt Romney, Mormons are praised for certain characteristics: being nice, having good families, valuing industry, thrift, or for being good citizens in the community. These are indeed genuine compliments that any community should be proud of. What is missing from this list of positive attributes is praise for Mormonism as having any important religious ideas. In fact, praises of Mormons as people often include the caveat that Mormon ideas and beliefs about angels, golden plates, and Kolob are strange, weird, ridiculous, and sometimes even dangerous.

April 27, 2012: In “I’m a Mormon, yes I am!”⁴⁷ Patrick Mason analyzes the “I’m a Mormon” campaign:

In my mind, what the ‘I’m a Mormon’ campaign actually reveals is twofold: first, that the LDS Church is, in pragmatic fashion, grasping at any strategy to maintain growth, particularly in the United States, where real growth has more or less flatlined (or may even be negative); second, that this is a young religion still desperately trying to gain legitimacy and validation. If you have to keep telling everyone that you’re just like them, chances are you’re not. And last time I checked, being different was sort of the whole point of Mormonism.

April 4, 2012: “Why Is It So Hard to Figure Out What Mormons Believe?”⁴⁸ asks Matthew Bowman at the blog Peculiar People. “Understandably, many in the media were confused when the church distanced itself from its own members. If a professor of religion at a church-owned university cannot be trusted to elaborate on what Mormons believe, who can? If the Mormons really wanted to stop particular proxy baptisms, couldn’t they?”

December 8, 2011: Jana Riess, on being on the receiving end of anti-Mormon prejudice: “And then someone found out the dirty truth that I am a Mormon. Not only that, but a ‘vocal Mormon,’ as an embarrassed, kind editor at the website put it in the apology sent to my publicist. (Apparently it is bad enough to be a member of a religious minority, but far worse not to feel a proper sense of shame.)” Read Riess’s post at Patheos, “Your Mormon Friend.”⁴⁹

December 5, 2011: Max Mueller discusses “Making Fun of Mormonism”⁵⁰ in Religion Dispatches: “So yes, religion does intersect with politics in this country, and we do need to find ways to talk about it. I’d like to suggest, though, that unless a set of Mormon underwear declares its candidacy for the presidency we would do well to leave it out of the conversation.”

July 26, 2010: On the Segullah⁵¹ blog, Carina Hoskisson asks, “Why aren’t you standing up for yourself at church? Why are you letting them get you upset week after week? Why aren’t you saying something? What happens if all the moderate, progressive, and in

some places, conservative voices leave the church? We need you. What if you're like me and don't care what flavor the politics are, you don't want to hear it at church? You have something that is worth hearing; your voice counts. So WHY WON'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?"

September 23, 2008: Craig Harline writes about the problems that occur "When Being Right Is Wrong."⁵²

There's just one problem. Your tongue-lashing shuts not only them up, but everyone else too. Now no one will talk. You've killed whatever good feeling was in the room—killed it more than those students were killing it. Now you're the one ruining the learning experience for everyone. You were right, those kids deserved it. But you were wrong as well. Wrong in how you handled it. Wrong in your tone, and delivery. Wrong in your meta message, which was (whether you meant to say so or not) that you probably don't care enough about the offenders to figure out an approach which not only solves the problem but allows the offenders to feel that they still matter to you. And thus, just plain wrong.

History

September 10, 2012:

I have serious reservations about recommending it to the average church member; if you need your prophet to be larger than life, or even just better than the average bear, this book is not for you. I think there is a substantial risk that people raised on hagiographic, presentist images of prophets would have their testimonies rocked, if not shattered, by this book. Perhaps this is just an idiosyncratic reaction, but I felt an increased appreciation for Joseph Smith, David O. McKay, and Spencer W. Kimball after reading their biographies. I can't say the same for Brigham Young; I liked him—and respected him—less. Much less.

So says Julie M. Smith in this "Book Review: *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* by John G. Turner."⁵³

July 30, 2012: Benjamin Park looks at “Individualism, Communalism, and the Foreign Past of Mormonism.”⁵⁴

This post is not designed to be a condemnation of today’s society or a passionate plea to return to nineteenth-century Mormon economic principles; far from it. Nor is it a denouncement of only one political outlook; indeed, both sides of the political divide are lacking a communalistic ethic. Rather, it is merely a reminder of the chasm between today and years past—a chasm that provides ironies, lessons, discomfort, and difficulty in squaring past traditions with today’s world; a reminder that things we assume is natural today has not always been that way. This is an especially complicated issue in a tradition that claims both prophetic authority as well as progressive revelation, causing issues that can often be difficult to solve.

May 2, 2012: “I think the (Reed) Smoot hearings are the great silent backdrop to this 2012 election,” writes Joanna Brooks in “Mitt Romney and the Ghost of Anti-Mormonism.”⁵⁵ Her interviewee, Kathleen Flake, responds,

I think today’s anxiety about Mormonism can’t be compared to that of the past. The anti-Mormonism that was nearly universal during Smoot’s era is now a tradition maintained by a very small slice of the American population. The Republican primaries gave that small slice a megaphone: the artificial loudness of their voice makes people overestimate their number. That said, it will be interesting to see what happens now in the general election when you may begin to hear from another voice that is anxious not so much about Mormonism per se but about any candidate that is too religious. And if Mormonism is anything in the American mind, it is a group of people who take their religion way too seriously.

July 13, 2009: Blair Hodges looks at “The Curriculum Department and the Search for the Authentic Joseph Smith”⁵⁶ in this post from Life on Gold Plates:

First, a little background. The manual was published in late 2007 as the latest installment of Relief Society and Priesthood

instruction manuals. A flurry of discussion on the manual swept through the Bloggernacle, including many positive and negative comments. The most common criticism is the manual's seeming "proof-texting" of Joseph Smith. It seems to "contemporize" him, missing an opportunity to educate members of the Church on various historical viewpoints not common to discussion of Church history generally. The most common praise is the manual's apparently more rigorous selection and use of source material as compared to past manuals. In that regard, the manual has been called a "step forward."

January 9, 2009: Ardis E. Parshall puts on her historical detective cap at Keepapitchinin to dispel "The Great Mormon Marijuana Myth."⁵⁷ "But how do you go about combating such a myth? We could point to all the historical flaws in the paragraphs quoted above, but somehow I doubt that would persuade anyone—I may have got some of the details wrong, but you guys still passed the first anti-marijuana law. That *had to have been because of your religion.*' End of discussion."

November 17, 2008: Matthew Bowman turns his scholarly skills to dissecting "Thomas S. Monson and the Paradoxes of the Utah Jazz"⁵⁸ in this fun post for The Juvenile Instructor:

For other equally Mormon reasons, however, we could have seen that fateful Thomas-Monson-to-Jerry-Sloan, prophet-to-head-coach backslap coming. Basketball has not come out of nowhere to compete for the Mormon soul. Church leagues have a long and noble history of socializing the youth of Zion (mostly by instituting behavioral 'guidelines' upon young folk who wanted to play and whisking them away from out of door courts into the easily monitorable sanctuary of the local stake house).

July 23, 2008: Craig Harline tells of a family history miracle that happened when he was visiting Ellis Island with his family: "Let us praise pioneers. Of all sorts, but today especially the traditional sort. I myself am thinking of Carl and Mathilda, whom I came to know through one of those wholly unexpected spine-tingling unbelievable fantastic experiences." Harline's beautiful personal

essay deftly takes readers into the lives of two-not-to-be-forgotten people, “Carl and Mathilda.”⁵⁹

Dialogue

May 10, 2010: In “Behold!”⁶⁰ Kristine Haglund introduces the journal’s significant step into the digital age: “In the past few years, it has become increasingly clear that *Dialogue* cannot survive as strictly a print publication. A new generation of thoughtful Saints and scholars who would benefit from becoming acquainted with *Dialogue*’s rich history will never find that content if it is languishing in library stacks. Thus, with some trepidation, the Board has decided to make all of *Dialogue*’s archive accessible online, retaining only the last two years’ content as premium content available by subscription.”

July 30, 2010: In a guest post for Scholaristas,⁶¹ Claudia Bushman exclaims, “The Pink Issue is forty years old! That’s two generations. That’s considerably longer than I was old when I worked on it. I’ve told this story many times over the years, and I will begin with the most important lesson from the whole business. WRITE! It’s the best way for powerless people with no money to make a difference. With something written, and it helps to be published, too, a document will be reinterpreted over and over in the coming years.”

Personal Essays

January 24, 2009: Natalie Brown reminisces about “My Blogging Life: How Blogging Continues to Change My Faith”⁶² at By Common Consent:

I started my first (and now inactive) blog, Mormon Rhetoric, with little expectation that anyone would read my musings and with the assumption that my identity on the web was entirely anonymous. However, within a few months I was shocked to discover that people in fact did read the blog and that the blog was traceable to me. Through a series of connections, I was invited to blog on BCC, and I thus ceased to be a private blogger. In

a startlingly short amount of time, my experience shifted from one of anonymity to one of community. With this shift came a parallel shift in my focus as a blogger: knowing that I had a readership caused me to think of blogging less as therapy and more as an act of community building.

March 26, 2008: “One night, in a state of insomnia induced by pregnancy, I searched the doctrines of the Church for an answer. They ranged from Brigham Young’s insistence that life begins when the mother feels the baby move, to ideas that—just like Adam—life is not received into the body until there is a breath. From the Church’s Public Issue’s website it is declared that, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no official position on the moment that human life begins.”” Courtney Kendrick tells three stories that helped her figure out “The Hourglass Theory,”⁶³ her personal comforting explanation for the tragedy of miscarriage.

May 13, 2008: In describing her father’s decline, Lisa Butterworth breaks hearts with this incredibly poetic post titled simply “Hollow”⁶⁴:

It’s an aromatic chair, it smells like hard work and long naps and my dad. My mother covers it with throws and towels, hoping to absorb aroma, but her efforts fail. I’ve always hesitated to sit in the smelly chair, because, well, it’s gross. All stinky and sweaty and earthy and fathery. It’s the same smell that now hollows me out. I kiss my dad and that smell fills my senses. I rub his rough cheeks and pound on his chest and yell “open your eyes dad, look at me dad,” but he never does. His heart beats, his lungs fill with air, he sweats and smells like the man who taught me to tie my shoes and build bright pink pine-wood race cars, but is he hollow too?

November 22, 2007: Heather Oman learns a simple lesson about gratitude in “Last Thanksgiving.”⁶⁵ Here’s a taste: “Cramping, spotting, unable to move without pain, I spent the day listening to my mother-in-law prepare the entire meal, which she did with amazing cheerfulness. I looked out the window at the bare trees in my yard, too distracted and worried to do anything else. I ate my mother-in-law’s delicious feast, tried to help with

the dishes, but then I doubled over in pain and started spotting. I promptly went back to bed. I settled back in the cushions, and stared out the window once more.”

August 7, 2006: Genevieve Taylor Oliver gives a glimpse into her lifelong struggle with depression in this incredibly personal but must-read post, beautifully titled “The Grace of This Darkness: Surrendering to the Mystery of Suffering and Creation.”⁶⁶

The first and most severe episode of depression began the winter I turned thirteen and lasted eighteen months, at the end of which I was numb, seared, barely alive. During the summer that followed, as I began the slow process of putting my life back together—a process which would take many years, and continues still—every weekday morning I would get up, put on my old jeans or shorts and a T-shirt, go out into the desert heat, and cross the street and the blazing, empty parking lot where the seagulls congregated on the dumpsters to the junior high, where I had to attend summer school. This winter I will turn thirty-five. During most months of most of the intervening years, despair has been my quiet, constant companion, in Lauren Slater’s words, my country. After more than two decades of struggling against the illusion that comes with every intermission, the illusion *I have conquered*, and the fatal false hopes that it will not return, I struggle to face the prospect that despair may be the condition of the rest of my life.

November 1, 2004: Karen Hall uses the blog platform to send a heartfelt letter to her birthmother in “Thank You, 31 Years Later,”⁶⁷ an early post at By Common Consent.

I don’t remember meeting you, although I’m sure that I made quite an impression on you 31 years ago. I know it must have been hard to make the decision to put me up for adoption. But I wanted you to know that I consider it to be the most admirable selfless act that I can imagine. My parents are amazing, supportive, loving people, and they raised me in a stable, spiritual home, along with my older brother. They aren’t rich, but they had the financial stability to support me and encourage my education. They also are happy, well-adjusted people, who raised me to be

practical and strong—but still call me princess. I am so grateful that I was raised in that home, and I know that you made it possible. I imagine that you were pretty young when I was born, and I also imagine you realized you couldn't give me everything you wanted to yourself, so you shared me with people who could. I like to think that you passed on to me the ability to make mature selfless decisions, because that is something that I admire about you, and am striving to develop myself.

Miscellaneous

July 26, 2013: Tracy McKay describes “Ministering on the Spectrum, Primary Help for Special Education Children”⁶⁸ in this important post:

Frequently a child with Autism will function better when an individual is called to be their teacher in a one-on-one capacity, rather than as a group setting. This may not always be possible, but depending on the needs of the child and the resources of the ward, this can be a very successful starting point. If the child has one person with whom they feel comfortable and trust in a small classroom, they can often manage the louder, less structured Sharing Time lesson with less anxiety or disruption, and can be easily taken out, if the need arises.

May 25, 2009:

Noah stared at Japheth in horror. His voice shook a little, “What do you mean an Opossum escaped at our last stop?” Noah was angry. “YOU KNOW ALL THE MARSUPIALS ARE SUPPOSE TO GET DROPPED OFF IN AUSTRALIA!” It was another blunder in a long series of blunders. Sailing around the earth dropping off the animals in their appropriate habitat had been hard, and he only dimly understood why it had to be done, but a marsupial in North America was going to get him in trouble.

So begins Steven Peck’s delightful, perhaps irreverent, but brilliant imagining of “Noah’s Lament” in having to place each and every animal in its proper habitat.⁶⁹

August 17, 2008: Kynthia Taylor pokes fun at *Sunstone* with this “Sunstone Program Parody”⁷⁰ that somehow manages to be both hilarious and heartfelt. One example of a faux program session: “‘Armpit Hair and the Gendered Dynamics of the BYU Honor Code.’ Recognizing that armpit hair is a secondary sex characteristic not dissimilar to facial hair, our panel explores the following pressing issue: should female BYU students be required to apply for armpit-hair cards before being allowed to cultivate a (well-groomed) thicket of hair in the underarm region? What about males?”

June 5, 2007: In one of the most commented-on posts at Mormon Mentality, Devyn Smith wonders about “Married Mormon Graduate Students on Welfare—Is It Right?”⁷¹ and concludes, “Perhaps the problem is with all of the pressure in Mormonism to start having kids the instant you get married, regardless of your financial circumstances. Am I off base on this? Should I be frustrated or am I just jealous that I did not ‘milk the system’ when I was in graduate school.”

April 5, 2007: Joanna Benson (Joanna Savage Briscoe) discusses the surprise findings when she takes a DNA test in “DNA Mormons?”⁷² and concludes,

The time has come to reveal the great gathering within myself. I gladly step out of the small dark box of Euro-centrism, into the big tent of humanity where the real party is going on. I know that I have been led to find them. I can see their dear faces lightly imprinted not only on my face, but the face of my loved ones. The gift I have been given is one of love and a shared identity with all of God’s children. Now when I meet someone of another nationality I can truly think perhaps you are my cousin. And that, my friends, is a wonderful gift.

March 23, 2004: At Times and Seasons, Kaimipono Wenger notes “The Nameless Mormon Blogosphere”⁷³ and asks for suggestions. The Bloggernacle comes to pass in comment #3.

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Rebecca Sorge
Against These Things
Mixed media



Rebecca Sorge
A Straight Course
Mixed media

Bo Knows Heaven

Craig Harline

So there's my sort-of-neighbor big Bo, who despite owning two rock-solid Scandinavian names including, yes, Bo, doesn't exactly seem to have things rock-solidly together.

We could start maybe with his wife-of-Bath-quantity marriages, or maybe just his announcement in church after his last divorce went through that he was happy to inform everyone he was happily single again, a free brother in the Lord, like he couldn't think of a finer theological or actual state to be in but more likely (in suspicious minds) clarifying for any interested ladies the totally legal availability of his person, a suspicion that was pretty convincingly confirmed when right after his announcement he hobbled down substantially from the pulpit on his one good leg and one bad one (that bows way out) and took a substantial seat right next to a couple of single ladies in the congregation who were almost but not quite in the same universe age-wise, which for him is pushing seventy.

Or we could move on to his car, which is changing all the time but is basically always the same, namely old and busted-up and increasingly-dented-the-longer-he-drives-it (if he has a little money he gets a "new" one when he hits that financial sweetspot right where the cost of fixing dents in order to pass inspection ends up being more than buying a certain brand of whole other car would), and that also needs regular jumping, which I know because he's asked me at 6:30 early for one, or failing that maybe a ride to his most recent job, regaling along the way how lucky he was to get this particular honey of a jump-needing car for only

300, making the two thou or so that he's put into it since then a bargain when ya think what he woulda had to shell out for new or even somewhat so-called "reliable" used.

Or don't forget the job itself, the most recent being in a call center full of youngish people, but Bo is a chatty guy and doesn't mind, except the potential problem looming there is that when Bo starts chatting long and free he tends to chat blunt and offensive too (see e.g. above, but also his occasional unintentional digs at church about some former or irregularly present member, or the occasional unintentional racist comment, or maybe the occasional questions he posed to the teenage daughters of a family he home-taught that were meant to show interest in their lives but ended up coming across as close to predator-like), and so ends up offending without his even realizing or meaning to, and pretty soon just like old Ishmael Bo's hand might as well be "raised against all," and the hands of all raised against him too, all maybe helping to explain why Bo isn't always in work, or for that matter in car or phone, and for all I know barely in apartment too, let alone in any reliable pension plan that at his age he really ought to be drawing from.

But Bo is really good at one thing, in fact supernaturally good, and that's where this is going. Bo's in charge of sacrament meeting at the care center within the confines of our geographically tiny and very non-NIMBY hodgepodge of a neighborhood, and not necessarily non-NIMBY because of so much virtue or something on the part of the neighbors but maybe just because there's just not enough collective energy or clout or money or moral outrage or domestic stability to keep out things like the care center or nearby children's crisis center or nearby halfway house for the nearby mental hospital, things that really together upstanding neighborhoods know how to put a stop to!

So the weekly twenty-minute sacrament (and only) meeting is held in the center's combo TV room/rec room/dining room/filing space/church room, which consists of a couple of couches, a big-screen TV, some brown folding-chairs in "rows," a piano, some filing cabinets, a couple of sinks, and some bulletin boards with the month's big events in big letters.

Even before it starts, the anywhere from fifteen to twenty care-center residents who attend the meeting, ranging from maybe twenty-five to seventy years old in assorted but not-viable-in-the-outside-world states of mental and physical non-well-being, are scattered around the room, some on couches and folding-chairs but most in wheelchairs and walkers, all waiting for Bo, including bolo-tied Wally, one of the four or so residents who talks okay and so who conducts the meeting from the wheelchair that he rolls up right next to one end of the long kitchen/sacrament table up front, so he can set his 64-ounce Big Gulp on it, which he needs for when he gets thirsty conducting in his really loud voice.

Wally likes to think he's in charge and not Bo, but Bo doesn't mind because he doesn't act like he's in charge anyway, he just goes around and talks to everyone, even though only a few can talk back, but Bo doesn't care, he's shaking both of everyone's hands and touching their shoulders and talking to them like he knows everything about them and also rubbing Donnie's head, because Donnie likes that, and with Bo Donnie doesn't even have to grab Bo's hand and put it up on his head the way he does with everyone else's hand, which has got to be Donnie's highlight of the week, someone finally and voluntarily head-rubbing real long after a week of smiling entreaties.

Wally's real competition for top-dog conducting rights actually comes from Marian, who likes to position her wheelchair up front too, at the other end of the long kitchen/sacrament table from Wally, and do a sort of parallel or maybe rival sort of conducting, calling on someone to say the prayer for instance before Wally can, or correcting Wally when he gets the order of things wrong, or announcing what they're doing next before Wally can announce it, or telling Wally to give it a few more seconds before ending the meeting so fast like he always does (he likes to hear one short talk or testimony max before shutting things down), and by the end Marian is pretty much conducting, making you think that maybe the revolution in female leadership in the Mormon Church has already happened, right here in the care center, and nobody except maybe Wally is even thinking about wheeling Marian from her spot, but just accepting that a parallel or rival or maybe

sometimes cooperating female conductor is just the natural order of things in Mormondom, especially when someone like Marian is doing such a good job at it. Wally gets back at her though by interrupting her testimony whenever she says it, slamming down his Big Gulp and telling her to cut it short.

Some time after the sacrament there's the weekly musical number too, which is the same number every week, and features Myra, Myra with the permanent smile on her face, Myra one of the oldest and tiniest and frailest ladies, Myra hunched way over in a wheelchair with her toothpick-shoulders poking up because the sides of the wheelchair are squishing in on her to keep her from falling out, Myra who when Wally says it's time for her solo metaphorically jumps right in, right from where she's sitting and sans accompaniment, singing the song she's remembered all these years, *Jesus Once Was a Little Child*, and she sings both verses, including the second one you'd forgotten about, about Jesus never getting vexed if the game went wrong, which is stunning not so much for the claim that Jesus played games but for using the word *vexed*, which isn't a word usually heard in a primary song, but she sings it right out, and also that Jesus always spoke the truth, and her voice quavers on the last try, try, try.

And there's some group-singing too, as in the opening, closing, and sacrament songs, taking almost half of the twenty minutes, but no one's really singing except the visitors who've come to do the sacrament or give talks or play piano or lead music, plus a couple of staff or visiting family members, but a lot of residents are really interested in leading the music, right from where they're sitting too.

But it's the sacrament part of the sacrament meeting that's the most memorable and that's really where Bo comes in again. His talking and head-rubbing and hand-shaking in advance are just a warm-up for this part, because see Bo is the one who actually passes the bread and the water around, which is no easy thing in a room full of walkers and wheel chairs, but making it even harder is that most of the people can't for the most part actually manage to get the bread or the cup to their mouths on their own.

But Bo knows. In fact Bo is possibly the only person in the world who knows exactly the sacrament-taking preferences of all

the assembled residents—whether they want to take the piece of bread or cup of water themselves from the respective trays and consume it on their own, whether they want Bo to put either one in their hand and let them take it from there, whether they want Bo to put his hand underneath theirs to guide it up to their mouth, or whether they even want Bo to actually put bread or water right in their mouth for them, old-Catholic-style so to speak.

And it's no easy thing remembering all that but it's even harder managing all that, starting with Bo having to squeeze himself into just the right position to do his thing, which might in some cases mean standing in front of but in others standing or sitting next to the person in question, and remember Bo isn't exactly the most graceful guy to begin with, what with his bum leg and bodily largesse, but there he is moving like Baryshnikov between the regularly shifting rows of wheelchairs and walkers, twisting and turning and possibly pirouetting and then standing or sitting according to their particular preference.

A few residents are wearing helmets so they don't hurt themselves, and when Bo approaches them they tend to rest their helmet on his upper arm so they can get a good angle to take the bread or water on their own. But that's easy compared to the more than a few who are making almost constant repetitive movements with heads and arms, which exponentially complicates sacrament-taking, not to mention increases average-individual-bread-or-water-taking-time from about three seconds per to more like thirty, but Bo is in sync with every single one, sometimes putting the bread with his own free hand right between their cheek and gum at just the right instant, or pouring the water right in, and especially with the water Bo is always ready with the forearm of his tray-holding hand and the handkerchief of his bread-or-water-giving hand to catch and wipe up whatever comes spilling or sometimes gushing out, then he wipes their mouth clean when they're done, Bo as unfazed by all this as St. Francis licking a leper's wound, Bo indifferent to saliva and other bodily fluids and also the possibly alarming hygienic state of assorted gums and teeth and mouths.

During all of this Beth is as usual holding the three children's books she likes while constantly waving and smiling too, alternating an open-handed wave with one that features only her middle finger but no one seems to mind. And of course Donnie is wanting his head rubbed again even during the sacrament, which Bo multi-taskingly does while letting Donnie take the bread and water for himself. But it's especially when you see Bo on his bum leg leaning bulkily but carefully over to gently wipe clean yet another only partially-successful intake of blessed water, and you see all the residents knowing that Bo knows just what they want sacrament-wise, that you realize that oft-married oft-divorced oft-offensive oft-struggling Bo is going straight to heaven.

Here's religion right here, you think, and not so much the sacrament part, but the wiping-up-of-their-messes-without-a-second-thought part, helping them do something they like doing, which is probably why most of them even show up early most of the time, unlike a lot of other churchgoers.

After a short testimony, Wally brings things to a screeching halt, the meeting ends, and one guy bursts out crying, for reasons not altogether clear—maybe he didn't like something, maybe he can't explain it, maybe he's sad at the thought of Bo leaving again, but Bo assures everyone that he'll be back next week and maybe during it too, and he stays longer than any other visitor even though he was the first to arrive, doing some more talking and double-hand-shaking and head-rubbing, and arranging for someone to stay and help him give Doris her weekly blessing right afterward, and he tells you afterward how much he loves all of them and you sense he's not just blowing pious smoke either.

And don't forget Bo's work with the fellows at the nearby mental halfway-house too, and that he chauffeurs them and still other people around more than you'd think a guy with a battery-jump-needing-seriously-dented car could, Bo always saying when you see him in the street that he's got to go give someone a ride (Where do they live? "Oh up in—" which is about 10 miles away), because see among his many acquaintances Bo has the "good" car, even just "the" car, plus not to mention Bo watching over one of the halfway-house fellows to the literal end, who had terminal cancer, and who

was black, which matters only because of Bo's aforementioned occasional racist comment, but Bo seemed to not even remember he'd ever had anything to do with any comment like that the way he took care of this guy, who had no family whatsoever on earth except for Bo, who might as well have been now.

And then there's me, who despite owning only one slightly-Anglicized Scandinavian name and despite assorted and undeniable lapses in life seems in comparison to Bo to have various things seriously together, maybe starting with a long marriage to a long-suffering wife, and three kids who seem to be doing all the right missioning and college-ing and marrying and grandchild-having things—and don't forget my Pee Aitch Dee, and my full totally non-partial professorship, and my highly reliable Consumer-Reports-approved and maintenance-scheduled car that has a few small dents only because anything big gets fixed thanks to rainy-day funds that easily cover the deductible, and my fifth-of-an-acre estate with tightly mowed lawn, and my pretty regular exercise regimen, and oh yeah my dynamite life-insurance/retirement-investment/and retirement-pension plans that have together just about secured a soothingly secure future. Yes sir, a lot seemingly together.

Except when I see Bo in action with the sacrament and around the 'hood there's something itching inside that needs scratching, something along the lines of I'd like somewhat inexplicably to be more like Bo, which itch I have to admit is one I never expected to find myself feeling.

And so I think maybe I could do that by bulking up my service portfolio, to go with my other portfolios, maybe doing things like going to the care center when Bo asks me to help out with the sacrament, and I say sure, but see way down inside I'm actually hoping that I'll just have to bless the sacrament and not actually pass it, because unlike Bo I don't really know how everyone likes to take it, but truth be told I can't get past the widely patented care-center smells, or the almost-certain encounters with stray saliva, and I can't get myself to manage skin-to-skin touching which is what the residents seem most to want, I can manage maybe only some quick hand-to-clothed-shoulder or something, or maybe I

can rub Donnie's head for a couple of seconds but what if he's got something(?), is what I'm really thinking. And then I'm not even very good at the sacrament here, because Wally has to pound his Big Gulp on the table to get my attention and remind me, who's sitting in a sort of shock, not to sing during the sacrament song but to stand up and start breaking the bread, which is something I've known I was supposed to do since I was sixteen but now here I sheepishly am having to be told.

But I can't will myself to do what Bo does, and I think I'm starting to figure out why. It's not an act of will with Bo, or a matter of doing, it's just a matter of being. He's not taking the classic seemingly-together-person's approach of "I have so much that I need to give something back," or "I'm happy to help the less fortunate," but instead he's right there with every single one of them, giving everything he is and not just something, feeling just as fortunate or unfortunate as they are, thoroughly identifying with them, the way Jesus did, equal to the least of these instead of superior to these, and basically saying not "I am helping you" but like some medieval imitator of Jesus "I am you."

Most of us to identify with someone else have to have been through exactly the same thing that person has been through, maybe because we don't have Jesus-level imagination. Bo's got some though. He hasn't been through everything his friends here at the center have, but he can somehow take his general and vast experience of being beaten up by life and that's all he needs in order to identify with them, all he needs to see that he's basically like them. I've got some beaten-up stuff too, but haven't thought hard enough about it, or am still not convinced about just how fragile and ultimately unreliable any of my seeming-togetherness actually is.

I'm also starting to get the sense that my very hard work and investment at getting myself so seemingly together might be precisely the thing that's keeping me from identifying here, that the illusion of togetherness is what keeps you from understanding that you're one of the least too, because see if you have the illusion of togetherness it's just about impossible to imagine that you're also least.

And not only that, but the illusion of togetherness is a total (and non-tautological) illusion anyway, because like my neuroscientist friend tells me, we all have like 6 billion brain cells and 11 miles of connective tissue in that brain (I always mix up the 6 and 11 but it's a lot either way) and so the chances of every single one of us having something seriously wrong inside is like 100 percent. Which is just another way of saying what King Benjamin said about us all being beggars. We're all literally messed up. And beggars. Which is why we all need to identify with and help each other, and recognize that yes we need serious help too.

But it's easy to look around and think that because wow we seem in a purely visible way to really have more together than some or even a lot of people, then we must actually have things together period, which keeps us from identifying with comparatively-less-seemingly-together people who in actual truth are in total value our exact equals, not to mention might also keep us (me) from noticing our (my) own Bo-quality troubles too, maybe because ours (mine) are sometimes (but not always) of a less visible sort than Bo's, but visible or not they're of the same exact depth—like seriously vexing all sorts of people around me without always even meaning to but other times certainly meaning to, and though maybe sometimes (but not always) employing a more subtle and formally-educated brand of vexing than Bo prefers it's at least as offensive and regular as his is, and very possibly even more shattering to recipients, and very probably actually takes recipients even more days or weeks or years to recover from, as certain wife and kids and teachers and students and fellow-workers and -drivers and -Walmart-shoppers and -citizens and -believers can attest, and which vexing, given the right cascade of events and circumstances and persons, could easily have no-joke led to employment very much different from my seemingly-together sort. And by the way who, very much including me, with the same right set of other-cascading events and circumstances and person(s) couldn't have been divorced and married one or two or four times by now, and very probably be just as clumsy and unsettled as Bo in negotiating the anxiety- and mistake-ridden minefield of the singles scene that you'd thought you'd left oh so comfortably behind?

And so last of all I'm starting to think that losing the illusion of togetherness is maybe the big key to getting what Bo has and that I'm hankering for, which is nothing less than the quality of at one ment with other people, and not just among the sorts of people I already know and like, which as Jesus pointed out just about anyone can do, but among all sorts of people, and at one ment really is what that word means by the way, it's not just some lame sacrament-meeting-talk-trick of playing around with a word to try to find something original to say. "Atone" has come to have the connotation of "pay for," as in if we do something wrong we need to pay for it or make up for it or that Jesus pays for it, but at one ment it seems to me (relying here heavily on Bo and a little on Alma too) isn't so much about doing as about feeling and being, or as much about paying for as about identifying with someone. It's maybe not as big of a mystery as we like to make atonement out to be, maybe especially when we turn atonement into theology instead of experience and feeling. But how to get it is the thing: by selling all you have? By losing your life to find it? Come to think of it, Bo's basically done both of those, so yeah, maybe that's it.

Outside the care center and halfway-house Bo is still vexing people left and right, like nobody's business and unlike the little child Jesus. He's not trying to, because at heart he's basically a good-hearted guy, which is how he can do what he does inside the care center, where his heart translates rightly instead of potentially disastrously. Inside those places, Bo knows just what to do, or better yet, how to be. And that's how he knows heaven.

A Walk through Blenheim

Karen Kelsay

Across the field, a partial hedgeline planted
three hundred years ago still winds its way
between an ancient English oak and plum.
At sunset, their silhouettes turn granite-gray,

revealing several spheres of mistletoe,
displayed like ornaments, in higher boughs.
Their filigreed twigs take on a ruby tint.
In wintertime, sparse greenery allows

a view of zigzag branches, errant arms
extending over broken walls. The damp
and barren limbs against the muted scene;
December's light hangs like a shaded lamp,

illuminating what the summer's hidden:
the undergirding, ridged and gnarled and dark,
a mass of wood, an artwork in itself,
three centuries of weathered, aging bark.

Then, I recall your picture as a youth,
the flawless skin, your fragile spirit, how
I never saw the strength beneath your charms,
until a later season would allow.

Parable of Bones

Sarah E. Page

I want to eat God, limb and line.

Each yellowing ivory Bible verse
Every sacrament of soft white
Bread and cool waters,
All of Him in a single bite.
Like Eve, I won't even leave the core.

I want to hold His beating heart
Against my ear, to savor the universe:
Quantum joy of colliding galaxies
Migrant planets, wandering humans,
Warm and fluttering as a word.

*He that eateth my flesh,
and drinketh my blood,
dwelleth in me, and I in him.*
Yet I hear nothing singing
In my vein or marrow.

I must peel back the ripe fruit
Flesh of my desires, devour agony's
Pulp and temperance's nectar
Before my teeth cut supernal calcium,
The coral-porous seed of God within.

Perhaps it isn't just His divine pulse
I am ravening for, but my own.

Divertissement

Anita Tanner

His death being end-stopped
never justifies
the enjambment
of my survival
that goes on and on,
line after line,
a run-on against
being alone,
avoiding my own company
in the eternal interlude
some call a dance.

But this is no *pas de deux*,
no matter the pace
or the footwork,
position or sequence
of the steps
in which I engage—
mine is an intricate
awkwardness,
a disjointed stumbling,
one foot loading, unloading
in front of another.

Grass Whistles

Anita Tanner

Children's fingers folded in,
thumbs aligned,
hands heart-shaped,
knuckled boxes.
Fluted grass
pulled taut
across the length
of the thumb's flesh,
reeds between joints,
phalanges compressing.

And then breath
blown into small ovals
between minute bones,
pipes of an organ
emitting clear sounds
from chimes of a clerestory—
vigils, lauds and vespers
emitting from
portable monasteries.

Let Rocks Their Silence Break

(Luke 19)

Anita Tanner

To hold the disciples' throats
against His praise,

after the tied colt
is ushered in,

the Lord riding him
into Jerusalem,

after the spreading of clothes,
branches and limbs,

after loud-voiced
worship of Him,

hosannas and hymns before He wept
over all of them,

yearning to gather the city in
like chickens

under His wings,
but they refused Him—

to hold these disciples' throats
against His praise

would quicken the very stones
to cry out, the sound prolonged

in homage to Him.

Faith

Ronald Wilcox

To exist without beginning's
ultimate mystery;
to comprehend end's easy
as eternity's imagined;
to see two ways at once
foreword and backward's
impossible;
for immune to God's scan,
I, a man,
shiver my inefficiencies;
to perceive the always was
always will be
inviting me to take
His proffered hand's
leading me over a horizon
I yet cannot see's
the firm beyond
of belief;
for life unending's
through faith
a man.

As Presently Constituted: Mormon Studies in the Field of Religion

Editor's note: These pieces were part of a panel discussion of Mormon Studies in the academy at the Mormon History Association's Annual Meeting in 2013. Also included in that discussion was a paper by Melissa Inouye, "The Oak and the Banyan: The 'Glocalization' of Mormon Studies," which was published in the Neal A. Maxwell Institute's Mormon Studies Review, vol. 1. We encourage Dialogue readers to read it and become familiar with the Review and the NAMI's other publications at their website: <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodicals/mormon-studies-review/>.

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES AS COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Michael D. K. Ing

This paper is entitled "Religious Studies as Comparative Religion," and its purpose is to suggest that comparative religion,

as one way of engaging in religious studies, can be fruitful for historians of Mormonism.

In the next few pages I will focus on the project of “comparison” in religious studies; but not comparison in terms of looking for similarities or differences in two or more traditions, figures, or time periods. Rather, I will speak about comparison in the sense of scholars creating a shared vocabulary that opens up space for cross-cultural examination. I will try to use my work on ritual in early Confucianism to demonstrate how this might be done, with the implication that historians of Mormonism might also look to their own work in contributing to other conversations, as well as looking to the work of others that may not involve Mormonism for the purpose of gaining fresh insight into Mormonism. I believe the results of taking up a comparative approach will be two-fold: one, we will see new and innovative work in the study of Mormonism; and two, we will see those in scholarly and popular circles take the study of Mormonism more seriously. So, I will begin by speaking about comparative religion in the context of religious studies, and then move on to talk about a Confucian theory of ritual.

Now, to *do* comparative religion is to contribute to a shared vocabulary about how human beings describe their ultimate concerns. The act of comparison is predicated not on universalistic assumptions about common experiences with a transcendent, but rather on a hope in commensurability. In other words, comparison is built on the chance that we, human beings, can speak to each other in ways by which we come to perhaps not fully, but largely, understand each other’s perspectives, feelings, and motivations. This is of course easier for those living in the same time, speaking the same language, and meeting face to face, but if carefully done this might extend to people living in other areas, speaking other languages, and even living in different times.

Religious studies, in this light, is not so much a discipline as it is a field; yet it is not a field in the sense of providing an area where we find objects of study. Rather, religious studies is a field in the sense of providing an arena of discussion for scholars studying human beings. It is a space for learning about and

exploring human possibility. Scholars of religious studies, as I am discussing them here today, take people's descriptions of their ultimate concerns and render them intelligible for others. They take things such as the Jonestown massacre, the Koran, or the Navajo *kinata* ceremony, and explain how human beings might kill themselves in the name of God, might believe that an illiterate man wrote a book after conversing with angels, or might stay up all night with the chants of a medicine man in order to move from the status of girl to woman. Said more personally, one job of comparative religion is to show how *I* might have been otherwise. It teaches how we, or you, or *I*, might have conceived of Captain Cook as the god Lono when Cook came to Hawaii in 1778, or how *I* might believe in the Buddhist doctrine of no-self, or even how *I* might have pulled the trigger at Mountain Meadows. Borrowing from Jonathan Z. Smith, who paraphrased the Roman playwright Terence, the act of comparison is coming to understand that nothing human is foreign to me.¹ As such, doing comparative religion entails cultivating values such as sympathy, critical curiosity, and even consternation.²

Comparative religion, however, does not stop at rendering others intelligible. One of my colleagues, David Haberman, a scholar of South Asian religion, is fond of drawing on Clifford Geertz's statement that "Anthropologists don't study villages . . . they study *in* villages."³ In other words, from Geertz's view the location of our study is the point of departure from which we connect the particular to the general, or the local to the global. We take the specifics of one person (or people) living in one place and one time and bring them into dialogue with the shared concerns of others.⁴ So in this view, a study of tree worship in India becomes an opportunity for others to rethink their relationship with the environment, a study of rabbinic views on death becomes an opportunity for others to reexamine their own frailty, and a study of Confucian ritual becomes an opportunity for others to reconsider the relationship between their hopes and fears. Comparative religion, in this light, is communal and personal. It is communal in the sense of contributing to a community of people invested in studying similar questions, and personal in the sense

of engendering introspection. Borrowing from a contemporary scholar named Wu Kwangming, comparison is the full process of metaphor—we move from the familiar to understand the unfamiliar, but the process is only complete when we reinterpret the familiar in terms of the unfamiliar. Wu explains this two-part process as that which “yield[s] a novel world.”⁵

Now, in the remaining pages of this paper I would like to turn to my own work to demonstrate how this kind of comparison might be done.⁶ One of the texts I work on is called the *Record of Ritual*. It purports to be the writings of Confucius’s disciples, which would place it in the 5th century BCE, although it was redacted, and likely authored, three or four hundred years later. The text, as its title suggests, is concerned with ritual, and large parts of it focus on mourning rites. These rites, I argue, are, among other things, about an apprehensive hope. Mourners anticipate the transformative power of ritual, while realizing that ritual is a trepidatious act. This enables Confucians, as we will see, to live in a world where both hope and fear are realities.

To talk about these mourning rites more specifically, one of the first rites that occurs after someone has died is the “calling back ceremony” (*fu* 復) where a mourner climbs on top of the deceased’s house to call his or her spirit back to the body. Later rites include the practice of putting objects into the tomb of the deceased that do not quite work—zithers, for instance, are placed in the grave but their strings are not properly tuned—and this, the *Record of Ritual* tell us, is done because the dead are no longer alive so they cannot use the items, yet, in its view, neither they are fully gone.⁷

The portion of the rites I would like to focus on occurs after the calling back ceremony and before the burial. In this section of the rites, which we might call the funeral procession, mourners follow the carriage carrying the body of the deceased to the grave. The *Record of Ritual* explains that mourners should do this as if the deceased were still alive. The chapter entitled “Asking about Mourning” (“Wensang” 問喪) describes this as follows:

In following [the funeral procession to the grave], mourners were expectant and anxious as if they sought to follow [the

deceased] but could not quite catch up to him. When returning, they wailed; and were hesitant and uneasy as if they sought after [the deceased], but did not find him. As such, when mourners follow [the funeral procession to the grave] it is as if they long to see [the deceased]; and when they return it is as if they are bewildered [in not being able to find him].

Regardless of where they sought him, he could not be found. They entered the door to his home, but did not find him there. They ascended up into the main hall, but did not find him there. They entered his personal quarters, but did not find him there. Alas, he was gone; only to be mourned, and never to be seen again!

This is why mourners wail, shed tears, beat their chests, and falter. They stop doing these things only after they fully exhaust their sorrow. Their hearts are despondent, morose, perplexed, and aggrieved to the point that they lose their focus and there is nothing but sorrow.

其往送也，望望然、汲汲然、如有追而弗及也。其反哭也，皇皇然若有求而弗得也。故其往送也如慕，其反也如疑。求而無所得之也，入門而弗見也，上堂又弗見也，入室又弗見也。亡矣！喪矣！不可復見矣！故哭泣辟踊，盡哀而止矣。心悵焉、愴焉、愴焉、愴焉，心絕志悲而已矣。⁸

This portion of the *Record of Ritual* maintains that mourners should follow the funeral procession to the grave as if they were traveling to catch up to the person while still alive; and after not finding him, they are to return to his home and call for him, hoping to find him there. When failing to find him at home, mourners “exhaust their sorrow” 盡哀 by wailing and shedding tears. The sorrow of losing a loved one reaches a heightened pitch as mourners fully confront the absence of the person. They are despondent to the point that “they lose their focus and there is nothing but sorrow” 心絕志悲而已矣. What is interesting here is that the text does not make the argument that these rites are necessarily effective in bringing the dead back to life; rather, the mourners should not fully expect the rite to alter the course of death.

In these mourning rites, we might say, mourners come to recognize the vulnerability of their hoped-for world to forces beyond their control. Indeed, what we see in these Confucian rites is a series of practices meant to confront this vulnerability. Mourners project their hope onto what we might call a dysfunctional world—a world of power, disorder, and anomie. Yet these mourners know that their mourning rites might not actually change things. Stated more strongly, mourners perform these rites to demonstrate their awareness of the fragility of their hoped-for world. In other words, these rites show how the socially constructed arena where our proper desires find fulfillment is often impinged on by the brute forces of disorder. The mourning rites, as such, become a means of navigating the tension between the desired world and the dysfunctional world. They become a kind of performative therapy for dealing with dissonance. Following this view, ritual is done to display one's understanding that one's best efforts are often frustrated by the dysfunctional world—that people do in fact die, but if it were up to us they would remain.

These mourning rites are particularly apt for demonstrating this point. Death presents a kind of ambivalence for many human beings.⁹ Our desire to accept finality in death conflicts with our hope for continuing a meaningful relationship with the deceased. Mourning rites, as such, become an important means of coping with ambivalence—they allow us to live in a world of hope *and* fear. The intrusion of the dysfunctional world into the socially constructed world becomes an occasion for the creation and performance of ritual. Yet ritual does not dissolve the tension between these worlds; instead it provides a way of navigating the tension.

Part of what makes the socially constructed world meaningful is the possibility of intrusion. The dysfunctional world is dangerous. It kills indiscriminately and is savage. The vulnerability of the socially constructed world to dysfunction means that everyone living in such a world lives with risk. Yet this risk itself partially renders life worthwhile. If relationships lasted forever, for instance, there would be fewer reasons to cultivate relationships now. The

threat of loss can lead to morbidity and depression, but it can also inspire the virtuous treatment of others.¹⁰ The uncertainty of the ritual world, in this sense, “mobilizes [the] energies” necessary for the appropriate treatment of others.¹¹

In the mourning rites discussed throughout the *Record of Ritual*, the failure to fully transform the dysfunctional world such that death does not occur is integral to the success of the mourning rites themselves. Proper performance is a vulnerable performance where the more genuine one’s hope of finding the deceased still alive when searching their home, the more genuine one’s sorrow when confronting their absence. These rituals, as mentioned in other portions of the *Record of Ritual*, must push the performer to the brink of madness.¹² The ritual agent, as such, takes upon him or herself the risk of going beyond the brink. This kind of flirtation with failure enables the success of the rites.

In performing the mourning rites, a state of vulnerability is preferred over a state of invulnerability. Stated more broadly, human beings, in this view, should not render themselves invulnerable to relationships that are contingent on the erratic nature of the dysfunctional world. These relationships, at least partially, constitute a meaningful life. The real possibility of the dysfunctional world impinging itself on our lives opens up opportunities for deep engagement with other human beings. It provides motivation to care for others, allows one to fully experience human sentiment, and creates space for continued reflection on the question of what constitutes a meaningful life. These mourning rites, as such, instead of simply attempting to create an “as is” world, also create a kind of “as if” space where performers enact a therapy of honesty in confronting a bewildering world. Or put more simply, from a Confucian perspective, the performance of ritual is often the very performance of ambivalence.

Now, I have only provided a brief and insufficiently argued account of Confucian mourning rites. A more fitting account would robustly describe the mourning rites as depicted in the *Record of Ritual* while remaining sensitive to the text’s historical composition, other early Chinese texts it might be in dialogue with, and a host of other issues.

While I have tried to phrase my interpretation of the *Record of Ritual* in a way that is already suggestive for others studying similar issues, my next step in the comparative project would be to situate the theory of ritual described here among other accounts of ritual. This next step serves to more explicitly enter the arena for creating a cross-cultural vocabulary of ritual. In broad steps, I might compare the theory outlined previously with theories advocated by Mircea Eliade or Axel Michaels, which describe ritual as actions that seek to change the world into a new and better place.¹³ Or, alternatively, I might compare it with theories advocated by J. Z. Smith and Adam Seligman, which describe ritual in terms of its subjunctive properties.¹⁴ In other words, for Smith and Seligman, rituals are actions that work to create an “as if” or illusory world, in opposition to in Eliade’s and Michaels’ views, where rituals work to transform the mundane world into the sacred world.

To bring this into the study of Mormonism, the Confucian theory of ritual I have portrayed opens up questions such as: What are various Mormon ways of mourning? How have Mormons explained situations where ritual does not transform the world the way it might be intended to? Does ambivalence play a role in Mormon religiosity? And, more generally, from diverse Mormon perspectives, what meaningful things in life are vulnerable to powers beyond our control? Further, in thinking beyond the practice of history, this approach opens up the possibility for comparative theology in the sense of asking how Confucian theories of ritual might inform a Mormon culture of mourning; and how Mormon conceptions of death might speak to Confucian concerns of loss.

To briefly summarize, what I have attempted to do in this essay is to show how I aim to utilize my work on early Confucianism in a comparative context. I employed the term “comparative religion” in speaking about this context. In short, comparative religion entails rendering the ultimate concerns of human beings intelligible to other human beings. It also involves contributing to larger conversations about those concerns, which in turn should lead to a reinterpretation of that which we study.

Notes

1. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 111.

2. “Critical curiosity” is a modification of Aaron Stalnaker’s “curious suspicion” in “Judging Others: History, Ethics, and the Purposes of Comparison,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2008): 440.

3. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 22.

4. This idea comes from Jonathan Wyn Schofer’s response to Stalnaker’s “Judging Others.” See Jonathan Wyn Schofer, “Virtues and Vices of Relativism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 4 (2008): 709–15.

5. Kwang-ming Wu, *On Metaphoring: A Cultural Hermeneutic* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 184.

6. A more detailed account of what follows can be found in Michael David Kaulana Ing, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). This essay in particular draws from pages 204–18.

7. See for instance, D. C. Lau 劉殿爵 and Chen Fong Ching 陳方正, eds., *Liji zhuzi suoyin* 《禮記逐字索引》 Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series 香港中文大學中國文化研究所先秦兩漢古籍逐字索引叢刊 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 台北: 台灣商務印書館, 1992), “Tangong Shang” 檀弓上 3.69. Hereafter “*Liji*.”

8. *Liji*, “Wensang,” 36.1. All translations are my own.

9. Parts of this were inspired by Susan Letzler Cole, *The Absent One: Mourning Ritual, Tragedy, and the Performance of Ambivalence* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985). On page 9 she comments, “Tragedy is an imaginative model of the paradoxical demands made on human consciousness when confronted by death.”

10. For more on the relationship between ethics and vulnerability see Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability: The Body and the Divine in Rabbinic Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 183–90.

11. Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability*, 183.

12. *Liji*, “*Jiyi*” 祭義, 25.9–11.

13. For Eliade, see *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated by Willard R. Trask, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954). For Michaels, see “Ritual and Meaning,” in *Theorizing Rituals*, edited by Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008): 247–61.

14. For Smith, see “The Bare Facts of Ritual,” *History of Religions* 20 no.1–2 (1980):112–27; and *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1987. For Seligman, see Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).



WHAT DOES KASHI HAVE TO DO WITH SALT LAKE?: ACADEMIC COMPARISONS, ASIAN RELIGIONS, AND MORMONISM

David J. Howlett

In a polemical treatise from late antiquity, Tertullian famously asked, “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” The readers of this essay might ask a similar rhetorical question of “What does Kashi have to do with Salt Lake?” What could we actually learn from the comparative study of Asian religions with Mormonism? Armed with tools and theories that largely extol the particular over the general, most contemporary scholars have been shaped to be suspicious of comparisons that excise the historical and universalize the local. Comparative projects seem so very retrograde. We snicker when we hear individuals cite comparative works like *The Golden Bough* or theories like phenomenology as authoritative sources or methods. Those projects were so pre-postmodern, we think as we roll our eyes. Nevertheless, I argue that if academic comparisons of Mormonism and Asian religions are disciplined, modest, and pragmatic, Kashi and Salt Lake have much to do with one another.

In this necessarily brief essay, I will suggest two topics and methods in contemporary religious studies that link Asian religions and Mormonism: the first is comparative history and the second is comparative theology. By doing so, I will cover two areas in which I neither am a specialist nor have any serious interest in studying. I am simply trying to show the range of what comparisons may do or how they are employed in current scholarship. Thomas Tweed notes that a theory is useful not just for its explanatory value for other instances but also for its

ability to generate accounts that challenge it.¹ Aware of this, I welcome criticisms of my own thoughts.

When it comes to the value of academic comparisons in religious studies, Jonathan Z. Smith seems to be as valuable of a guide as any to thinking about the topic. Most religious studies scholars have encountered Smith's corpus of works in a methods and theories course where they have read books with wonderful titles like *Drudgery Divine* or *To Take Place: A Theory of Ritual*. Even though Smith mainly analyzes western religions in late antiquity, he typically makes much larger methodological contributions that have rightly made him one of the more influential voices in religious studies over the past generation. Given my essay's limitations, I want to merely quote a few Smithian "proof texts," if you will, on academic comparisons—texts that I think will be good for our own intellectual "improvement."

Firstly, Smith, quoting and extending the ideas of another anthropologist, reminds us that any comparison is never *in toto*. It is always aspectual.² That should chasten our claims about what our comparisons can accomplish. A comparison simply highlights an aspect of two things. But for what end? Here a commonly cited proof text from Smith is helpful: he states that "a comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge."³ A less pithy, but equally insightful statement by Smith is that a "comparison requires the postulation of difference as the grounds of its being interesting (rather than tautological), and a methodological manipulation of difference, a playing across the 'gap' in the service of some useful end."⁴

With these "doctrines" in mind, I would like to briefly suggest how what might seem like an unlikely historical comparison can provide further insight into the dynamics of Mormonism—and in particular, insight into the writing of Mormon history by individuals engaged in "faithful history." In the last twenty years, historiographical reflection on the writing of faithful history in Mormonism has become a topic of great interest among scholars who attend the Mormon History Association, as well as more recently historians associated with the Conference on Faith and History, a group whose core largely includes scholars who identify

as evangelicals. Matthew Bowman, for instance, has compared contemporary Mormon faithful history to various strains of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Protestant Providentialism.⁵ While I think this comparison is sound, I would like to suggest that we need to turn our eyes to the Indian subcontinent to further understand aspects of contemporary Mormon faithful history.

Religious studies scholar Kim Knott notes that contemporary practicing Hindus have powerful motivations for understanding the origins of their religion, which many devotees describe as *sanatana dharma*, or the eternal tradition: one whose origin lies beyond human history. When Hindus seek to understand the origins of their religion, they often do not feel bound “by scholarly evidence and argumentation.” “They are guided first and foremost by revelation,” says Knott. “Where historical evidence can support a devotional view, it may be welcomed, but a firm religious conviction does not require such evidence in order to thrive. It depends rather on faith. For some Hindus, then, all this argument about what happened in early India is only relevant where it accords with what the scriptures tell them.” Conversely, Knott notes that “there are plenty of modern Hindus who feel strongly that scholarly theories and historical data offer important support for what they believe.”⁶ While we might note that Knott is already trying to translate a Hindu dilemma into Western Christian idioms (note her use of “faith” and “revelation” rather than the more precise and complicated terms like *dharma*, *shruti*, and *smriti*), we would be obtuse not to note that what Knott calls Hindu devotional history has responded to history in the academy in ways similar to the reaction of Mormon faithful history—that is, it has responded not by outright rejection, but by selective appropriation.⁷

The difference in how this appropriation is deployed, though, adds an important element in the comparative study of Hindu devotional history and Mormon faithful history. One appropriation can be linked to nationalism (specifically, the assertion of India as a Hindu nation) and the other linked to the international expansion of a hemispheric religion (or, respectively, the late-twentieth-century expansion of the LDS Church outside of North

America). What we see, then, in a comparison of Mormon faithful history and Hindu devotional history should not lead us to a glib assertion of their essential sameness. Instead, it should alert us to how two groups (or more accurately, two groups within groups) with shared aspectual elements use faithful histories to construct “alternative modernities” for varied reasons to serve varied ends.

This brief discussion suggests that we need to occasionally look beyond the local or the national in our historical projects; comparative history helps us do that, bringing subjects into conversation that would otherwise be separated by space, culture, or disciplinary interests. And the payoff is that by doing so, we can learn more about both subjects—and even about a much wider context—in the process of this study.

If comparative projects like the one I just highlighted seek useful historical explanations, comparative theology seeks comparisons for very different ends—namely a disciplined theological understanding of one’s own tradition by studying another. The Jesuit theologian and Harvard professor Francis X. Clooney is one of the most visible advocates for comparative theology. His raft of books bears titles such as *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* and *The Truth, the Way, the Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Srivaisnava Hindus*. In a recent synthetic work, Clooney defines comparative theology: it “marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition.”⁸ Clooney’s Catholic commitment to a notion of reason connected to natural law allows him a great deal of generosity when dealing with other traditions. For instance, not long ago, Clooney blogged about his experience of reading 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon—an exercise that he regarded as an act of learning across religious boundaries.⁹ As a member of a tradition known for its missionary work in Asia—missionary work that was inevitably part of political, social, and economic forms of imperialism—Clooney is well aware of how crossing

traditions can be turned into imperialistic appropriation.¹⁰ Still, he is not content to simply live in a theological world that does not learn from the “Other.” And when the Other talks back to Clooney, he is intent on listening. Mormon academics may find Clooney’s project—something that confesses “multiple religious belonging, human but also divine”—as something not very congenial to a tradition that historically has demanded singular belonging.¹¹ However, Clooney’s particular project is not the only way to pursue comparative theology. Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye has gestured toward the possibility of what I see as Mormon comparative theology when she muses on thinking of Mormonism as an Asian religion.¹² Comparative theology may not be for everyone, but, then, to steal a line from Grant Wacker, “neither is professional hockey.”¹³

Whether in careful, methodologically sound historical or theological studies, comparisons inevitably are acts of translation. Early Mormonism itself elevated the concept of translation as something holy, and even routinized it as the function of an office. But whereas the goal of early Mormon translators like Joseph Smith seemed to be to escape from that “little narrow prison” of language,¹⁴ to recapture an ancient Adamic language, in short, to escape all limitations on the transmission of knowledge, the kind of translation to which I refer actually can only achieve . . . well . . . more translation. As anthropologist James Clifford notes, “To use comparative concepts . . . means to become aware, always belatedly, of limits, sedimented meanings, tendencies to gloss over differences. Comparative concepts—translation terms—are approximations, privileging certain ‘originals’ and made for specific audiences. Thus, the broad meanings that enable projects . . . necessarily fail as a consequence of whatever range they achieve.”¹⁵ Finally, then, comparative projects bring us to deeply humanistic ends—ends that acknowledge limits as much as they seek to transcend them. Or, as Michel Foucault once stated, work on our limits “is a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty.”¹⁶ That, for him, was enlightenment. This enlightenment is not the *moksha* of Kashi or the endowment of the Salt Lake temple, but it is a form of liberation worth our patient, disciplined scholarly endeavors.

Notes

1. Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 166.
2. J. Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 23–24.
3. J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 52.
4. J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 35.
5. Matthew Bowman, “History Thrown into Divinity: Faith, Knowledge, and the Telling of the Mormon Past,” *Fides et Historia* 45, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2013): 76–91.
6. Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.
7. Of course, both projects have at heart an interest in rejecting parts of modern critical inquiry—an inquiry that, in the words of postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty, asserts “that the human is ontologically singular; that gods and spirits are in the end ‘social facts,’ that the social somehow exists prior to them.” But this is rejection in part, not *in toto*. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.
8. Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10.
9. Francis X. Clooney, “Reading the Book of Mormon: Part I,” *America: The National Catholic Review*, September 14, 2012, <http://americamagazine.org/content/all-things/reading-book-mormon-part-i> (accessed May 20, 2013.)
10. Radhanath Swami, “Columbia University—Discussion with Francis X. Clooney,” April 24, 2012, <http://www.radhanathswami.com/2012/04/columbia-university-discussion-with-francis-x-clooney/> (accessed May 20, 2013.)
11. Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 146.
12. Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, “Mormonism: An Eastern Religion?” *Sunstone* no. 153 (February 2009): 12–19.
13. Grant Wacker, “Understanding the Past, Using the Past: Reflections on Two Approaches to History,” in *Religious Advocacy and American History*, edited by Bruce Kuklick and D. G. Hart (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 177.

14. This phrase comes from a letter, the original of which may be found in Joseph Smith to W. W. Phelps, November 27, 1832, in Joseph Smith Letter-book 1, p. 4, Church History Library, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

15. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 11.

16. Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 50.



RESPONSE

John-Charles Duffy

In the field of religious studies, comparison is a long-established method that has in recent decades suffered a backlash. The term "comparative religion" used to be commonly employed in the U.S. and Europe to describe the field that on this panel we've been calling "religious studies." I teach in a department that is still called the "Department of Comparative Religion," a name that makes me squirm a little because it strikes my ear as *passé*—as if I were teaching in a department of "philology" or "Oriental studies." The problem with all those terms is that they conjure up older conceptions of what those fields were about. "Comparative religion" is an intellectual endeavor that Westerners have pursued in the past for various partisan reasons—like showing why Christianity is superior to other religions; or identifying commonalities between Christianity and other religions that could offer a point of entrance for Christian missionaries; or advancing a liberal, pluralistic kind of theology that postulates an underlying unity beneath different religions or some transcendent reality toward which different religions are pointing. Today, those agendas are seen by many in religious studies as ideologically problematic, or lacking academic rigor, or insufficiently distanced from the agendas of religious insiders. The postmodern turn in the academy has made many contemporary scholars wary of comparisons that seem to postulate universality or to efface difference.

Nevertheless, despite these qualms that have come to surround the activity of “comparison,” it appears to me that religious studies scholars still accept as common sense the notion that setting one thing alongside another thing can be a useful way to gain new perspective. And that is what our panelists today have done—I would argue, to intriguing effect. By setting certain Mormon phenomena alongside certain phenomena from Asian religions—or rather, *non-Mormon* Asian religions, taking a cue from Melissa Inouye—the panelists open up interesting new avenues of inquiry. I would like to use my response to press the panelists either to walk us a little farther down those avenues or to articulate more explicitly the agendas they are pursuing with these particular comparisons.

Howlett looks at the way that Hindu devotees have selectively appropriated Western-style academic scholarship in support of devotional claims; he compares this to “faithful history” in Mormonism. He also holds up Francis Clooney’s work in Catholic-Hindu comparative theology as a possible model for how Mormons might gain “fresh theological insights” into their own tradition by engaging with another tradition.

Howlett’s remarks raise two questions for me. First, he suggests that the comparison between Mormon faithful history and Hindu devotional history can help us learn something about both faithful history and devotional history. He did not, however, elaborate what that “something” we could learn might be. Like a golden contact, I would like to know more. Second, Howlett acknowledges that Clooney’s comparative theology could be problematic for Mormons: basically, Howlett perceives the possibility for tension between the claim that Mormonism is the one true church and comparative theology’s devotion to learning from the religious Other. Does this mean that Howlett has a partisan theological agenda in promoting comparative theology as a method for the study of Mormonism? That is, does Howlett promote comparative theology because he wants to pull against the kind of conservative Mormon theologies that emphasize the “one true church” claim, in favor of more liberal, pluralistic versions of Mormonism? It seems to me that Howlett has given us, perhaps inadvertently, a glimpse of his hand; I

would urge him to lay his cards on the table in the interest of clarifying the politics of comparison. Exactly what interests are served or what agendas are advanced—in this case, perhaps, a theological agenda—by the particular act of comparison that Howlett has performed?

Michael Ing suggests that studying others' teachings and practices helps us reexamine our own personal or communal questions of meaning. As an example, he shows how studying Confucian mourning practices opens up questions like: "How have Mormons explained situations where ritual does not transform the world the way it might be intended to? Does ambivalence play a role in Mormon religiosity?" Like Howlett, Ing champions comparative theology, which he envisions could let Mormons use "Confucian theories of ritual [to] inform a Mormon culture of mourning." Or we could see how "Mormon conceptions of death might speak to Confucian concerns of loss."

Again, as with Howlett, I find myself with two questions for Ing—two subjects about which I would like to know more. First: the examples he offers of questions generated by comparison tend toward the existential and tend to strike me as questions that would certainly be of interest to people *inside* particular religious communities—e.g., Mormonism or Confucianism—but not so clearly of interest to scholars working from what in religious studies we call the "outsider's perspective." How relevant will the kind of comparison in which Ing is interested prove to scholars *outside* these religious communities? If the answer is, "Maybe not so much," then comparison could, ironically, reinforce ghettoizing tendencies in Mormon Studies. Second: Ing anticipates that through comparison, scholars of Mormonism can persuade "those in scholarly and popular circles [to] take the study of Mormonism more seriously." Concern for being taken "more seriously" is a frequent refrain in Mormon Studies. I would like to ask Ing: For you specifically, what is the chip on your shoulder? What has happened or not happened that makes you feel not taken seriously? I ask not because I think it's wrong to have a chip on your shoulder, but because I would like to know if the chip on your shoulder is the same chip on my shoulder. If it is, I will likely be sympathetic

to the comparisons you want to pursue; if it is not the same, you might be pursuing an agenda I am not willing to sign onto. As in my response to Howlett, I am fishing for clarification about the specific politics of comparison.

My response to Inouye is directed not only to her remarks today, but also to other work of hers that I've had the opportunity to read. Inouye's study of Chinese Pentecostals has inspired her to ask what I find particularly attractive questions about globalized Mormonism: Where is Mormonism's "charismatic center"? Have scholars of Mormonism been too quick to assume the effectiveness of correlation, and have we thus failed to recognize diverse Mormon expressions? How have Mormon attitudes toward the supernatural developed historically? Also, if I understand her correctly, Inouye sees comparison as a way to establish that Mormonism isn't as weird or heterodox as some might think, i.e., because it has precedents or analogues elsewhere.

While I am intrigued by what all three panelists have offered today, I am especially excited to see how Inouye may develop her work in the future. Questions she has raised—such as, "Where is Mormonism's charismatic center?"—are tantalizing as ways to rethink our understanding of Mormonism as a globalized movement, a movement that is not just imported to new contexts but transformed by them in ways that may not have been foreseen from the movement's American center. Also, Inouye poses her own version of a question I found myself wondering about as I responded to Ing: What does the study of Mormonism offer scholars who are not specifically interested in Mormonism? "Why should someone outside of North America be interested in studying Mormons?" Inouye has written. "Beyond being a cultural mirror to American history or an American general election or two, what does Mormonism have to offer scholars?" I would like to know how Inouye answers that question, and I would like to press her to be specific in identifying scholarly discourse communities which she thinks ought to be interested in Mormons and why. Should scholars of global Pentecostalism, for example, be interested in Mormons as a comparative case—and if so, why? If comparative work around Mormonism

is going to produce fruitful *conversations* with practitioners of other scholarly specializations, then those of us who are interested in Mormonism need to be asking not just, “How do Hindu cases, or Confucian cases, or Pentecostal cases, help us better understand Mormonism?” We also need to be asking, “How do Mormon cases help us—and our colleagues with other specializations—better understand other religious phenomena?”

Katy, My Sister

Jenn Ashworth

We didn't have much stuff when we moved into the new place. Not carpets or a dining table, or even curtains or beds at first. My dad must have thought if we weren't allowed our things we'd come back. But we didn't, and when the council gave us our new house the members in the Ward gathered round and donated things to us and because we didn't have a car any more, they made a rota for who would give us lifts to church and to the supermarket too.

"If there's one thing we know how to do, it's service," Mum said, as we accepted the boxes of other people's chipped dishes and dented baking pans. We were all called to serve, each according to his talents. Mum had given so much to the Ward that there was no shame at all in accepting help this time. This is how we met Brother Johnson, who'd only recently moved into the area himself. After a couple of weeks of doing his share on the service rota, he took Mum to one side and told her he'd had a personal revelation about marrying her. He still had a wife, Mum explained, but she was very ill and going to die soon so would we like to meet her, and the boy and girl who would be our new brother and sister? Me and Anthony said yes, and we were invited round to theirs for tea.

Sister Johnson lay in a special hospital bed sent over from Ireland before the rest of their stuff had properly arrived. I never saw her leave it. It was slotted into the wide bay window at the front of the house so she could watch people going past during the day and wave at the neighbours. I wanted to ask if they'd bought their new house specially with this window in mind, so they could have

her out in front like that, like an expensive thing for sale. Tubes snaked over the blankets and down to little green and orange pouches at the side of the bed. She had a side cabinet full of bottles of Gaviscon and tubs of Vicks and Sudocrem. The whole front room smelled like a bedroom someone had been sleeping in with the windows shut.

“Here’s Amy,” Brother Johnson said. His daughter and son were standing with him; not in Sunday best, but close to it. Katy and Jake.

“Go on and meet her,” said Mum, a bit irritated because we were hanging back and holding things up. Me and Anthony went forward but I looked over my shoulder. They stared back at us and didn’t move. Katy was scowling slightly, her gingerish hair cut in layers around her face like a girl out of a magazine. Jake was just like Anthony—pale and fidgety. Brothers everywhere are all the same.

“Sit down then,” Katy said. It was the first time I’d heard her speak. Her accent was something special. Brother Johnson had put three dining chairs out next to the bed and we sat in them. I suppose the third was for Mum, but Mum had already got to know her by visiting during the day when we were at school, so she stayed back with Brother Johnson.

“Hiya,” Anthony said.

Amy said hello. She was puffy, with grey curly hair and grey shadows under her eyes.

“Have you been at school today?” she asked. I wondered what she knew about us; if she knew about the problems I used to have at school. Surely not, I thought, Mum would only have told her the good things about us.

“Yes,” I said. My brother nodded. She made a rattling sound as she breathed—she might have been laughing. She sank back onto her pillows and I tried not to stare.

“Do you like school?”

Anthony shrugged. I said, “It’s all right.”

Behind us, Mum and Brother Johnson were smiling at our awkwardness, as if we were five year olds mangling our lines at a nativity. Sister Johnson signalled urgently for Katy.

“What is it? Is it . . .” Katy gestured at the blankets.

“Not now, but in a minute, it will be,” Sister Johnson said. “Can you . . . now?”

Katy did something strange then. She pulled a basin out from under the bed, lifted one of the coloured pouches into it, disconnected it from the pipe and then emptied it into the basin and reconnected the pipe. There was a smell of something funny: unpleasant and hot and familiar. We knew something private was happening, even though Sister Johnson was no more uncovered than she had been when we were speaking to her. My brother looked at his feet. I tried to be mature and not embarrassed but it was difficult.

“Why don’t you kids go upstairs,” Brother Johnson said. He pulled a comb out of his top pocket and swept his comb-over back over his red and sweating scalp. “Go up and get to know each other. We’ll stay down here.” Him and Mum sat next to the bed on the wooden chairs. I saw him hold her hand, and Sister Johnson started to talk in her soft, wavering voice. Perhaps they were praying about something but I don’t think so.

* * *

Jake had a bird-eating spider for a pet that he kept in an aquarium in his room. He’d been allowed to get it as a reward for not making a fuss about moving over from Ireland and having to leave all his real friends at his old school behind. It was black and orange and he showed us how it would rear up and strike if he put his long school ruler into the tank and nudged it with the edge of it.

“Is it a boy or a girl?” I asked.

“It’s a boy. It’s called Legend,” he said proudly. “I can hold it in my hand, it knows me. But if you held it,” he pointed with his ruler, “either of you girls, then it would sink its fangs into you and pump you full of venom and you’d die.” He put his hands round his throat and fell to the floor, pretending to choke and splutter. He rolled his eyes backwards into his head and let dribble come out of the side of his mouth. It was very realistic. His face went purple and as his legs writhed about on his bedroom carpet, his fingernails scratched at his neck and face and a terrible noise came out of his mouth.

"I'm dying," he said, "I'm really dying."

Katy rolled her eyes. She had these triangular sweeps of green eye-shadow on that I hadn't noticed at first. Dead subtle, but you could tell if you looked carefully.

"How can you tell it's a boy?" she said. "Have you been looking for its dick?"

Anthony started laughing then, and Jake got up off the floor and shooed us out of his room. "You can hold it," he said to Anthony, in a confidential voice, "if you're not scared. But those two girls can't. They'd scream."

"You're such a baby," Katy said.

I followed Katy into her bedroom. You could tell they'd just moved in. There were built-in wardrobes either side of the chimney breast, but the only other furniture was a mattress on the floor. All her things were scattered about, chiffon scarves hanging from the lampshade. She only had one poster, a black and white picture of Courtney Love torn out of a magazine and stuck crookedly to one of the wardrobe doors.

"Do you think it will be good when we all live together? When you and me share a room?"

Katy sat on the floor and unzipped her makeup bag, stirred its contents, looked up at me, and then chose an eye pencil. She didn't say anything.

"You could teach me to do make up and stuff," I said. I wasn't actually allowed to wear any yet, not until I was sixteen, but I thought when we all lived together it wouldn't be fair to have one rule for me and another for Katy, so I'd probably be allowed then. I looked at Katy leaning over the hand mirror propped against the edge of the mattress. She was pulling her eyelid taut with one finger and drawing a line of eyeliner against her upper lashes. She liked it dark, and thick.

"Have you ever had sex?" she asked.

This was more like it. This was what it was going to be like, having a big sister. It was going to be really great.

"No," I said.

"My friend did," she said. "She said she liked all the before-stuff, but as soon as it went in," she waved the pencil through

the air like a wand, “nothing. She didn’t know what all the fuss was about.”

“Oh.” Katy stared at me. “Why did she do it then?” I asked. She laughed gently.

“People just do. The urge comes over them and they’ve just got to.” She shook her head and I couldn’t tell what she was thinking about. “That’s why they’ve got to get married.”

“Are you going to get married?”

She shook her head. “No way,” she said.

There wasn’t anything else to say. I leaned against the wall in her bedroom and watched her put her makeup on and then take it off again. After a while Brother Johnson crept up the stairs and tapped on the door to say it was time for us to go home. He drove me, Mum, and Anthony back in his car. Anthony was shouting and excited about the spider, telling us that Jake had let him hold it, let him walk about with it sitting on his head. I caught Brother Johnson and Mum smiling at each other, his hand bumping hers accidentally on purpose as he reached for the gear stick. Him and Mum stayed in the car a long time talking, once he’d dropped us off. There were a lot of plans to make for the future. I made us toast and we put ourselves to bed.

In the morning, Mum had breakfast set up ready when we came downstairs and sat at the table with us watching us eat. Eventually she asked us what we thought.

“Can I have a spider as well?” Anthony asked. Mum smiled.

“No, but you can share Jake’s, when the time comes,” she said. She looked at me. “Well? What did you and Little Miss Panda eyes get up to?”

“We were just talking,” I said. “She’s got her own CD player.” I looked at Mum hopefully.

“She’s been allowed all kinds of things since Amy got ill,” Mum said. “Don’t get any ideas.”

I went and fetched my journal and showed her a page I’d written a few weeks before. I’d been in a funny mood when I’d been writing it, and had done a whole page all about how horrible

things were and how black they felt and how something was going to have to change, how everything would have to change, really soon, or I didn't know what I was going to do. I just couldn't stand it anymore, that's what I'd put. I couldn't hack it and something needed to be different.

Mum read it out loud and then asked if she could take it to work and make a copy of it on the machine there because it looked like I'd had my own revelation too, that things were going to change completely, for all of us, for the better, and me writing this before I even knew about what the plans were was confirmation of Heavenly Father's hand in all of our lives.

"When will the time come?" I said. I remembered Sister Johnson and that bad smell in the room. The way the skin hung off the top of her arms, and her stained night dresses hanging on an airer in the back of the kitchen.

Mum shook her head. "We work on the Lord's time. No one knows when he'll take Amy back home. The Doctors say very soon. Before Christmas. You might start sorting through your things, deciding what you want to keep. We won't have room for everything. Compromises will have to be made."

* * *

During that winter, while Sister Johnson was still on earth with us, there was to be a short period of adjustment during which it was important that we all got to know each other. It was especially important for us to learn to love Sister Johnson as a kind of second mother while she was still here, because she would be forever part of our eternal family, and when she died she would be getting our house in heaven ready for us.

But I didn't like to go and see her. I'd pretend to be ill, or busy, and so instead she sent me notes and cards in unsealed envelopes and my mum would leave them on my pillow or prop them against my bowl at breakfast time. The cards always had pictures of Jesus on them, either ascending to heaven, or showing the holes in his hands and feet to his disciples, or showing Mary Magdalene the rolled back stone in the doorway of his tomb.

"James is a good man," she wrote in one of them, and for a minute I didn't know who she was talking about. "He wants to

look after you and your brother, and most of all your mum. We know you've had a hard few years and you all need a time of peace and for home to be a sanctuary, a place of safety and calm to return to. You don't ever need to worry about him shouting at you or hitting you. He will give you your privacy and the support—both emotional and financial—you need to grow up into the intelligent and sober young woman your mother knows you can be. I will be praying for you."

When I finished reading I noticed Mum was standing over me. She was pretending that she just wanted to get near to the window with her hand mirror so she could put on some lipstick but I knew she'd been watching as I read.

"Well?" she said.

"He sounds," I said, putting the card back into the envelope, "like he's applying for a job."

"Don't be hard on him," Mum said. "It's not an easy thing that Heavenly Father is asking him to do. He's pulled in all sorts of directions. He's got to make sure this is best for his own children, as well as you and Anthony. It's his job to lead us in this. Have you prayed about it?"

"No," I said.

"Well, I think you should."

I said I would but every time I tried I imagined Sister Johnson in her resurrected body, those strange pouches trailing behind her. She was always in her nightdress, her glasses on a pink string around her neck. Maybe when we got to heaven she would brandish those plastic tubes at us to prove that it was really her, that we'd come to the right place.

* * *

Because I wasn't keen on going back to their house, Brother Johnson decided that he would start driving us home part of the way from school and that would be a good way for us to spend time together and get comfortable in each other's company. I didn't like the idea of Brother Johnson picking us up right outside the school gates, so we made a compromise—we'd walk to the train station, which was about half way, and he'd pick us up from there.

He had a small black car—a Fiesta Pride, with several combs tucked into the driver’s side sun visor. Anthony got me to distract him by asking questions about the Millennium while he dawdled around the back of the car, writing “gay” in the dust over “Pride.” It made us laugh and when we got home and he’d gone back to his own family, we told Mum. Mum told us off but not really; I could tell she was laughing a bit too.

Sometimes my brother wasn’t there in the car because he’d decided to go and have tea at our dad’s instead. So Brother Johnson would let me sit in the front and would park a little way away from the house so we could have a chat.

“Katy’s very close to her mother,” he said, even though I didn’t ask. “She’s looked after her since she left school. When things change,” that’s how he referred to it, when talking to us, “then she’ll be able to go to college.”

“That’s good,” I said. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel.

“She’s bright, is Katy. Very,” he narrowed his eyes and smiled, “canny. She came to me and asked me what was going on before me and your mum even thought of telling the children. She’d noticed.”

“I noticed too.” I said. “I had a revelation as well. In my journal.”

“Yes, you did,” he said. “Your mum told me. Amy saw the copy. Very astute of you.”

I felt pleased.

“The thing is,” he said “between us, in our family, we know what all this means. Amy broached it with me before I was ready to listen to what the Lord wanted from us all. This isn’t,” he said, “anything to do with immorality. Your mum and Amy, they’re busy getting to know each other. Becoming sisters. Do you understand?”

“I do.” I said.

“That’s why I don’t think it would be a good idea to talk about this much, at church—even to your friends. People could get the wrong idea. I asked Katy what she thought—she’s seventeen now—mature enough to have an opinion on these things. She says she doesn’t want people talking about her mother while she’s so ill. You can understand that, can’t you?”

Mum had told me about this. I'd asked why they sat outside in the car all the time, why he just wouldn't come into the house to talk when he dropped us off at home. "It wouldn't be appropriate," she'd said, "him coming into the house with us not being married yet and no other adult here. It could give the appearance of evil." It was important that through the whole transition we were all above reproach. That our new family started as we meant to go on: spotless.

"We wouldn't want people talking about any of us," I said. "Anthony would feel the same way. No one wants to be gossiped about, do they?"

"Your mum said you'd say that," Brother Johnson said, and reached for his comb. "You've got wisdom beyond your years. You and Katy are going to get on well, I can see that."

I was pleased again, and smiled as I got out of the car and went inside. I didn't usually bother, but that day I even turned and waved to him before I went into the house.

In the run up to Christmas, when it was dark before we got home from school, Mum started spending a lot of time with Sister Johnson during the day.

"I've got a lifetime with those children to catch up on," she said, which made it sound like she spent her time learning the faces in old photograph albums and making lists of what kind of food Katy and Jake liked to eat. In fact, it was the other way round—Katy was teaching Mum the sort of things that Sister Johnson needed doing for her: the trick to changing a bed with a person still lying it, or giving someone a bath even if they couldn't stand up. Brother Johnson would take us back to his house instead of our own after school, and Katy and Mum would be in the kitchen together talking about the best way to get a crispy top on a shepherd's pie, or how to get Anthony and Jake to eat their veg, and whose turn it was to do the washing up afterwards. Brother Johnson brought back a prospectus from the college down the road and made Katy look through it.

"You should try nursing, or childcare, or holistic therapies," Mum said, looking at the brochure over Katy's shoulder. Me,

Anthony, and Jake were eating sausage and peas. Anthony was rolling his peas over the table to Jake, and Jake was using the salt pot as a goal. Katy shrugged.

"I don't know. There's no rush, is there? I can always wait another year." She looked through the archway into the front room at her mother, propped up on her pillows with her plate resting on a wobbling tray.

"A year my foot! I can take care of things here, during the day," Mum said. She was wearing Sister Johnson's old apron. I wondered why they'd bothered bringing it over the water with them when they must have known she wasn't going to get any better.

Katy looked like she was going to say something else, but Sister Johnson's fork slipped down the side of the bed and she started to cry: a little high pitched growling sound like a cat. It sounded funny and I had to bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from laughing. Katy went in from the kitchen but Mum got to the bed first.

"You sit and have your tea, love," Mum said. "You've been on your feet all day. Eat, go on." Brother Johnson sat down at the head of the table and smiled, but Katy picked up her plate and took it to her room.

* * *

Christmas came and went and between Christmas and New Year Jake and Katy's older brother, Michael, came back from his mission. He'd only been serving in Edinburgh but they'd not seen him for two years, and Mum said we should admire him for sticking with it because he'd been worried the whole time that Sister Johnson wouldn't last until he came back. When he did arrive home, we were all there, Mum with her chair right close to the head of Sister Johnson's bed, and nervously holding her hand.

"Michael!" Katy stood up and ran towards him as he came in at the front door. She hugged him and didn't let him go for ages. I suppose she'd not liked being the oldest, and in charge of being canny about everything while he'd been away. Try doing it full time, for fifteen years, I thought, but then realized that would change too so I didn't say anything. Michael hugged her back but over his shoulder, he was looking at us.

"Hello Michael," I said, and "welcome home. We're glad you're back safe," which is what my mum had told me to say. She said things were bound to be awkward the first few minutes, but just to smile and get through it. So I did.

Michael didn't shake his dad's hand, but hugged Jake and told him how much he'd grown and made a joke about having to fight him for who got to be the man of the house now. Then he went to sit on the edge of his mother's bed.

"Are you missing Ireland, Mum?" he said quietly, as if there was no one else in the room.

"Things move on, son. We move on with them, or we get stuck," she said, which even I knew wasn't an answer. I wondered who'd packed up his things in the old house, who'd chosen what would be sent over to England and what would be thrown away.

"And who's this? New friends?"

Brother Johnson introduced us properly and he leaned over and shook our hands. Sister Johnson and Katy were staring at him hard. I couldn't tell by looking at him if he knew who we really were, or not.

"Merry Christmas," he said quietly, and turned away. We pulled the last of the crackers and ate some Christmas pudding that was a bit past its best. Katy sat near him, looping her arm through his, and whispering in his ear. I watched her, seeing what it was like to have a big brother.

"Come on now, Katy," Brother Johnson said, "say it in front of everyone, or not at all. We don't do divide and rule in this household."

Me and Anthony gave Michael the Christmas presents we'd saved for him; nice things to make a good first impression. Mum had bought a good shirt and some new black socks. I'd made a photo frame out of cardboard and Christmas wrapping paper and glitter pen. I thought he'd want to put a picture of all of us together in it. Anthony hadn't done anything but I let him write his name on the tag along with mine, just to be nice. But when we gave them to Michael he put them next to him on the chair and didn't open them. Mum said he was just tired, and felt a bit awkward because no one had warned him we'd be doing presents and he hadn't brought anything for us.

When Brother Johnson said it was time to drive us back, Michael said he'd do it himself, and there was silence in the car all the way home.

* * *

In the New Year, the Youth had a special dance to prepare for the show we were putting on for the Ward Valentine's social. We were going to do the barn raising bit from *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, with us learning the dance and also the song. It was really hard to do the dance and sing at the same time. Jake and me had been assigned to each other as dance partners, which Brother Johnson took as further evidence of Heavenly Father making our paths cross and putting us together as family. We'd practice once a week after school, and now and again on a Saturday afternoon.

"Come on then," the Bishop said, "strike up the band and let's get on with it."

When Jake put his hand on my waist and twirled me the other boys and girls said "wooop wooh" and made kissing noises.

"Oi fancy you, oi does!" someone said, doing a really fake Irish accent. Everyone laughed.

Jake took his hands off me and turned around quick to see who had said it. The big skirt I had to wear as part of my costume was still swishing and settling around my legs. Katy was playing the piano and when the music stopped we realized everyone was staring at us.

"Jake," she said gently, "it doesn't mean anything. Just leave it."

Someone giggled nervously and Katy turned back to the piano and started to play the first few bars of the chorus. But Jake had rushed across the room, pushed someone out of his way so hard that they fell and skidded across the polished wooden floor of the cultural hall, and went into the lobby. There were piles of hymn books in wooden boxes out there, and we could hear him shouting and grunting as he picked them up and threw them against the glass doors. The Young Men's President stood up but Katy was there, shaking her head. "Leave him," she said, "I'll go out to him." She looked right at me. "Go and ring Michael, will you? Tell him we need picking up early."

Me and Anthony felt sort of special, being the ones let into the Bishop's office to make the call and talk on the phone. We could hear Katy and Jake outside in the lobby, the books bouncing off the glass doors, and Jake shouting and crying.

"What's wrong with him?" the Bishop asked, once we'd hung up. "Is it his mum?"

"She's ill," Anthony said, then we shut our mouths and wouldn't say any more.

* * *

It wasn't as if Anthony and me spent a lot of time discussing these things when no one else was around. Unlike me, he liked to go to our dad's and once the school holidays finished, he spent more and more time there at weekends. Eventually, he almost gave up coming to church all together. I would remind him now and again about Legend and sharing a room with Jake and how we all needed to be pulling together during these last few weeks, now more than ever, but it didn't make any difference to him. Sometimes though, it was like it used to be.

"Who's this? Guess who!" he'd say, combing his fringe to one side and waddling into the room with a cushion stuffed up his school shirt. "*The thing is,*" he said, in an Irish accent that was actually fairly good, "*eternal families aren't born, they're made with effort, with tears and sweat and prayer. We work our hardest when we're on our knees!*"

We fell about laughing at times like this, and even when Mum caught us doing our impressions it wasn't so bad—she'd laugh too, or close the door gently with a twinkle in her eye and pretend she hadn't heard us. I suppose she thought it was part of our adjustment process, and that all this light mindedness and levity would have to stop when we started living together, so we may as well just get it out of our systems now.

* * *

Around Valentine's Day Mum knocked on the door of my room. I was busy cutting out red hearts to sew onto the skirt I was going to wear for the dance. They'd actually swapped the partners around and given me Anthony instead of Jake, which was embarrassing

and also totally ironic. And who even knew if Anthony was going to bother turning up for the performance or not? She told me to put the scissors down.

“What is it?”

“We’re going to move house,” she said.

I thought Sister Johnson had finally died.

“When? Have you told Dad?”

Mum had been crying. “There are cleaning jobs going at the Temple. I’ve asked the council if we can transfer to the estate up there. There’s a school bus, you won’t have to move.”

“What about ...?”

“No. We’ll be in a different Ward from now on too. It will be all right. You’ll make friends quickly. Do you know where Anthony is?”

I shook my head. “What happened?”

“It’s Katy,” she said, “she’s in the hospital.”

“What’s wrong with her?”

“Michael found her. He drove her in himself. They waited ten minutes for the ambulance and then he just put her in the car and went.”

“What did she do?” I said, but Mum put her hands over her face and wouldn’t tell me.

* * *

We’d not been very good at keeping our secrets—the Ward was supposed to be one big happy family in Christ and the Gospel and because people cared enough to talk to each other, I eventually found out what had happened.

Brother Johnson had been taking us to church every week, and because Sister Johnson was always too ill to come with him, the lot of us had started sitting together every Sunday. It just seemed to make sense. But when Michael came back, he’d decided he didn’t like it, and had talked to the Bishop. Apparently, he hadn’t been the first. Some of the women from Relief Society had noticed Katy and Brother Johnson turning down their help with the household things because Mum had been covering all that side of things for them. The Bishop had had his eye on the situation for some time

now. Five days ago he'd gone over to the house, and while he'd been in the sitting room with Sister and Brother Johnson, Katy had gone upstairs and tried to hang herself from the back of her bedroom door.

After a few days the Bishop came to our house specifically to tell Mum that the revelation had been all wrong. It had been a bit of a lie, and Sister Johnson wasn't going to die, at least, not any quicker than the rest of us, and we'd to stop accepting lifts from him and going round to his house, and we certainly weren't to sit together in church any more.

"You weren't ever family," he said to her, and I heard my Mum start to cry in the way she always does when she's trying to keep it in because she thinks me and Anthony are asleep, "You've got to get that idea out of your mind because it wasn't ever true."

"Can I go and see her?" Mum asked. I was on the stairs and couldn't hear what the Bishop said, but I reckon it was a no because she started to cry properly then, and said, "But what about the children?" and I wasn't sure if she meant Katy and Jake, or me and Ant, or all of us.

"Just pray for them," the Bishop said at the front door, "but stay away from now on."

* * *

Mum left it to me to tell Anthony. I was mad about it, but there wasn't any choice. She'd gone right back to the way she'd been when we'd first moved into the new house. That meant hours of her just sitting on her own watching the telly. She never went to bed properly and just slept where she was on the settee. I kept waiting for her to snap out of it and even thought about ringing up Brother Johnson and getting him to come and talk to her. But he wouldn't have come in the house. He probably wouldn't even have answered the phone to us. It was all down to me again. So I took Anthony upstairs where Mum couldn't hear us and just told him.

"You might as well know, it's all off," I said. "Not that you cared anyway."

I told him what Katy had done to herself.

“How did she do it?” Anthony whispered. We were in my bedroom, sitting side by side on the divan bed. There was still no carpet on the floor so the little castors on the bed would roll suddenly if you tried to lean back against the wall. It was a pain, but we were used to it.

“With her dressing gown cord,” I said, “over the coat hook.”
“Grim.”

I nodded. “She’s still in hospital. Mum says she’s got a pipe up her nose and everything.”

The windows in my room were bare—before Christmas Mum had promised to let me choose the material and she’d sew them for me herself, but then when it looked like we’d be moving again in a matter of weeks, or less, she’d never bothered and I’d almost got used to getting changed with the lights out, or pinning a sheet up against the window at night.

“You’re not to get yourself upset. I knew there was something wrong with her,” I said. “I could tell from the beginning. I had a revelation about it.”

Anthony had something in his hand, a dark, ragged bit of fluff, and he kept stroking it with his finger as if it was something special.

“You thought she was all that and a bag of nuts,” Anthony said.
“Don’t lie.”

I shrugged. “That was when I thought we’d all be living together. You’re supposed to think the best of your family, aren’t you?”

“Jake said she used to get up in the night and do weird things,” Ant said. “He said she’d been at it for ages.”

“What sort of things?”

He shrugged, “Tearing the pages out of books. Dropping plates on the kitchen floor. She ate a whole block of butter once, for no reason.”

“Jake might have made that up,” I said. I realized then what was in was in Anthony’s hand—an old spider skin. Jake said Legend would shed them now and again, as he grew bigger, and Anthony had made him promise to save one for him if and when it happened. He wanted to use it to scare the girls at school with, I bet. It lay on his palm, limp and leggy but just like a real spider

with the guts sucked out. I made myself a promise not to scream if I woke up someday soon and found it on my pillow or draped over my face.

"You didn't ever think it would really come off, did you?" Anthony said. "I knew it was never going to happen. From when Michael came home. The look he gave us when he saw us sitting in that front room." He carried on patting at the skin and arranging its legs to make it look more life-like. "I could tell that his mum and dad hadn't said anything about us. He didn't know our names or anything, did he?"

"Maybe they didn't want to bother him on his mission. Maybe us three were too important to mention, just like that, in a letter."

Anthony snorted, then tapped the side of his head. "It's some sort of game they play."

"Don't be stupid," I said.

"Go and ask your Katy then," he said, "I bet she'll tell you the truth."

I thought about her and her machines. Blue marks around her neck. Pipes and wires and things to help her breathe. Hospital smells and bottles of Fruit and Barley.

"Is she going to die?" Ant asked.

"No one knows. We've just got to wait, and pray."

Anthony held up the skin on the palm of his hand and blew—*whoomph*—and it flew at me, hit me in the mouth and landed on the front of my jumper, the little stiff hairs on its legs making it stick there. I rubbed my lips and shook and shook but it wouldn't come off, and Anthony rolled back on the bed and laughed like he was going to be sick.

"Why do you always have to—" I couldn't find the words, "spoil things?"

I suppose I was thinking about *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, and how in the end we didn't bother with it because there'd been no Katy to play the piano, and no Jake to dance with me, and Anthony had refused to stand in for him and how I'd cut out all those hearts and done all that practicing and sewing for nothing.

"You've always got to spoil everything!"

I tried to push him off the bed but he rolled and dodged me easily.

“Don’t be like that,” he said. “Dad told me to work on cheering you up. Said it wasn’t our fault our *bloody mother* had taken up with a *load of nutters*.” He gently picked the skin off me and stood up. “*Ant*,” he said, doing his Dad impression, “*don’t let yourself get sucked into their fuckery, my son*.” For some reason I didn’t move or say anything, but kept thinking of Katy, and her middle-of-the-night butter eating. Maybe the thought occurred to Anthony at the same time as it did to me, but all of a sudden I was picturing Brother Johnson rushing backwards and forwards between Katy’s sickbed and his wife’s, getting all red and stressed and shedding combs and loose hairs everywhere. I tried not to laugh but when Anthony shook the spider at me and mouthed *fuckery* again I couldn’t help it, I lost it, and we both let rip.



Rebecca Sorge
Press Forward
Mixed media

Dialogue at the Crossroads

Jacob T. Baker, ed. *Mormonism at the Crossroads of Philosophy and Theology: Essays in Honor of David L. Paulsen*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012. xliii + 351 pp. Paper: \$31.95. ISBN: 9781589581920.

Reviewed by Edwin E. Gantt

This excellent collection of essays not only honors one of the most influential LDS thinkers of the past forty years, David L. Paulsen, but does so as a beautiful example of the very sort of critically reflective and respectful interfaith dialogue that he worked so hard to encourage throughout his career as both a teacher and a writer. As such, this volume contains a variety of thoughtful essays that cover a wide range of topics in areas as diverse as how Mormonism might best be classified as a theological system, the nature of transcendence and the meaning of deification in Mormon thought, the question of divine embodiment in LDS and traditional Christian thought, the challenges that Fideism may present to an ostensibly “atheological” Mormonism, LDS contributions to contemporary philosophical debates in creation theology, whether an “Evangelical Mormonism” is a viable possibility, and what sorts of connections there may be between the way scholars have explained Jesus Christ and the way they explain Joseph Smith. As such, this volume represents a very impressive contribution to the burgeoning interfaith dialogue between LDS and non-LDS scholars, both in terms of its intellectual rigor and the deeply respectful and faith-affirming tone it exhibits throughout.

The unique combination of breadth of topic and depth of analysis found in many of the essays in this volume speaks both to the sophistication and insightfulness of their individual authors and, perhaps even more significantly, to the profound influence that Paulsen’s work has had over the years in setting an appropriate tone for these sorts of discussions, as well as in establishing an open and hospitable intellectual environment in

which they might take place. Indeed, one thing that readers may be most struck by as they work through the various essays in this collection is the frequency with which so many of the authors take occasion to note not only Paulsen's impressive academic and intellectual contributions, and the influence his thinking has had on their own, but also the genuinely loving and welcoming spirit with which he invites others to participate in careful analysis of some of the most weighty issues in theology, philosophy, and Christian living. If this volume does anything right—and, quite honestly, it does many things right in many ways and in many areas—it is that it embodies in each of its essays that very same loving, open, and yet always seriously critical spirit that characterizes Professor Paulsen's own work over the past four decades.

Following a detailed introduction that provides a helpful overview of each of the seventeen essays, the volume begins with a brief but well-focused biographical essay by Daniel Barron and Jacob Baker on Professor Paulsen's personal and academic life. Among a number of choice nuggets of insight into Paulsen's mind and history contained in this brief biography, one that stands out as perhaps most revealing about his own relationship to the work of apologetics and theological reflection to which he devoted so much of his life is this penetrating comment he made in an interview with one of the chapter's authors: "My faith in God is grounded in his self-disclosures, not in logical inferences from philosophically constructed premises" (xxxix). In the work of apologetics, where hard-nosed logical critique and relentless rational defense are so often taken to be the name of the game, Paulsen readily admits that the tools of logic and critical thinking are just that: tools. For Paulsen, one does not proceed to knowledge of God by means of logic-splicing and rational analysis, but through direct experience with God in deeply personal ways. For Paulsen, as for his intellectual guide Kierkegaard, knowledge of God is deeply relational in nature, and, thus, principally grounded in personal, revelatory experience with God. The categories and methods of logic—indeed the entire project of formal apologetics—though vital to the task of defending faith and nurturing a healthy intellectual life through

thoughtful reflection on the meaning and coherence of religious doctrines and the meaning of God, always come later, somewhat late to dinner, one might say, though certainly still welcome to the feast. Such an understanding of the nature of apologetics and philosophical reflection, as well as the inherent limitations (and subtle seductions) of logic and reason, helps illuminate the origins of Paulsen's personal and professional style in both encouraging and embodying a loving and respectful approach to interfaith dialogue.

While each of the essays in this volume is worthy of commentary and commendation, in the interests of brevity—and in light of the fact that the book itself provides excellent introductory summaries of each essay—I will mention only a select few here that I believe may be of particular interest to the reader who might consider investing in this volume.

In the opening essay of the collection, Carl Mosser (recent co-author and long-time friend of Paulsen) tackles the question of how Mormonism is to be theologically classified, especially in light of the many ways it resists assimilation into traditional Christian theological categories. In the end, while Mosser argues that *Anglo-American finitism* might best describe Mormon thought—if a formal theological classification absolutely must be settled on—he also notes that Mormon thought stands, in a number of profound ways, quite apart from any current theistic classifications. Unlike many others who have struggled to conceptualize Mormonism, or reconcile it to existing and popular theological frameworks, Mosser clearly appreciates the singular nature of the LDS understanding of God and the unique perspective that its truth claims provide.

In “Is Evangelical Mormonism a Viable Concept for the Near Future?” Craig Blomberg suggests that in recent years that the contours of the category “Evangelical” have become sufficiently loosened as to allow for the possibility that much of Mormonism could be appropriated under that title. Blomberg argues that a close reading of the National Association of Evangelicals’ statement of faith reveals that the basic tenets of Mormonism may well meet the doctrinal standards for evangelicalism that

are set there. Blomberg does good service in helping to clear-up a number of common misconceptions that many of his fellow Evangelicals have concerning the nature (and “Christian-ness”) of many Mormon beliefs, showing that in many ways Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals are not nearly as far apart as it is sometimes assumed. However, Blomberg does note that for anything like a full rapprochement to occur there would need to be serious concessions by Latter-day Saints in terms of the ecclesiological language we use and the truth claims we make concerning prophets, priesthood authority, and the salvific necessity of certain ordinances. However, such reconciliation, despite Blomberg’s optimism to the contrary, would seem to strike the death-knell of Mormonism because it requires that we wipe away certain key truth claims that are absolutely essential both to Mormonism’s singularity as a Christian worldview and to its spiritual and intellectual vibrancy as a religious movement. Nonetheless, efforts to initiate respectful, engaging, well-informed dialogue such as Blomberg evidences here are worthy of sincere thanks and thoughtful emulation by both LDS and other Christian thinkers.

In contrasting essays by Stephen Davis and Clark Pinnock, the question of corporeality of God—a fundamental claim of the restored gospel and, as such, a major challenge to traditional Christian theologies, as well as other religious traditions and philosophical thought itself—is examined. Davis engages Paulsen’s pioneering work on divine embodiment directly, carefully detailing a number of important contributions that Paulsen has made over the years to the theological and philosophical literature. Davis, however, responds by outlining (what he takes to be) a biblical case for divine immaterialism, arguing that the text of the Bible offers clear evidence that supports the notion that God is invisible, that He is omnipresent, that He is omnipotent, and, thus, a necessary being who is in no way dependent on the material conditions or physical laws of the universe. Taking the opposite tack, Pinnock argues that if it is doctrinally true that God is able to genuinely engage us as His children, feeling, loving, and suffering-with us in our daily lives, then God must

be embodied in some fashion. While Pinnock does not go so far as to suggest that God's embodiment must necessarily be as it is understood in Mormon thought, he does make a strong case that if God is in fact a person, and that embodiment is an essential feature of personhood, then God must be materially embodied in some fundamental way.¹

In his essay, "Transascendence: Transcendence in Mormon Thought," James Faulconer examines the meaning of divine transcendence in light of the restored gospel, particularly as it stands in problematic contrast with more traditional notions of how God is taken to exceed the world. LDS thought has traditionally emphasized God's immanence in the world rather than his transcendence of it as an ontologically distinct being (i.e., absolute otherness). Drawing on the philosophical work of the French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas and his concept of "transascendence," Faulconer proposes that while defenders of traditional notions of divine transcendence are right in asserting that it is not possible to adequately or comprehensively capture the being of God, they have failed to note that the same holds true of the being of other mortal persons as well. Thus, not only is God transcendent, but so is every other person in the world; in that, our deepest experience of other persons always comes as an interruption and an overflowing of categories, a profound sense of "moral height" in which we find ourselves obligated to them. Faulconer argues that in this irruptive experience of being drawn to another person, to whom we find ourselves indebted and before whom we are called upon to give moral response, we can see "an analogy for thinking about God" that overcomes both the relational problematics of traditional notions of divine transcendence and the reductionist consequences of mere immanence.

While only a small slice of the pie as far as the number of essays contained in this volume, each of these well reflects the overall sophistication, insightfulness, and spiritually (as well as intellectually) uplifting quality of all of the book's entries. As the volume's editor correctly notes in the introduction, even though "the essays here are not strictly written dialogues," they

are nevertheless “dialogical in nature, products of a consistent and patient exposure and imaginative working out of the subject matter, in conversation with others sharing the same general concerns” (xi). In light of the number of authors in this book who first engaged Mormon thought from an antagonistic and confrontational perspective, and who now seek instead to engage it in more open and considerate ways, perhaps no greater evidence of the fruit of David Paulsen’s tireless efforts to generate thoughtful and respectful interfaith dialogue between LDS and non-LDS thinkers can be found than this fine book itself.

Note

1. Catholic theologian Stephen H. Webb’s excellent recent works “Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints” and “Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter” strike very similar chords and advance a very similar case by way of a careful analysis of Mormon doctrines of divine materiality.

God’s “Body” and Why It Matters

Stephen H. Webb. *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 232 pp. Hardcover: \$29.95. ISBN: 9780199316816.

Reviewed by John W. Morehead

Stephen Webb is a Roman Catholic scholar who has made a great effort to understand and interact with Mormonism in sympathetic ways. In his prior volume on this topic, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (Oxford University Press, 2011), Webb considered the possibility of the materiality and divine embodiment of God by way of elements in the history of Christian thought, specifically “heavenly flesh” Christology. In *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints*, he narrows his focus to consider Mormon materialist metaphysics and what this might mean for his own Catholicism, as well as the doctrine of the rest of historic Christendom.

In contrast with classical theism where God is an immaterial spirit, Webb entertains the idea that God possesses a material body (5). He wonders whether this might be a possibility for traditional Christians as they consider the implications of Joseph Smith's interpretation of his "First Vision" which provided him with an "insight into the materiality of the divine" (9). This has resulted in a Mormon metaphysical teaching on matter wherein God is not only embodied and material, but also, "Most fundamentally speaking, spirit and matter are not opposites at all. Spirit and matter complement each other and are not ultimately different in substance" (34).

Webb recognizes the serious implications of this for traditional Christianity, if true, in that it "calls for the revision of nearly every Christian belief" (124). For this reason a thoughtful analysis from the perspective of traditional Christianity is in order. At several points Webb calls for civil and respectful engagement of Mormonism (23, 113–14, 159), and notes that unfortunately "skeptics can be tempted to reduce it to a simple set of claims for quick criticism and polemical rebuttal" (23). This reviewer eschews such approaches, and what follows is a respectful and thoughtful critique of Webb's thesis incorporating Mormon ideas. In the review that follows I bring the perspective of an Evangelical scholar with a background in Mormon studies, appreciation for interreligious engagement, and a desire for religious traditions to critically engage each other in civility. The following areas of critique are especially significant to traditional Christianity both Protestant and Catholic, in my mind.

In order for traditional Christians to embrace Mormon materialist metaphysics, it will need to be seen as compatible with biblical teaching. This is true for traditional Christians in its historic branches, including Roman Catholics, but particularly for Protestants, and most notably Evangelicals, where the Bible holds a place of special authority in matters of faith. In the instances where Webb mentions the Bible in relation to divine embodiment, he draws upon a literal hermeneutic, such as the creation of human beings in God's image (8–9, 104), and Old Testament texts referring to people "seeing" God (84–85). Webb wonders

whether these might be examples of God revealing his physical form. This hermeneutic is surprising in that it is an unsophisticated method found in Christian fundamentalism, an expression of Christianity that Webb seems to find lacking (122, 176), and which cannot be the basis for a restoration of the church (164).

In response, there are several dimensions to biblical interpretation. In its ancient near eastern context, the gods were believed to have several bodies, but scholars recognize that the dominant strains of Old Testament monotheism rejected this idea.¹ It is difficult to believe that Webb would accept multiple bodies for each of the persons of the Godhead. Then there is the conceptualization behind the text. For the Hebrews, Old Testament anthropomorphisms express God's "being and properties" or qualities, not his form.² Although Webb takes exception to anthropomorphism (85), it played a part in Hebraic thinking. In addition, they emphasized divine action rather than abstract theorizing about the nature of being. Then there is the significance of religious communities to the hermeneutical process. One cannot cite the biblical text without consideration of the religious communities in which it is interpreted according to internal assumptions. Beyond its original contexts and readers, scriptural texts take their meaning within religious communities, whether that of ancient Israel, the branches of Christendom, or Mormonism. Webb would be better served by wrestling more carefully with a host of hermeneutical issues related to the Old Testament than by citing texts based upon a literal fundamentalist interpretation.

Another area of critique relates to Mormon materialist conceptions of the incarnation of Christ. In Webb's view, "[Joseph] Smith expands the mystery of the incarnation without diminishing it in any significant way" (123). He speculates that in Mormon materialism "the incarnation is a specification (or material intensification) of [Christ's] premortal state, not the first (and only) time that God and matter unite" (123). But for traditional Christians, the incarnation is best expressed in a biblical text like John 1, specifically verse 14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (KJV). This passage brings together several Jewish ideas related to God's presence among his people, including Torah (the

first five books of the Bible), the Temple, divine Wisdom, and the Shekinah (the presence of God through his glory. In so doing it is reminiscent of both the Jewish creation story and God's presence in the Exodus wandering and Temple. For traditional Christians Jesus is the embodiment of Judaism's incarnational symbols so that in Jesus the living and invisible God is present in flesh with his people. In so doing, the Word took on something he did not previously possess, a material body, and "was made flesh."

The final area of critique relates to the sources for Smith's ideas on metaphysical materialism. Webb reminds us that it was Smith's experience of God in the First Vision that informed his materialist metaphysics, "not speculations about nature or analysis of matter" (35), nor was it historical or theological reflection on early Christianity and ancient Judaism. Such visionary experiences were common in Smith's time and region of the country, including among the Methodists.³ But why did Smith interpret his vision in ways that would lead to a materialist metaphysics (84) that Methodists and others having similar experiences did not interpret in similar fashion?

The answer comes by way of the influence of various esoteric ideas. Webb is aware of such connections, and he devotes an entire chapter (one of the longest) to "The Magic of Being Mormon." In particular he discusses Smith's critics who have pointed to the work of John Brooke in *The Refiner's Fire* and who argue that the Prophet's innovative thinking arose out of hermeticism. Webb dismisses this idea, stating that there is a closer connection to Old Testament magic, and that Smith cannot be construed as a Gnostic. Brooke's thesis has elicited strong and mixed reactions, including negative responses from the academic community and within some segments of Mormonism,⁴ but it cannot be dismissed in totality.

In addition, Webb would benefit from a broader understanding of esoteric thought in a reconsideration of the influence of esotericism on Smith's teachings. The connection between Smith and esotericism does not only come from critics. Scholars such as Catherine Albanese have connected the dots between Smith and American metaphysical religions. Harold Bloom views Smith

as a modern Gnostic in his book *The American Religion*, and goes on to state that his conception of God is like that form of Jewish mysticism found in the Kabbalists. And in an extensive essay in *Dialogue*, Lance Owens has made the case for the influence of esotericism and hermeticism on Smith, in particular the influence of the Kabbalah on his views of deity.⁵ In another essay, Owens cites Brooke's research, noting "the striking parallels between the Mormon concepts of coequality of matter and spirit" and the "philosophical traditions of alchemy and Hermeticism."⁶ Owens also speaks of "the importance of Hermeticism in the evolution of early American religious consciousness and political culture,"⁷ and the "intersection between dispensational restorationism and the Hermetic occult."⁸ A good argument can be made that Mormonism's materialist metaphysics finds its roots in esotericism forged in synthesis with the restorationism of nineteenth century America, rather than in "neglected practices and overlooked beliefs from ancient Christianity" (181).

Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians will disagree with Webb's thesis and the Mormon materialism it encourages them to embrace. But as John Bracht reminds us,⁹ we must pause to remember its wonder and significance for Mormons. To them, the immaterial God of Christendom seems less personal and real than the Man of Holiness found in the First Vision and the Plan of Salvation. For traditional Christians God is intensely personal without a glorified body, from Israel's love affair with the invisible God who was not to be represented in physical images to the early Christians who sensed the post-Resurrection presence of Jesus in power through the Spirit. In all of this, even while rejecting Webb's thesis, it must be acknowledged that his book provides thought-provoking ideas for conversations between traditional Christians and Mormons.

Notes

1. Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

2. Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 101 (cf. 109).

3. Christopher C. Jones, “‘We Latter-day Saints are Methodists’: The Influence of Methodism on Early Mormon Religiosity,” (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009).

4. “Thoughts about the Academic Community’s Response to John Brooke’s Refiner’s Fire,” in Jan Shipp, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

5. Lance S. Owens, “Joseph Smith and Kabbalah: The Occult Connection,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 117–94.

6. Lance S. Owens, “Joseph Smith: America’s Hermetic Prophet,” *Gnosis Magazine* 35 (Spring 1995): 63.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. John L. Bracht, *Man of Holiness: The Mormon Search for a Personal God* (Salt Lake City: Sacred Tribes Press, 2010). Expanded electronic edition of 1988 MA thesis, University of Sydney.

Deep Cheer

Dana Haight Cattani

Note: This talk was given at the Bloomington Indiana Stake Conference on March 9, 2014.

Nine years ago, my husband Kyle was offered an attractive job at Tulane University in New Orleans. At the same time, he was offered—and ultimately accepted—a position at Indiana University. Six months later, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, and Tulane shut down for an extended period. If Kyle had accepted that job, we likely would have been displaced indefinitely from home and work and schools. We felt empathy for those who suffered, and we thanked our lucky stars that we had dodged this bullet.

Three years ago, I was in a head-on car collision. I had just picked up my kids from school when a car traveling toward us drifted across the center line and hit us. Our car was totaled, but none of us had serious injuries. We felt empathy for the other driver, who did need to go to the hospital briefly. We hadn't quite dodged this bullet, but it had only grazed us, and we gave profound thanks for this good fortune.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with advanced uterine cancer. No dodging this bullet. It was a direct hit. There was no heartfelt prayer of thanks and then resuming our familiar lives. I had ten months of surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy. It was a lost year. It was also a kind of holy year of solitude and wrestling with God.

“I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say” (D&C 82:10).

Really? Is there a customer service desk where I could file a complaint?

“The destroying angel shall pass by them” (D&C 89:21).

Could you not read the numbers on my mailbox?

“O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt”
(Matthew 15:28).

Okay, make it go away.

But alas, there seemed to be a common-knowledge escape clause for every promised blessing. *In God’s own time. God has a higher plan for us. God works in mysterious ways.*

Indeed.

Case in point: I could be a Word of Wisdom poster child. All my life, I have eaten fresh produce in the season thereof and meat sparingly. I eat kale, for heaven’s sake. I have avoided tobacco, alcohol, drugs—not to mention trans fats, MSG, Twinkies, Big Macs, and—to my sons’ chagrin—any cheese that can be served through a pump. I even played Relief Society basketball every week for seven years. I got cancer anyway.

I know how to be a cynic: scornful, jaded, suspicious. It’s easy. And it’s satisfying—briefly. After that, cynicism buys me nothing. That bank account is empty. But I have learned that cynicism costs me a lot. It costs me an orientation of hope and trust in the goodness of this world and of my sense of friendship with life. Cynicism may be warranted, but it is not the stance of the people I admire most.

People like Amy, my cancer rehab swim instructor. My class met at a modern day Pool of Bethesda, where the halt and the maim gathered to try to heal themselves. Bill had a giant scar over his heart. Helen had one breast. I was still bald and had a chemotherapy port visible above my swimsuit. We were not exactly the varsity. But in life belts, even the halt and the maim can float. With Amy’s generous encouragement, we kicked our way toward some kind of elusive health. Amy knew all about it. She had cancer, too, although I did not know it until the time she told us that it was her 53rd birthday, a day that she had never expected to see. Week after week, Amy cheerfully helped me raise my heart rate and my spirits.

Cheer. That's what it was. It is the stance, in some of the people I admire most, toward life, even a life compromised by suffering and heartache. I'm not saying that these people are cheerful all the time. I'm saying that they rally around cheer as often as they can.

This is not a shallow cheer. Shallow cheer is plastering a smile on your face in public so that no one will know you are hurting. Shallow cheer is manic levels of activity in hopes of being too busy to feel what you feel. There is nothing lonelier or more depressing. In fact, when suffering people seem too cheerful for the circumstances, I sometimes wonder whether they are delusional, in denial, or medicated. I've been all three, and I know that sometimes whatever it takes to get through a traumatic experience is *what it takes*, and I make no apologies. But shallow cheer can be hard work and requires vast energy to maintain.

Deep cheer can be hard work, too, but in a less stressful way. Its root is authenticity, a full awareness of life's limitations and of our own. Deep cheer is a turning away from desperate, one-sided bargaining with God for our heart's desires. Deep cheer is not contingent on getting the outcomes we long for. This kind of cheer is the hard-won stance of those people who move forward after life's losses with all the grace they can muster. They accept that God does not always provide for us what we want, and they still find him relevant.

Job asks, "What is man, that thou shouldest . . . set thine heart upon him?" (Job 7:17). Enoch asks, "How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?" (Moses 7:29). We teach that a holy and eternal God has set his heart upon us, that he created us and chooses to love us and that he weeps—not over our sins or our disobedience—but over our suffering.¹ This god is not a genie in a bottle or a fairy godmother who magically appears, wand poised.

But why bother worshiping a god who does not deliver us from evil or grant us our heart's most worthy desires?² It's a fair question. In my experience, sometimes we dodge the bullet, sometimes it grazes us, and sometimes it's a direct hit. However, nobody worships a genie or a fairy godmother. They are not invested in us

beyond our three wishes or after the clock strikes midnight. They have not made themselves vulnerable to our inevitable suffering. They have not set their hearts upon us. To me, a weeping god is the only god worthy of worship, the only God who can credibly say, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:27), or “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Faith in this loving, caring God who has set his heart upon us is a powerful source of deep cheer. However, sometimes even that is not enough. One of my favorite hymns, “Where Can I Turn for Peace?” examines this abyss of human suffering. Emma Lou Thayne, the author of the text, describes its inspiration:

[I was] trying to deal with the frightening illness of our oldest daughter, then a freshman in college.

In 1970, treatments of manic depression/bipolar disease and eating disorders were, by today’s standards, rudimentary. More than bewildered by our usually happy nineteen-year-old daughter’s self-destructive behavior, we stumbled into the bleakest time we had known in our family. . . . [T]he three years of her battle for healing were a blur of upheaval in our home.²

In this miserable context, Emma Lou Thayne wrote:

Where can I turn for peace? Where is my solace
When other sources cease to make me whole?
When with a wounded heart, anger, or malice,
I draw myself apart, searching my soul?³

These are the direct hits, the private Gethsemanes, situations which might cause any of us to beg, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39). They occur in every life. They can leave us scarred or bitter or wiser or more compassionate. I believe we have some choice in the matter.

I believe, also, that it can be difficult for us to know whether the direct hits in our lives are the end of the world or the beginning of a new one.

[According to an old Sufi tale, there was once] a wealthy farmer, Amad, whose prized Arabian stallion ran away. His neighbor

came to him and said, "Amad, how terrible! You have lost your best horse."

Amad replied, "Maybe."

The following day, the horse returned, bringing two mares along. Now his neighbor said, "Amad, how wonderful! Now you have three horses instead of one. Perhaps you will have colts, soon, too."

Amad replied, "Maybe."

The following day, Amad's son jumped on the back of one of the mares and rode it around the farm. Before long a big wind came along and frightened the steed. It reared back and threw the boy to the ground, and he broke his arm. Now the neighbor said, "Amad, how terrible. Your only son has broken his arm. How will he help you to gather the crops? This is truly a catastrophe."

Amad replied, "Maybe."

The next day, the army rode through the countryside, looking for conscripts for their next battle. They came to Amad's farm, having heard that he had a young son whom they could spirit away. But when they saw the son's broken arm, they left him behind to seek someone else who was more fit. Now Amad's neighbor was beside himself with excitement at his friend's good fortune. Amad's measured reply was still, "Maybe."⁴

Although I am less cautious than Amad about celebrating apparently good news, I admire his modesty and patience in suspending judgment. The trick is to recognize that good times come and go, but so do bad times. I take heart in the old adage that "everything will be all right in the end. If it's not all right, then it's not yet the end."

For each of us, sometimes things are most definitely not all right. However, we believe that any true end is yet a long way off, far beyond this world. In the meantime, I want to be open to the possibility of deep cheer. I find inspiration in the kindness and

generosity of those around me. In 2002, Fred Rogers of the PBS children's program *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* spoke at Dartmouth College and said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"⁵

Who are the helpers? One is my grocery store pharmacist who, on a Sunday afternoon, called me when I was in the hospital just to check on me and offer encouragement. Another helper was a flight attendant with a short blond ponytail who noticed me wearing a ski cap in July and said quietly, "I lost my hair two years ago." Then there was my neighbor, who offered to bring dinner to my family when I had treatment on December 26th. When I protested that it was a busy season, she said, "Look, Christmas is really low-stress for Jews. Let me do this for you." Any of these people might be considered presumptuous, but for me, their timely outpouring of support was a different and welcome kind of direct hit.

This I know. It rains on the just and on the unjust. I do not attribute my cancer to either a punishment or a test from God. I would be hard pressed to worship such a God. Fear? Oh, yes. Resent? Certainly. But worship? Only under duress. But the God I worship is known by different works: creating, loving, and sometimes weeping. This is not a God I need fear or resent—just one I am drawn to seek. Even in hard times. Especially in hard times. Because this is a God of deep cheer, and deep cheer is the only life stance I know that offers comfort and hope, that can suture our broken hearts and confer wholeness on our shattered spirits. And I don't say this lightly, but that is better, even, than hair.

Notes

1. Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The d dGod Who Weeps* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak Publishing, 2012).

2. Emma Lou Warner Thayne, *The Place of Knowing* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011) 149–50.

3. *Hymns* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), 129.

4. Susan Golant and Mitch Golant, *Kindergarten: It Isn't What It Used to Be* (Lincolnwood, Ill.: Lowell House, 1990), 73.

5. Kirstin K. H. Campbell, "Kirsten's Adventures in Wonderland: Forward and Back through the Looking-Glass," http://www.exponentii.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Exponent-II-Magazine_Q4-2013_compression.CV01_2.pdf (accessed February 22, 2014).

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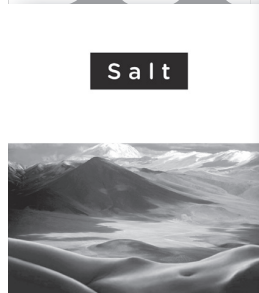
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RONALD WILCOX {iamron2@verizon.net} was born in Holladay, Utah, in 1934. Educated at Brigham Young University, he later received a Masters Degree of Arts from Baylor University, where he studied experimental drama with theatrical innovator Paul Baker. He played the lead role in Thomas Wolfe's *Of Time and the River*. This ground-breaking, mixed-media rendition of the novel became the premiere production of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Dallas Theater Center. As a resident artist in the Professional Repertory Company for twenty-three years, Ron appeared in over sixty plays. Four of his own plays were produced in Dallas. He designed and directed the premiere of his multi-media poetic drama, *The Tragedy of Thomas Andros*. He has published a novel, *The Rig*. He has contributed to *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought* since 1967. His latest poetic narrative, *Mormon Epic*, tells the story of Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel. At eighty years of age he continues to write lyric poetry.

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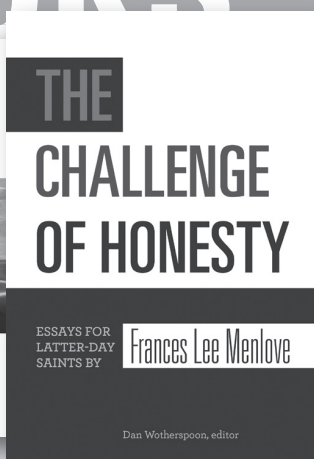
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