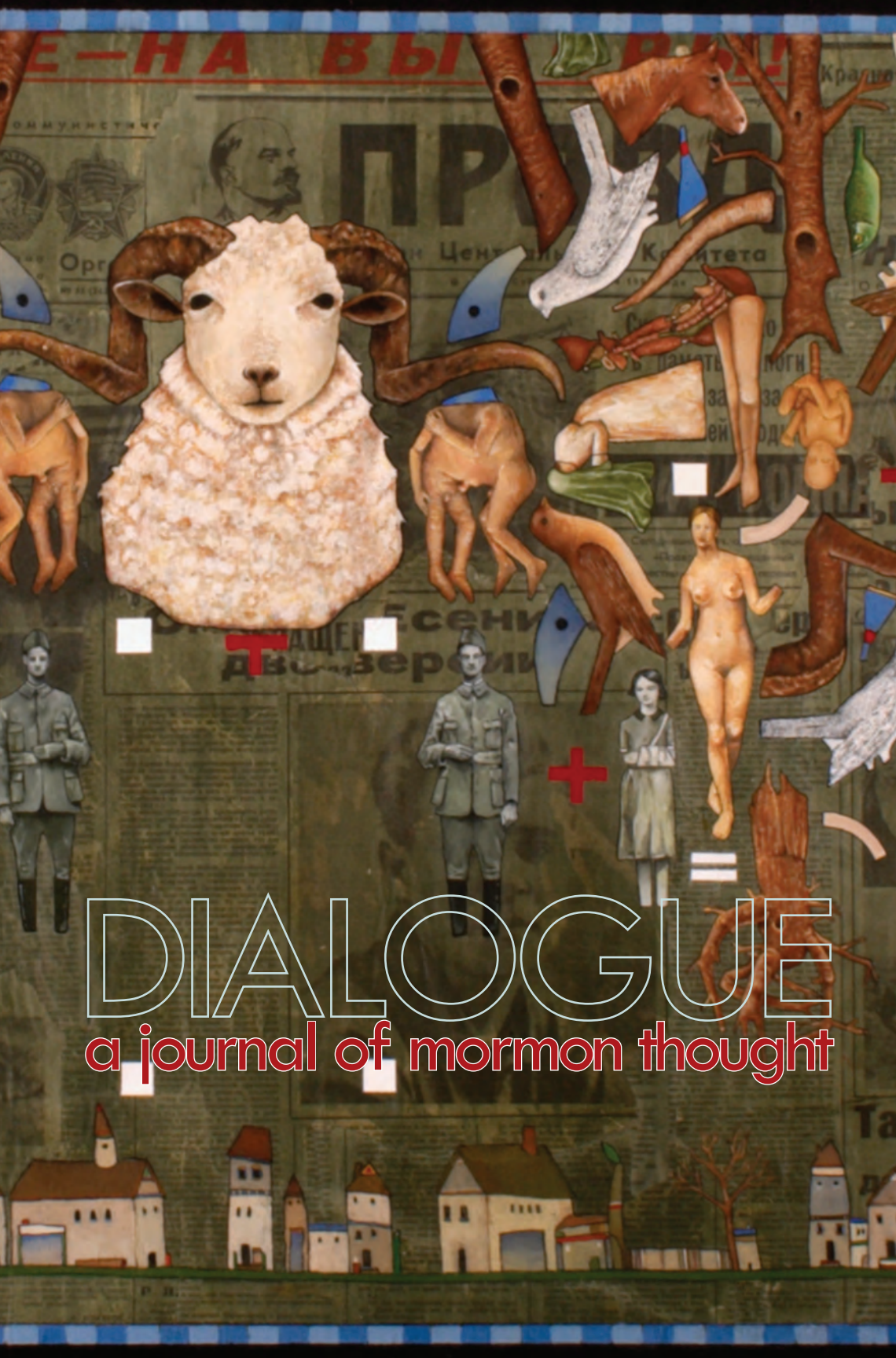

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

On the Cover: David Ruhlman,
The earth is a secret knot (black birds/November 7, 1937),
2010, gouache/mixed media on wood panel, 48" x 24"

DIALOGUE
a journal of mormon thought

is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.

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Reading Scripture

I was pleased to read the articles on the King James Bible by Grant Hardy and Ronan James Head in the Summer 2012 issue of *Dialogue*. This is a subject that has long interested me as a missionary, as textual scholar, as someone engaged in interfaith work, and as a teacher (of gospel doctrine, Institute and Seminary classes, and currently of courses at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley). I especially appreciate Grant Hardy's balanced approach and the broad and deep scholarship that informs his discussion. I have praised elsewhere his brilliant scholarship on the Book of Mormon,[1] and was pleased to see it on display here as well.

If the first object of studying the scriptures is to understand what they say, then access to understanding has to take priority over other considerations. That is, revelation comes to our hearts *and* our minds and when we do not know what a scripture means or even if we have only a vague comprehension of its meaning, its full cognitive, emotional and spiritual import are not accessible to us. We might feel good about reading or speaking the words, but without knowing their meaning, without specific connotative and denotative connection to the intent of the writers of scripture, we might as well be babbling—which, I'm afraid, is what sometimes happens in our classes and pulpit presentations.

As someone who has taught Shakespeare, Milton and Chaucer, I am keenly aware of how much distance there is between Middle, Elizabethan and Jacobean English and the English we speak today. Since the English used by King James's translators was archaic even at the time they produced their Bible and since, as Hardy points out, their syntax was much more complicated than ours, the KJV is often impenetrable to modern readers. As a teacher of literature, I love the rhetorical beauty and rhythmic majesty of the King James Bible and am delighted when I find it echoed in other documents down the ages (as for example in Lincoln's memorable words about the Mississippi, "the Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea"), but even with three degrees in English, I often find myself unable to grasp the import of what is being said, unable to untangle the full meaning of particular scriptures.

I appreciate Hardy's suggestion that we read more modern translations along with the KJV, although I suspect that most Mormon readers will find that one step too complicated (or assumed forbidden!). My late wife and I often read the scriptures with one of us using the KJV and the other using the NIV or the NEB (Hardy's REB) and commenting on the difference. We also found the NIV Study Bible helpful as we did the extensive notes and verse-by-verse explanations and explications in the Zondervan *NIV Commentary*.

The extent to which Latter-day Saints sometimes slavishly cling to the KJV was dramatically illustrated to me several years ago when I was teaching gospel doctrine class in the San Lorenzo Valley Ward (Santa Cruz

Stake). On one Sunday, in order to help the class understand a particularly dense passage from one of Paul's letters, I had three members of the class read the passage, respectively, from the KJV, the NIV, and the NEB. Afterward, a member of the bishopric informed me that I was forbidden from ever using any translation but the KJV. To emphasize the seriousness of his instruction, he said, "And Brother Rees, if you ever use another translation, consider yourself released on the spot."

Having taught gospel doctrine class for over thirty-five of my, by then, sixty years in the Church (as well as Institute, Seminary and priesthood classes), I was flabbergasted by his comments. I tried to explain that I always used the KJV but found it helpful at times to use other translations as supplementary sources, but he was adamant and intractable, even after I wrote him a long letter full of examples showing general authorities (both in general conference and in the Ensign), Mormon scholars, Mormon journals, and prominent LDS websites using the NIV.

Ultimately, this brother was not persuaded and still forbade me from using any translation but the KJV. Therefore, I appealed to the bishop. I told him that if he insisted on my doing so, I could conform to his counselor's dictate (which is what it was), but that I considered it a stupid ("given to unintelligent decisions or acts") request because it ran counter to the very idea of what Sunday school was for. He agreed with me and I continued teaching as before.

While I find some of Ronan Head's arguments in favor of keeping the KJV persuasive, ultimately (and I hope sooner rather than later), I believe the Church will have to change its position, if for no other reasons than those Hardy states—the edification of members, the success of missionary work, and unity with other believers. My guess is that a study of members' Bible study would reveal both a reduction in actual reading time and a diminishment in understanding what is read. If one of the objects of our scripture study is to find the "precious" truths contained therein, we must remember that "plainness" (or understanding) is a necessary prelude. If, as Hardy states, "Decade by decade, the language of the 1611 KJV is becoming more foreign, artificial, and opaque to young people [and, I would add, *older people!*] and potential converts," then the Church is facing a choice of some significance—moving toward a text that people can understand and therefore will be more inclined to read, or sticking with a text that they might read but will not understand.

I endorse Hardy's recommendation that the Church adopt a modern translation, preferably the NRSV, for the reasons he articulates. When I baptized my bright, beautiful granddaughter two weeks ago, I gave her the LDS standard works with her name embossed on the covers. She is a very sophisticated reader at her tender age, but I couldn't help wishing as I handed the scriptures to her, that I was giving her a more readable, un-

derstandable text, one that would be more accessible to her heart and mind.

Hugh Nibley translated the Greek logos in John 1:1 to read, "In the beginning was the dialogue, and the dialogue was with God, and the dialogue was God," suggesting that logos (normally understood as Christ) is ultimately associated with a dialogue with God. That dialogue cannot take place without our understanding the Word of God itself. The writers of Jewish Midrash saw God himself as wrestling with scripture: "The Talmud says that God himself studies the Bible every day. It says God is sitting in the *bet midrash,* the study house, wearing a round black cap and holding an open Bible, arguing and wrestling his own text right along with learned rabbis throughout the ages."[2] Our dialogue with God and with one another can only happen if we too read from an open bible.

Robert A. Rees
Mill Valley, California

Notes

1. See my review-essay, "The Figure in the Carpet: Grant Hardy's Reading of the Book of Mormon," *The John Whitmer Historical Associa*tion *Journal* 31:2 (Fall–Winter 2011), 132–143.

2. Judith M. Kunst, *The Burning Word: A Christian Encounter with Jewish Midrash* (Brewester, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2006), 4.

Formulas and Facts: A Response to John Gee

Andrew W. Cook[1]

The Story Continues

In winter 2010, Chris Smith and I published an article in *Dialogue* demonstrating that no more than ~56 cm of papyrus can be missing from the interior of the scroll of Hôr—the papyrus Joseph Smith identified as the Book of Abraham.[2] John Gee has responded by claiming that our method is "anything but accurate" and that it "glaringly underestimates the length of the scroll."[3] He states that "Two different formulas have been published for estimating the original length of a scroll," then attempts to show that "Hoffmann's formula approximates the actual length of the papyrus," whereas "Cook and Smith's formula predicts a highly inaccurate length." The fact is, the two formulas are completely equivalent. They are both exact expressions of an Archimedean spiral and they yield precisely the same results, if correctly applied.

A Tragedy of Errors

Gee has confused differences in *notation* and *convention* with differences in the formula itself. Hoffmann's *expression* for the spiral formula is: $Z=(E^2-6.25)/(2S)-E+S/2$, where Z is the length of the missing interior section of a spiral, E is the length of the innermost extant winding and S is the average difference in length between successive windings.[4] We *expressed* the spiral formula as: $L=(W^2-2.5^2)/(4\pi T)$, where $T=S/(2\pi)$, W=E and L=Z+E–S/2. (Our centered convention for the winding numbers and definition of where the missing section begins removed the factor of –E+S/2 from the right-hand side.) In other words, Hoffmann's Z, E and S variables are freely interchangeable with Cook/Smith's L, W and T variables, using the relations: Z=L–E+S/2, E=W and $S=2\pi T$.

Plugging these relations into Hoffmann's equation converts it to the Cook/Smith format. Likewise, the Cook/Smith equation is readily transformed into Hoffmann's format by straightforward substitution. Properly applied, the "Hoffmann formula" and the "Cook/Smith formula" give *identical* predictions for the missing length because they are mathematically equivalent.

How then, did Gee manage to obtain such wildly different results from the two equivalent expressions for the same spiral formula? It's hard to say for certain, since he doesn't report any winding measurements or other basic information necessary to check his work. However, his comments and results strongly suggest that, in applying the "Cook/Smith Formula," he used the wrong T parameter appearing in the denominator of equation (3) in our 2010 paper. We called this parameter "effective thickness," since it represents the average increase in *radius* of the (wound up) scroll with each 360 degree wrap of papyrus. It plays the same role as Hoffmann's S factor, which represents the average increase in *circumference* of the scroll with each 360 degree wrap. When the scroll is unrolled, circumference becomes *winding length*. Just as the radius of a circle can be computed from its circumference, so too can effective thickness (T) be computed from winding length (S). The T parameter derives from winding lengths and equation (4) in our paper is another way of saying $T=S/(2\pi)$. It appears that Gee has ignored this essential fact, since he describes his methodology as follows, "I applied each of the mathematical formulas, using the assumptions made by the authors of the formulas concerning papyrus thickness, air-gap size, and size of smallest interior winding." Neither papyrus thickness nor air-gap size has anything to do with the equations in our paper and we made no assumptions concerning them. As discussed below, it seems that Gee has erroneously applied the T value we reported for the Hôr scroll to ROM 910.85.236.1-.13, a 332–330 BC Book of the Dead for a man named Amenemhet.[5]

Some Puzzles from the John Gee Paper

The only quantitative result in Gee's paper is a plot of the length of Papyrus ROM 910.85.236.1-.13 vs. winding number. It contains a blue curve, a purple curve and a green curve. The green curve is labeled "Cook/Smith Formula" as though it had

something to do with the formula in our paper. The purple and blue curves, respectively labeled "Hoffmann Formula" and "Actual Length," lie well above the green curve. Obviously, if the green (Cook/Smith) and purple (Hoffmann) curves had been correctly plotted, they should have lain directly on top of each other. The only way to generate a difference between the green and purple curves is to feed them different inputs; e.g., set $T>S/(2\pi)$ for the green curve, where S was used for the purple curve. In an effort to justify the altered inputs for the green curve, Gee wrongly declares that "Cook and Smith use the thickness of the papyri (which they did not measure but only estimated) as an indication of the change in diameter to calculate the difference between the lengths of successive windings in the scroll." On the contrary, we did not use or estimate the material thickness of the papyri in any manner in our calculations. We plainly stated that physical thickness cannot be used to estimate missing length due to the many additional unknowns involved, such as Gee's "air-gap size." Gee has stated our method exactly backwards; we did not use thickness to calculate winding differences, rather we used the winding differences to calculate T (essentially unrelated to the *physical thickness,* except that it must be greater). The T factor is purely a *derived parameter of convenience*; i.e., T can be *entirely removed* from the spiral formula by simply combining equations (3) and (4) in our paper. The spiral formula (be it Hoffmann's expression or Cook/Smith's expression) should receive winding lengths as inputs and nothing else.

Undeterred by the actual content of our paper, Gee proceeds to contrast the blundering Cook/Smith with the wise and steady Hoffmann; "Hoffmann—knowing that most papyri are already mounted, thus rendering it impossible to measure the thickness—uses the average difference between successive windings for the same purpose." Had Gee made a genuine effort to understand our methodology, he might have realized that we applied the very same "average difference" technique as Hoffmann; i.e., we derived the effective thickness (expressed as T or S) from the windings (W), not the windings from the thickness, as he alleges. We explicitly stated, "Our primary task therefore, is to determine the effective thickness of the papyrus from the winding lengths."

And we expressed this statement mathematically in equation (4) of our paper, which Gee disregarded.

The green (Cook/Smith) curve is not only shifted downward with respect to the other curves but it is also much smoother than the purple (Hoffmann) curve. This may be a result of Gee using multiple (local) values of S in the "Hoffmann Formula" (combined with inaccurate winding measurements) but only a single (global) value of S (or T) in the "Cook/Smith Formula." Consistency would, of course, have required that either the local or global method be used for both formulas. However, if the green curve had received the same "erratic" inputs as the purple curve then it would have occasionally crossed the blue (Actual Length) line. This might have given some readers the impression that the "Cook/Smith formula" could occasionally produce the right answer. It appears that Gee could not tolerate such an outcome, since the green curve exhibits a systematic shift in both the *magnitude* and *variance* of the input data, thus keeping it comfortably below the blue curve for all winding numbers. To bolster this satisfying result, Gee's editor assures us that "John Gee has tackled this relative question with objectivity and precision."

New Light on the Amenemhet Papyrus

With the gracious assistance of Janet Cowan, the ROM's paper conservator, and Irmtraut Munro, an Egyptologist at the University of Bonn, I obtained a complete set of winding measurements for Papyrus ROM 910.85.236.1-.13.[6] After performing basic consistency checks and cross validations against the measurements of Cowan and Munro, I evaluated Gee's calculations by applying each version of the spiral formula to the first 73 (contiguous) windings of the scroll. The 1st (innermost) winding measures 3.40 cm and the 73rd winding measures 11.30 cm; hence, the S factor for this scroll is (11.30–3.40)/(73-1)=0.11 cm (T=0.0175 cm).[7] Using this S factor, I plugged each winding length into the "Hoffmann Formula" and the "Cook/Smith Formula" and computed the length of the scroll at each winding number. (This appears to be what Gee did in evaluating the "Cook/Smith Formula," except that here I've used the correct S factor.) The results are seen in Figure 2, which should be compared to the plot in Gee's paper.

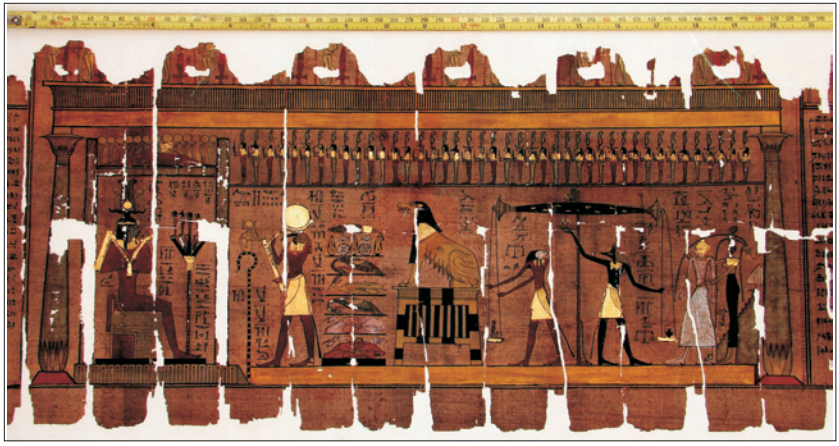

Figure 1. *Windings 46–51 (papyrus section 910.85.236.10) of the Amenemhet Book of the Dead. As in Facsimile 3 in the Book of Abraham, the deceased is accompanied by Maat and Anubis into the Hall of Two Truths where his deeds are judged before the throne of Osiris. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, © ROM.*

Given the same inputs, the two versions of the spiral formula predict exactly the same papyrus length, regardless of location (winding number). Properly applied, the spiral formula gives excellent predictions for the length of this scroll because the windings exhibit a nearly *linear* progression; i.e., they increase by an almost constant amount from one winding to the next.[8] Archimedean spirals possess this very same property; in fact, a linear winding progression *defines* an Archimedean spiral. Hoffmann provides a nice example of linear winding progression in Figure 3 of his paper, wherein he plots the windings of Papyrus Spiegelberg as vertical bars and draws a straight line through their end points. The slope of Hoffmann's line sets the S factor (average change in length between windings) for P. Spiegelberg to 0.44 cm.

For the Hôr scroll, we also reported an S factor of 0.44 cm.[9] This is four times larger than the S factor of the Amenemhet scroll, which further indicates that, in evaluating the "Cook/Smith Formula," Gee misapplied the Hôr scroll's S factor to the

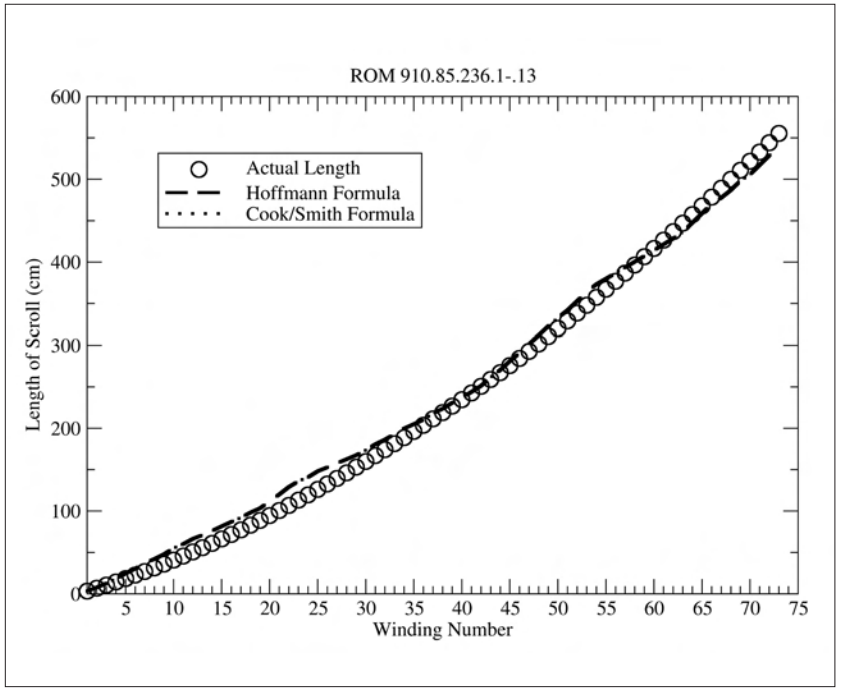

Figure 2. *Comparison of actual scroll length to predicted scroll length using the two versions of the spiral formula. The dashed and dotted lines lie on top of one another. The oscillations in the dashed and dotted lines are due to uncertainty in the winding measurements.*

Amenemhet scroll. Gee notes that "Cook and Smith's formula also improves with more data, ranging from about a quarter of the correct length to about a third of the correct length." The factor-of-four difference in S between the two scrolls appears to account for Gee's "quarter of the correct length" at larger winding numbers. Furthermore, if S is computed locally for the Amenemhet papyrus, it increases to about 0.147 cm at the core of the scroll, or about a third of the Hôr scroll's S factor. This would account for Gee's "third of the correct length" at lower winding numbers. Interestingly, had Gee been consistent (albeit wrong) and applied P. Spiegelberg's S factor to the Amenemhet scroll, as his input for the Hoffmann formula, his purple and green curves would have overlain each other.

Figure 3. *Top half of papyrus ROM 910.85.236.1-.13 as it appeared during the unrolling process. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, ©ROM.*

Just the Facts

Gee's attempt to cast doubt on the spiral formula is a red herring. The formula is exact for Archimedean spirals and such spirals are excellent models of papyrus scrolls.[10] We needn't fear that there may be "some errors in it or in the assumptions upon which it is based." Fundamentally, a scroll's length is simply the sum of its windings. Another way of determining a scroll's original length, which involves less math, is to plot the lengths of the extant windings and fit a straight line to the results. The missing windings will reliably lie along the straight line. The spiral formula is just a convenient way of adding up all the missing windings. What really matters is that the extant windings be accurately measured.

The heart of our 2010 paper was not the spiral formula but rather the autocorrelation method for more accurate and reliable determination of the winding lengths. The method returns noninteger winding numbers, from which we derived the T parameter for the extant sections of the Hôr scroll. To simplify our results and facilitate comparisons, I have converted our winding numbers to integers by using the T value we found from the autocorrelation analysis. Numbering from the beginning (outside) of the papyrus inward (right to left), the extant windings of the Hôr scroll are (in centimeters): W_1=10.64, W_2=10.21, W_3=9.77, W_4=[9.32], W_5=8.86, W_6=8.39 & W_7=7.91.[11] Continuing this progression for the missing windings yields: W_8=[7.43], W_9=[6.95], W_{10}=[6.47], W_{11}=[5.99], W_{12}=[5.51], W_{13}=[5.03], W_{14}=[4.55], W_{15}=[4.07], W_{16}=[3.59], W_{17}=[3.11], W_{18}=[2.63] & W_{19}=[2.15]. The length of missing papyrus can be determined by manually adding up these numbers. This simpler procedure requires neither formulas nor faith, only "objectivity and precision."

Notes

1. I am grateful to Chris Smith for his valuable insights and helpful comments on the various drafts of this paper.

2. Andrew W. Cook and Christopher C. Smith, "The Original Length of the Scroll of Hôr," *Dialogue: AMormon Thought* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 1–42. For a comprehensive treatment of all the Joseph Smith Papyri, see Christopher C. Smith, "That Which Is Lost: Assessing the State of Preservation of the Joseph Smith Papyri," *The John Whitmer His-*

torical Association Journal 31, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 69–83. For a full translation of the Joseph Smith Papyri, see Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition*, (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2012).

3. John Gee, "Formulas and Faith," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 1 (2012): 60–65. See also John Gee, "Book of Abraham, I Presume," presentation delivered at the FAIR conference on Aug. 3, 2012, http://www.fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2012-fair-conference/2012-book-of-abraham-i-presume.

4. Friedhelm Hoffmann, "Die Länge Des P. Spiegelberg," in *Acta Demotica: Acts of Fifth International Conference for Demotists* (Pisa, Italy: Giardini Editori e Stampatori, 1994), 145–155.

5. Gee refers to this papyrus as ROM 978x43.1; however, the Royal Ontario Museum no longer considers this accession number to be correct. It was assigned in 1978 but the museum has since found the original number to be 910.85.236.1-.13. The Museum has requested that this original number be used in correspondence and publications referring to this scroll.

6. These data are available for download from the *Dialogue* website.

7. This is an unusually small value for Ptolemaic papyrus. When I presented these results to Irmtraut Munro, she replied, "Indeed the papyrus was the thinnest material I have ever seen, so that in some cases two sheets stuck together."

8. The slight over prediction at small winding numbers is due to the fact that the inner windings are a little looser than the outer windings, as determined by direct measurements.

9. A recent correction suggests the S factor for the Hôr scroll should be closer to 0.48 cm. Page 29 of our *Dialogue* (2010) paper contains an error, which unfortunately carried through some of the arithmetic. The "2.221" should be "1.665" leading to T=0.0859 cm, rather than T=0.0649 cm. Averaging the three reliable estimates yields T=0.0771 cm, rather than T=0.0701 cm. This changes the estimate of the missing papyrus length from 56 cm to 51 cm.

10. In Hartmut Stegemann's study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, he found that, ". . .if the material involved is 0.8 mm papyrus [this refers to effective thickness (T) not physical thickness], the increase or decrease [from one winding to the next] is always about 5 mm. One can measure this arithmetic progression with exactitude in all of the larger Qumran scrolls." Hartmut Stegemann, "Methods for the Reconstruction of Scrolls from Scattered Fragments," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin*,

edited by Lawrence H. Schiffman, JSOT/ASOR MONOGRAPH SERIES (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 194–197.

11. Some of winding 4 falls in the gap between pJS 1.2 and 1.3; nevertheless, its length can be interpolated along with the other windings. Based on the scatter in T, each of these winding lengths should be accurate to plus or minus half a millimeter.

Editor's Introduction

Kristine Haglund

The many recent conferences on Mormonism, or sessions at larger conferences that deal with Mormon issues, show that Mormonism has become one of the hotter topics in the academy today—in part because Mormonism is such a useful lens for looking at a variety of interesting issues, from literature and film studies to history to cultural studies. While many of the papers presented at these conferences are eventually expanded and refined and published in journals, others never make it into print. Rather than let them languish on the authors' hard drives, we decided to publish a Conference Report, which includes many papers just as they were presented. They may be a little rough, but that's part of their interest: we see here the first drafts of the sort of academic work that will change how we think about Mormonism in decades to come.

Mormon Blogs, Mormon Studies, and the Mormon Mind

Patrick Q. Mason

Note: *Earlier versions of this essay were delivered at the American Society of Church History Winter Meeting, held in Chicago in January 2012; and the Mormons and the Internet conference at Utah Valley University in March 2012.*

In 1971, African-American artist Gil Scott-Heron released a powerful political anthem called "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Forty years later, in Tahrir Square and Occupy Wall Street, the revolution was not only televised, but also blogged, Facebooked, YouTubed, and tweeted. The phenomenon of Mormon-authored, Mormon-themed blogs—collectively known as the "bloggernacle"—may not properly constitute a revolution in Mormonism, but it has undoubtedly changed both the cultural landscape and the broader conversation both within and about Mormonism. Rather than focusing on the entire digital landscape of the bloggernacle and its meaning and impact, here I will narrow my focus to consider some of the intersections of Mormon blogs with the emergent academic field of Mormon studies, and then offer some reflections on what we might call the "Mormon mind" in the context of modern secularity. Even more specifically, this study con-

*The twelfth annual UVU Mormon Studies Conference, centered on the theme of "Mormonism and the Internet," was held March 29–30, 2012, at the Utah Valley University campus in Orem.

centrates on the experiences of current graduate students who will help constitute the next generation of Mormon academics. By way of terminology, I will refer interchangeably to the "bloggernacle" and "the blogs," keeping in mind that my subject of study is limited to Mormon-themed, Mormon-authored blogs, especially those that aim to deliver intellectual content rather than (or often in addition to) personal or devotional reflections.

My observations are based on an online survey and questionnaire I conducted in late November and early December 2011. The survey was posted on four major Mormon blogs—*By Common Consent*, *Faith Promoting Rumor*, *Juvenile Instructor*, and *Times and Seasons*—and was linked to from other blogs and Internet sites. The questionnaire specifically requested the participation of "current graduate students (full or part-time) who are also members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or otherwise interested in the field of Mormon studies."[1] I did not define "Mormon studies," nor try to independently verify the graduate student status of the respondents. My sample is neither random nor representative—I simply collected anonymous responses from anyone who volunteered. In all, I received 113 responses, with male respondents outnumbering females more than three to one (86 to 27). As one would expect for a survey of graduate students, the vast majority fell in their late 20s and early 30s, though there was a wide range of ages included in the sample.

When asked to list the blogs they regularly read, the 113 respondents provided 86 distinct answers, demonstrating the astonishing breadth in the world of Mormon blogging, even excluding personal and devotional blogs. This wide variety also suggests a fractured online community, as 68 of the 86 blogs were mentioned by five respondents or less. Only five blogs received more than twenty total mentions; all of them are group blogs: *Faith Promoting Rumor* was listed by 32 of 113 respondents (28%), *Juvenile Instructor* by 38 (34%), *Feminist Mormon Housewives* by 41 (36%), *Times and Seasons* by 66 (58%), and *By Common Consent* by 94 (83%).[2] I should underscore that my sample consisted of an unrepresentative, self-selecting group of graduate students, so we cannot make any significant inferences about the broader Mormon blogging community or readership from these statistics. For instance, the substance and tone of *Faith Promoting Rumor* and *Ju-*

venile Instructor would generally be more attractive to graduate students (especially those in the humanities) than to a broader reading public. On the other hand, the readership of the three blogs receiving the most votes—*By Common Consent*, *Times and Seasons*, and *Feminist Mormon Housewives*—probably cuts across the board, due to their diversified content and popular authors. Although most blogs keep statistics close to the vest, key bloggers at *By Common Consent* told me that in 2011 they had over two million visitors, requiring a vastly broader viewership than merely the 94 respondents who listed it in my survey.

Beyond simply asking what people were reading, I included a series of questions about what that reading meant to them. When asked what their main reasons were for participating on the blogs, whether as active writers, commenters, or more passive readers, most respondents pointed to the blogs as a space that filled otherwise unfulfilled needs, usually in the form of a community where they could explore the relationship between their spiritual and intellectual selves. Often feeling isolated because of their intellectual orientation within a formal congregational structure and culture that values consensus and surety over critique and questioning, most of the respondents said that the blogs acted as a lifeline allowing them to bridge the life of the mind and the spirit and thus stay integrally connected to Mormonism within an intellectual framework. As one respondent wrote, the blogs serve as "something of a safety valve to keep my sanity; to keep me from being too cynical."[3] Another reflected that the blogs "have shown me a place where the intellectual and devotional realms can intersect. . . . I continue to read these blogs so that I can see what this sort of intersection looks like in practice, and hopefully bring it into my own practice." A related response was that the blogs allowed their readers, most of whom are Latter-day Saints, to join in a community of individuals with similar attitudes, interests, and outlooks—a process which many reported was difficult to do in most geographically defined LDS wards with a generally conservative membership. One respondent said that he specifically approached the blogs "looking for like-minded Latter-day Saints"; another noted that it was "helpful to have an outlet where I can find others with similar views." Readers used various terms to describe the qualities of the community they were seeking for: "in-

tellectual," "progressive," "interesting," "liberal," "challenging," "meaningful," or "discussing the 'hard' questions." What seems to emerge from this conglomerate profile is the desire for a community within a community, predicated on a shared sense that the institutional Church is not fulfilling all the spiritual or intellectual needs of at least this segment of its membership.

The blogs represent, and to some degree validate and perpetuate, heterogeneity within the Mormon community. One respondent wrote that they "thicken the narratives of what it means to be an active committed member of the LDS Church"; another said that they "have opened up a space for alternative kinds of Mormon study, faith, and practice." The possible downside of this, as some writers pointed out, is balkanization within a religious community that prizes unity. One respondent warned that the blogs create "micro-communities that self-select, and then self-reinforce"; another suspected that they "have a polarizing impact . . . because now everyone can find support for his or her ideas about religion outside the structured organization." Others also expressed concerns about a growing "dichotomy between 'Internet Mormons' and 'chapel Mormons.'" Although some blogs are specifically oriented toward those who have left active membership in the Church, are in the process of doing so, or who are otherwise "on the fence," writers and commenters on the most widely read blogs generally express their fidelity to the institutional Church while embracing the alternative voluntary community mediated on the bloggernacle.

What is the relationship between the blogs and Mormon studies? How are they impacting the training of the next generation of LDS academics, not just in Mormon studies but in all fields? One of the striking (but perhaps not surprising) findings of my survey was that the vast majority of the graduate students reading the blogs are *not* specifically engaged in original research in Mormon studies, nor have they received any formal academic training in the field; this would presumably be even more true for the general blog readership. Of the 88 respondents who listed their degree program, only 16 are in fields that are typical cognates of Mormon studies (American history, religious studies, or theology).[4] Other degree programs ranged from Chinese history to Spanish literature, domestic violence policy to speech language

pathology, atmospheric sciences to civil engineering, and also a number of JDs and MBAs. On the question of whether they had ever formally studied Mormonism in a university setting, many noted that they had taken religion classes at one of the Brigham Young University or LDS Institute of Religion campuses, but they typically discounted that instruction as primarily devotional rather than academic. There was some correlation between those who have at least some Mormon studies training and those currently engaged in original scholarly research, although it was not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence.

When asked about the relationship of their participation on the blogs to their formal graduate studies, in whatever field they were pursuing, one writer bluntly captured the majority response: "It serves as a distraction when I should be studying metallurgy." A number of respondents rather sheepishly admitted that they consciously concealed their participation on the blogs from their faculty advisors. Some noted that this was not just to avoid the image of being distracted from their formal studies, but also to dodge any suspicion that might come upon them in academic circles if their faith commitments were fully revealed. One even said that his faculty advisors had told him to "remain somewhat distant from the bloggernacle" so as not to be tainted or pigeonholed on the job market.

A number of others, however, had just the opposite experience. One respondent noted that "the blogs help me come to articulate Mormon concepts, history and engagement in more secular ways I can [then] explain to my classmates and professors." This use of the blogs to help construct a second-order discourse about Mormonism is particularly intriguing, especially given that the vast majority of the discussion on the blogs is by Mormons and at least implicitly for Mormons. A number of respondents said that conversations on the blogs provide concepts and framing devices that were helpful in their research on non-Mormon topics. For those respondents who are engaged in Mormon studies scholarship, the blogs provide a scholarly community that complements and actively supports their research and writing—"we regularly hit each other up for bibliographical tips, help on primary sources, and sometimes even proofreading." This was particularly important for students in foreign countries who read

the blogs "as an access point to LDS opinion, culture, theology and general lifestyle," and for the handful of non-LDS respondents studying Mormonism who use the blogs to get a better "feel" for distinctive Mormon discourse, to build networks with LDS scholars and interlocutors, and for general fact-checking; one non-LDS respondent remarked that he used the blogs "to make sure I don't make too many boneheaded mistakes."[5]

When asked specifically what effect the blogs had on Mormon studies, most responses ranged from warm to rapturous. In addition to the aforementioned creation of spiritual and intellectual community, a number of respondents were enthusiastic about the bloggernacle's democratizing effect on Mormon studies. Blogs allow for immediate dissemination of ideas as well as for publicizing new work being published in traditional print venues, thus creating a multi-tiered platform for those interested in engaging with Mormon history, ideas, belief, and culture. The blogs also provide a forum for writers to "field test among the masses." As one respondent put it, "the blogs are to research and academia as commercial- and consumer-grade products are to scientific research." The nature of the online community on most blogs forces writers to think beyond a purely academic audience, so they must translate their ideas into readily accessible language. Authors must "be better prepared to share their research with general members," thus helping "[close] the distance between academia and the pews." A number of respondents thought the blogs were especially important as an independent and thus safe space for exploring ideas not generally discussed in Church meetings or in correlated and devotional church publications. In this way, the bloggernacle has helped secure the position of Mormon studies "firmly outside the control of Church leaders" and made it more difficult for the institutional Church "to control and clamp down on dissenting voices." All of this creates a space where "grassroots scholarship" can thrive and "a new generation of Mormon scholars" can be trained. Some respondents see the blogs not just as a vehicle and platform for Mormon studies but also as an important text to be studied. Many said that the blogs constitute an important primary source that will be drawn upon by future researchers as a record of "what 'we' thought in 2011."

A vocal minority of respondents was more skeptical, even crit-

ical, about the impact of the blogs on Mormon studies. One avenue for this critique was through a gender lens. A few respondents reported what they saw as an overarching patriarchy in many segments of the bloggernacle, referring to it as "a kind of 'old boys' club.'" One writer said, "I think that it tends to be very male-dominated, and women continue to be not taken seriously, especially when they write from experience rather than from a scholarly perspective." If the unbalanced gender ratio among my survey respondents is at all indicative (76% of respondents were male), it suggests that there are more Mormon men than Mormon women in graduate school, or reading these particular blogs, or both.[6] While each of the major Mormon blogs has outstanding and highly respected women writers, even a cursory scan of daily posts and responses suggests that most of these well-trafficked blogs are disproportionately if not dominantly male. A lopsided gender mix does not necessarily equate with patriarchy, but it is a red flag for further consideration. Of course, women are hardly invisible in the bloggernacle, as a number of widely-read and well-regarded blogs, such as *Feminist Mormon Housewives* and *The Exponent*, are almost exclusively the preserve of women. Some respondents asserted that the blogs have "unquestionably strengthened feminism" among their readers. None remarked that the predominantly female blogs should feature more male writers. A gendered critique of the bloggernacle opens space for future research—a systematic analysis of the gendered nature of participation on the blogs would provide clues to masculine and feminine discourse, performance, and ways of knowing in contemporary Mormonism.[7]

Another complaint was that the blogs diluted, rather than enhanced, the quality of Mormon studies scholarship. One respondent wrote that with a few notable exceptions, "the blogs have turned Mormon Studies into even more of an echo chamber . . . more interested in entertaining readers than in actually dealing with the paramount issues facing Mormon Studies." Other critics wrote that most activity on the blogs qualified as little more than "glorified navel-gazing." Still others lamented the quality of scholarship on the blogs, complaining that the bloggernacle "creates pseudo-scholars"; one dismissed the content on the blogs as "pretty worthless" and "rather superficial." One writer contrast-

ed his own professional field of engineering and observed, "it's too easy for amateurs to become convinced they are experts [in Mormon studies]. . . . I have to wonder if we have too many armchair Mormon experts and not enough trained professionals." In that vein, another respondent argued that the blogs tilt discursive authority toward "younger scholars," even those in the early stages of their education. While this gives the blogs "a dynamic feel," the writer feared it also lent "a sense of immaturity" to the discussion, as "ideas are sometimes aired too early." While many respondents were convinced that the blogs facilitated greater output of Mormon studies scholarship through collaboration, encouragement, and shared ideas, others were not so sure. Acknowledging instances when the blogs have seeded scholarly projects, some worried that all the effort spent by graduate students on the blogs took time and energy away from the rigorous demands of professional-level research and publication. One writer was concerned that the blogs "had the negative (and entirely unintended) effect of reducing the attention paid to other scholarly work" because people "will be satisfied with the research to which [the blogs] link." Indeed, some suggested that the blogs have too much influence, at least among their dedicated readers, in the sense that they become a substitute for published research for many readers and "are becoming an authority of sorts that needs to be somewhat appealed to," even to the point, in one respondent's view, that "if an idea doesn't gain traction amongst the blogs than it might as well have been unthought."

No doubt many of these critiques, from questions about the gendered nature of the blogs to their possible distraction from the time-honored (if somewhat elitist) tradition of high-quality peer-reviewed scholarship, are valid. To some degree, this is all part of a broader conversation about the nature of knowledge and community in the digital age, a conversation that includes but far transcends Mormonism and the Mormon blogs. Some of the challenges of the information revolution for traditional scholarship were recently articulated by Samuel Brown, who as a medical researcher, physician, blogger, and university press-published author personifies the new frontier of research and writing opportunities opening up beyond the professional, full-time academy: "Whose voice will be heard? What standards will regulate access

to the accepted corpus of Mormon [studies]? What is a credential? What do we make of chemists and mathematicians and linguists and attorneys who seek to contribute both in the more traditional and in the more current methods of Mormon [studies]?"[8]

The hierarchical, credential-obsessed world of the academy is still coming to grips with the democratizing, flattening nature of the Internet. But the simple fact is that no single work of published Mormon scholarship—and perhaps not even the composite of all published Mormon scholarship—will ever enjoy over two million visitors in a single year, as *By Common Consent* did in 2011. The bloggernacle, though less than a decade old, has had and will continue to exert significant influence not just on the interior intellectual and spiritual landscapes of its readers but also on the direction and output of the growing field of Mormon studies, many of whose practitioners and apprentices are anxiously engaged in blogging. We have to anticipate that the trend will only accelerate. Each medium of scholarship—the classroom, the periodical, the book, the blog—has its advantages and disadvantages, its strengths and weaknesses. If all these media are here to stay, then Mormon studies will do well to harness their complementarities and, while honestly acknowledging their respective liabilities, also capitalize on their unique contributions in moving the field forward by any and all means available.

A significant question all of this raises is not just what the blogs do for Mormon studies—though that is important—but what it all means for what we might call the Mormon mind. Emerging from most of my survey respondents whose graduate work is not directly related to Mormon studies was a practical notion of separate intellectual spheres. As one noted, "in reality I compartmentalize my interest in Mormon blogs pretty well from my formal graduate studies." Another confessed, "One side effect of blog participation is that I have no desire to do Mormon themed work in my field. I have realized that for my sanity and spiritual well-being my professional life and Mormon life are best kept separate." One respondent acknowledged that participating on the blogs helped her "to be a better writer and aid in being a critical thinker," but otherwise did not contribute substantively to her graduate studies. Another, reflecting on the link between the blogs and his graduate studies, simply stated, "There is no mean-

ingful relationship between the two." For others the wall of separation was not so high and impenetrable, but the relationship between their graduate work and the blogs was essentially unidirectional. As one respondent wrote, "what I study does have implications for what I think about Mormonism. I blog as a way of working out . . . how religious studies, gender studies, critical theory, biblical hermeneutics, etc., affect my understanding of what Mormonism is, was, and can be." Another put it even more directly: "My studies influence what I write on my blogs more than the blogs dictate what I study."

This bifurcation between the respondents' Mormon and non-Mormon intellectual selves, lived out in the blogs and graduate school, respectively, belies the notion often propagated by Brigham Young and others that Mormonism "embraces all truth that is revealed and that is unrevealed, whether religious, political, scientific, or philosophical," and thus approximates a theory of everything.[9] Instead, we can sense a Mormon corollary to historian Mark Noll's famous opening line to his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*: "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Noll proceeded to stick the pin halfway back into the grenade by acknowledging that of course there are plenty of highly intelligent evangelicals, but he claimed that "modern evangelicals have not pursued comprehensive thinking under God or sought a mind shaped to its furthest reaches by Christian perspectives." What he pined for, nearly twenty years ago, was greater "effort to think like a Christian—to think within a specifically Christian framework—across the whole spectrum of modern learning, including economics and political science, literary criticism and imaginative writing, historical inquiry and philosophical studies, linguistics and the history of science, social theory and the arts."[10]

To appropriate Noll's question, what would it mean to think like a Mormon? Certainly, some Mormon bloggers and graduate students have made forays in precisely the direction of considering what a "Mormon mind" would look like, and speculating on its implications for the full range of human thought and endeavor. One survey respondent intriguingly asserted, "My spirituality, and specifically my religiosity, is integral to my theory of psychology and how I approach therapy with my clients. How I view

my field (psychotherapy) is directly impacted by what I read on these blogs." Another respondent affirmed that his participation on the blogs and his graduate work (not in Mormon studies) were "very closely integrated." But this sort of integrated approach proved the rare exception to the rule. If the responses to my questionnaire can be taken as any kind of measuring stick, it must be said that the general sensibility among Mormon graduate students is that religious (and specifically Mormon) ways of knowing and being should be, or at least simply are, more or less sealed off from secular ways of knowing. What hath Mormonism to do with metallurgy? For that matter, what hath a Mormon mind to do with Mormon studies?

One of the hallmark characteristics of the secular modernity borne by the Western Enlightenment is the differentiation of knowledge. To some degree we are the fortunate victims of an explosion of information in recent centuries (and especially the last one). Even more so than in earlier ages, it is simply impossible for any one person to comprehend, let alone master, the sum of all accumulated knowledge. The university was designed to be the collective repository of all knowledge, but even that is no longer feasible in terms of any one institution. Disciplinary specialization has added necessary and productive depth at the cost of unifying breadth. We often admire Newton for his physics but judge his alchemy and occult studies to be quaint if not suspect. Such a judgment is really an articulation of a late modern worldview that makes distinctions between science and superstition (or religion and magic) rather than acknowledging Newton's early modern (or even premodern) notion of the unity of all knowledge.[11]

This unity of knowledge characterizes much of the nineteenth-century Mormon worldview, classically formulated in a September 1830 revelation: "For by the power of my Spirit created I them; yea, all things both spiritual and temporal. . . . Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:31, 34). Nineteenth-century Mormons (and Protestants, and Muslims, and others) could read prophecy as science and history, and vice versa. It was not that they did not recognize diverse ways of knowing and being—certainly they understood that digging an irrigation ditch,

engineering the Salt Lake Temple, and preaching the gospel required different skill sets. They simply would not have recognized a late modern distinction between ditch digging as inherently secular, proselytizing as only spiritual, and building a religious edifice as something of both.

If Mormonism is, as its nineteenth-century proponents and prophets claimed it to be, a totalizing, comprehensive worldview that resists the differentiation of knowledge characteristic of secular Enlightenment modernity, then its adherents, regardless of their chosen professions, might search for ways to integrate in more robust fashion the different sources and ways of knowing that are, for the most part, currently segregated in their minds—and certainly in most segments of the academy. This is more complicated than we might assume at first blush, since secularity is the very air we breathe in the late modern (or postmodern) West. We are all deeply secular, to the degree that we buy into and perpetuate a modern paradigm of the differentiation of religious and other forms of knowledge and authority. To proceed along any other lines is perhaps the most countercultural thing that a modern person can do—hence the existential danger of fundamentalism in late modernity. An exclusively Mormon mind (or a Christian mind, or a Muslim mind) thus stands in inherent conflict with a modern mind. Scriptures that might be invoked to imply a rapprochement—for instance, "the glory of God is intelligence" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:36)—are actually expressions of a premodern unity that by definition stands in contrast to the differentiation that is characteristic of modern ways of knowing.[12]

The most fundamental conclusion that may be drawn from my survey data is that one does not have to choose between being secular and being Mormon. My graduate student respondents demonstrated that they more or less comfortably reside in both epistemic communities every day. This is presumably true of virtually all Mormons, even those not engaged in postgraduate study and pursuing academic careers. Recognizing the cohabitation of the Mormon mind and the secular mind helps confirm what many scholars have postulated in recent years: that even if functional and epistemological secularity in many ways define the modern condition, there are actually multiple—and often con-

tending—ways of being modern. What is needed is not the triumph of the Mormon mind over the secular, but a fuller articulation and understanding of what it means for the two to be integrated. If the blogs resist the temptation to pit the Mormon versus the secular and explore instead what it means for modern Mormons to be both, then perhaps they will have proven to be revolutionary after all.

Notes

1. The survey was called "The impact of blogging on Mormon studies." It was originally posted online on November 29, 2011. The survey asked participants to respond to twelve questions in short-answer form, and then to identify themselves by gender, age, and the graduate program they were currently enrolled in. They could include their name and e-mail address for follow-up contact, but were not required to do so, and I guaranteed to preserve all respondents' anonymity in any presentations or publications using the data from the survey. The project received "exempt" status from the Institutional Review Board at Claremont Graduate University.

2. There could be a strong sample bias here, since the blogs that I posted the survey on were the ones that came back with the greatest number of professed readers. I deliberately selected the venues for posting the survey based on what I knew to be the most likely places to attract the highest number of responses.

3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes in this article are compiled from responses to my online survey.

4. This number is necessarily a broad approximation, because people could be engaged in Mormon studies from other fields such as political science, anthropology, or philosophy, or they could be avoiding Mormon studies altogether within religious studies or American history.

5. This has been the experience of my non-LDS teaching assistant and many of the non-LDS students in my Mormon studies courses at Claremont Graduate University. They find reading blogs an invaluable way to go beyond official and scholarly discourse to feel the pulse of contemporary Mormonism. I remind them that the blogs do not represent the entirety of the Latter-day Saint community but agree that they can be helpful in revealing the breadth and depth of current debates within certain segments of Mormonism. For this reason the bloggernacle can be an important resource for students—undergraduate and graduate, LDS and non-LDS—seeking to get oriented to the often-confusing world(s) of Mormonism.

6. It is possible the disproportionately high male response rate simply represents a statistical anomaly.

7. An earlier iteration of this paragraph, as delivered in a conference paper, inspired a blog post on *By Common Consent* specifically taking up the question of patriarchy on the bloggernacle. mmiles, "Mormon Blogging and the Good Ole Boys' Club," *By Common Consent*, February 1, 2012, http://bycommonconsent.com/2012/02/01/mormon-blogging-and-the-good-ole-boys-club/ (last accessed May 30, 2012). The post precipitated a lively debate with 226 responses before being closed five days later.

8. Samuel M. Brown, "Canon: Open, Closed, Evolving." Review of *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restrain in Early America*, by David F. Holland. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44 no. 4 (Winter 2011): 202.

9. Brigham Young, "Eternal Punishment – 'Mormonism' – &c.," *Journal of Discourses* vol. 9 (Liverpool: George Q. Cannon), 149. More contemporarily, Howard W. Hunter observed, "With God our Heavenly Father, all truth, wherever found or however apprehended, is circumscribed into one great whole. Ultimately, there are no contradictions, no quarrels, no inscrutable paradoxes, no mysteries." "President's Formal Charge of Responsibility," *LDS Church News*, November 26, 1994.

10. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 3–4. See also Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

11. In Newton's day, the tools of "science" were more or less limited to mechanical physics. A recognizably scientific field of chemistry would not develop for another century or so, meaning that for Newton and his colleagues, alchemy *was* chemistry. Thanks to Richard Haglund for this insight.

12. My characterization here is especially applicable from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences. It would be less true for those in certain areas of the sciences, such as unified field theory, who continue to search for a "theory of everything." Ironically, this puts fundamentalists and (some) scientists closer together than either camp would probably prefer or admit.

To Forsake Thy Father and Mother: Mary Fielding Smith and the Familial Politics of Conversion

Amanda Hendrix-Komoto

Note: *This article was first presented at the annual conference of the Mormon History Association in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, on July 1, 2012.*

In 1852, Heber C. Kimball delivered a funeral oration for Mary Fielding Smith, the sister-in-law of the martyred prophet and the wife of his brother Hyrum. Kimball described her as a devoted wife and mother. He told the congregation that "if any person has lived the life of a Saint, she has."[1] He offered her as an example to the women of Zion, as an exemplar of the faith who had looked after her sons and daughters. She also had not complained when her second husband had not visited her very frequently. Kimball ended by telling the congregation, possibly making insinuations about the industry of other women, that she lived with "economy" and "industry," caring not only for her immediate family but also for several older adults in her care.[2] Kimball was not the only one

*The 2012 Mormon History Association Conference was held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, June 28–July 1. The following papers were presented in a session titled "Conversion in 19th-Century Mormonism: Identities and Associations in the Atlantic World." Richard Bushman was the respondent.

to eulogize her. Her son Joseph proclaimed that "nothing beneath the celestial kingdom" could "surpass [his] deathless love" for his mother. "She was good!" he exclaimed. "She was pure! She was indeed a Saint!" and "a royal daughter of God."[3]

In many ways, this emphasis upon Mary's virtue continues today. Conference talks, biographies, and children's books extol her virtues and offer her as an example to Mormon women on how to be a Saint.[4] Although the emphasis provides young women with a much-needed female role model, it also misrepresents her life. Mary Fielding Smith indeed sacrificed much for her commitment to Mormonism, but doing so was not easy or uncomplicated. Mary's conversion, for example, placed a strain on her relationship with her family in England who saw her faith as a delusion and hoped she would return to the Methodism of her youth. In a world in which the family was at the center of Anglo-American senses of identity, this estrangement was particularly difficult. Her relationship with Hyrum was no easier. In one letter, he accused her of being an unloving wife, all too willing to have him absent and too severe a disciplinarian to be a proper mother. In this paper, I explore the familial politics of Mary's conversion, exploring first her relationship with her natal family and then her marriage to Hyrum. Doing so reveals not only the complications in her life but also the difficulties faced by Mormon women and other converts within the early church in general, as well as the operation of class in the Anglo-American world.

Mary was born in Bedfordshire (in northeast England) in 1801. Still relatively rural, Bedfordshire was not unaffected by the dislocations and shifts in production that were transforming nineteenth-century Britain. The enclosure of fields and the introduction of intensive farming techniques and new crops transformed the rural economy, contributing to what some historians have termed "the industrious revolution."[5] As a result, rural counties like Bedfordshire moved from semi-communal ownership of the land to holding it privately and managing it with commercial landlords.[6]

Like many people in the early nineteenth century, the Fieldings found their lives profoundly changed by these transformations. Their father, John, abandoned his native Yorkshire as a youth in order to live as one of his uncle's tenants. When he had

first visited his potential farm, he felt that the land was unsuitable; but upon opening his family Bible, his eyes fell upon a verse so appropriate that he came to believe that their move to Bedfordshire had been ordained by God.[7] In becoming rural tenant farmers, the Fieldings lived between social classes. Although not quite middle class, they did not identify themselves either with the laboring classes of industrial Britain or with the rural villagers among whom they lived.

The instability of their social position was underscored by their father's decision to become an itinerant preacher within the Primitive Methodist Church. Although Methodism had begun as a radical critique of the Church of England in the eighteenth century, it was calcifying by the time that John bought his farm in Bedfordshire. The Methodist movement, which had once embraced female spirituality and allowed the working class a space within church governance, was becoming a more respectable (and thus less responsive) church. Primitive Methodism appealed to those who experienced this increasing respectability as a palpable loss. The members of the Primitive Methodists were often laborers, artisans, and farmers who felt that industrialization had destroyed their communities. Intense emotional meetings evoked an extinct world of cottage-based industry and critiqued industrialization.[8] The church also embraced female preaching and gifts of the Holy Spirit that the mainstream Methodist church now largely eschewed. Although John Fielding moved to Bedfordshire in the hope of providing for his wife and children, he may have found himself unable to do so. Whatever the ultimate reason for his joining the Primitive Methodists, he found himself attracted to the movement and soon became an itinerant preacher. His decision to join a lamented sect would have placed the family in an even more marginalized position within British society.

By the time that Mary converted to Mormonism, however, her family were no longer the marginalized tenant farmers they had once been. Her brother James was a prominent preacher in northern England and her sister Ann had married a clergyman in the Church of England. When Ann wrote an obituary of their mother, Rachel, she emphasized her mother's extreme piety and religious devotion. Doing so was a way to posthumously claim her mother's respectability. It was important in the nineteenth cen-

tury for middle-class men and women to have certain understandings of domesticity and the family. In their book *Family Fortunes,* Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argue that middle-class men and women defined themselves against a dissipated aristocracy and a lazy, uneducated working class by emphasizing their inherent morality and industriousness.[9] The painstaking needlework that middle-class women completed, the display of family Bibles and frequent church attendance in middle-class homes, and the emphasis upon modest dress and aspect for both middle-class men and women were meant to portray its members as people upon whom governance could rest.

This emphasis upon domesticity is evident in Ann's obituary of her mother. In one section, she refers to her mother's skill at "domestic affairs," which combined "frugality" and "benevolence." She suggests that her mother practiced "economy" in all of her affairs, never wasting a spot of cream or buying unnecessary ribbons to adorn her dresses. Yet, her mother was also "always ready to yearn" over "the afflictions and distress" of her "sons and daughters." "Her hand and heart," Ann writes, "were ever open to relieve their wants."[10] In stressing these aspects, the obituary creates her mother as an admirable woman whose respectability and propriety were beyond reproach. In doing so, she shores up her own respectability and class status while claiming a similar position for her mother.

Ann's obituary of her mother also provides the context within which Mary's conversion to Mormonism must be understood. Her family was one that was at the edge of respectability. Thus, correct understandings of domesticity and family were extremely important to maintain their class status, as others might continually question their position within British society. Mary's conversion to Mormonism challenged their assumption of middle-class status. She had converted to Mormonism in the 1830s when missionaries visited Canada, where she lived with her brother Joseph and sister Mercy. Most people responded to the presence of these missionaries who proclaimed that God's church had been restored to earth and that miracles were again being worked with scorn and derision. A woman named Izabella Walton, however, invited the preachers into her home. A few days later, a missionary preached in the Fielding house. According to Mary's brother Jo-

seph, the man explained the prophecies of the Bible better than any other minister in the area. In spite of local opposition, the Fielding siblings soon became convinced of the "great power" of the new gospel and were baptized.[11] Mary immediately wrote to her family about the new church, hoping to provide her English siblings with a foretaste of the gospel in order to prepare them for eventual conversion.

Her brother Joseph's letters suggest that the news was initially well-received. Their brother James found their missives so edifying that he read them to his congregation, who then prayed to "the Lord" to "send them his servants" so that they could learn about the new gospel. They, however, did not tell their brother everything about the gospel. Fearing that they might jeopardize this favorable response, they held back from telling their family about the most radical parts of Mormonism.[12] Absent presumably was anything more than a few lines about the discovery of an important new testament or the revival of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In 1837, Joseph was called as a missionary to Great Britain. As he departed from New York City, Joseph felt anxious. It had been his "earnest Prayer ever since [he] came into the Church . . . that the Lord would open the way, the glad Tidings to go to [his] native Country, particularly to [his] Brethren in the Flesh."[13] When he first arrived in England, he met with a cordial reception. His brother James offered to let Joseph and his companions use his chapel as a place to preach. Only one Mormon sermon was ever preached in that chapel. Although James could rejoice in the revival of spiritual gifts and the appearance of a new record of God, the idea that men had to be fully immersed in order for their baptism to be valid shocked and angered the Christian minister, who then cast the missionaries from his chapel.[14] Although it is difficult for those of us living in the twenty-first century to understand the venom and vitriol with which James responded to full immersion, he was not the only minister in Britain to feel this way. Debates over the sacrament had been fiercely contested in Britain, occasionally breaking into violence. Baptism symbolized entrance into the Christian community and the acceptance of God's love. To debate its meaning and efficacy was to debate who had been saved and who would be cast out of the Kingdom of God.

The Mormon missionaries, however, rejected the reasons

James provided for his denial of the gospel. Instead, they blamed his sudden opposition not on theological difference but on avarice. They accused him of being too greedy and proud of his position within the community to accept a maligned and despised religion. An 1841 edition of the *Millennial Star* called the minister a "hypocrite" and accused him of deception.[15] James' decision to cast out the Mormon missionaries was hardest on Joseph, whose diary recorded a telling incident between the two brothers. As they were sitting down to breakfast one day, James "began to say very hard things of [the missionaries] and the Book of Mormon."[16] Unable to eat, Joseph stood up from the table with feelings of anger and grief and declared that "the Book [of Mormon] was of God" and James would be forced to repent.[17] He then quickly left the house, refusing to return.

Mormon scholarship has generally not been kind to James Fielding. In his biography of Mary Fielding Smith, for example, Don Corbett describes him as a man who willingly gave into the power of the adversary and turned against those men to whom he had promised his friendship. Part of the reason for the ill portrayal is that Joseph is a sympathetic character for those who believe in the Mormon gospel. Another reason is the imbalance of sources available. Although a few letters survive from James' hands, the vast majority of the evidence comes from Mormon sources, making it difficult to ascertain his motives. What remains, however, suggests a more complicated picture in which James Fielding was a man concerned to stress spiritual gifts while avoiding enthusiasm and delusion. His rejection of the gospel ultimately relied upon the same type of reasoning that his brothers and sisters had used when deciding whether or not to accept the gospel: he believed that the message of Mormonism was not in accordance with the scriptures. Joseph had seen in the sermons of the Mormon missionaries better explanations than he had seen offered for the content of the Bible. James simply could not see these.

The Mormon missionaries, however, were not completely amiss in attributing his decision to class motives. Indeed, his descriptions of Mormonism were laden with class imagery. In a letter he wrote to his sisters Mercy and Mary, he compared the visions that Joseph Smith had received to the mad delusions of

Joanna Southcott and the French Prophets.[18] The former was infamous for claiming to be pregnant with the son of God, possessing a sealed box of prophecies, and receiving dictation from the "Spirit invisible."[19] Her visions attracted thousands of followers who believed she would die only to be resurrected and inaugurate the end times. The French Prophets similarly reeled, railed, and swooned as they invoked the Holy Spirit and spoke dramatic prophesies.[20]

The contemporary press responded to the spectacles such prophets offered with sarcasm. Although both of these movements included followers among all social classes, they became by-words for the follies of working-class religion. Newspaper articles used their legacies to warn against the dangers of populism and an uneducated working class. After the arrival of Mormon missionaries in Great Britain, British newspapers explicitly compared Mormonism with these earlier religious fantasies, lamenting that the "poor deluded wool comber" had been tricked into joining their movements.[21] When Mary, Mercy, and Joseph Fielding agreed to be baptized, their family members believed that they had embraced delusion and spurned rational thought. Mormonism's radical embrace of spiritual gifts and acceptance of the visions of a New York farmer seemed to align it with Southcott, the French Prophets, and a multitude of failed English prophets. For the three siblings to join Mormonism, then, was to challenge nineteenth-century middle-class ideas about class, respectability, and family. James saw his brother's radicalism as an affront to their family unity and to their newfound social position. He wrote to his sisters that Joseph had torn apart his flock and destroyed his congregation.

Mary did not respond to the schism within her family well. Joseph initially feared to tell her about the result of his labors.[22] She had prayed fervently for her family's conversion and their rejection of Mormonism would disappoint her. Even after she learned of their decision, Mary continued to send letters, which Joseph read to them with little positive result.[23] Mary's distress was doubtless born mostly out of her love for her family. The pain she felt, however, would have been deepened by expectations for women in the nineteenth century. In this time period, women's spirituality focused on their status as daughters, sisters, and moth-

ers. The separation between political and domestic economy had encouraged women to find meaning in their families. Magazines contained images of women surrounded by their golden-locked children or nursing infants whom they proudly displayed in their arms. Similarly, devotional literature of the time encouraged women to be dutiful to their parents and husbands and to dote upon their children. For Mary to be separated from her family and rejected by them was difficult. It meant abandoning the image of herself as a dutiful daughter and loving sister. It would have placed her in a difficult position and marginalized her within her community. It was, ironically, a position that her mother had occupied before her.

Mary likely found solace in the presence of her sister Mercy. The relationship, however, was not an uncomplicated one. She and Mercy had initially immigrated to Canada together where they had lived with their brother. After their conversion to Mormonism, Mary married Hyrum Smith and Mercy, a man named Robert Thompson. Like the two sisters, Mercy's husband was originally from England and had settled in Toronto, Canada. In 1841, however, he contracted tuberculosis and died after a short illness. In an effort to take care of his wife's sister, Hyrum married the widow two years after her husband's death. Doing so brought the sisters closer together and may have brought Mercy additional comfort. It also, however, further estranged them from their natal family. According to the literary theorist Felicity Nussbaum, middle-class understandings of domesticity emphasized the importance of chastity and monogamy within marriage. Although members of the middle class had premarital sex, took multiple lovers, and frequented prostitutes, their wealth allowed them to do so clandestinely. In the middle-class Victorian imagery, it was only members of the working class and colonized countries that acted promiscuously and had multiple partners. In entering into polygamous marriages, Mormons seemed to take what had been secret and illicit and bring it into the very heart of marriage. The open sharing of their husband would have further alienated Mary and Mercy from their brothers and sisters in England, who likely would have seen their marriage as immoral and even obscene.

Many Mormon men and women who were alienated from their families of origin because of their religion took comfort in

the creation of new families through temple adoptions and the bonds created by polygamy. Mary's marriage to her husband Hyrum, however, was anything but easy. During their early marriage, Hyrum was frequently absent due to his imprisonment and church duties. Only one year after they were married, he was imprisoned for more than four months in the Liberty Jail. During his imprisonment Mary was quite ill, although Hyrum did not know or recognize the extent of her illness. Her absence greatly troubled him. Hyrum wrote that his greatest trouble was that he had not heard from her but once. He greatly desired to know how she prospered. Eventually, his despair at not having heard would turn to anger. In March 1839 he wrote to her, saying that even if she had no feelings for him as a husband she could have sent "some information concerning the little babe or those little children" that lay near his "hart."[24] He also felt that if she had decided to forsake him she should "send me word. Then I should know what to depend upon."[25]

The difficulties that Mary was having with Hyrum denied her some of the solace she could have found in the Mormon community after her natal family had abandoned her. His constant imprisonment and the distance between them denied Mary the full status of wife and mother. His comments made her feel isolated and alone. In one instance, she discovered that rumors circulating about her abilities as a mother had come from the lips of Hyrum himself, who had accused her of being too harsh and strict with his children. In her letters to her husband, she tried desperately to fix their relationship and to reassert her position as wife and mother. She wrote to her husband that she could not "bear the thought of [his] having any such suspicion" and that he must be "misacquainted with the principles of [her] heart." Her "reason, religion, and honor and every feeling of [her] heart" forbade her to even entertain "such a thought" of abandoning her poor husband. Furthermore, she wrote that she was far from "an oppressive Step Mother" and had always acted as she thought best.[26] There is a sense of indignation but also of desperation in her letters.

Although she and Hyrum eventually reconciled, Mary's position within the Mormon community was far from secure. After her husband's death she married Heber C. Kimball as a plural wife but in many ways remained a widow. She was forced to find

her own way to Zion, and her son Joseph Fielding often recorded slights that other members of their camp made against his mother. One man asked her to wait until the next company left because he believed that her presence would hinder the group. After she arrived in the valley, she became one of a dozen wives of Heber C. Kimball. Instead of having the love and comfort due a wife, she had to be satisfied with occasional visits from her husband, which she often initiated. Kimball recorded that she accepted her lot with grace and was satisfied with him even if she only saw him once or twice a week.[27] In spite of her acceptance of her life, Mary's lot was not easy. She had been estranged from her natal family, had had a difficult relationship with her husband Hyrum, and had been left to care for her children and stepchildren alone.

Focusing on her estrangement from her family and her difficult relationship with Hyrum allows us to see Mary as a more complicated figure than the hagiographies that have been written about her would suggest. She struggled with her position in the Mormon community. She also struggled to reconcile her desire to be seen as a dutiful mother and faithful daughter with her estrangement from her family and her strained relationship with Hyrum. (In this way, she was like many early Mormon women. The letters that Louisa Barnes Pratt wrote to her family after her conversion suggest a similar discomfort on the part of evangelical relatives who worried that her acceptance of the Mormon gospel would lead her to hellfire.) The writings of Mary's biographers and eulogists perform a work similar to that which her sister Ann did for their mother: they try to posthumously create her as a sanctified woman whose grace was recognizable to anyone who saw her. In so doing, they hold her up as a model for Mormon women and girls, but they also flatten her life and make it difficult to understand her precarious position within both British society and Mormonism.

Notes

1. Heber C. Kimball, "Funeral Address," *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 1, edited by George D. Watt (Liverpool and London: S.W. and F.D. Richards, 1854), 246.

2. Ibid.

3. Quoted in Jane McBride Choate, "Heroes and Heroines: Mary Fielding Smith—Mother in Israel," *The Friend* (July 1993), 32.

4. See for example, Susan Easton Black and Mary Jane Woodger, *Women of Character: 100 Profiles of Prominent LDS Women* (American Fork: Covenant Communications, 2011), and Aileen H. Clyde, "Confirmed in Faith," http://www.lds.org/general-conference/1996/10/confirmed-in-faith?lang=eng (accessed August 10, 2012).

5. The term "industrious revolution" was originally coined by Akira Hayama to describe the changes in spending habits and consumption that accompanied the Industrial Revolution. It also explains the transformations that occurred within agriculture and cottage industry in this time period. It is perhaps best explained in Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

6. *Western Civilizations: Their History & Culture*, 17th edition, Vol. 2, edited by Judith Coffin, Robert Stacey, Joshua Cole, and Carolyn Symes (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 581.

7. Ann Fielding Matthews, "Memoir of Mrs. Rachel Fielding of Honidon, Bedfordshire," *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* (August 1830), 516.

8. Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

9. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), passim.

10. Matthews, "Memoir of Mrs. Rachel Fielding of Honidon, Bedfordshire," 517.

11. Joseph Fielding, Diary of Joseph Fielding, March 1797-December 19, 1863, MS 15214, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 3.

12. Joseph Fielding to Mary Fielding Smith, October 2, 1837, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, MS 2779, Folder 5, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

13. Diary of Joseph Fielding, 4.

14. See Joseph Fielding to Mary Fielding Smith, October 2, 1837; Diary of Joseph Fielding, 12; and Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, and Willard Richards, "Mission to England," *Millennial Star* 12, no. 1 (April 1841), 290–292.

15. Kimball, Hyde, and Richards, "Mission to England," 291.

16. Diary of Joseph Fielding, March 1797–December 19, 1863, 12.

17. Ibid.

18. James Fielding to Mary and Mercy Fielding, May 28, 1840, Mary

Fielding Smith Collection, MS 2779, Folder 6, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

19. For work on Joanna Southcott and her relationship to British Christianity, see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles.: University of California Press, 1997), 108–117; and Susan Juster, "Mystical Pregnancy and Holy Bleeding: Visionary Experience in Early Modern Britain and America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 2000), 249–288.

20. For a history of the French Prophets, see Catharine Randall, *From a Far Country: Camisards and Huguenots in the Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

21. "Modern Instances of Superstition," *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* Vol. 1, No. 3 (January 20, 1844), 44; "The Mormonites, or the Church of Latter-Day Saints, Part III," *The Edinburgh Christian Magazine* 5, no. 118.

22. Joseph Fielding to Mary Fielding Smith, October 2, 1837.

23. Diary of Joseph Fielding, 18.

24. Hyrum Smith to Mary Fielding Smith, March 20, 1839, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, MS 2779, Folder 1, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

25. Hyrum Smith to Mary Fielding Smith, March 30, 1839, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, MS 2779, Folder, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

26. Mary Fielding Smith to Hyrum Smith, April 11, 1839, Mary Fielding Smith Collection, MS 2779, Folder 1, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

27. Kimball, "Funeral Address," 246.

The Theology of a Career Convert: Edward Tullidge's Evolving Identities

Benjamin E. Park

When Edward Tullidge arrived in Utah during the late summer of 1861, one of his first actions was to write Brigham Young and state his "earnest desire" to enter the prophet's service. "I care not in what form I am employed, within my capabilities, so that I am set to work by *you,*" he urged. A few months later, either out of worry that his original point wasn't clear or because he wasn't satisfied with the shoemaking job he had been assigned, he made a second, more detailed, plea: "From the time I came into the Church," he wrote, "I fervently desired to live to see the Saints a great nation, and ranking in the first class of civilized society." But witnessing wasn't enough. He continued, "To desire to see this was in me also a desire to help it out. To be numbered among the workers-out of Zion's social and national greatness, became my ambition." Tullidge emphasized his activities of the past decade, especially his service as associate editor for the *Millennial Star,* Mormonism's British periodical. He concluded the letter with a personal—and poignant—admission that next to his "ambition to do the work" was also "an ambition to gain your approbation and acceptance of my labours."[1]

This letter is an important glimpse into several of the competing motivations that drove Tullidge's Mormon experience. First, he desired the church to be a great "nation" that in turn initiated a cultural revolution; second, he desired to be part of that revolution; and third, he desired to gain acknowledgement

for his part in that revolution. These motivations remained constant throughout his fitful engagement with Mormonism. Born in 1829 in England, Tullidge was raised Methodist before converting to Mormonism, backsliding into deism, recommitting to Mormonism, migrating to Utah, taking part in the Godbeite reform movement, returning once again to Mormonism, and briefly affiliating with the RLDS faith before finally rejoining the LDS Church, this time until his death. Importantly, Tullidge narrated, documented, and defended these numerous transitions throughout his life with a broad corpus of writings that included editorials, articles, plays, poems, and books. Indeed, Tullidge can be considered a religious weathervane whose constant shifts indicate the broader currents that tossed him to and fro. While it is tempting to dismiss him as merely lacking strong convictions, it is productive to instead consider the trajectory of his religious beliefs and affiliations as case study in the evolving nature of belief in general, and as a guide to the dynamic religious and political cultures he inhabited in particular.[2]

Belief is rarely stagnant, stolid in the face of changing surroundings. Rather, it is a constant negotiation between complex individuals and equally complex environments. Concrete terms of a religious manifesto barely capture the nebulous status of personal belief or the motivations for personal action. The written and oral construction of religious identities which maintain apparent stability and order develop through a complex process that draws from private beliefs, existing genres, political motives, and cultural expectations in an attempt to create an affirmative and consistent narrative trajectory. As cultural historian Stuart Hall has noted, "Identity is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are." It is through this process, he explains, that individuals bring "structure" to their lives, thoughts, and surroundings.[3] The study of this process of identity formation reveals much about personal, cultural, and psychological elements at play within a given historical context, unveiling the raw materials from which individuals construct their worldview.

This paper looks at the question of evolving identities by briefly engaging the evolution of Edward Tullidge's relationship to and understanding of Mormonism. I will offer three snapshots

of Tullidge's public writing career, each taking place in a different context: his expositions of Mormonism's theocracy in England in 1854, his defense of Mormonism's social and organizational reform potential in New York in 1866, and his appeal to religious liberty and separation between Church and State in opposition to Mormonism in Utah in 1869. By comparing these key moments in his life and analyzing the evolution that took place between them, I aim to shed more light not only on Tullidge himself but also the culture he is speaking to and the Mormonism he is speaking from. Tullidge represented a foundational intellectual shift taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century in which universalism and social reform merged into a new political theology that emphasized humanity over dogma.

* * *

Tullidge's religious career was notably circuitous. Shortly after his conversion to Mormonism in 1849, he embarked on a three-year missionary circuit, spending a majority of his time going from town to town without purse or scrip. However, in 1852, Tullidge left the faith. The reasons for his disaffection are unclear; it may have been dismay at the official introduction of polygamy, or perhaps a result of stress related to overzealous missionary labor. Job Smith, who was then serving as president of the Bedfordshire Conference, later recalled that Tullidge "had forsakin his mission and Mormonism, and that he was now a disbeliever in all revealed religion." Tullidge's main concern was the impossibility of obtaining certainty about a "God" who intervened in human existence.[4] Like many in industrial Britain during that period, Tullidge likely believed that the poverty, crimes, and evils rampant in Victorian England could only be explained by deism's coldly absent God.

Another possible response to those social ills, of course, was to make precisely the opposite claim: that humankind, at that moment more than ever, needed the intricate hand of Providence to dictate right belief and action. Tullidge's brief deist interlude was followed by a quick return to Mormonism and the immediate repudiation of his deist convictions. It is not known exactly when he returned to the fold, but the first issue of *Millennial Star* in 1854,

less than two years after his renunciation of the faith, contained Tullidge's strong defense of "Revealed Religion." "Men have fallen into a great error," he declared, "in treating religion as an abstract speculation, and making it evaporate in a few prayers and absurd ceremonies." The true purpose of religion, he explained, was to be intrinsically connected with government and society, a theocracy that is the polar opposite of deism's aloof agnosticism. "A theocracy is the most *natural* system which the mind of man can conceive," he trumpeted, "and instead of wondering that it ever existed, we ought rather to wonder that it is not universal."[5] In another publication three months later, he specifically denounced deist beliefs as "even more infidel and presumptuous than those of the acknowledged unbeliever."[6]

Such a foundational shift in religious belief is striking. And yet we can see important commonalities in Tullidge's understanding of God, and also in the way he understood his position within the world. Both Tullidge the deist and Tullidge the theocrat insisted that a theology espousing a God who was capable but unwilling to intervene was inadequate to the challenge of modernity's cultural ills. He also consistently opposed the widespread Victorian conviction that Christianity validated what was then taking place in Britain.[7] In short, at the heart of Tullidge's agnostic and theocratic views was a frustration with the gulf between modern religion and modern society.

* * *

If Tullidge intended, with his forceful writings, to gain his ecclesiastical leaders' "approbation and acceptance of [his] labours,"[8] he succeeded. Promoted in 1856 to be the associate editor of the *Millennial Star*, he wrote a majority of the paper's editorials and became a leading voice for the British Saints. Emboldened by this new position, he contemplated a literary work about Mormonism with "epic" scope—a piece that would be "three times as extensive and more complicated than any poetic work yet undertaken," including those of Homer and Milton.[9] Within the next decade he migrated to Utah, supported himself through various odd jobs, tentatively ventured into a number of publishing projects, and positioned himself as a spokesman for the faith. Then, in

1866, Tullidge moved to New York City to defend Mormonism to the world.

But these public commitments to Mormonism masked private religious turmoil. The seeds of doubt were planted as early as 1858, when news of Utah's clash with the American government arrived along with rumors of a tragic massacre at Mountain Meadows. (Tullidge later identified national press coverage of these two events as the impetus for backsliding.) His writings for *The Utah Magazine* experimented with what were described as "Protestant heresies"—most likely a reference to his growing universalism.[10] By 1869, he wrote that he possessed "unbelief of eight years," and that he had settled "into a philosophical state of religion, anchoring faith in the Divine Mission of the World, rather than in the mission of any special prophet."[11] Yet he maintained that he "never doubted" the religious genius of Joseph Smith, "though for years I have doubted that spiritual zion has come to dwell in Utah."[12] So when Tullidge moved to New York City in 1866 to defend Mormonism, he was not defending the same Mormonism he had trumpeted in 1854. Having largely abandoned its theological claims, Tullidge now understood the LDS faith as a potential vehicle for social reform, loyal organization, and the introduction of a higher civilization. In doing so, Tullidge was participating in a larger intellectual movement as strikingly similar messages were at that same time being delivered in New York by other social reforms developing progressive political theologies, most notably Octavius Frothingham.

Though Tullidge maintained his triumphant tone when he proclaimed the virtues of Mormonism, his descriptions of it reflected a new outlook. In his first editorial, published in the popular *Galaxy*, Tullidge emphasized that Mormonism had evolved not into "a great church," but "a little nation." The church's growth and success, he explained, "manifest themselves through social and political organizations, and commercial activities." Having lost their "fanatical element" Mormons were now ready to participate in society "in common with other men." Tullidge asserted that Mormonism's theology was of no importance—in one place he stated that it was "the facts that have outgrown out of the movements of the people, not their faith," in another that "polygamy

. . . [and] our very doctrines of theology . . . are but our side issues and phases of specialities"—and he argued that what Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had done was establish an international network of missionaries ready to carry forth civilization to the entire world. "Not in the history of any community," he boasted, "have they their counterpart in this specialty." "Empire-founding," not theological development, was the purpose of the Mormon faith.[13]

Tullidge continued his theme in later editorials,[14] emphasizing the American empire-building impulse embedded within Mormonism's missionary work and insisting that the church—part of "the Republic of America"—was "a unit, religiously, socially, and nationally, even though scattered throughout the whole earth." This interconnected web represented a universal extension of American culture, through "priests" known more for loyalty than belief, with unlimited possibilities for cultural colonization. "Here let me emphasize again," he concluded, "that Mormon missionary movements mean not sermon-making but administration—the government of the most peculiar and wonderful commonwealth that has ever existed since man was made."[15]

Central to Tullidge's understanding of Mormonism during this period was a recasting of Mormonism from a theological kingdom to a secular empire; the descriptor "theocracy" rarely entered his language, having been replaced with "Mormondom," a phrase that downplayed the movement's theological emphasis. Indeed, when Mormonism's religious tenets are mentioned, they are primarily used as an example of the optimism, empowerment, and "unbounded faith" in human potential Mormons gain through their movement's worldview. The purpose of the LDS faith was to gain confidence in their message and earnestness in their purpose. Then, once the foundation for this empire-building system was in place, the cause of social regeneration could finally begin.[16]

This was an important transition period for Tullidge, one in which he abandoned Mormonism's theological claims but still maintained an attachment to its organizing potential. It also hints to the malleability and dynamism of both the Mormon movement and the surrounding culture during the period. Tullidge occu-

pied a middle position between the orthodox persona of a traditional believer—like himself only a decade before—and the disillusioned and bitter identity of ex-members—which he embraced two years later. Tullidge constructed a new religious identity from certain tenets of Mormonism and American culture, contexts that provided tools for the construction of a new religious identity—an identity that may have been unique to him but a construction process that wasn't unique at all. From his faith he took international missiology and loyalty, from American thinkers he borrowed nationalism and societal reform, and from the Anglo-American world he embraced imperialism. This ideological blend, which Tullidge managed to fit into what could still be recognized as a species of Mormonism, demonstrates the extent to which personal identities and religious beliefs can vary by individual, location, and era—an evolutionary process indicative of the Age of Darwin, in which adaptation is not only allowed, but necessary. And Tullidge's evolution was nowhere near complete.

* * *

Tullidge's evolving views would continue to test the boundaries of Mormon belief and affiliation. Tullidge originally planned to remain in New York for "two or three years," but returned to Utah by the end of 1867.[17]Even as he remained committed to the church, which included receiving substantial support from Brigham Young and other leaders during a serious illness, he continued his progression into Universalism.[18] "I hold universalism[,] not a special faith," he wrote in the *Utah Magazine*, a periodical in which he supported Brigham Young during the comparatively calm year of 1868. "I am not fairly orthodox. I know it. I cannot deny this even to myself." But this tenuous balance of loyalty and disbelief was unsettled by the Godbeite revolt.[19]

The origins and progression of the Godbeite movement—in which a number of Salt Lake City's leading business men and intellectuals revolted against Brigham Young's authoritarian approach—have been skillfully documented elsewhere. But for our purposes, it should be noted that Tullidge never quite fit in with the rest of the dissenting group's adherents. Unlike William Godbe or the Stenhouses, Tullidge was not economically at risk from

Brigham Young's practices; if anything, Tullidge was often the beneficiary of the church's incursions into the Utah economy. But his evolving notions of universalism, religious liberties, and social reform led him to question even the organizational structure and institutional loyalty he had praised only two years before. He explained in October 1869 that "the social redemption of mankind is that which commands the special mission of nearly all modern reformers," but noted that "a mere mission of doctrinal theology and fierce religious controversy possess no charm for the broad-minded men of the present age," men who are enticed more to "the practical good for society than the conscienceless spirit of religious fanaticism." When he listed contemporary individuals he considered to be "Apostles of the *social redemption* of the human race," he singled out Robert Owen, not Brigham Young.[20] Once the Godbeites were publicly disciplined, Tullidge publicly renounced his loyalty to Young by proclaiming himself "a believer in republican institutions and not in a *temporal* theocracy."[21]

As he once again reconstructed his relationship to and presentation of Mormonism, Tullidge positioned himself as an anthropologist documenting the evolution of religious communities. "History is the most infallible revelation," he claimed. He argued that the progression of humankind demonstrated the necessity of religious liberty, the relative insignificance of theology, and the tendency toward cosmopolitanism. "The growth of civilization is simply the growth of universality," he argued. "In proportion as nations become universal in their relations one with another, do they throw off the barbaric remains of the primitive ages and come more into harmony with the great Commonwealth of all mankind." Utah's separation from the rest of the world was "unnatural," he argued, because separation stagnates civilization. Whereas he had previously thought of the "Mormon commonwealth" spreading across the globe and destined to encompass the rest of humanity, he now understood that it was Mormonism that must be subsumed into the "commonwealth of humanity."[22]

But this did not mean, at least in Tullidge's mind, that Mormonism would lose its importance; far from it. Even though "we have been cut off the Church," he urged, "we still do believe in that destiny—ay, more than ever believe in it now."[23] He referred

to Godbeitism as "Pure Mormonism," signifying his belief that the transition was still within the Mormon framework.[24] But his Mormonism was not the theocracy he heralded in 1854, nor the social organization he defended in 1866, but a preparatory system that taught people liberality, optimism, and social responsibility. He claimed that he and thousands of others "embraced Mormonism because they believed it to be the broadest and most liberal system, socially and religiously, ever revealed from heaven to man." The "Divine government" they originally proclaimed was not the parochial Deseret but the "*good will* for all mankind—not less general in its applications for human good in every part of the earth."[25] In a way, Tullidge was part of the liberal Christian movement then taking root in America.[26]

Whereas Tullidge in 1866 defended the missionary system as a large network of loyal followers who could be mobilized as an army that would be submissive to centralized power and able to extend that power widely, he now depicted Mormonism's ecclesiastical reach as "one of unlimited free thought, free speech and individual manifestations of gifts and character." It produced a "republican" genius rather than a loyal soldier by tearing down "conservatisms" and pursuing "a progressive course."[27] Mormonism for Tullidge, in this iteration, was a mindset that urged believers to look forward and outward—not a theocracy that brought stability, not an imperialist institution that brought conformity, but a way of viewing the world that encouraged progress and embraced all of humanity. Even if "we have been cut off from a small portion of God's family," he wrote shortly after his excommunication, "now we belong to the whole world...We will no longer be a sect, but a world." As pompous as these sentiments may be, they aptly capture the universality of Tullidge's 1869 Mormon message.[28]

* * *

Of course, that specific message didn't last long. By February of 1870, Tullidge had already become disillusioned with the Godbeite movement and started a casual wandering that lasted two decades, occasionally touching mainstream Mormonism. At his most stable moments, he wrote popular and provocative books

narrating the Mormon story—books that made him famous; at other moments, he rewrote those same books to match his constantly revised beliefs, as when he recast his LDS publication *Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* to be an RLDS anti-polygamy and anti-Brigham Young tract. And though the LDS leadership sometimes tried to be tolerant of Tullidge's vacillation, at other points they grew frustrated. John Taylor accused the enigmatic figure of being duplicitous: "when you are in the East," he wrote, "you are an apostate, because it is expected your book will sell better. . . . Here you are a Saint, because to be a Saint pays better."[29] While such an accusation is not implausible, it likely undervalues the sincerity of Tullidge's spiritual pilgrimage.

Even in the few periods examined in this paper, even when focusing on a few key words that are found in every period engaged, one can see the intellectual evolution that took place within Tullidge's life. Words like "theocracy" and "fanaticism" evolved from being markers of laudable stability to symbols of contempt and barbarity; the definition of "commonwealth" transformed from an attachment to the Mormon kingdom to an embrace of broader humanism; and the significance of "universality" transitioned from the spread of a unified message to a tolerance of religious pluralism. In an important way, Tullidge embodied and anticipated the broader religious transition soon to take place in the progressive era: the continued incorporation of Enlightenment ecumenism into religious thought as America lurched into modernity.[30]

More than describing the growth of a single person, however, this study suggests the mutability of theologies, traditions, and conversions. Mormonism meant something different to Edward Tullidge in different times and in different places, just as it meant something different to many Latter-day Saints reacting to their newly embraced faith and their ever-changing environment. The pliant nature of religious constructs and vocabulary allows a slippery understanding of terms, which in turn necessitates and facilitates a constant and careful reconstruction of religious ideas. Belief is unstable, and it must be treated as such, but it can also reveal profound lessons about not only past individuals, but also the worlds they inhabited and the worlds they imagined.

Notes

1. Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, 1861, Church History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter CHL); Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, November 25, 1864, CHL. I express sincere thanks to Ardis Parshall, who provided transcripts of this and all other Tullidge correspondence used in this article.

2. Works on Tullidge include Ronald W. Walker, "Edward Tullidge: Historian of the Mormon Commonwealth," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (1976), 55–72; Claudia L. Bushman, "Edward Tullidge and the Women of Mormondom," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33 (Fall 2000), 15–26; William F. Lye, "Edward Wheelock Tullidge, Mormons' Rebel Historian," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 28 (January 1960), 57–75; Davis Bitton and Leonard Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 29–40.

3. Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," *Radical America* 23, no. 4 (October–December 1989), 9–20.

4. Job T. Smith Statement, December 4, 1869, CHL. It should be noted that this statement was made in the midst of the Godbeite rebellion, and thus was meant to discredit Tullidge's commitment to Mormonism. But see also "The Diary of Job Smith: A Pioneer of Nauvoo, Illinois and Utah," 29, Job Smith Papers, CHL, which is a more contemporary document and includes much of the same summary.

5. Edward Tullidge, "Revealed Religion," *Millennial Star* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 1854), 3–5 (emphasis in original).

6. Edward Tullidge, "These Things Are No Longer Needed," *Millennial Star* 16, no. 13 (April 1, 1854), 198–200.

7. For the coincidence of Christianity and British nationalism, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

8. Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, 1861, CHL; Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, November 25, 1864, CHL.

9. Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, February 19, 1858, CHL.

10. Edward Tullidge, "Leaders in the Mormon Reform Movement," *Phrenological Journal* 53 (July 1871), 31.

11. Edward Tullidge, "The Oracles Speak," *The Utah Magazine* 3 (December 18, 1869), 521.

12. Edward Tullidge, "Joseph Smith and His Work," *The Utah Magazine* 3 (December 18, 1869), 474.

13. Edward Tullidge, "Views of Mormondom, by a Mormon Elder," *The Galaxy* 2 (October 1, 1866), 209–214.

14. Tullidge claimed that his first editorial was so popular the newspaper paid him up front for a second. Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, October 18, 1866, CHL.

15. Edward Tullidge, "The Mormon Commonwealth, by a Mormon Elder," *The Galaxy* 2 (October 15, 1866), 351–364. See also Tullidge, "Brigham Young and Mormonism, by a Mormon Elder," *The Galaxy* 4 (September 1867), 541–549.

16. Tullidge offers his psychological description of Mormon theology in his "The Mormons: History of Their Leading Men," *American Phrenological Journal and Life Illustrated* 44, no. 5 (November 1866), 144–151.

17. Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, May 14, 1867, CHL.

18. For Brigham Young urging fellow leaders to support Tullidge in a time of medical and emotional need, see Young to Bishops and Brethren in the Settlements, November 25, 1868, Brigham Young Letterbook, CHL.

19. Edward Tullidge, "Universal Man," *Utah Magazine* 2 (November 21, 1868), 114–115.

20. Edward Tullidge, "Our Social Redemption," *Utah Magazine*, October 23, 1869, 394–395 (emphasis in original).

21. Edward Tullidge to Brigham Young, October 27, 1869, published in *Utah Magazine*, October 30, 1869, 405 (emphasis in original).

22. Edward Tullidge, "Our Family Difficulty," *Utah Magazine*, November 6, 1869, 424–426.

23. Edward Tullidge, "Do We Fear Civilization?" *Utah Magazine*, November 20, 1869, 455.

24. Edward Tullidge, *The Life of Joseph, the Prophet* (New York: Tullidge and Crandall, 1878), 639.

25. Edward Tullidge, "The Schism in Utah," *Utah Magazine*, November 13, 1869, 440.

26. For the growth of liberal religion in America, see Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

27. Tullidge, "The Schism in Utah," 441.

28. Tullidge, "Do We Fear Civilization?" 445.

29. John Taylor to Edward Tullidge, in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 2:316–317.

30. For the merging of Englightenment thought and religion as the hallmark of America's modernity, see David Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American

Encounter with Diversity," *Journal of American History* 98 (June 2011), 21–48.

Comment on "Conversion in 19th Century Mormonism: Identities and Associations in the Atlantic World"

Richard L. Bushman

I don't intend praise or to criticize these three engaging papers—they certainly are all clear and compelling—but to pay them the highest compliment, which is to comment on the thoughts they provoke. They compel us, as they were meant to do, to think more deeply about conversion. What does it consist of? What readies a person for conversion to Mormonism? What does Mormonism mean to converts?

In a way, conversion is a branch of intellectual history, where the basic question is how do ideas spread? How does one country invent the postage stamp and then other countries pick it up? After the idea was adopted in one location, what readied other nations to adopt a postal system based on stamps? By analogy, what led people to adopt the Book of Mormon once the idea had been invented in Manchester, New York? Or Zion or the Priesthood? Why did the idea spread?

But the analogy to intellectual history does not quite do justice to conversion. Conversion is not just to a set of ideas, it is a life decision like marriage or choosing a career. It requires a more full-bodied acceptance. It has to touch you, to resonate, to enlighten, or redeem; it is something like falling in love.

For that reason we have to look at life conditions to explain conversion. What broad circumstances readied a person to make this commitment? And that is what these papers do. They speak

more broadly of the social world in which the converts dwelt. They bring in the social as well as the intellectual to fill out the picture of conversion.

Chris Jones,[1] for example, helps us to understand how open and mobile, even turbulent American society was in the early nineteenth-century. These people had trouble settling on a career. Ezra Booth was first a preacher and then a farmer. James Covel was a doctor and a preacher who traveled from Maine, to upstate New York, to New York City. So many people in these years had connections but not deep roots.

They moved religiously too. Think of all the varieties of Methodism available to the three men Chris discusses. Ezra Booth was a Methodist, then a Mormon, then a Millerite. Covel faced a smorgasbord of Methodist varieties from which to choose: the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Society of New York, then Congregational Methodists, Independent Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, and Reformed Methodists. As Chris depicts the process, each of these religious dilettantes could select from a variety of religious forms to find one that precisely suited his taste.

But the word "dilettante" does not do these men justice. They practiced a kind of scriptural rigor too. They wanted to find the truth and believed they would know it when they saw it. One reason Covel could not abide the Mormons was their insistence on baptism by immersion. He knew they were wrong. Ezra Booth traveled with the Johnsons to the next county to listen to the Mormons because they were confident they would know the truth when they saw it. All of these people enjoyed a kind of self-sufficiency in their religious choices. They did not have to consult someone or turn to an authority. They had the confidence they could recognize the truth themselves. They believed in their own reason and knew that the Bible was an infallible guide.

The Methodist world was in turmoil partly because so many devoutly religious people were searching for the true religion and believed they could decide for themselves where it could be found. They were on the move, perhaps you could even say on the prowl, for a faith they could embrace with conviction. This frame of mind explains why a few people could take to Mormonism with its strong truth claims, but also why they often left soon after.

They could decide for themselves to be sure, but they also could be easily dislodged. If something went awry, they would be on their way again in search of a better truth. They were self-anointed amateur religious connoisseurs.

A similar kind of juxtaposition runs through Amanda's paper on Mary Fielding. Over against a set of social concerns, devoted religious people in her narrative were also seeking biblical truth, confident they would know it when it came along. Belief in a rigorous biblical standard and social strain were, perhaps, in dynamic tension, as so many scholars have suggested. People could bear social turbulence because their lives were anchored in biblical truth, or perhaps the other way around. They insisted on religious exactitude because so much else was uncertain for them socially.

Amanda's paper, however, deals more with social class than social disruption. She deftly traces the precarious position of the Mary Fielding's family in England. They were East Anglian farmers, an honorable position if not an exalted one in English society. Amanda suggests their standing was a little precarious, rising above the lower classes, yet not firmly situated in the middle classes. Mary's mother, Rachel, strove as best she could for respectability, and Mary's brother James achieved eminence as a preacher. Her sister Ann married a clergyman. No one was a gentleman or a gentlewoman but they were respectable. On the other hand, Mary's father, John Fielding, preached for the Primitive Methodists tying them to the lower middling classes.

For these people balancing on the edge of social propriety, conversion to Mormonism, associated as it was with lower class delusion, was to give up all pretensions to religious respectability. Conversion meant a drop in social position that was painful for the English Fieldings to behold. It was a grave disappointment for them to learn of their Canadian siblings' decision to become Mormons.

Why did the Canadian Fieldings agree to this drastic descent? Because Joseph Fielding, Mary's other brother, thought the Mormon missionaries explained the biblical prophecies better than anyone. Biblical rigor trumped social respectability. By the same token, James's rejection of his brother's Mormon message turned once again on Methodist objections to immersion. While the fam-

ily was concerned about markers of class and about family loyalty, they were more concerned about the conception of truth. Biblical conviction weighed more with them than social standing.

Ben Park's paper on Edward Tullidge reverses the order of the other two papers. Chris and Amanda reflect on the social influences on Mormon conversion. Ben Park discusses how a convert, Edward Tullidge, thought Mormonism could affect society. Tullidge seems to have thought of Mormonism as a tool for reforming the world. His greatest commitment in Ben's telling was to the social redemption of mankind. Mormonism provided a means for achieving that goal.

He was not the only one to sense some kind of primal force in Mormonism that could be diverted and reshaped. John C. Bennett seemed to have entertained thoughts of using Mormon manpower and zeal to build a great kingdom in the West. James Arlington Bennett, the Long Island intellectual who was baptized but never gathered to Nauvoo, though disgusted by the other Bennett, nonetheless referred briefly to similar ambitions. To further confuse the Bennett picture, the newspaper editor James Gordon Bennett wrote of Mormonism as a body with immense potential that might someday raise up a mighty kingdom. "The Mormons under the guidance of their great prophet and seer, the famous Joseph Smith," Bennett wrote in *The New York Herald*, "are organizing a religious empire in the far west that will astonish the world in these latter days." Smith "combined religion, political, moral, and social institutions in one mass of legislation and empire." Tullidge picked up on that same Mormon dynamism and sought to direct it toward the spread of a beneficent civilization through the world.

Tullidge's ambitions came from the missionary force that he first encountered in England. It was easy to imagine that all that zeal and that compelling message of a millennial Zion harnessed to reform society at its core. Tullidge's Mormonism seems to have waxed and waned according to his hopes that the Church could help him fulfill his liberal dream of a new world order. He dabbled with the Godbeites and came and went but ultimately returned to the fold. He could find nothing that quite matched the Utah church for energy and organization.

These papers together blend the study of Mormonism with the study of society. Rather than a story of doctrine or faith, they emphasize the social order within which Mormons formed their lives. Surely this is the way that scholarship in the future must go. It is not enough to see conversion as a matter of understanding doctrine combined with humbly seeking God. These elements of the story certainly deserve their place; the converts themselves thought that way. But we cannot isolate the spiritual from the social or the cultural. Religion was lived in society. For the actors themselves the conditions of life were an ever present reality. Our histories, if they are to recover the past, must reconstruct the social worlds the converts inhabited.

Note

[1]Jones's paper could not be included, but will be published at a later date.

"I Will Sing to the Lord": Women's Songs in the Scriptures

Julie M. Smith

The scriptures include many references to creative women. Hannah and Dorcas created treasured textiles (1 Samuel 2:19; Acts 9:39), but we don't know what those garments looked like. Sarah created memorable meals for her guests (Genesis 18:6), but we don't know her recipes. The daughters of the Lamanites danced in delight (Mosiah 20:1), but no technology could capture their creative whirl. So most of the results of women's creative efforts have been lost to history. But one form of women's ingenuity has survived: contained within the canon itself are several examples of women's sacred songs. This paper will explore some of these songs; we'll see that sacred songs have been a central venue for women's theological activity.

We begin with Miriam. After crossing the Red Sea, Miriam the prophet[1] took a small drum, danced, and sang: "Sing[2] ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:21). That's not a long song.[3] But it is enormously significant. The story of the Exodus begins with Miriam's actions beside the waters that hold her helpless baby brother,[4] and the story ends with Miriam again beside the waters, this time celebrating Moses' victory over the waters. Rescue from the waters and the centrality of Miriam's words are

*The first annual Women's Studies Conference was held at Brigham Young University, November 3–5, 2011. The theme was "Women and Creativity."

key elements in both stories.[5] So Miriam bookends the Exodus story. This brief song is also theologically provocative: it was typical for women to greet their men with praises when they returned victorious from battle (e.g., 1 Samuel 18:7), but in this case it is not a human army but the Lord of Hosts whom Miriam praises. By subverting expectations, Miriam makes a profound and profoundly theological statement.

It is significant in another way as well, which gets to the heart of the matter of women's involvement with sacred song. The biblical tradition suggests that there was something along the lines of tripartite leadership during the Exodus, with three people called "prophet": Moses, Miriam, and Aaron; they are remembered later in the Bible as a leadership unit (Micah 6:4). A distinction can be made between early worship led by Aaron, resulting in the unfortunate incident with the golden calf (see Exodus 32), and the worship led by Miriam, who set the precedent for worshipful song and dance. J. Gerald Janzen writes,

> If Miriam and Aaron are the first two cultic leaders in Israel's celebrations of the Exodus, then Israel's centuries-long tendency to accommodate cultic idolatry is given its exemplar in Aaron the priest, while the countervailing impulse for true worship of the God of the Exodus is given its exemplar and prototype in Miriam, who in such a context is, significantly, identified as "the prophetess."[6]

With both Aaron's calf and Miriam's song, there is a festive, worshipful atmosphere of dancing, but Aaron's includes idolatry while Miriam's focuses on words of praise to the Lord.

Central to Miriam's song is that she, a mere slave woman, is celebrating the fact that she has done something Pharoah's army could not do: cross the Red Sea on dry ground. And she did it because the Lord is on the side of the oppressed. Most importantly, the meaning and purpose of the Exodus—a focal point in all of Israel's history—is explained through the words of a woman. She is given the position of chief interpreter of the Exodus; in the text, it is her words that explain the ultimate meaning of that key event.

We now turn our attention to Deborah. A prophet and the leader[7] of Israel during terrible times, she is responsible for orchestrating an important military victory (Judges 4). Afterward, she sings a hymn of praise.[8] Much like the pattern found in Exodus 15, here is a military victory followed by a song of praise of-

fered by a woman. The woman's song explains the event's theological significance and provides closure to the incident.[9] The songs also create a space where readers are invited to join in the celebration.[10] Another resonance between Deborah's song and Miriam's is found in the theme of idolatry; Judges 5 implies that idolatry was the root of Israel's problems, but the rise of Deborah was the key to overcoming it.

The most compelling aspect of Deborah's praise song is its ruminations on motherhood. While Deborah is identified as the wife of Lapidoth,[11] she is not identified as a mother. Militarism, not maternity, is the major focus of her story. Nonetheless, in her hymn, she describes herself as a "mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7). It may be that she is using that term since both prophets (e.g., 2 Kings 2:12; 13:14) and military leaders (e.g., Isaiah 22:21) were sometimes described as fathers. But it may also be because her hymn complicates what it means to "mother" in fascinating ways. The song presents the military victory as ultimately belonging to Jael who, in effect, mothers the enemy leader Sisera to death. Jael shelters him in her tent, tucks him into bed (Judges 4:18), gives him milk, and then ruins this picture of maternal care by beheading him. Jael is called "blessed above women" (Judges 5:24) not in spite of, but because of, her violent act. And then the hymn references Sisera's actual mother (Judges 5:28), who wonders why her son has not returned to her. This song explores what it means to "mother"—for Deborah, for Jael, and for Sisera's mother—in very unexpected and compelling ways. In Deborah's vision of motherhood, acting as a prophet and a leader is mothering, killing an enemy using the tools of a mother's trade is mothering, while the hopes of a mother who is opposed to Israel are thwarted. Certainly Deborah's role in theologizing this significant military victory is not what the average Israelite might have expected; while it follows the pattern of Exodus, it focuses a military victory song on the meaning of mothering and ties the practice of mothering to the success of a nation.

This leads us to Hannah, whose song is also linked to her experience of motherhood. Tormented by her infertility and by a vengeful—and fertile!—sister wife, and living in a time of increasing wickedness, Hannah weeps uncontrollably in the shadow of the temple (1 Samuel 1). She vows that if the Lord will give her a

child, she will consecrate him to the Lord to serve in the temple. Despite the hostility, arrogance, and wickedness of the temple leadership in her day, she fulfills her promise. At that point, she sings a song of praise (1 Samuel 2:1). Note that the song does not come after the confirmation of the pregnancy or the birth of the child, but rather when the child is sent to the temple. Her victory is obviously not a military one, but neither is it physical birth; it is in the consecration of the child to the temple and the keeping of her covenant to do so. Hannah's song would have had a deeply personal significance, but for Hannah, the personal was also political. She wanted the child not for companionship, but so that he could serve the Lord and help Israel depart from its horrid path.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of her hymn is the use of the word "anointed" in 1 Samuel 2:10. This is generally regarded as the first reference to the concept of an anointed leader in the Old Testament (note that the Hebrew word for "anointed" comes into English as "messiah" and the Greek word as "Christ"). It is also one of the few references to God raising up an anointed king ever made by a rank-and-file Israelite. It is perhaps not coincidental that her own son would have the role of anointing Israel's first king (1 Samuel 10:1); we can only wonder whether he understood this doctrine and practice because of his mother. When, at the conclusion of the books of Samuel, David sings a psalm that mentions the horn, the anointed, the rock, and salvation, we hear him echoing Hannah from the beginning of the story (2 Samuel 22). And when Jesus is anointed in the New Testament, it will be by a woman (Mark 14:3-9).

The anointed at the end of Hannah's poem is more specifically "the horn of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10) and it is bracketed by a reference at the very beginning of the hymn to Hannah's own horn (1 Samuel 2:1). Because animals used their horns for defense, the horn became a symbol of strength. So we can read this hymn as Hannah celebrating the link between her own strength and the strength of the anointed leader that the Lord would provide to Israel. Hannah refers to a variety of body parts—heart, horn, and mouth—but not breast or womb, as would be more traditional for the celebration of bearing a child (e.g., Luke 11:27–28). Hannah has seen the link between her own circumstances and those of her nation:

> The prayer opens with Hannah and closes with the King. It opens with her own personal praise and closes with a confident assertion of God's victory over every adversary and of his sovereign rule. It opens in Shiloh; it closes at the ends of the earth. It opens with a local reversal; it closes with a cosmic reversal. It opens in the present age; it closes with the age to come.[12]

And the story of the kingdom of Israel begins with the story of a barren woman, one who creates the theological meaning of her motherhood through song, with reference to God's anointed.[13] Hannah tweaks the expected song that follows a battle victory to one where it follows the birth of a long-anticipated child. A woman's theologizing leads us to find victory not just in military success but in the birth of a child. It also, of course, sets the stage for Mary in the New Testament.

Mary's song (Luke 1:46–55), commonly known as the Magnificat,[14] is uttered to Elisabeth[15] after Elisabeth praises Mary. While custom would have called for Mary to praise Elisabeth in return, Mary instead praises the Lord.[16] A major theme of Mary's song is reversals. While Deborah and Hannah also speak of reversals, the concept reaches its full flowering here as Mary reflects on her change in status from the low position of God's slave to someone who will be called blessed by all generations (Luke 1:48). Mary then extends her personal experience to a universal one, much as Hannah did, and reflects on the reversals that affect the hungry and low. Because the hymn uses some past tense verbs, there are various theories for understanding it. Some scholars have understood Mary to be speaking prophetically of future events as if they had already occurred.[17] Others see Mary reviewing the history of Israel, and still others see her interweaving past and future. In any case, she is emphasizing God's ability to transform not only her personal life but also the broader social, cultural, and political realities into a new creation (Luke 1:51–54).

While the image of Mary has historically been focused on the pliant and maternal, this hymn is also one of judgment, with harsh condemnation of the proud, mighty, and rich. When, a few chapters later, Jesus pronounces woes on the rich (Luke 6:24–26), he is echoing his mother's words. Mary's song also changes her story from one of passive acceptance of God's will to the active creation of theological reflection. Mary's song incorporates themes and

language from its Old Testament predecessors, including the songs of Deborah and Hannah.[18] Raymond Brown describes the Magnificat as almost a mosaic[19] due to its abundance of Old Testament references; by some counts, more than a dozen different texts are quoted. We see Mary as someone familiar with the Old Testament and capable of applying it to her own situation: she creates a new scriptural text from relevant passages.[20] She finds in her own experience both resonance with and departure from the experiences of her predecessors.

Similarly, Mary is offering a praise song—not, as Miriam and Deborah did, after a military victory, but in celebration of the impending birth of a child. Mary's song celebrates not battlefield success but faithfulness and obedience, as Hannah's song did, and while Mary's song does include judgment on some groups, it is missing the condemnation of political enemies found in some of the earlier songs.[21] Jael was blessed above women for killing an enemy, but Mary is blessed above women for faithfully mothering Jesus.

So Mary both conforms to and subverts expectations as she incorporates previous scriptural texts into her own song. Mary gathers and shapes the tradition available to her in order to emphasize what is theologically significant.

Transitioning from the biblical world to the Restoration, we find another woman associated with religious song—Emma Smith. While Emma herself did not write hymns, she was tasked by revelation (D&C 25:11) with selecting hymns for the church.[22] According to Carol Cornwall Madsen,

> It took two years for Emma to complete the hymn selection, and another three passed before the hymns were printed in a single volume. From July 1830 to April 1832, when the selection process was completed and W. W. Phelps was instructed to correct and publish the hymns, Emma worked despite a growing antagonism toward the Church in Kirtland and a series of personal tragedies.[23]

The hymnal was eventually printed, with editorial assistance from W.W. Phelps,[24] in 1836.[25] Just under half of its hymns were written by Latter-day Saints,[26] and several hymns written by non-Latter-day Saints were altered, which was an accepted practice at the time.[27] The hymnal was pocket-sized and therefore frequently carried about, and such hymnals were sometimes used to teach

children to read. It was common for the lyrics to be read aloud before the hymn was sung in a meeting, which, according to Mary Poulter, "stressed the importance of the textual content."[28] In this context, the importance of hymn selection as a tool for shaping the doctrine and culture of a church is maximized, so it is very significant that this task was given to a woman. As Poulter writes, "Often, long sermons are forgotten and only small portions of great discourses are remembered, but texts expressed in the rhythms of poetry and music are easily memorized and can become an integral part of a belief system."[29] Much as the biblical women we have encountered shaped theology through their individual hymns, Emma Smith had a different task but with much the same result: her work in selecting hymns formed the early Saints' understanding of their doctrine and beliefs to a great extent.[30] The early church even interpreted Emma's task as an exclusive one; Carol Cornwall Madsen writes,

> The idea that Emma Smith should be the sole compiler of the Church's hymnal emerged in 1839 when the high council authorized an expanded hymnbook. David Rogers, a New York convert, had previously published for the New York Saints a hymnal that had drawn heavily on Emma's 1835 selection, and Brigham Young had taken a collection of hymns to England with the intent of publishing a hymnal there. But the Nauvoo high council voted to destroy all copies of Rogers's hymnbook and to forbid Brigham Young to publish a British edition.[31]

While discussions of the revelation commanding Emma Smith to select hymns tend to focus on publication, Michael Hicks is surely right to point out that "the revelation said nothing about publication. Indeed, as it was first delivered to Emma Smith, the revelation appeared to be principally a command to decide what hymns already known to church members were proper to be sung."[32] This is significant because it (along with W.W. Phelps' editorial role for the hymns that Emma had previously selected) emphasizes that Emma and the early church understood her task not as a practical nor an editorial one, but rather as a spiritual and creative one: selecting which hymns—and, therefore, doctrines—would be the backbone of the Restoration. Mary Poulter's article "Doctrines of Faith and Hope Found in Emma Smith's 1835 [sic] Hymnbook" does an excellent job of tracing the ways in which

Emma's songs promulgated distinctive doctrines of the Restoration, particularly regarding the Second Coming. Much as faithfulness and a hopeful attitude were found in the other women's songs we have discussed, these also were themes in the hymns that Emma selected.

Emma's commission to select songs is rare in that a reason is given for the commandment: Doctrine and Covenants 25:12 reads, "For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads." Three reasons are given here for Emma's task: that the Lord likes hymns, that hymns are a prayer, and that singing hymns results in blessings. Because Emma is the one selecting the hymns, and because hymns are prayers and conduits for blessings, this meant that the revelation gave Emma a role in shaping prayers, perhaps somewhat analogous to what Jesus did when he taught, "after this manner therefore pray ye" (Matthew 6:9; 3 Nephi 13:9). The preface[33] to Emma Smith's hymnal echoes the language of Doctrine and Covenants 25 nearly verbatim when it states that "the song of the righteous is a prayer unto God,"[34] suggesting the role that the revelation played in Emma's work on the hymns. So Emma's work should not be viewed as merely secretarial but rather as an executive role, assigned to her by revelation, in crystallizing the doctrines of the Restoration.

The distinctive role women have played in sacred music in general and in the Restoration in particular reaches a crescendo with Eliza R. Snow's[35] "O My Father."[36] This hymn is best known as the earliest and clearest expression of the Restoration belief in a Mother in Heaven; Eliza wrote that, through reason and through revelation, one could know of the reality of a divine female. Less frequently explored are the roles that the hymn assigns to Heavenly Mother. Note that the final stanza uses the plural forms 'you' and 'your' as opposed to the first stanza's singular 'thou' and 'thy.'[37] Where the plural pronouns refer to deity, we can mine the text for the doctrine Eliza was teaching about a Mother in Heaven. In the final stanza, the hymn envisions a reunion with Mother and Father after death, but only with permission from both of them. The line "Then, at length, when I've completed/all you [which is plural] sent me forth to do" implies that

mortal assignments came from both the Father and Mother. Finally, dwelling with them again will require the "mutual approbation" (or joint approval) of both. So Mother in Heaven is given two specific roles in this hymn: issuing mortal assignments and participating in the judgment. In this hymn, no division of tasks or status between the Father and Mother is implied—when they act, they act in unity. While Gordon B. Hinckley counseled that prayers addressed solely to Mother in Heaven are not appropriate,[38] this hymn features what we might call a "tandem prayer," since the hymn itself is, in effect, a prayer to both Mother and Father in Heaven.

Perhaps because of the focus on the hymn's reference to a Mother in Heaven, other aspects of its theology have received less attention. One noteworthy exception is President Spencer W. Kimball's comment that this hymn "speaks to the whole gospel program."[39] And it is true that the entire plan of salvation, as Latter-day Saints would later come to call it, from pre-existence to post-mortal life, can be found within Eliza's four famous stanzas. As Jill Mulvay Derr notes, "'O My Father' is primarily a hymn of orientation. It speaks of place, habitation, sphere, wandering, residing, and dwelling"[40] and thus describes the soul's journey through the eternities. From our vantage point, we can see how Eliza Snow, through her creative writing, has shaped the doctrine and culture of the church.

Given that so many of the sacred songs attributed by name to a specific person in the scriptures[41] are associated with women,[42] we might speak of sacred songs as, to borrow a phrase from yet another example of the genre, part of "the errand of angels . . . given to women."[43] In the examples that we have considered, the woman's song was crucial in constructing the theological meaning of a key event in sacred history. Taken as a whole, women's songs define and delineate theological themes including the central role of God, the importance of faithfulness, expected reversals of fortune as the Lord makes his will felt, the importance of rejoicing, and the concept of motherhood both on earth and in heaven.[44] Sacred songs appear to be one of the primary venues in the scriptures open to women not only for the exercise of their creative gifts, but also for the definition and promulgation of doctrine.[45]

Notes

1. I use the term "prophet" instead of the KJV's "prophetess" since feminine word endings unfortunately tend to connote a lesser status (e.g., majorette versus major, mistress versus master, governess versus governor). The word "prophetess" is used in six places in the Old Testament with reference to a female: Exodus 15:20 (Miriam), Judges 4:4 (Deborah), 2 Kings 22:14 (Huldah), 2 Chronicles 34:22 (Huldah), Nehemiah 6:14 (Noadiah), and Isaiah 8:3 (the wife of Isaiah). Counts vary, but approximately 13 percent of the named prophets in the Old Testament are female.

2. Because of the ambiguity in the English translation, some readers have understood 15:21 to be directed only to the women. But in Hebrew, the word we have as "sing" is a masculine plural verb, indicating that Miriam is speaking to either an all-male or to a mixed-gender group. The latter is more likely given the context.

3. Many scholars believe that although the longer praise song in Exodus 15:1–19 is attributed to Moses, it is more likely to have been originally attributed to Miriam. Certain ambiguities in the text allow for this possibility. It is also possible that Miriam's song in 15:21 is older and the song attributed to Moses in 15:1–19 is a later expansion. Since 15:21 quotes 15:1, it is also possible that what Miriam is singing is the entirety of 15:1–19, with only the first verse reiterated for reasons of brevity, much as we might substitute a title for an entire work. See Richard D. Patterson, "Victory at sea: Prose and Poetry in Exodus 14–15," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161, no. 641 (1984): 42–54. See also J. Gerald Janzen, "Song of Moses, song of Miriam: who is seconding whom?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (April 1, 1992): 211–220. See also Frank M. Cross and David Noel Freedman,"The Song of Miriam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (October 1955): 237–250. These questions about authorship, priority, and content cannot be definitively settled, so the following analysis assumes no particular position.

4. The sister who takes the infant Moses to Pharoah's daughter in Exodus 2 is not named and some scholars think that she might have been a different sister. While these details may be lost to history, it is nonetheless clear that in literary terms, the story of the Exodus is bookended by the faithful sister(s) of Moses.

5. J. Gerald Janzen, "Song of Moses, song of Miriam," 211–220.

6. Ibid., 220.

7. The KJV translation "judged" may be misleading for English speakers used to the modern role of a judge. Deborah has an executive

role—not just a judicial one—as her leadership of military affairs in Judges 4 implies.

8. See Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (Lousville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 78. Judges 5:1 has a feminine singular verb for "sang," implying that the speaker is Deborah. It has also been suggested that the reference to Barak is a later addition. Note that Judges 5:7 credits Deborah with the composition of the song as well.

9. "The psalms used in narratives as victory songs (Exod. 15, Judg. 5, 1 Sam. 2, Jdt. 16) have in common their nationalistic themes, association with female prophets (Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith), and concluding positions." James W. Watts, "Song and the Ancient Reader," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 22, no. 2 (June 1, 1995), 139.

10. "Study of the individual texts suggests that hymnic poetry in this position invites readers to join in the celebration, an effect which is especially strong in the victory songs of Exodus 15, Judges 5, and Judith 16." James W. Watts, "Song and the Ancient Reader," 139.

11. But note that "wife of Lapidoth" in Judges 4:4 could be translated as "woman of fire" or "fiery woman." See Danna Nolan Fewell, "Judges," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol Ann Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 75.

12. Stanley D. Walters, "The Voice of God's People in Exile," *Ex Auditu* 10 (January 1, 1994), 73–86.

13. There is an interesting comparison with Anna in Luke 2:36–38. Anna and Hannah share a name (Anna is the Greek form of Hannah), focus on the temple, reflect a desire for a long-anticipated child, invoke a statement of praise, and are called "prophetess." Hannah prophesies of the anointed; Anna rejoices in the realization of that prophecy.

14. "Magnificat" is the first word of the song in Latin.

15. A small number of scholars argue that Elisabeth, not Mary, should be credited with the Magnificat, but this idea has not persuaded the majority.

16. Note that this is similar to what Miriam did in praising the Lord in a situation where praise of the military was expected; cf. Exodus 15:20–21.

17. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 362–363.

18. It also appears to refer to Judith's song from the deuterocanonical Book of Judith.

19. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 357.

20. "The use of the language of tradition is not necessarily a sign that creative ability is lacking. Traditional language is language already heavy with meaning. It carries the weight of its use in the past, and a

skilled poet can awaken this past meaning and use it for his own purposes. In the case of the Magnificat, there seems to be a deliberate attempt to speak so that one always hears the echoes of the biblical tradition in the background." Robert C. Tannehill, "Magnificat as Poem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 2 (June 1, 1974), 263–275. Tannehill's close reading of the poetry of the Magnificat itself serves to illuminate Mary's skill and creativity.

21. Historically, some interpreters have imported violent imagery into Mary's story by reading her as the new Eve whose seed would bruise the serpent's head (see Genesis 3:15), but most modern interpreters see the martial imagery as absent from Mary's story. See Brittany E. Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (July 1, 2006), 436–456.

22. In the nineteenth century in the United States, it was unusual but not unprecedented for women to write hymns. One study found that about 4% of hymns written in this period were written by women. See Mary de Jong, "'Theirs the Sweetest Songs': Women Hymn Writers in the Nineteenth-Century United States," in *A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender, and the Creation of American Protestantism,* edited by Susan Juster and Lisa MacFarlane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 144–145.

23. Carol Cornwall Madsen, "The 'Elect Lady' Revelation (D&C 25): Its Historical and Doctrinal Context," in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Doctrine and Covenants*, edited by Craig K. Manscill (Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2004), 117–133.

24. "Ordered by the Council that the Hymns selected by sister Emma be corrected by br William W. Phelps." See Minutes, April 1832, http://Josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/minutes-30-april-1832 #2, accessed July 21, 2012.

25. The hymnal has a publication date of 1835, but most scholars believe that it was not actually printed until 1836. See Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith: Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe* (Champaign.: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 57.

26. Karen Lynn Davidson, "The Book of Mormon in Latter-day Saint Hymnody," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, Number 1 (2000), 22.

27. See Michael Hicks, "Poetic Borrowing in Early Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Spring 1985), 134–135.

28. Mary D. Poulter, "Doctrines of Faith and Hope Found in Emma Smith's 1835 Hymnbook," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 2 (1997–1998), 34.

29. Ibid., 33–34.

30. Note that virtually no hymnbooks were compiled by women in this period of history. According to Mary de Jong, "Hymnbook making was subject to men's control. Almost 99% of nineteenth-century American hymbooks were edited by men or by all-male committees that often consisted largely of ministers." Mary de Jong, "'Theirs the Sweetest Songs'": Women Hymn Writers in the Nineteenth-Century United States," in *A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender, and the Creation of American Protestantism*, 147.

31. Apparently Brigham Young didn't get this message in time; eventually, Joseph Smith did permit other people to compile hymnals. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, "The 'Elect Lady' Revelation," 117–133.

32. Michael D. Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 10.

33. The preface is unsigned but Emma probably wrote it. Michael Hicks suggests that, while we cannot be certain, it is likely that she wrote it since it was also used in the 1841 hymnal, which Phelps did not assist her with. (Personal communication from Michael Hicks in the author's possession.) Carol Cornwall Madsen also concludes that the preface was written by Emma. See Carol Cornwall Madsen, "The 'Elect Lady' Revelation," 117–133.

34. Emma Smith, comp., *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter day Saints* (Kirtland: F. G. Williams, 1835), iv.

35. It is possible that Eliza Snow had a formal role similar to Emma's. She is widely known as "Zion's poetess" and that title seems to go back to Joseph Smith. Derr speaks of her being "appointed" that title by Joseph Smith, although it is difficult to know to what extent either of them might have thought of this as a formal calling. See Jill Mulvay Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 36 (January 1996), 88.

36. The hymn was originally a poem titled "My Father in Heaven," published in *Times & Seasons*, November 15, 1845. It was later published as "Invocation, Or the Eternal Father and Mother" in a book of her poems. See Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," 105.

37. Ibid.,101.

38. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Daughters of God," *Ensign*, November 1991, 100.

39. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood," *Ensign,* March 1976.

40. See Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," 86.

41. One exception to this might be the Psalms, where about half of

the psalms contain a notation that they are "of David." This has traditionally been interpreted to mean that David wrote them. However, most scholars are not convinced that David wrote (all of) these psalms; they note that the phrase "of David" could also be translated as "to David" or "in the style of David" or "on behalf of" or "for David" or "about David," and "David" might refer to any Davidic king. Furthermore, the superscriptions that contain the phrase "of David" were probably written much later than the psalms themselves, making their attribution to David further suspect. Once the authorship question is opened, it is possible that some of these anonymous psalms may have been written by women; scholars in particular point to Psalm 16 and 131 as having evidence of a female hand in their construction. See John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1: Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2006), 25–27.

42. There are several other candidates for women's sacred songs that have not been considered herein, including Eve's statement in Moses 5:11, Huldah's pronouncement in 2 Chronicles 34:23–28, and Sariah's response in 1 Nephi 5:8, all of which fit the pattern of (1) containing a statement of hope/joy, (2) occurring after a trying incident, and (3) including a reflective theological statement, and all of which (with a little work) could be read as poetry.

43. From "As Sisters in Zion" in the 1985 LDS hymnal. The original lyrics to Emily H. Woodmansee's hymn, which was first known as "Song of the Sisters of the Relief Society," referred to "the office of angels, conferred upon woman" as a "right" that women claim. See *The Woman's Exponent,* 3, no. 13 (November 1, 1874), 98.

44. Derr links Hannah, Mary, and Eliza to the theme of rejoicing. See Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," 100.

45. In a recent General Conference talk, Elder Richard G. Scott suggested the possibility of female authors of scripture when he said, "Throughout the ages, Father in Heaven has inspired select men and women to find, through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, solutions to life's most perplexing problems. He has inspired those authorized servants to record those solutions as a type of handbook for those of His children who have faith in His plan of happiness and in His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. We have ready access to this guidance through the treasure we call the standard works—that is, the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price." In Richard G. Scott, "The Power of Scripture," October 2011 General Conference, http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2011/10/the-power-of-scripture?lang=eng (accessed August 6, 2012).

To Do the Business of the Church: A Cooperative Paradigm for Examining Gendered Participation Within Church Organizational Structure

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Part I: The Crisis

I will be talking today about how women fit into the functional structure of LDS church governance; but, unlike many of the others speaking today, I do not have advanced degrees in my subject, nor do I consider myself an academic. My credentials as someone qualified to talk about this subject come from: first, a lifetime of personal experience as a woman in the Church and now the mother of three daughters; second, my role as founder, in 2010, of a non-profit organization, the Mormon Women Project, which publishes stories of faithful Latter-day Saint women from around the world; and third, a twelve-year career in marketing and brand

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strategy, including my current role as associate creative director of Church-owned Bonneville Communications, the agency partnered with the Church on Mormon.org and the "I'm a Mormon" campaign.

Today, I will be applying that professional lens to examine the way LDS women are involved in ecclesiastical functions, and also how we talk about that female church involvement to an external, media-informed audience. As a marketer, I know how important it is for what we say we do regarding women in the Church, what we actually do, and what the Lord says we should do to be in triangulated harmony with each other. Today, I will explore how we can improve on our current practice of that triangulation.

As I started my research and was still seeking a solid thesis for my paper, there seemed to be a barrage of articles and blog posts that addressed the gendered division of labor in the Church. At first I was delighted by the breadth and volume of these articles on gendered church work, coming from a wide range of sources and philosophies, from *By Common Consent* to *A Well-Behaved Mormon Woman* to *Feminist Mormon Housewives* to *Times and Seasons.* As part of my research, I sent out my own survey as well, asking friends for their own insight into what the gendered division of labor means for them personally.

What happened was that the more I read, the more I took notes, the more I prayed and studied, the more I realized that my thesis needed to reflect the deeply emotional and sensitive nature of these discussions. Every expression of opinion packs in it feelings rooted in personal experience, in relationships with male leaders and family members, and in one's personal relationship with God. This was a reality which I've understood to be true for many years but which this initial research offered me unfiltered.

I came to rest on a prominent, consistent theme: There is a tremendous amount of pain among our women regarding how they can or cannot contribute to the governance of our ecclesiastical organization, and we need to pay attention to that pain. Listen to these statements, recently gathered across a variety of forums: "My 12-year-old son gets the priesthood and all of a sudden he's got more power and authority than me!"[1] Or another: "I truly wish you could feel the pain I feel as a woman in the Church. I know my potential and worth, and to have it limited to the role of

'presidee' in all areas discredits me as a daughter of God."[2] Or this one: "I feel like if I had been a 'good' Mormon, I wouldn't have gotten my Master's degree. I wouldn't be working now, and I wouldn't WANT to work so much. I'd want to be a mother and have kids and stay home."[3] Lastly: "I have a PhD and am a full-time professor at a university. I am also married and have three children. The only place in my life where I am treated like a lesser human being is at church."[4] I could go on and on.

How is this possible? Why is this happening when you walk into Deseret Book and see shelves of books just for women? What is going wrong when we hear women praised and adored from the pulpit? We have wonderful men in this church who are good husbands, sons, and bishops. If we take off the table the possibility of structural changes and work from an assumption that gendered segregation is divinely mandated, the burden is on us as members to figure out what it is we are doing with our current tools that is not living up to our potential. The pain is real.

Acknowledging the confusion and oft-resulting pain of being a woman in the Church is not something that is relegated to extremist academics or feisty feminist bloggers. In 2011, a comprehensive survey of over 3,000 people who had lost their belief in the gospel revealed that 47 percent of those respondents cited women's issues as a "significant" reason for their loss of faith.[5] The percentage of women who cited this specific issue as being the primary reason for their loss of faith was higher, at 63 percent. Additionally, 70 percent of single women who have lost their faith ranked women's issues as significant. Lest we think that these people who are losing their faith are an aberration or a fringe annoyance, in November of 2011, Elder Marlin Jensen confirmed that church members are "leaving in droves" and that "since Kirtland,"[6] the Church has not seen the exodus which we are now experiencing. Although Elder Jensen did not draw a direct correlation between this exodus and the pain surrounding women's position in the Church, the survey data support the conclusion that tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of women each year are unable to maintain their church activity because they cannot internally reconcile their position within the church organization. We may be tempted to justify the idea that people who leave the Church look for scapegoats for their inactivity, and that blaming

women's issues is just a way to deflect attention away from personal sin or loss of the Spirit. While this may be true in some cases, to use this as a rationalization for claiming that women's pain is overstated is patronizing and naïve. The bottom line is that women's role in church governance is a primary reason many people are telling themselves it is okay to leave, and at the very least we should be distraught that this issue opens the door to the way out.

Part II: The Pain Is Real

Allow me to tell you about my personal history as a further jumping-off point for this discussion.

I was born and raised in New York City as the only child of an eventually single, professional mother. I attended an all-girls' school for twelve years, which, ironically, has made me appreciate the importance of gender-segregated experiences and responsibilities as an adult. From the example of my mother and other exceptional women, I gained an intuitive understanding of the gospel as empowerment; it was the means by which energy and productivity blossomed in each of these influential women.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I was in the Relief Society presidency in my Yale University student ward and our greatest challenge was keeping young freshman girls active at church. Who wouldn't want to go to church, when you were away from home for the first time and feeling unsure of yourself and out of place? Apparently, plenty of girls. I struggled with finding ways to engage them, to make them feel needed, to give them jobs in our church organization that were more appealing to them at 9 A.M. on a Sunday than staying in bed and sleeping off that 3 A.M. dance party. After all, I couldn't ask them to get themselves out of bed to pass the sacrament.

The relationship of women to the Church didn't strike me as a crisis until I moved to San Francisco and served in another Relief Society presidency there under a phenomenal woman and mentor. Immediately after she was released from her calling, she and her husband and their three children had their names removed from the church records, citing her inability to reconcile her role as a woman in the Church. Since that experience, which was traumatic both for me personally and for our whole ward, I have tried

to reflect on what causes pain so deep that a woman will distance herself permanently from her culture, her family, even her entire worldview, to be free from that pain.

It was this experience and several others like it that prompted me to launch the Mormon Women Project, a collection of interviews with LDS women from around the world who exhibit the faith-infused empowerment that my mother and so many of the women I grew up with exemplified to me. The purpose of the Mormon Women Project is to give women models that show our women dealing with complex cultural challenges, family structures, and professional pursuits with the gospel and their church membership as tools of empowerment, not hindrances. But in addition to my constant effort to publish reaffirming narratives of spiritual empowerment, I have positioned myself as a bridge between various camps of thought—which has made me privy to and sympathetic to this pain that I am describing. In 2011, for instance, I helped spearhead a podcast series on Patheos.com called The Round Table, in which the founders of a wide spectrum of Mormon women's organizations—including Segullah, Feminist Mormon Housewives, LDS WAVE and The Power of Moms—met monthly to share our feelings and experiences about being women in the Church. I have spoken with these sisters at a variety of conferences as well. The Savior said, "If ye are not one, ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). Although my own personal struggle regarding the gendered division of church governance doesn't keep me awake at nights, this scripture does.

Unfortunately, denying this pain or belittling it is an all-too-common occurrence among both our men and our women. Consider this statement from a man in a metropolitan area bishopric: "I don't think that ambition or 'personal growth' of a woman in [the sphere of church governance] has any place in the church and that it is really a disguised form of pride. I'm wary of how impassioned female leaders could . . . play a role in that individual's path towards apostasy."[7]

When my 8-year-old daughter asks me why she'll never be able to pass the sacrament, is she being "prideful"? At work, I make decisions for men and male executives pay me to consult for them on business decisions in which I have expertise, yet as a member of my ward's Primary presidency I have to get approval from my

bishop to join Junior and Senior Primary opening exercises. Am I on the path to apostasy because I wonder why this is so? With the broad sweep of the word "pride," the bishopric member quoted above instantly devalues the pain in both my own daughter's sincere question and the requirement that I suspend my work experience when I interact with male leaders at church.

Similarly insensitive statements come from women, too. Consider this statement from a female blogger: "It's been my experience in speaking to and reading the thoughts of many progressive Mormon women, that they do not have a strong, LDS doctrinal understanding of priesthood and womanhood. . . . Faithful, active Mormon women do not oppose the counsel and inspired direction of living prophets."[8]

This statement leaves absolutely no room for a woman to even wonder why things are the way they are, and it condemns her for opposing the prophet if she does. Are we really going to let *wondering* become a red flag of lack of faith? Are we going to deny any give and take, any room for struggle, for doubt, for weakness, for pain, which often are the tools that bring us to more solid testimonial foundations than we started on? Can this absolutist approach of claiming to know another's depth of doctrinal understanding really represent the inquisitive gospel of love and moral agency that we cherish?

While some too flippantly dismiss or judge the pain, there are others for whom the pain seems to define their spiritual lives and, like my former Relief Society president, they measure every element of their church experience through the lens of that pain. "Women are the support staff to the real work of men. Period," is one woman's statement, as she describes how she understands the division of labor. "It's a patriarchal tradition" is another response I noted in my own personal survey. "There is no such thing as 'good' patriarchy," concludes yet another. Most of our women, however, are somewhere in the middle: not sweeping the issue under the carpet or judging those who struggle, but also not dismissing our ecclesiastical organization as entirely flawed or even abusive to women.

How can we help more in our community find peace in a middle ground, where the pain is acknowledged and we provide doctrinally-sound tools and behavioral guidelines for addressing that

pain? The first step must be to extract exactly what it is about our current rhetoric and practices that is at the source of this crisis among our women.

Part III: Identifying the Sources of Pain

As we start that exercise, allow yourself for a moment to step into the shoes of someone who struggles with finding her place. Consider, for instance, the narratives that define the rights of passage of our youth and the source of this bitterness may become illuminated.

So many of our narratives about our youth involve those moments when a dad ordains his son to the Aaronic priesthood, and then the first Sunday the son gets to pass the sacrament, or bless the sacrament, or go home teaching or collect fast offerings or become an Eagle Scout or receive a mission call. These are times of spiritual outpourings and parental pride, the joy of eternal progression made tangible through the bodily actions taken on by that worthy son. It's not often a mother describes a similarly gripping scene when her daughter graduates from Mia Maids to Laurels.

To illustrate this point even further, there is a narrative that all LDS mothers of young daughters do share. It is the narrative of breaking the news to a young daughter that she will never be able to pass the sacrament, be the bishop, or become the prophet.

Consider this reflection by the mother of a six-year-old:

> The other day I overheard a conversation between my six-year-old daughter and my mother-in-law. They had been talking about how her older brother would become a deacon later this year. My daughter said enthusiastically, "When I turn twelve, I'm going to pass the sacrament too!"
>
> You should understand that one of this child's favorite Sunday rituals has been taking the sacrament tray from the administering deacon and distributing it to the rest of the family; when she returns the tray to the deacon and sits back down, she has a big smile on her face and it's clear that she feels she's done something very grown-up and important.
>
> So imagine her disappointment when her grandmother informed her that passing the sacrament is a job only for boys. Crestfallen, and with that childish sense of entitlement, my daughter asked, "But what do I get when I turn twelve?"
>
> . . . It made me very sad. My question is not what my daughter

> "gets" when she turns twelve, but what will be asked of her? What messages will she get about her role in the church?
>
> On the one hand we want to impress upon young men what a privilege and honor it is to [act in these sacred responsibilities], while on the other hand we insist to our young women (and women of all ages) that it's really no big deal. Seriously, ladies, you don't want [to have to do this stuff]. You shouldn't want [to have to]. Nothing but trouble, that priesthood! And yet, very important. Without it our church would be nothing. Worse than nothing, a fraud. But at the same time, you aren't missing out on anything. Trust us![9]

And here is a second narrative in which former BYU professor Valerie Hudson describes this same moment with her own daughter, Ariel:

> In the spring of 1996, I was driving my then-nine-year-old daughter, Ariel, to judo class. She was unusually quiet and I knew why. For years, when anyone had asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she would answer, "President of the United States, prophet of the Church, a mother, a botanist, a teacher and a ballet dancer." This had been the topic of conversation just before we got in the car and her older brother had cavalierly informed her that there was no way she could be prophet of the Church—that only men could be the prophet. We drove along in silence for several blocks and then she turned to me, her chin quivering, and asked, "Mom, is it true? Is it true women can't be prophet?" I told her it was true. She began to cry in earnest. I realized this was a major turning point in my daughter's life. For the very first time, she saw that her gender constrained who she could be. My heart broke for her, broke for the loss of something she might never regain—the feeling that who Ariel was was more important than the fact that she was a girl. Through my own pain I determined that I could not leave her with this bald, isolated, soul-withering fact when the context in which it was embedded gave her so much richer possibilities.[10]

The sadness expressed in these narratives and in many others that I've heard over the years does not necessarily come from the fact that our daughters won't get to do the same things as our sons. It is rarely driven by the "pride" the bishopric member I quoted earlier describes as power-grubbing or seeking beyond the mark. Rather, the pain simply comes from the disconnect between our identities as women in our day-to-day lives in the external world and our identities as women in the institutional church. We are not a hermetic religion, and so we function in a world where individuality and opportunity are celebrated as the hall-

marks of civilized societies. Valuing the individual's right to aspire to any circumstance or opportunity is practically the mantra of the 21st century. And yet, as women functioning within the ecclesiastical church structure, we are asked to put aside our understanding of how contemporary societies and workplaces ideally should function and instead grasp hold of a very different model. We require that our women suspend their understanding of social equality as it is currently represented in our modern society. This is consistent with our belief that we should be "in the world" but not "of" it, but we members should not flippantly dismiss how difficult this can be in actual practice for a woman whose role in worldly society has changed so swiftly and dramatically over the past hundred years.

Desiring to be used, engaged, recognized, and appreciated for our public contributions is not, for most women, about the glory of public praise or being in the spotlight. It's not about wanting to eradicate the divine differences between women and men. It is simply about a basic human need in every person—man or woman—to be told, "You are needed. You matter. You have a purpose. Your opinions matter. Not just at home behind closed doors, not just with our children, as essential as those influences are, but also in the broadest context of the Lord's kingdom." I was speaking last week with a woman who runs an NGO in Uganda, offering reading and computer literacy classes to men and women who are coming out of the bush after ten-plus years of being child soldiers or sex slaves in Joseph Kony's guerilla regime. She told me that most of her students desperately want to create Facebook accounts. When I expressed surprise, she quoted one of her students as saying, "I want people to know that I *am.* That I have an identity of my own. That I have a personality and can make choices. That I survived the bush, that I am strong." In the face of life's greatest suffering, one need that arises above many others is the need to be recognized as a unique and valued contributor.

Part IV: The Cooperative Paradigm

Having established the magnitude of this crisis and having struck at some of the roots of the pain, I'd like to turn now to what we can do to alleviate this pain. There is a premier rule in public relations that you cannot tell a story that is not true and still have

it resonate or feel authentic to the audience you are trying to convince. PR strategy must reflect how an organization is actually behaving or it can never ring true, and that is true with external audiences as well as internal audiences. The internal audience must be behaving in the way that they say they are behaving, or else they will ultimately be exposed or criticized. Right now regarding our women, there are gaps between what we say we are doing, what the Lord has told us we ideally should be doing, and what we actually are doing. If we bring these three points of triangulation into harmony, we will have greater integrity, stronger convictions, and happier women.

I will first address our rhetoric and communications, or what we say we are doing. In a typical organization that might examine the alignment between their internal behavior and external communications, it would be more common to start scrutinizing the internal behavior and making changes there which would later be communicated externally. But we are not a typical organization. Instead of having two points of alignment that create a straight line—the way we act and the way we say we act—we actually work in a triangular relationship between the way we act, the way we say we act, and the way that the Lord says we should act. Examining our external communications first allows us the opportunity to see how well we are doing in echoing back to the world what the Lord has first spoken to us.

Let's look at one common narrative we share when confronted about our system of gender segregation in this contemporary world. Last year, the *Washington Post* asked Michael Otterson and representatives from nineteen other religious congregations to comment in 500 words on the following prompt: "Former president Jimmy Carter has said, 'The discrimination against women on a global basis is very often attributable to the declaration by religious leaders in Christianity, Islam and other religions that women are inferior in the eyes of God.' Many traditions teach that while both men and women are equal in value, God has ordained specific roles for men and women. Those distinct duties often keep women out of leadership positions in their religious communities. What is religion's role in gender discrimination?"[11]

The title of the response from Otterson was "What Mormon Equality Looks Like," implying that there is a system of equality in

our leadership that simply needs to be revealed to an external audience. Otterson wrote:

> I put this question to three women in my church and asked them for their own insights on how they see their role and life in the Church. . . .
>
> Here are their points about life as a Mormon woman.
>
> Women in the Mormon faith regularly preach from the pulpit to the congregation and lead prayers during Sunday services. As a result, today's Latter-day Saint women tend to be well educated and confident. Most have experience in speaking in public, directing or presiding over organizations, teaching and leading by example. Brigham Young University turns out more female than male graduates.

The negative response to Otterson's piece among the Church commentary in the bloggernacle was intense and personally painful to Otterson, who feels that he is usually in tune with the membership. One thing that was misunderstood was that he did not write the title of the piece, which so cavalierly used the big "E" word: Equality. The laudable fact that he reached externally to women to guide his response was overshadowed by one significant disconnect and the disconnect was this: the fact that our women preach from the pulpit and say prayers in sacrament meeting does not make them "equal" to our men, according to any publicly accepted definition of that word.

Why do we do this? Why, when confronted with an intentionally inflammatory accusation like "gender discrimination," do we immediately default to defensive claims that our women are actually just the same as our men because they speak in church, go to school, and get to feel the Spirit the same way? We so often instinctually fall back on earthly paradigms to describe our structure. In an effort to bridge our own experience with the experience of our external audience, we rely on comparisons to hierarchical power structures of fallen world institutions: governments, corporations, and universities in which men and women ideally work side by side to advance to opportunities available to both genders. We talk in terms of opportunity, advancement, visibility, and hierarchical power, which are hallmarks of advanced worldly institutions (in America, at least). We highlight statistical equalities like how many women graduate from college. If you'd like fur-

ther proof of this tendency, go read through some of the answers members have given on Mormon.org to the question, "Why don't women hold the priesthood?" and note how many times those answers cite the fact that our women speak in sacrament meeting or run the Primary.

But I call this the Apples-to-Snapples comparison: leading an auxiliary organization that has influence over a subset of the population is *not* the same as leading the entire organization. According to the world's definition of equality, women's leadership opportunities in the Church organization are a watered-down version of the real thing, with lots of sugar added.

Continuing to rely on the Apples-to-Snapples comparison is not good enough because, in the outside world, when you say men and women have equal leadership opportunities, you mean—at least ideally—that men and women have the same cleared path to advance to the same positions of influence and authority. When the outside world looks at our structure and sees men ecclesiastically responsible for even the highest-ranked women in our organization, the media perceives our claims as being false advertising and we lose our credibility to tell our own story. It then becomes someone else's job to "uncover" the truth for us, leading down a path of exposés and betrayals.

Is there gender discrimination in the Church? If discrimination means separation according to gender, yes. If it means delineation of opportunities based solely on gender, yes. Many argue that having different opportunities based on gender is unfair, adverse, and/or abusive by definition. The Church does not satisfy secular gender-related egalitarian ideals, period; and our institutional behavior fits that definition of gender discrimination in several inescapable ways. We shrink away from accurately representing how we work, thinking it condemns us as a church. And in the eyes of the world it might. But the Church does not, and should not, operate according to secular concepts of power, status, etc.; if we attempt to justify ourselves in this paradigm we will not only fail, but also betray our own ideals.

We need a narrative that doesn't rely on justifications. It shouldn't rely on comparisons to fallen world paradigms. It needs to stand on its own, while acknowledging that it may have little

precedent and little comparison to worldly paradigms that describe gender-related egalitarian ideals.

What is this new narrative? I'd like to take the time to explore a possible option now that is specifically tailored to a marketing or public relations context and also has integrity for an internal audience.

In preparing his response to the *Washington Post's* prompt, Otterson asked three women to share their opinions with him. I was one of the three women that the public affairs team approached to ask for input, but out of respect to the fact that he didn't incorporate any of my specific ideas, he left my name out. I've had the opportunity to speak with Otterson since then, and he and the public affairs team have been exceptionally receptive and sensitive to my ideas. I have been thrilled with the seriousness Public Affairs has shown to the concerns and pain of our women. However, at the time he was writing this response for the *Washington Post,* 500 words in an online panel discussion was not the appropriate place in which to spell out a new paradigm for explaining our gendered structure. I understood these limitations of space and context myself as a marketing professional. I'm grateful to him for the unqualified support and interest he's shown me since then.

To explore what this alternative rhetoric might be, allow me to share with you some of the thoughts I sent to the public affairs team when they first approached me about how I would respond to the *Washington Post's* prompt:

> I do not suggest presenting a blanket claim that women have leadership roles within the organization. While we can certainly point to the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary, the ratio of global female leaders to male leaders is so small that pointing it out only serves to highlight the discrepancy. Also, bringing attention to the fact that our women only lead other women and children is playing into the logic of the prompt because it can then be inferred that women are not considered of high enough value to be more than special-interest figureheads. I also think that taking the "look, women really do lead!" angle sounds inherently patronizing coming from a male author.

The prompt suggests women do not hold leadership positions, therefore women are inferior. I suggest we argue it is true that Mormon women do not hold an equal number of global lead-

ership positions as men, but that is not because they are of lesser value. It is because we believe we are working in an eternal paradigm in which roles and responsibilities are divided up cooperatively rather than hierarchically. Mormonism is a lay church, so the members are the ministers, and this is a completely different organizational structure than traditional Christian priesthood or ministry, which is defined as an exclusive or trained clergy. Thus, when we talk about our ministerial structure to the outside world, we are starting from very different foundational understandings of what ecclesiastical ministry means.

The prompt's logic doesn't adequately leave room for our organization's cooperative structure of service, where no one person is paid for his or her ministry or deemed of greater value than another and where each brings unique resources to his or her responsibilities.

• Working toward a Zionistic cooperation within an earthly paradigm means that we often default to the human ordering with which we are most familiar: that of hierarchy and the currency of power. In an organization such as a church where no one is getting rich off of personal dedication to the cause, hierarchical power is sometimes weighed as the greatest currency because it is the human way of measuring success on the way to a goal. However, in a cooperative structure where people are rotating positions every few years and no one is materialistically rewarded over another person, that hierarchy is a flimsy currency on which to base one's value.

• In the cooperative structure that is the LDS Church's lay ministry, there is a division of roles for the benefit of the organizational order. This division of labor is, we believe, a reflection of divine mandates given to Joseph Smith. The division of labor—not just among men and women but among varying age groups, geographical groups and also among individuals—is a central theme of the Doctrine and Covenants. For example, in March of 1835, Joseph recorded a revelation from the Lord that specified the organizational structure of the church governance: Section 107. Close reading of this revelation shows how abundantly the Lord uses phrases such as, "of necessity" and "it must needs be" and "to do the busi-

ness of the church" in describing how important an ordered approach was to church administration. Similar language is used in the Book of Mormon when congregations of believers are organized in ancient civilizations.[12]

• Nowhere does the Lord intimate that various callings and responsibilities are intended to give one person power over another. In fact, the words "lead" and "leader" appear nowhere in this section, and similarly, the word "leader" appears nowhere in the Book of Mormon. Even that book's most admirable leaders, like Captain Moroni, are described as "servant[s]" and "righteous follower[s] of Christ." This emphasis on organizational stability, on the specific roles and responsibilities of various parties to act as facilitators within the larger community, is, we believe, of divine origin and eternal value.

• Lastly, the world calculates in terms of top-down power; God's calculations are exactly opposite. In the divine kingdom the servant holds the highest status, and in the Church every position is a service position. Given the obvious parallels between the Church's administrative channels and a business organization, it's easy to mistakenly assess the Church as a ladder-climbing corporation with God in a corner office at the top, but in this line of thinking we only reveal our shoddy human understanding of power.

In concluding my thoughts to the Public Affairs team, I finished by saying, "When we claim, as we regularly do, that the Church as an organization gives women and men equal leadership opportunities (which is simply not true), we're using the same paradigm of power that President Carter is implying and the prompt assumes, which is an inadequate paradigm for evaluating power dynamics in an ecclesiastical institution such as ours. The paradigm is the problem, and must be addressed if we're to offer anything beyond hollow excuses for women's status in the Church. To argue, as Carter did, that women have inferior status and inadequate power because they lack hierarchical leadership opportunities is to superimpose a human construct onto a divine one. I—and many women I know—would love to see us moving away from this rhetoric."

This idea of a cooperative paradigm is much harder to explain

in our modern-day, fast-paced, soundbite-oriented news outlets than simply falling back on the Apples-to-Snapples comparison. My own explanation above was considerably more than Otterson's allotted 500 words, and there are theologians and scholars who have produced thoughtful commentary of their own, such as Don Sorenson and Valerie Hudson's *Women in Eternity, Women in Zion,* and Beverly Campbell's *Eve and the Choice Made in Eden.* But whatever rhetoric we move to, it is essential that we rely on a doctrinally-rich explanation that challenges and even confounds fallen world paradigms rather than playing unfavorably right into them.

One of beauties of the cooperative paradigm over the hierarchical paradigm is that the cooperative paradigm more accurately incorporates both ecclesiastical and sacerdotal definitions of priesthood, which seems to be understood generally throughout the Church as being much more gendered than a close reading of scripture suggests. For example, let us return to the organizational language of the Doctrine and Covenants. Section 84 states: "And again, the offices of elder and bishop are necessary appendages belonging unto the high priesthood. And again, the offices of teacher and deacon are necessary appendages belonging to the lesser priesthood" (D&C 84:29–30; see also D&C 107:5). Pay attention to that word "appendages." An appendage is "a thing that is added or attached to something larger or more important." Are not the offices of elder or bishop or teacher or deacon appendages to the priesthood, and not the priesthood itself? Are these so different from the female organizations, which we routinely call "auxiliaries"?

Pulitzer Prizing-winning Harvard professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has written about the vocabulary we use to describe our various congregants. She notes that our casual interchange of the words "men" and "priesthood" contributes to our misunderstanding that the men only have the power to do God's work. Have you ever heard a member of the bishopric thank "the priesthood" for passing the sacrament, instead of the "Young Men" or even the "men of the priesthood"? The bishopric in my ward does an admirable job of thanking "the men of the priesthood" rather than the "priesthood" itself, but it's likely that each of us, despite our best intentions, carelessly conflates the power to act in God's name

with the vehicle designed to administrate its use. Professor Ulrich describes the conflation this way: "Because we use the word *priesthood* to refer to both the vehicle and the power, we get into some curious situations, almost like mistaking a utility pole for electricity or a sacrament cup for water."[13] Elder Dallin H. Oaks has spoken on the importance of this clarity of language as well: "We must never forget that the priesthood is not owned by or embodied by those who hold it."[14]

In the survey I sent out to my own network of women, I asked what explanation the respondents would give for why only boys get to pass the sacrament. The number one answer I received was, "Because they have the priesthood." Equating the priesthood with a gendered privilege, like passing the sacrament, reinforces over and over again the understanding that men "get" something the women don't and the women are therefore lacking and lesser. Some in my survey included as part of their answer that if men "get" the priesthood, then women get motherhood, which is an explanation that brings great peace to many. However, it also makes some women extremely uncomfortable. Examining the difficulties in the motherhood-to-priesthood comparison would be the subject of another paper entirely, but the arguments broadly fall into a few points: First of all, saying motherhood is the complementary gift to priesthood again solidifies the gendered assignment of the power to act under God's direction as something only men can do. The complement to motherhood, the argument goes, is actually fatherhood. Secondly, a man's ability to act in the name of the priesthood is something that is earned through worthiness and by personal triumph of character. The only way a man can exercise the power of God effectively is by being sufficiently righteous to represent God. By contrast, personal worthiness is not a prerequisite for a woman's ability to bear children. There are many righteous, worthy women who are not mothers and some of them will never be mothers in this life. Becoming a mother is beyond the control of many women, despite their personal worthiness or triumph over character. In a church where more than half of our women are single, we need to tread carefully when claiming a parallel between motherhood and priesthood.

Returning to the cooperative paradigm, it might feel counter-

intuitive to some to be backing off bold claims of equality in an age when we are striving to be relevant to and more widely respected by the outside world. However, I feel that this alternate paradigm—explained and reiterated thoroughly over time and in the right contexts inside and outside of the Church—actually offers us a much wider platform on which to explore doctrine, bring others along in that exploration, and value each other cooperatively rather than hierarchically. Most importantly, this alternate paradigm gives us the conviction we need to make sure that the currency of power does not dictate our behavior as servant-leaders. For my purposes as a marketer, the cooperative paradigm provides an answer of integrity that opens the door for meaningful external dialogues, as well as internal dialogues, to which I now turn.

Part V: The Internal Shift

This August on the Mormon Women Project, I posted an exclusive historical interview with Maxine Hanks, one of the "September Six" who was excommunicated from the Church in September 1993. Last year, Maxine was personally invited by church leadership to be rebaptized as a member of the Church, an invitation she heartily accepted after a 20-year journey into feminist theology, including periods as a scholar of Gnosticism and a nondenominational chaplain. In her interview, Hanks reflects on why, after studies and experiences that took her as far away from Mormonism as theologically possible, she chose to again bear witness of the truthfulness of Mormonism.

Hanks says, "I don't think gender tensions in Mormonism are due to *inequality* in the religion, but due to *invisibility* of that equality. The equality is embedded, inherent in Mormon theology, history, texts, structures. Gender equality is built into the blueprints of Mormonism, but obscured in the elaborations. . . . The inherent gender equality in Mormonism just needs to be seen by extracting it from other distracting elements and contexts."

What kinds of initiatives could we take as church members to excavate this gender equality that we are currently not taking? Harvard professor Clayton Christiansen, known for his work on disruptive innovation, often speaks to LDS Harvard students

about how many of the standard Church programs—seminary and Family Home Evening, for example—started from the initiative of a small group of church members who saw a need and innovated ways to address that need that didn't compromise doctrine or divinely mandated ecclesiastical practices in any way. How can we apply this same innovative spirit to the arena of women's responsibilities at church? How can we put into practice our desires to see this cooperative community become more of our practiced reality? In essence, while we are reigning in our external claims, we need simultaneously to be broadening the practice of egalitarian ideals in our behavior so that with these opposite pulls we can have both internal and external meet harmoniously in the middle. I ask each man and woman in the audience today: What are you doing to excavate the power of the women in your ward and make their contributions more visible?

Women: We women need to do a better job of claiming the power and direct access that comes from being a child of God and realizing that power in the choices we make in our own lives. Ours is not a gospel of limitation; it is a gospel of empowerment to get the education we want, pursue our dreams, work in partnerships with spouses and friends to raise families, contribute to our communities as our talents dictate, and seek out answers to our deepest questions without intermediaries.

Men: In your ecclesiastical roles, many of you have frequent opportunity to make choices regarding how to use the talents and insights of the women in your ward. To give one example, let me cite a conversation I recently had with a bishop in New York City. This bishop, out of his own awareness of his ward's needs, has been brainstorming how to engage women more in his ward since he was called to his position two years ago. "I'm particularly searching for ways to connect with the Young Women," he told me. He said, "With the Young Men—especially since I was the Young Men's president just before becoming bishop—I can call them up and ask to go on a walk with them or take them out for a soda to talk about their lives. I can't do that with the girls. I struggle with how to make our girls feel a part of sacrament meeting; I can't just call them up like I can the boys and ask them to pass or bless the sacrament to get them cleaned up and to church on Sunday morning. I've been thinking: how can I make our young

women part of the Sacrament Meeting preparation and organization like the Young Men are? I've thought of having one of the Young Women classes responsible for preparing the program each week, and another class be the greeters. That way the ward would see them and they would have a role in preparing the ward for Sacrament Meeting. I've also thought of placing the girls at the doors during the Sacrament to open and close them as the boys go in and out to pass to the people in the hall."

I love this bishop's thought process: first, he has identified for himself as the leader of a congregation the need to have equally meaningful relationships with both the boys and the girls in his ward. He has also identified the need for the girls in his ward to have a more visible role in preparing for their future service in God's kingdom, noting that there is a discrepancy in the ways our girls and boys are trained for service leadership. Lastly, he has identified barriers that make it difficult for him to engage the girls in the same way he does the boys, and he has committed to finding innovative solutions that are still within the purview of his stewardship, as outlined in the Church Handbook.

Allow me to share with you a number of other ideas both men and women can employ to make our women more visible, more engaged, more appreciated, and better trained for service leadership:

Let's make sure the female leaders of the stake—the stake Relief Society president, the stake Primary president, the stake Young Women's president, and their counselors—are known by face and by name just as well as the members of the stake presidency or high council are known. This can be done by inviting these presidents and even their counselors to sit on the stand during stake conference. Those planning stake conference can have the stake Relief Society president be a standard speaker in the meeting, year after year, just as the stake president always speaks, so that the congregation easily recognizes her as a stake leader. The same can be done with the female leadership on a ward level. Have them sit on the stand during ward conference. A variation on this idea could be having the stake's female leadership speak on a monthly planned rotation with high council speakers in wards throughout the stake. Alternatively, the wives of bishops and stake presidents could be regularly highlighted as speakers in

these key gatherings, or could at least sit on the stand with their husbands if not attending small children.

In my ward, I am making a subtle but consistent effort to call the Primary president I serve under "President Snyder" rather than "Sister Snyder." I do the same for my Relief Society president. Titles matter, and ward members will pick up the respect and visibility afforded to the female presidents of these organizations if they are addressed as such.

When either male or female leaders or ward members are talking about women, quote other women. It is so nice to have men talk about how wonderful we are, but let's face it. The experts on who women are and what they are like are women. And we women know this. We want to hear from our own. We want someone who has had a life experience—physically, spiritually, emotionally—closer to our own to tell us what our Heavenly Father thinks of us and how we can best serve Him as women. It is important for the women in our stewardship to hear us value, use quotes from, and tell stories about women. And, you know, men need to hear what women have to say, too. By hearing women quoted, men will become more aware of the wisdom and capability embodied by our women. Admittedly, it has been difficult in the past to find compelling statements by our female leaders because they haven't been as organized and readily published as men's words, but that is changing. The recent publication of *Daughters in My Kingdom* was a huge step in legitimizing the female leadership of the entire church population, and President Julie Beck offered several sermons at the end of her tenure that shone light on the Relief Society's tremendous potential as a leadership organization. Also, the seven-volume "Women of Faith in the Latter Days" series that is now underway sheds light on our wise fore-mothers others. And of course the momentous forthcoming publication of the Relief Society minutes will give us ample material. Did you know the Relief Society minutes are being published? This is huge and should be read as voraciously as any biography of a prophet or the Joseph Smith Papers. Exciting developments are also underway at the Church History Archive under the exceptional care of the Church's first women's historian, Kate Holbrook, who is working to make more accessible the vast repository of women's life writings, sermons and journals.

I will never forget the opportunity I had to sit in a small room on the upper floor of the Lion House about two years ago and hear one of Eliza R. Snow's sermons performed by an actress. The sermon was delivered by Eliza Snow in the Ogden Tabernacle in 1873,[16] and the words of the monologue communicated an understanding of female power and communion with the Spirit that shocked most of us in the room, and this group included several women who themselves have spoken in our general conferences. I recently read my great-great-grandmother's patriarchal blessing from 1870, three years before Snow's sermon in Ogden, and in the blessing my great-great-grandmother is referred to as a "prophetess and revelator." Can you imagine using such language of empowerment to describe the female leaders in your wards? If we grew accustomed to hearing our women leaders speak as authorities, as prophetesses and revelators, and referred to them that way ourselves, perhaps there would be fewer among us who feel the need for a soda or bathroom break when the female speaker comes on the screen during general conference.

One idea for helping include the influence and inspiration of women in sacrament meeting is to call a woman to be a "Sacrament Meeting Coordinator," a position that existed in my Cambridge, Massachusetts, ward. In this calling, a woman worked with the bishopric to identify sacrament meeting topics or to find people in the ward who she felt would be good at speaking on those topics. She also worked with the ward music leader, chorister, and choir director to identify supporting hymns and musical numbers. If a female sacrament meeting coordinator is not used, then male leaders can still seek input from women and female ward leaders on topics and speakers. Find other callings to give specifically to women. For example, in New York, two female CPAs were recently called to be stake auditors.

Avoid having men always speak last in sacrament meeting. Sometimes have all women speakers or at least a woman as the final speaker. As directed in the handbook, avoid having the speakers always be husband/wife combos. If a husband and wife are speaking, ask the wife if she would like to speak last. Let's do away with the expectation that the woman has to tell the cute dating story! Mix up the gender expectations of activities too. The boys don't always have to go camping and the girls don't always have to

sew scripture bags. Invite the Activity Day girls to participate in the Pinewood Derby. Have your Priests make homemade pizza or apple pies. Mix things up on Sundays too: Ask a female president to lead a ward council training or a fifth Sunday lesson. In Alexandria, Virginia, a Relief Society presidency member gave a thoughtful and well-received training in her ward's Elders Quorum about the new church book, *Daughters in My Kingdom*.[17] Ask a sacrament meeting speaker to talk about one of the general conference addresses given by a female leader. Consider how infrequently a young man or adult man in the Church is asked to listen to a woman as a public spiritual authority and find ways to challenge that status quo.

Honor women's requests to be called by the name they desire, whether it be a married woman with a different surname, a divorced woman returning to her maiden name, etc. My husband and I decided I would keep my maiden name when we got married, but the ward clerk in the first ward we lived in together told me it was "illegal" for me not to take my husband's name; and he printed my name as Neylan Smith on all ward lists and publications, despite the fact that Neylan Smith didn't even exist on government documents. Make sure all ward lists and directories reflect the woman's desires on this matter. Ensure that a woman's cell phone or other contact information be included with ward lists and directories. It is inconvenient and disrespectful for a fellow ward member to have to call the husband to reach the wife because her number is not listed.

Bishops, recognize that baby blessings can be hard experiences for some women. They have made huge sacrifices to bring a baby into the world and can feel discouraged that the only public recognition of this fact in the Church is by their husband and male members of the ward or family. My bishop does a fantastic job of recognizing the mother and her sacrifice from the pulpit by having her stand up after the blessing. I've heard of wards where the bishop asks the mother ahead of time if she would like a moment to speak herself after the blessing.

Follow the example of the general Church leaders and use gender inclusive language whenever possible. If a scripture or quote says "man" but means all people, then it is okay to change that to "man and woman," "sons and daughters," "male and fe-

male," etc. We see this kind of emphasis in general conference and in the talks of our Church leaders. On the topic of language, I have heard more than once a male leader talk about how he and other leaders "take care" of the women in their ward. Let us be extremely careful how we use this phrase. There may be times when taking care of a widow or a single mother is vital and deeply appreciated, but I have very few peers who would think it desirable to be "taken care" of by men. Describing the male/female relationship as one of taking care of the women implies that the men have access to resources, skills and spiritual insight that is not available to women, and this plays directly into the hierarchical paradigm of someone being higher on the ladder of power than another.

Let's consider home teaching and visiting teaching for a moment. From the age of twelve, a boy is invited to join his father or older men in the process of home teaching, receiving direct training in how to care for ward members at a young age. Boys also interact regularly in official priesthood meetings with older men, giving them examples of ward ecclesiastical leadership years before they are actually tasked with this duty themselves. Let's contrast this with the experience of our Young Women. They are never included in Relief Society meetings. As women, we are not encouraged to take our daughters or other young women with us when we go visiting teaching. There is a lost opportunity to show the girls what servant leadership looks like, to engage them early on in the caring of the ward. Is there a rule against including a daughter or another young woman in a visiting teaching companionship? Not that I know of. In the spirit of Clayton Christiansen's disruptive innovation, I encourage some of us to try it out.

Here's something for male leaders to try out: Examine the make-up of your Priesthood Executive Committee (PEC). According to the Handbook, this meeting consists exclusively of men, with the ward Relief Society president being included periodically by invitation. One Relief Society president's account of these meetings sheds light on how vital it is that at least some female presence is consistent. She says:

> The PEC meetings I attend are not disorganized or poorly run or irrelevant. The men are gracious and competent, and . . . I enjoy

> working with them. My ward, like most others in the Church, has more active women than men on the rolls. The "priesthood matters" that make up the agendas at these meetings virtually always affect women, either directly or indirectly. Yet the committee officially consists entirely of men. This structure leads to some puzzling administrative arrangements.
>
> For example, seemingly analogous roles turn out to be not at all parallel. The Young Men president is a permanent PEC member, but the Young Women president is not even on the potential guest list. Similarly, the apparent ranking of stewardships is a bit odd. The Young Men president has a very demanding calling but a relatively narrow stewardship. He serves males ages 12–18—in my ward, about eight young men. In contrast, the Primary president serves children of both genders ages 18 months through 11 years—in my ward, about 80 children. She oversees 10 times as many people as the Young Men president, including the largest staff in the ward, and her organization touches upon a much higher percentage of the ward households. However, like the Young Women president, the Primary president is never part of this executive committee. In the same way, an elders quorum president and high priests group leader divide home teaching and quorum responsibilities for the adult households, while a Relief Society president serves any household that includes a woman over 18—in my ward, virtually everyone. Short of the bishop, the Relief Society president's stewardship is the broadest in the ward. Yet, she is not a permanent member of the executive committee.[18]

If the handbook says the Relief Society president can be included by invitation, by all means, invite her! Always. Every week. The meeting is not called "Men's Executive Committee." If a bishop doesn't feel comfortable inviting the Young Women president and Primary president because the Handbook doesn't mention them, there are opportunities to have those leaders' thoughts and concerns represented in other ways. One solution would be create a Women's Council, an idea I've heard implemented in California, where the female leaders regularly meet with a member of the bishopric to discuss the issues, callings and concerns that are unique to the women of the ward. Or perhaps the ward leaders could work together to make sure that in Ward Council meetings—where all three of these female leaders *are* present—the agenda prioritizes the business of the female organizations. There has been significant attention drawn to the role of the Ward Council meeting in the 2010 Worldwide Leadership Train-

ing, and the essential representation of women on these influential committees has, admirably, been a central point of discussion, but we can still improve.

What else can we do? What can we do in our homes? I've been impressed with many of the things my husband has done to include our three daughters in his own servant leadership. For example, my husband takes our oldest daughter with him when he delivers the sacrament to homebound ward members. I've seen my daughter carefully holding the trays on her lap in the car as they go off together. Because my ward, like many others, has a father/son campout but no father/daughter or mother/daughter campout, my husband has taken my daughters with him to the campout, and at least in our experience no one has seemed to mind.

As a mother, my language and attitude can make a difference with my daughter as she asks the hard questions about why she can't pass the sacrament or receive the priesthood authority. The time will come when she and I will study the cooperative paradigm together, or the Two Trees theory,[19] or when she will work for a testimony of gender division for herself. But in the meantime, when my daughter asked me why only boys passed the sacrament, I answered her, "Esme, who *really* hands you the bread and water every week?" She thought, and said, "Well, actually you do." It's me, her mother. Inevitably, I'm the one sitting next to her. Or maybe it's her sister. Maybe it's her dad, but whoever it is, whatever gender that person is, whether she's related to them or has never seen them before, by them handing that tray to her, she is joining her family and her ward community in gaining equal access to the cleansing power of the Atonement. This will not always be a satisfactory answer for her, but while she is young and before we study more doctrinally-rich answers, I hope I am modeling for her an example of finding power in my own sphere of responsibility.

Part VI: Conclusion

Lest you leave today unconvinced that examining the involvement of our women in church governance is something that demands our intent consideration, let me offer one final data point: there was a woman involved in almost every one of Jesus Christ's

mortal milestones. From his very first miracle facilitated by his mother, to revealing Himself as the "living water," to being the subject of numerous parables, to being anointed by a woman hours before his death, to being the first witness of the resurrection, women were not just bystanders but were engaged contributors to his ministry. They were symbols of the extent to which the Savior was willing to challenge the conventions of his culture and usher in a new social ideal. Compared to the way women were treated in the Savior's own time and place, His treatment of them was radical. By involving not just his mother and female friends in his ministry, but by also embracing the fallen woman, the daughter of a Gentile, the sick woman, the Samaritan woman, Jesus, through his example, challenged us as His followers to engage all women, trust them, lead with them, and lean on their spiritual power. Let us meet that challenge.

Notes

1. Don Sorenson and Valerie Hudson Cassler, *Women in Eternity, Women in Zion* (Cedar Fort, 2004), 11.

2. Mormon Research Foundation, "Understanding Mormon Disbelief," March 2012, survey.

3. Personal correspondence.

4. Mormon Research Foundation, "Understanding Mormon Disbelief."

5. Ibid.

6. Peter Henderson and Kristina Cooks, "Mormons Besieged by the Modern Age," *Reuters*, January 31, 2012, http://reuters.com/article/2012/01/31/us-mormonchurch-idUSTRE80TICM210120131 (accessed August 7, 2012).

7. Personal correspondence.

8. Kathryn Skaggs, "Mormon Women, Priesthood and Equality," *A Well-Behaved Mormon Woman*, May 31, 2012, http://wellbehavedmormonwoman.blogspot.com/2012/05/mormon-women-priesthood-and-equality.html (accessed August 7, 2012).

9. Rebecca J, "My Feelings about Not Holding the Priesthood," *By Common Consent*, May 30, 2012, http://bycommonconsent.com/2012/05/30/my-feelings-about-not-holding-the-priesthood-part-two-of-a-million-parts (accessed August 7, 2012).

10. Sorenson and Cassler, *Women in Eternity, Women in Zion*, 141.

11. On Faith, "A Woman's Role?" *The Washington Post*, April 13,

2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/faith-and-feminism/2011/04/11/AFlcBqWD_blog.html (accessed August 7, 2012).

12. See Alma 1:26-28 and Mosiah 26:37.

13. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "On Appendages," *Exponent II*, winter 1985, http://www.the-exponent.com/on-appendages (accessed August 7, 2012).

14. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Relief Society and the Church," *Ensign*, May 1992, 36.

15. For a more complete exploration of the priesthood/motherhood comparison, see http://bycommonconsent.com/2012/04/30/why-i-dont-like-the-priesthood-motherhood-analogy/ (accessed August 7, 2012).

16. Eliza R. Snow, "An Address," *Woman's Exponent,* Sept. 15, 1873, 62.

17. This and several of the other ideas in this section are from a forthcoming pamphlet from LDS WAVE called "Increasing Women's Contributions." Many thanks to Chelsea Shields Strayer and others for sharing their draft with me.

18. Dana Haight Cattani, "To PEC or Not to PEC?" *Exponent II*, summer 2012, 33.

19. Valerie Hudson Cassler, "The Two Trees," http://www. fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2010-fairconference/2010-the-two-trees (accessed August 7, 2012).

Lost "Wagonloads of Plates": The Disappearance and Deliteralization of Sealed Records

Rachael Givens

Introduction

When Joseph Smith's unearthing of the "gold plates" with the mysteriously bound portion first stirred intense controversy in the regions of New York, notions of "sealed books" had already been causing upheavals in other parts of the globe. At the time tremors were still being felt in England from efforts to uncover the controversial "sealed prophecies" of the mystic and prophetess Joanna Southcott, Russell Huntley was establishing a sizeable trust fund for the publication of the forthcoming sealed portion of the Book of Mormon. Huntley's confidence that the Reorganized LDS Church would soon have the remainder of the record in its possession seemed to have waned by the 1880s, at which point he requested the money be returned.[1] Yet the desire for hidden re-

*Since 1997, the Mormon Scholars Foundation has sponsored a series of Summer Seminars, granting fellowships to young scholars to conduct original research under the direction of senior scholars like Richard Bushman, Terryl Givens, and Matthew Grow, on the campus of Brigham Young University. Rachael Givens's paper was developed and presented at the 2011 Seminar, and Saskia Tielens's presentation was part of the 2012 Seminar.

cords has not disappeared. A small group of Southcott followers survives today, with a once-active advertising campaign calling for the "sealed prophecies" to be restored, and splinter groups of the LDS Church have generated their own versions of the "sealed portion" of the Book of Mormon plates.[2]

For the LDS Church, the controversy surrounding Joseph Smith's claim to have received and translated a record of ancient American inhabitants has overshadowed the parallel promise of more to come—the so called "sealed portion" of the Book of Mormon which would one day be made available to the world. The majority of the plates' eyewitnesses mentioned the striking feature of a "part . . . which was sealed,"[3] which reportedly ranged in volume between one-third and two-thirds of the entire plates.[4] Smith, on the other hand, did not seem to attach much significance to them, noting only that he had been "very impressively" prohibited by Moroni from tampering with it.[5] The ways in which the sealed portion (have) been understood, and more significantly, (have) been used, reveal changing currents and dynamic tensions in Mormon thought, particularly in relation to conceptions of revelation, millennial expectations, restoration, and prophethood. Such ideas were being continually negotiated amidst the shifting cultural and political climates, as well as the competing pressures of a faith tradition committed to radical literalism and institutional demands, to notions of personal revelation and revelatory authority, and to a paradigm of continuing, adaptive revelation as well as divinely orchestrated narrative.

For early church members, the sealed portion's most salient function was as an instance of material contact with the divine, enabling an ongoing revelatory "flood of knowledge" that "would fill the earth" in preparation for the millennium.[6] Angelic visitations, streams of revelations, preparations for gathering Israel, and building a utopian Zion corresponded to a brand of faith in this period that was at once disarmingly literal and robustly idealistic. However, as the years passed and certain promises went unfulfilled, including the delivery of the sealed portion, enthusiastic anticipation dwindled to vague, provisional expectation, and then to reproving self-admonishment. Over time, as a fundamentalist strain emphasizing obedience and worthiness began to in-

fuse Mormon culture in the early twentieth century, the sealed portion ironically transformed from literal artifact to an abstract corrective tool; its continuing to be held back became a barometer of unworthiness rather than a source of hope for revelatory abundance. The irony of de-literalization serving the purposes of fundamentalist trends (typically characterized by a deeply literalist approach) is one manifestation of how the Church's identity was reshaped in the early decades through different arrangements and emphases of underlying doctrines and narrative structures.

Textual References to Sealed Records

Because early Mormons understood the Book of Mormon to be a tangible collection of plates physically unearthed by Joseph Smith, the sealed portion was understood in a similarly literal manner. References scattered throughout the Book of Mormon text describing lost scriptures and sealed records provided provocative clues for the possible contents of the sealed portion. For Smith's contemporaries, the sealed record's role as a doctrinal blank check, open to speculation, was constrained by its purported identity as a collection of tangible plates that were part of a real historical story. The Book of Mormon text itself specifies a number of other purposes the sealed records served, beyond that of being a material source of revelation.

Firstly, the sealed records were believed to preserve the account of "all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof," and thus the prolonging the bestowal of the records kept the canon open (see 2 Nephi 27:7, 10 and Ether 4:14). The well-known "A Bible! A Bible!" passage in 2 Nephi 29 of the Book of Mormon tells of God's rebuke to those who try to close the canon at one "bible" and "murmur" at "receiv[ing] more of [God's] word" (2 Nephi 29:7). "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible" (2 Nephi 29:3), such people exclaim, failing to recognize that "there are more nations than one," and that God has commanded "all men, both in the east and in the west, in the north and in the south, and in the islands of the sea . . . [to] write the words which [he] speak[s] unto them" (2 Nephi 29:11). In essence, the canon will never close, and

the lacuna of scripture is but an assurance that God's work is ongoing.

Secondly, the sealed portion serves as a form of spiritual exercise and probation. Mormon's commentary in 3 Nephi, for example, explains that he has written only a "lesser portion" of the things Christ taught the Nephites in his post-resurrection ministry; before the "greater part" will be made manifest, God will "try the faith of [His] people" and the mettle of their obedience (3 Nephi 26:3–12). The sealed vision of the brother of Jared, among other sealed teachings, also specifies similar preconditions of faith, repentance and sanctification, for Gentile and Nephite alike (Ether 4:1, 6–7, 11; 2 Nephi 27:8).

Thirdly, the text also endowed the possessors of the sealed portion with a degree of spiritual authority. The most well-known Book of Mormon passage concerning sealed records—an expansion of Isaiah 29 found in 2 Nephi 27—prophesies that "God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book . . . of them which have slumbered" which will contain a sealed book with a "revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof" that only the chosen "unlearned" man can read. The incapacity of the learned man to read the sealed portion highlights a foreordination and spiritual power afforded those called to handle the sealed records. Transcribers of sealed records had a particular stewardship, as indicated when Nephi is explicitly directed not to write down the revelations of John the Apostle, because John was exclusively ordained to do so. Nephi was also informed of "others who have been" likewise ordained, to whom God hath "shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity . . . in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 14:26).

Finally, within the text, the opening of the sealed portion signals key eschatological events. In his account of the Jaredites, Moroni explains that when the house of Israel turns to God, the great revelations of the Apostle John "shall be unfolded in the eyes of all the people," at which the people "shall know that the time is at hand that they shall be made manifest in very deed" (Ether 4:16). In other words, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon will signal the Restoration and gathering of Israel, while the coming forth of the sealed portion (of John's revelations, in

this case) signals the apocalypse (2 Nephi 29:1–2). Nephi's explanation of Isaiah's prophecy adds a sense of proximity to these millennial events, in declaring that the sealed words will be "read upon the house tops" as part of the "marvelous work" God intends to do among the people in but "a very little while" (2 Nephi 27: 11, 26, 28–29).

"Flood of Knowledge": Literal Anticipation in a Millennial Era

Given such an array of textual clues, early Mormons confidently theorized concerning the contents, location, and timetable for the return of the sealed portion. Despite their fidelity to the sacred texts, writers during this period clearly emphasized the proximity, literalness, and relevance of the sealed records. But one exasperated New York newspaper columnist, reminded of the alarming fervor surrounding the Southcott episode, exclaimed: "If an imposture like the one we have so briefly noticed, could spring up in the great metropolis of England, and spread over a considerable portion of that kingdom, it is not surprising that one equally absurd, should have its origin in this neighborhood . . ." [7] Many Mormons, however, saw not absurdity but exhilarating discovery, and viewed the sealed portion with the same exuberant literality manifest in other pre-millennial preparations and Zion-building endeavors.

Newel Knight, Orson Hyde, Daniel Rupp, the Whitmer brothers and their mother, along with Orson Pratt, Lucy Smith, William Smith, and Joseph Smith, Sr., among others, gave accounts of the gold plates that included descriptions of a "large portion of the leaves [that] were so securely bound together that it was impossible to separate them."[8] Oliver Cowdery believed that Joseph had identified the sealed portion as the full revelation of the Apostle John, as he recorded in the *Messenger and Advocate* in 1835: "A part of the book was sealed . . . [which] part, said [Joseph], contains the same revelation which was given to John upon the isle of Patmos."[9] Two decades later, however, Orson Pratt, claimed that "the plates which were sealed contained an account of those great things shown unto the brother of Jared."[10] and until a little past the turn of the century, the sealed portion was identi-

fied inconsistently as either the visions of John or the brother of Jared or both.[11]

Perhaps no image better captures the vivid reality with which the early Saints viewed the sealed records than Oliver Cowdery's recounting of the "cave of treasures." According to Brigham Young's account,

> They [Cowdery and Smith] walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. [Cowdery] says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls.[12]

Brigham Young urged the Saints to understand these things "so that they will not be forgotten and lost," while Heber Kimball also stressed the significance of the records that had been revealed and were yet to come. When a certain Brother Mills opined that the handcart treks of the pioneers were the "greatest events that ever transpired in this Church," Kimball corrected him. Though this "method for gathering Israel" was a useful test, "its importance is small" when compared to angelic visitations, the reception of the sacred records, and "the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry."[13] Perhaps this vision convinced Orson Pratt, who had originally thought the plates were "no doubt kept in charge of the heavenly messenger,"[14] that they were instead, as David Whitmer also confirmed in an 1878 interview, "hidden in the hill Cumorah."[15]

In early discussions, the issue of when the plates would be returned began to acquire more significance than where they were hidden or what they contained. Perhaps this is a result of an orientation of the Saints toward a divine timetable, in an epic narrative of millennial preparation for which they themselves were responsible. After all, commentators in these early years addressed the query with confidence: W.W. Phelps claimed in 1832 in the *Evening and Morning Star* that one might "expect . . . as soon as wisdom directs, many sacred records, which have slept for ages" to come from its pages.[16] Even until 1877, Orson Pratt was assuring

his fellow Saints that "these plates of gold will come forth, as well as many other records kept by the first nation . . . And not only these, but the Lord intends, in *this dispensation in which you and I live*, to overwhelm the whole earth with a flood of knowledge in regard to himself."[17]

Just a decade later, after published interviews with David Whitmer that mentioned the forthcoming sealed records, a critical newspaper sardonically responded with the following clip:

> "OTHER REVELATIONS": (From God, man, or the devil) are in store for humanity, already so sadly afflicted, that is, that additional Books of Mormon are liable to come out of the ground "in mine own due time." Or, as D. W. has it, "more records are yet to come forth from the book that is sealed," and we all know that by the gift and power of God Joseph only got his stone eye on a part of the contents of the plates, while the rest was kept. Remembering the amazing and interminable mischief already wrought through that old hat we all cry with one accord: From all further calamities of that sort, good Lord deliver us.[18]

As animatedly as some Saints—and as unenthusiastically as some critics—awaited the forthcoming sealed records, there were voices of restraint and patience as well. The Book of Mormon text itself had couched the delivery of the records in conditional terms of obedience and readiness, and was echoed by a more temperate Oliver Cowdery in 1835: "when the people of the Lord are prepared, and found worthy, then it will be unfolded unto them."[19] Even Orson Pratt acknowledged, in more cautious moments, that "we are told that all those things are preserved to come forth in the due time of the Lord," and stressed elsewhere that only upon the sanctification and obedience of the Saints would the precious knowledge from the sealed records be given at last.[20]

Tones of literal and proximate promise underscore early conceptions of revelation and seership, and millennial expectations. The sealed record played an important function in each of these doctrinal ideas for the early Saints: they kept the canon open and encouraged Saints to anticipate future revelations, heightened the importance of prophethood and seership, and served as an anticipated source of instruction and light critical to preparing the Saints for the impending millennium.

Revelation

Though Joseph Smith eventually received revelations without any physical medium, material records still held a particularly strong claim on the Saints' sense of scriptural historicity and religious legitimacy. Indeed, Orson Pratt used the literal earthiness of the plates to persuade others of the Book of Mormon's authenticity in some of his tracts:

> Now, if Mr. Smith had professed that he had got his book as Swedenborg obtained his or as the Shakers obtained theirs; that is, if he had professed to have obtained this book to usher in this last dispensation in any other way but 'out of the ground,' we should have had reason to suppose him a deceiver, like Swedenborg and thousands of others.[21]

Early missionary pitches focused predominantly on the testimonies of the witnesses who handled or saw the plates—not on the content of the plates themselves.[22] The eruption of the divine into the temporal—in Pratt's words, from out of the earth—served as a crucial bridge to the divine presence, a presence that was at home in history, not removed from it. The promise of the sealed portion, therefore, was a reminder of the physical revelations unearthed, and a sign of those to come forth. The sealed portion was both a link to the material reality of the gold plates (now no longer in the Saints' possession), and a portal to the "wagonloads" of records that awaited them, a promise of the continuation of the divine contact that Joseph Smith had initiated. Just as the Book of Mormon demonstrated that "divinity had not ceased direct intercourse with humanity at the end of the apostolic age," the promise of the sealed portion wedged that door of communication open.[23]

In this sense, revelations were understood not only as spontaneous instructions or visions that characterized the Doctrine and Covenants, but as knowledge grounded in the materiality of ancient records. During the same year Orson Pratt was celebrating ancient records and anticipating future revelations, Charles Penrose also wrote a discourse in which he identified the authorities of the Church as revelators of *records*, not just of divine inspiration: "We sustain our brethren of the twelve, as prophets, seers, and revelators . . . [to] show to God and to angels, that we are

ready at any time, if the Lord has a word of revelation to communicate to us, to receive it . . . whether by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost . . . [or] by means of the Urim and Thummim . . . until God brings forth everything needed for the building up of his work . . . and all the ancient records that have been lost will be brought to light."[24] While urging the Saints to sustain the twelve as "prophets, seers, and revelators," Penrose taught that sustaining did not "make those men prophets seers and revelators" as much as it signaled to God that they were ready to receive revelation from them in the approved "legal channels."[25] The apostles were viewed as the source to which the Saints would look for the ancient records that had been promised. Prophethood, revelation, and records were thus inextricably linked.

Prophethood/Seership

Many Saints saw divine affirmation of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling in his reenactment of the pattern of prophethood, records, and revelation established in the Book of Mormon. But as Richard Bushman points out, while Joseph Smith explicitly defined himself in the more encompassing office of prophet, it was his role as translator, or seer, which truly set him apart.[26] A seer, as defined by the Book of Mormon, had a higher status than that of a prophet, as the translation of records was a great spiritual gift. (According to the book of Mosiah, a seer is "greater than a prophet" and "can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light" [Mosiah 8:15–17]). The notion and reiteration of seership was unique to this period of early Mormonism. Contemporary Mormonism, in contrast, rarely makes reference to either the sealed portion or to seers, and does not substantively link seership with prophethood as in decades past (despite sustaining the twelve apostles and First Presidency as "prophets, seers, and revelators" at the biannual general conference).

But for early Saints, the promise of forthcoming records maintained the status of seers as translators. It was this gift of translation that Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith's primary scribe, sought from God in what is now Doctrine and Covenants section 8. This

revelation promises Cowdery that he would "receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records" and "translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred." Even after Cowdery's failed attempt at translating, another revelation reassured him that "other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate."[27]

The role of seer, or the "mighty one" (2 Nephi 20:34) as the Book of Mormon described it, was closely associated but distinct from that of prophet, and held substantial authoritative weight. Orson Pratt, writing in 1877, makes this evident in his musings regarding the sealed record: "When [the sealed record] is brought forth, I expect that the same Urim and Thummim which the Lord gave to Joseph Smith will come forth with these plates, and they will be translated, but by whom I know not. Who will be the favored Seer and Revelator that will be raised up among this people to bring this revelation to light, is not revealed to me."[28] A year later, the defected David Whitmer used a stronger adjective in his response to queries concerning the sealed record. The plates, he explained, were residing "in a cave, where the angel has hidden them up till the time arrives when the plates, which are sealed, shall be translated," until the time when "God will yet raise up a mighty one, who shall do his work till it is finished and Jesus comes again."[29] But the aura of power that shrouded the role of seer, or the future translator of the sealed portion, was soon to be extinguished as the sealed portion, and the record-wielding seer, faded from mainstream Mormon thought.

Millennial Preparation

In another interview that same year, David Whitmer mentioned Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith's vision of the cave full of plates, including the "portion of the gold plates not yet translated." Pithily, he remarked that "when they are translated much useful information will be brought to light";[30] that same year, Orson Pratt explained what kind of "useful information" that would be.

In his discourse, Pratt spoke of the preparations necessary for the millennium, which required organizing Zion (both structurally and spiritually) and receiving the sealed portion and other

lost records of scripture. The sealed portion and lost records would be particularly important to "teach the Latter-day Saints how to organize, how to be prepared" for the "great day that is to come," namely through the Nephite model of the United Order."[31] By this point, the law of consecration under the United Order was undergoing a problematic revival[32]—but Pratt seemed to expect that success would come with proper instruction from the translated sealed portion.[33]

Pratt also related the vision of the brother of Jared (contained in the sealed portion) to the knowledge requisite for millennial preparation: "And if it were important for [the brother of Jared], in the early ages, to understand the great things of the latter days, how much more important it is for us who are living, as it were, just preceding the coming of the Son of Man; and if ancient men of God were privileged and blessed in understanding the things of the future, how much greater blessing it will be to us, inasmuch as these things are at our doors."[34] The sense of imminence mirrored other of Pratt's exhortations, as evident in another declaration that "the Lord intends, in this dispensation . . . to overwhelm the whole earth with a flood of knowledge in regard to himself . . . [and] in regard to the preparation of the earth for the thousand years of righteousness to come. Hence . . . these great numbers of plates . . . as well as those sealed records of which I have been speaking, will all come to light."[35]

Many other leaders echoed the call for obedience and worthiness in order to ensure the speedy arrival of the sealed portion; one critical newspaper article in 1885 even satirized the idea that God was testing His people with the unsealed installment, and concluded that the absence of the promised sealed portion was proof that God "was not pleased with the result."[36] In light of failed attempts at Zion's Camp, the United Order, and the law of polygamy—all practices that were identified with the millennial society—many Saints may have concurred. It is likely that for this reason, the sealed portion ceased to become an object of anticipation, and began to serve instead as an incentive for righteous living. The words of Elizabeth McCune to the young women illustrate this impulse: "Seek for light . . . in the study of the Book of

Mormon . . . so that when the sealed portion of this sacred record comes forth, you will be prepared for it."[37]

A parallel to this form of purposeful obedience can be seen in the way Mormons began to view Zion, or the New Jerusalem, by the turn of the century. As Craig Campbell notes, the pronounced millennial fervor of early Saints, and their plans for establishing a literal, physical Zion, began to fade by the 1850s, after which the failed Jackson County episode was "often used as a spur to encourage the Saints to build up the Salt Lake Valley."[38] Following the polygamy manifestos—which, as Jan Shipps describes, "signaled the beginning of the end of the extraordinary situation wherein Latter-day Saints had lived their lives in sacred space and sacred time,"[39] the expectations of establishing an Enoch-like society to usher in the millennium began to dwindle. By 1890, apostle James E. Talmage depicted the New Jerusalem in a way that "adhere[d] to the doctrine of a return to Independence but [gave] emphasis on the return occurring according to the faithfulness of the Saints"; and by 1900, with statehood and prosperity secured, Talmage "renewed a focus on the theme of disobedience of the people, which ostensibly caused the Lord to push the promised establishment of the New Jerusalem further into the future."[40] Likewise, the sealed portion—once regarded with keen anticipation, then utilized as an incentive for righteousness—sank into the shadows of abstraction while the perpetually unmet conditions of obedience took center stage.

Delayed Millennium and Retrenchment (Twentieth Century)

While the polygamist manifestos at the turn of the century signaled a distinctive turning point in the millennial era of "sacred time and sacred space," the mental transition into a more pragmatic paradigm was fraught with complexity. Theories regarding the sealed portion were reformulated in subtle ways to fit the new needs of an assimilating and expanding Church. One scholar describes the turn of the twentieth century as a time when "some of the most fundamental concepts of nineteenth-century Mormonism were reinterpreted to meet new social realities."[41] The demands of political and economic accommodation, as well as the emerging intellectual trends of scientism, rationalism, and higher criticism, redirected the attention of Church leaders to-

wards management of an increasingly institutional church, ordered within priesthood lines and stabilized by a focus on obedience and orthodoxy. Throughout the twentieth century, influences of fundamentalism, retrenchment, and what O. Kendall White, Jr. terms "neo-orthodoxy" oriented Mormon leaders' concerns not toward apocalyptic paradigms, but toward temporally proximate matters, ironically relegating concrete doctrines like the Kingdom of God (Zion), charismatic spiritual gifts, and the sealed portion to the realm of abstraction and metaphor.[42] It was more than temporal preoccupations that pushed these ideals into the realm of the indeterminate, however; a profound pessimism regarding mankind's moral capacity rendered these ideals utterly unreachable.[43] Subsequent to World War I's devastation, Mormonism's widespread critique of Protestant liberalism and secular rationalism's optimistic confidence in human nature (which optimism had originally been championed by Joseph Smith and his contemporaries, up through Widtsoe, Talmage, and Roberts) introduced a return to ideas more in line with the great Reformers and theologians such as Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr.[44] As a result, by the end of the twentieth century, the sealed portion as a material source of revelation, prophetic stewardship, and millennial instruction had transformed into a symbol of mankind's incapacity for faithful obedience, which would only be rectified at Christ's coming.

Higher Laws and Probation

A 1914 *Liahona* article captures a moment of this paradigm shift well. The discourse deals directly with the question of records and revelations, and describes Cowdery's anecdote of the cave of treasures, affirming that "the place where [the plates] have been hid up unto the Lord is described with precision." Clearly, though, the edge of anticipation had already faded: the author tartly responded to those who listen "for the first time to the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon" and "almost invariably" ask after the whereabouts of the plates: "It should be of no concern to us where the records now are so long as a copy of the Book of Mormon is in evidence. Man has no right to question the Lord's purposes; it is only a 'wicked and idolatrous nation' that

will ask for a sign." Indeed, "it would be useless for mortal man to spend any time searching for them unless he has been instructed to do so by Supreme Authority" because "the plates are not for us yet to see until such a time as the Lord shall see fit to again bring them forth that we might know what the sealed portion thereof contains."[45] Even the telling title for God as the "Supreme Authority" bespeaks a new preoccupation with obedience and order, while specifics of the plates are clearly secondary.

Several years later, Anthony Ivins' conference address printed in the same Church magazine handled the whereabouts of the sealed portion with similar evasiveness: "Whether they have been removed from the spot where Mormon deposited them we cannot tell, but this we know, that they are safe under the guardianship of the Lord[.]"[46] Yet while he could assure his congregation that the records would be revealed "without doubt . . . in the not-distant future," and his contemporaries confirmed more cautiously that such would happen "when the people of the Lord are prepared and found worthy,"[47] others began to advocate more stringent requirements.

Three years later, Joseph Fielding Smith specified that only when the Saints could "demonstrate [their] faith" and heed the "lesser teachings" would God keep his promise to restore the sealed records to his people.[48] In the meantime, however, their "faith [was] on trial," and unfortunately, he continued, "the indications point to the fact that our faith is weak, and therefore we are not prepared to receive these greater revelations which will come forth when men are sufficiently humbled, prayerful, obedient, and filled with faith, such as the brother of Jared had."[49] Ironically, as people's capacity to qualify for the sealed portion apparently dwindled, the criteria seemed to rise: in the same sermon, Joseph Fielding Smith asserted that "this revelation of all the ages cannot come forth until the hearts of men are prepared to receive it in perfect faith . . . willing to accept *all* the words of the Lord without doubts and mental reservations."[50] The "higher teachings" had a high price, indeed.[51]

Whereas the early Saints had set out in full vim and vigor to keep a "higher law"—focusing more on unity, selflessness, and purity in preparation for the imminent millennial day—the strains of orthodoxy and retrenchment that set the tone after the turn of

the century did not allow for such optimism. Some splinter groups, however, did approach the higher law more sanguinely. Just as Heber Kimball taught the Saints in 1856 that they had to live the higher law first before Zion could be gathered[52] with the clear expectation that such could be accomplished, later fundamentalist leaders proved even more confident of their capacity to live the higher law. The 1950s fundamentalist Rulon C. Allred claimed that the higher law, i.e. consecration and polygamy, was contained within the sealed portion, and while general church membership might not be capable of receiving that portion and observing the higher law, he and other select members apparently could. And "when *they* [the LDS Church] strive to live all that they have, the higher principles will again be given to *them*."[53]

Around the same time, Joseph White Musser, a high councilman from Salt Lake, also exploited the mythology of the sealed portion to promulgate the "milk" of monogamy before the hearty "meat" of polygamy: "Children must needs be fed milk before meat. It is more than likely the historians of the [Book of Mormon] record were impressed not to present this marriage principle in fulness in the abridgement . . . [but] when the sealed portion of the record is available the same will be found to be set forth with clearness and positiveness."[54] It is not unlikely that such heterodoxy proved worrisome to Church leadership and contributed to their growing distance from the dangerously adaptable sealed portion.[55]

Mainstream LDS leaders from Joseph Fielding Smith to President Kimball and Bruce R. McConkie refocused the attention of the members away from the "higher law" to the principles already revealed. Smith stated in 1931 that the LDS Church was placed "on probation" by the Lord—and for failing to "live up to the requirements in this probationary state" God would "hold from [them] those other things which one time will be revealed."[56] But until such obedience was manifest, he reproved on another occasion, "why should we clamor for more when we will not abide in what we already have?"[57] President Kimball, after rehearsing an instance where President Smith had asked for a raise of hands of those who would read the sealed portion if it were given, rebuked the eager for not reading the present Book of Mormon, conclud-

ing: "Many people want to live the higher laws when they do not live the lower laws."[58] McConkie frequently affirmed that "the milk," or the translated portion of the Book of Mormon, must precede the "meat" found in the sealed portion."[59] This continued stress on being tried and found wanting sank in for at least one lay member: one Robert English's autobiography records, "God promised us that he would deliver to us the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon just as soon as his people have accepted the portion already given. But we have not received it, so it is obvious that we are not prepared for it."[60]

Prophethood without Records

Splinter groups and dissenting fundamentalists highlighted another dangerous element of the sealed portion—the aura of power around the sealed portion and the seer. One writer opined that the Reorganized Church would receive the remainder of the gold plates, and the "Utah Church" would not; consequently, numbers of members would fall away from the "Utah Church" to join the Reorganized.[61] And while Orson Pratt had mused over the identity of the "favored Seer and Revelator" of the sealed portion, others infused this role with more authority. Clyde Neilson and Dale Lowell Morgan looked forward to this "Seer" or "Eighth Priest" to rescue the Church from its polluted state, having forsaken polygamy and consecration. In *From the Dust They Shall Speak Again: The Sealed Records or the Great Convincing Act*, they asserted that the time was ripe for the "Seer spoken of in 2 Nephi 3:7 . . . the Eighth Priest" to come forth and "translate the sealed part of the records, which will be done in power, glory and majesty to the convincing mankind of the divinity of Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith and the work he did."[62] Several years later, in 1958, Ross W. LeBaron, a member of a powerful fundamentalist sect, wrote a letter recounting a personal revelation in which the "Mighty and Strong" one (the seer as described in D&C 85:7) was identified as a future Indian Prophet who would "bring forth the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon."[63] Even the more modern personal letters of one Gail Porritt reflect an intense preoccupation with the question of "WHO WILL DO THE TRANSLATING?" (Porritt, inciden-

tally, believed his patriarchal blessing confirmed his own identity as the chosen one).[64]

In contrast to (or perhaps, as a consequence of) these fringe figures, the notion of prophethood became increasingly divorced in the mainstream Church discourse from records and seership, and, consequently, from the Restoration process. While early Church writings showed a clear association between prophets, records, and an open canon as a vital combination for millennial preparation, later sermons radically altered this relationship by viewing the millennium as a distant and uncontrollable event, and the restoration as an event already completed, or one that will culminate after Christ returns. In 1966, McConkie claimed that "this is the great era of restoration . . . [where] all the truths had in ages past shall be restored . . . and lost scriptures . . . [are] yet to come," and several years later, he rebuked that

> it is our habit in the Church—a habit born of slovenly study and a limited perspective—to think of the restoration of the gospel as a past event . . . . But the restoration of the wondrous truths known to Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham has scarcely commenced. The sealed portion of the Book of Mormon is yet to be translated[.][65]

While this may seem reminiscent of Pratt's enthusiastic calls to prepare for the cascade of records that would pour forth throughout God's restoration, McConkie takes it in a different direction: "All things are not to be revealed anew *until the Lord comes*. The greatness of the era of restoration is yet ahead."[66] The concept of the sealed portion was a significant symbol of the continuation of the Restoration and a technically open canon. Yet by emphatically declaring the records to be unavailable until Christ comes again, any genuine preparation on the part of the members to ask or prepare for such knowledge was futile. The restoration process is not a millennial preparation, but a millennial culmination; hence, the canon was functionally closed.

In the wake of the functionally closed canon, the notions of "revelation" and "prophet" underwent similar definitional restructuring, being stripped of their associations with translation and records. Even up until 1965, this association was still intact, as

evident in this excerpt on the role of prophets from a proposed Church curriculum:

> *Ask the students 'Will these future prophets also bring forth new direction and guidance for us as church members?' When answered, put up the book with the question mark–signifying books to be revealed in the future. The teacher might also have students tell of the following to be received in the future: 1) The sealed portion of the Book of Mormon plates, given to Joseph Smith, Jr. 2) The revelations from Christ to the Lost Tribes plus their own written history. [Reference to 2 Nephi 29:11-14] 3) Any other examples the students or teacher wish to bring out.*

In contrast, current LDS manuals make no mention of records, let alone sealed portions, in their discussions of prophets, revelation, or scripture. Furthermore, the idea of an open canon, so vividly described in 2 Nephi 29 and celebrated by Orson Pratt and other early Saints in terms of the restoration of sacred records, now refers primarily to non-canonized verbal declarations of living prophets and leaders. Less prominent figures such as Rodney Turner and Avraham Gileadi have differed, arguing that the restoration of the records is still a part of the Restoration process and a significantly preparatory pre-millennial event, even constituting what Gileadi identified as God's actual "great and marvelous work." [67]

Millennium

Perhaps the most fundamental change in the LDS approach to the sealed portion is that the revelation of the sealed portion no longer functions as a preparatory pre-millennial event. As certainly as the Book of Mormon had heralded the opening of the dispensation, the revelation of the sealed portion was expected to herald its convergence with the millennial era. Because many nineteenth-century groups including Mormons believed the millennium to be at the very door, the linkage of the sealed records to millennial preparation not only was seen as a logical precondition, but also gave a much more proximate, literal tone to the discussion of the sealed portion's advent. Yet by the 1970s, Bruce R. McConkie was stating confidently that the sealed portion would be part of a millennial project, only to be commenced by Christ.[68]

Instead of Orson Pratt's pre-Millennial utopia, where the

whole earth would be flooded with the knowledge of God in preparation for his coming,[69] McConkie asserted that "There is going to be another . . . great period of enlightenment, when [Christ] comes; and at that time he will reveal all things, such as the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon."[70] "But," he continued elsewhere, "I am clear in my mind that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon will not come forth until the Millennium."[71] This assertion, repeated over the years various times and with increasing emphasis on the sealed portion's complete inaccessibility to the Church, culminated in a categorical assertion that "we have no such hope" in any records coming forth before the millennium.[72] Apparently, this new timetable stuck, and by 1988, Rodney Turner surmised that "most commentators believe that these revelations will not be had again until the millennial reign of Christ," (though he himself disagreed with McConkie's interpretation).[73] Paradoxically, McConkie taught that "without any question, . . . the scripture that is yet to come forth, which will reveal more of the mind and will and purposes of the Lord than any other, is the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon"—yet it was also the one utterly out of reach. Why? "The answer is obvious. They contain spiritual truths beyond our present ability to receive. Milk must precede meat, and whenever men are offered more of the mysteries of the kingdom than they are prepared to receive, it affects them adversely."[74] This last statement of McConkie's, published the year of his death, reflects the downward trajectory in terms of optimism about man's ability to receive and comprehend future revelations. It is also a stark contrast to Orson Pratt's advice in an 1877 sermon: "Now perhaps some of you may say, 'Withhold these things; do not send angels; do not bestow the gifts of prophecy, if by being so blessed we are in danger of apostatizing from our religion.' This is the other extreme; on the other hand, we are commanded to seek the face of the Lord always, that we may possess our souls in patience."[75]

Of course, there were others that suggested different views. Neal A. Maxwell was one consistent and gentle voice that counterbalanced McConkie's disavowal of the sealed portion during the 1980s and 1990s, admonishing the Saints to be aware of the absence of the sealed portion, among other lost records, and to look

forward to their return with "anxious expectation."[76] Recent years have witnessed only a smattering of references, while serious treatments of the sealed portion have emerged only from the Maxwell Institute, an academic arm of the Church dedicated to the study of ancient scripture, and from splinter groups, with full-fledged translations emerging from the Brotherhood of Christ Church or the Worldwide United Foundation, among others.[77] For all intents and purposes, however, the sealed portion has faded from mainstream discussions in the Church.

Conclusion

After decades of being admonished to not "clamor for more," and with discourse that continually emphasizes certainty and celebrates "having the fulness" of the Gospel, twenty-first century Saints are immersed in a rhetoric of satiety. The sense of yearning and incompleteness, or even galvanizing admonishment, has been replaced with completeness and plenitude—restoration as a *fait accompli*. The focus isn't so much on seeking truth and preparing for revelation as it is perfecting the application of what has already been given.[78]

This has rendered the question of the sealed portion merely academic, and seemingly a superfluous concern. The passion that fired a generation of Mormons to anticipate a deluge of revelation that would only accelerate in coming years has been tempered by the demands of correlation, fears about the fragmenting power of rampant revelation, and leadership's concerns about the distractions of speculation from the staid and steady purposes of Zion-building. Well might a nineteenth-century Pratt bemusedly juxtapose, "A Book of Mormon, a Book of Mormon, We have a Book of Mormon. Why is there need for more?" with the contemporary idea that there is "enough to save and exalt us now."[79] Such is a far cry from his confident exclamation that "there is nothing too great to be withheld from the Saints of God in the last dispensation of the fullness of times."[80]

This rhetoric of satiety and mandated preoccupation with heeding what has been given (as opposed to what has been promised, i.e. the sealed portion) may have created another irony regarding the concept of faith. Scottish Congregationalist George Macdonald opined that "they that begin first to inquire will soon-

est be gladdened with revelation; and with them [God] will be best pleased, for the slowness of his disciples troubled him of old."[81] Orson Pratt himself often reminded the Saints that they would receive the sealed portion only if they did not fail to "inquire of [God]," or God would "withhold the greater information."[82] Yet in a culture of certainty, faith is measured in terms of conviction, not thirst; it is what we affirm, not what we seek, that becomes the gauge of faithful discipleship. But the line between faithful acceptance and spiritual passivity becomes dangerously blurred when the very mechanism by which we are to acquire revelation ("ask, and it shall be given you") can be viewed as a spiritual flaw instead of a spiritual gift. This, indeed, would put the sealed portion, and all other revelations, forever out of reach.

Notes

1. Roger D. Launius, "An Ambivalent Rejection: Baptism for the Dead and the Reorganized Church Experience," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 2 (June 1990): 69.

2. "Notes and Queries," *The Guardian*, n.d. http://www.guardian.co.uk/notesandqueries/query/0,5753,-4563,00.html (accessed April 25, 2012). (accessed April 25, 2012). See also Christopher Nemelka, trans., *The Sealed Portion: The Final Testament of Jesus Christ* (Worldwide United Foundation Organization, 2008); and The Brotherhood of Christ Church, *The Sealed Portion of the Brother of Jared: Volume I* (Leawood: Leathers Publishing, 2001).

3. According to volume 1 of Dan Vogel's *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), Orson Pratt's 1839 and 1840 account, Orson Hyde's 1842 account, Joseph Smith's description to Daniel Rupp (1843), Lucy Smith's interview in 1842 with Henry Caswall, and William Smith's interview with James Murdock (1841) all describe the plates with virtually identical words, including the mention that "a part of which was sealed" or "some of them are sealed together and are not to be opened, and some of them are loose." William Smith's account also says, "The pages which he was not to translate were found to be sealed together, so that he did not even read them and learn their contents" (479). David Whitmer's later interviews also report that "The plates, as I saw them, were fastened with three rings. About half of them were loose and movable, but the others were solid, as if sealed" (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:85, 133).

4. David Whitmer said "a large portion" and "about half," as cited in Kirk B. Henrichsen, "How Witnesses Described the 'Gold Plates,'" *Jour-*

nal of Book of Mormon Studies: 10, no. 1 (Provo: Maxwell Institute, 2001), 16–21. Orson Pratt (not a direct witness) said two-thirds: see Pratt, "The Faith and Visions of the Ancient Saints," April 13, 1856, *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854– 86), 3:347b. A 1907 article says one-third: "Ancient American Prophets," *Liahona, the Elders' Journal,* 23 (November 23, 1907): 630–632. George Q. Cannon also says that only one-third was sealed: Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith*, (Nabu Press, 2010), 45; also as cited by Bruce R. McConkie, "Gold Plates," in *Mormon Doctrine* (Bookcraft, 1958). Both Bruce R. McConkie and Gordon B. Hinckley cite the two-thirds portion described by Orson Pratt: McConkie, "The Bible—A Sealed Book," Church Education Symposium, Brigham Young University, August 17, 1984; and Hinckley, *Truth Restored* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 14–15.

5. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:85, 133. In an interview with the *Chicago Times,* Smith explained that the angel had told him "very impressively that the loose plates alone were to be used, and that the sealed portion was not to be tampered with."

6. Orson Pratt, December 9, 1877, "King Limhi's Enquiry," *Journal of Discourses*, 19:217b.

7. "The Gold Bible, No. 4," *The Reflector* (Palymra, New York) 2, no. 13 (February 14, 1831), 100–101.

8. See Kirk B. Henrichsen, "How Witnesses Described the Gold Plates," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001), 16–21; see also Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1:479, 4:30, 5:13, 85, 133, 161, 164, and 290).

9. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, "Letter IV," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1, no. 5 (February 1835), 80.

10. Orson Pratt, "The Faith and Visions of the Ancient Saints, etc.," April 13, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:347b.

11. Pratt's assertion was reaffirmed three years later in 1859 by an article in the *Millennial Star*, which stated that the sealed portion of the plates "contained a sacred revelation given to the brother of Jared." "Originals of the Bible and Book of Mormon," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, no. 37, September 12, 1859. A catechism in W. M. Egan's *Our Deseret Home* in 1882 broadened the contents to include a "revelation giving an account of the world's history from the foundation to the ends thereof." Egan, *Our Deseret Home* 1, (1882), 236. A 1927 *Improvement Era* article followed this trend, identifying the sealed portion as both "an account of those great things which were shown to the brother of Jared . . . and also the revelations given to John, the beloved, on Patmos." J. Sjodahl, "Notes on the Book of Mormon," *Improvement*

Era, 1927. Three years later, *Liahona: the Elders' Journal*, identified the revelations as the "portion of the brother of Jared's vision which Moroni, in his abdrigement, said should not be opened." John Foote, "Plates of the Book of Mormon," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 27, no. 21, (April 1, 1930): 896.

12. *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38.

13. *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105; see also Cameron J. Packer, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 50–57, http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=13&num=1&id=338 (accessed July 12, 2011).

14. Orson Pratt, *Orson Pratt's Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1851): chap. 8, "Evidences of the Book of Mormon and Bible compared."

15. P. W. Poulson to editors of the *Deseret News,* August 13, 1878, *Deseret News* (August 16, 1878), 2. Interview between Edward Stevenson and David Whitmer—Where are the plates now?
[Whitmer]: In a cave, where the angel has hidden them up till the time arrives when the plates, which are sealed, shall be translated. God will yet raise up a mighty one, who shall do his work till it is finished and Jesus comes again.
[Poulson]: Where is that cave?
[Whitmer]: In the State of New York.
[Poulson]: In the Hill of Comorah [sic]?
[Whitmer]: No, but not far away from that place);

See also Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry, etc.," *Journal of Dicscourses* 19:218b. Oliver Cowdery's account of seeing the "wagonloads" of plates in the cave with Joseph is in Monte Nyman, "Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no.1 (2001): 52–61, http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=13&num=1&id=338 (accessed July 14, 2011).

16. *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 1 (June 1832): page 1, column 2. It is interesting to note that this reference was on the first page of the first edition.

17. Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry, etc.,"*Journal of Discourses*, 19:218b, emphasis mine. See also another sermon in 1877, where he wrote that he had "no doubt the generation will have passed away that were living in 1829; but all things will be added to those revelations that the Lord gave to that generation, namely, the records of the ancient Nephites . . . the records . . . that revealed all things from the foundation of the world to the end thereof, records that were kept when Jesus administered to the Nephites . . . all of which are to come forth." Pratt, "Revelation Gradual, etc.," May 20, 1877, *Journal of Discourses,* 19.

18. "David's Reflections: The Very Latest from the Newest Heavenly Kolob: NEW DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT: Which it is David Whitmer's Book, Showing the True forwardness of the Latter-day Diabolism—Murder Will Out—Tell the Truth and Blame the Devil," *The Salt Lake Daily Tribune,* XXXIIII, no. 42 (December 11, 1887).

19. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, "Letter IV," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1, no. 5 (February 1835), 77–80

20. Orson Pratt, "The Faith and Visions of the Ancient Saints, etc.," April 13, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:347b; see also Pratt, "Revelation Gradual, etc.," *Journal of Discourses*, 19:14a–14b. "But first," says the Lord, "I will try my people; I will perfect them; I will see whether they will be obedient to my commandments; I will reveal to them little by little; I will give them line upon line; I will impart a little light upon this subject and upon the other subject: and if my people shall inquire of me, in relation to these things, then I will teach them still more, giving them another line and another precept, I will issue forth another commandment; but if they do not inquire of me, and their hearts be found full of covetousness, and they feel in their hearts to slight these things which I have given to them, then I will withhold the greater information; I will not let them know the law which I gave to the ancient Nephites; I will withhold many things calculated to benefit them, until they learn the things that they are already taught. But when they become obedient students, obedient men and women of God, obedient to my commandments, hearkening to the voice of my servants, giving heed to the whisperings of my spirit, doing away with covetousness, then I will reveal more."

21. Orson Pratt. *A Series of Pamphlets* (Liverpool, England: R. James, Printer, 1848), 9.

22. Terryl Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America* (Greenwood Press, 2002), 144.

23. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (University of Illinois Press: 1985), 33. For a thorough treatment of the early American history of the open canon, see David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

24. Charles Penrose, "The Word of the Lord," November 29, 1879, *Journal of Discourses*, 21:47b.

25. Ibid.

26. Richard Bushman, "Joseph as Translator," in *Believing History*, edited by Reid Neilson and Jed Woodworth (Columbia University Press, 2004), 235. Bushman points out that Joseph Smith always "subordinated his role as translator to the more encompassing office of prophet," and

the "tangible evidence of Joseph's divine calling was the Book of Mormon and the miraculous translation of the hieroglyphs."

27. Ibid., 236.

28. Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry, Etc," *Journal of Discourses*, 19:217b.

29. P. W. Poulson interview with David Whitmer, *Deseret Evening News,* 2. Emphasis mine.

30. Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,* quoted in Cameron J. Packer, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 50–57, http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=13&num=1&id=338 (accessed July 14, 2011).

31. Pratt, "Revelation Gradual, etc.," *Journal of Discourses*, 19:14a.

32. Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People* (Random House, 2011), 114–115.

33. Thomas Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 6.

34. Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry, Etc," *Journal of Discourses*, 19: 216a.

35. Ibid., 19:217b.

36. "David Whitmer on his Death Bed." *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 17, 1885.

37. "New Year's Greetings," *The Young Woman's Journal* 12, no. 1 (January 1901), 40.

38. Craig Campbell, *Images of Jerusalem* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 151.

39. Shipps, 125–126.

40. Campbell, 150.

41. O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* (Signature Books, 1987), xv.

42. White, Jr., xiv–xv, and Alexander, 288–289. See also Alexander, 288, for Heber J. Grant's response to the disagreements among Widstoe, Talmage, and Smith that captures the essence of this attitude: "No good can be accomplished by dealing in mysteries. . . . "

43. Alexander points to an interesting example of this move: Lorenzo Snow announced in 1900 that many "under the sound of his voice" would "have to go back to Jackson County and assist in building the temple," yet Joseph F. Smith and his counselors "downplayed the imminence of the millennium" by revising Pratt's *Key to the Science of Theology*: removing passages predicting the nearness of the millennium, and treating the millennium in general, not apocalyptic, terms (Alexander, 288–289).

44. White, Jr., xiii.

45. Lizzie O. Borgeson, "Where Are the Records or Plates from which the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 34 (February 17, 1914), 570–72.

46. Anthony Ivins, "Conference Address of President Anthony Ivins: The Purchase of the Hill Cumorah," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 25, no. 24 (May 15, 1928), 847.

47. J. Sjodahl, "Notes on the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era*, 1927.

48. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Deseret Book, 1949 edition), 339. Excerpts published first in 1931 by the Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 337

51. Others, such as President Rudger Clawson, held to such standards with slightly more optimism; he closed a 1940 Conference Report with this musing: "I am of the opinion that if we were perfectly prepared and followed carefully the revelations and instructions we have already received in the Church possibly that sealed portion could be brought to the people through faith and good works." Rudger Clawson, "The Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon," *Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* April 1940 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semi-annual).

52. *Journal of Discourses*, 4:106.

53. Quoted in Lyle O. Wright, "Origins and Development of the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times," (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University College of Religious Instruction, 1963): Appendix D. Rulon C. Allred, Polygamist [1950s], p. 216. Allred declared himself a member of the church, supporter and sustainer of President McKay, but that because of a special dispensation given to John Taylor to keep the "higher principles" alive among select members, he practiced polygamy and therefore he and his followers gathered outside the Church. Emphasis mine.

54. Joseph White Musser, *Celestial or Plural Marriage* (1944), 21–22, quoted in Dean C. Jessee, "A comparative study and evaluation of the Latter-day Saint and 'Fundamentalist' views pertaining to the practice of plural marriage" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University College of Religion, 1959).

55. President Heber J. Grant considered Musser "impudent" (Alexander, 72), and it is likely that Musser's ideas, unpopular as they were, may have contributed to the LDS Church distancing itself from the sealed portion as well as from the fundamentalists, much like the cur-

rent LDS Church distances itself from the notion of polygamy and the fundamentalist sects that practice it today.

56. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation,* 4 vols., compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Bookcraft, 1956), 3:201–202.

57. Ibid. Emphasis in original.

58. *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 532. See also *Selected Writings of Daniel H. Ludlow*, Gospel Scholars Series (Deseret Book Company, 2000), 6.

59. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Deseret Book, 1981), chap. 117, "Expounding the Scripture."

60. Robert W. English, *Autobiography* (self-published, n.d.). http://www.worldcat.org/title/autobiography/oclc/253596418&referer=brief_results (accessed July 30, 2011).

61. C.J. Hunt, "Sacred Records—Balance of Book of Mormon Plates," *SH* 76 (March 6, 1929), 271–74.

62. Clyde Neilson and Dale Lowell Morgan, *From the Dust They Shall Speak Again: The Sealed Records or the Great Convincing Act* (N.p., 1945), 5.

63. Ross W. LeBaron, letter to Margarito Bautista, December 6, 1958, quoted in Wright, 1963. The Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times is a Mormon fundamentalist sect headquartered in northern Mexico that was founded in 1955 by Joel LeBaron and members of his family. They were involved with Joseph Musser at one point.

64. Avraham Gileadi, "The Great and Marvelous Work Yet to Come Forth," n.d. (most likely 1970s–80s), found among the materials in Paul R. Cheesman Papers, Box 24, fd. 2., Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo. Emphasis in the original.

65. Bruce R. McConkie, "Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah," October 1973 General Conference, http://www.lds.org/ensign/1973/10/ten-keys-to-understanding-isaiah?lang=eng (accessed August 3, 2011).

66. Ibid.

67. Gileadi, "The Great and Marvelous Work Yet to Come Forth."

68. McConkie, "Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah."

69. Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry," 217b.

70. Bruce R. McConkie, "This Generation Shall Have My Word through You," *Ensign,* June 1980.

71. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Doctrinal Restoration," in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Truths*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 15.

72. Ibid, 16. See also his discussion on the sealed book in McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Deseret Book, 1985); McConkie,

"The Bible—A Sealed Book," *Church Education Symposium*, Brigham Young University, August 17, 1984; McConkie, *Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), esp. the section "The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times"; and *Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), esp. chap. 117, "Expounding the Scripture."

73. Rodney Turner, "The Three Nephite Churches of Christ," in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture: Paper from the First Annual Book of Mormon Symposium*, edited by Paul R. Cheesman (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988).

74. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 443.

75. Orson Pratt, "Book of Mormon, etc.," July 18, 1875, *Journal of Discourses*, 18.

76. Neal A. Maxwell, *But For a Small Moment*, (Provo: Deseret Book, 1986), esp. chap. 2, "A Choice Seer." See also Maxwell, "Yet Thou Art There," *Ensign,* November 1987, 30; Maxwell, "'For I Will Lead You Along,'" *Ensign*, May 1988, 7; Maxwell, "'From the Beginning,'" *Ensign*, November 1993, 18; and Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Bookcraft, 1990), 18.

77. For a sampling of other references to the sealed portion: Robert J. Matthews, "The Restoration of All Things: What the Doctrine & Covenants Says," in *Heavens Are Open: The 1992 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*, edited by Byron R. Merrill (Deseret Book Company, 1993); Donovan J. Fleming, "Their 'Best Shot,' *BYU Speeches,* June 17, 1997. For Maxwell Institute treatments of the sealed portion, see Monte S. Nyman, "Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001), 52–61; Valentin Arts, "A Third Jaredite Record: The Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002), 50–59; Cameron J. Packer, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004), 50–57; and see translations noted previously in the introduction.

78. See the following talks for examples of this: Thomas S. Monson, "Finding Strength through Obedience," October 2009 General Conference ("There is no need for you or me in this enlightened age, when the fullness of the gospel has been restored, to sail uncharted seas or travel unmarked roads in search of the fountain of truth. For a loving Heavenly Father has plotted our course and provided an unfailing map—obedience!"); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Way of the Disciple," April 2009 General Conference ("The gospel of Jesus Christ is taught in its fullness in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints").

79. Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Deseret Book Company, 1982), chap. 19. Quote dated May 31, 1948.

80. Pratt, "The Book of Mormon," August 25, 1878, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:76b.

81. George Macdonald, "The Higher Faith," *Unspoken Sermons* (NuVision, 2007), 26.

82. Pratt, "Revelation Gradual, etc.," *Journal of Discourses* 19:14b.

The Gold Plates in the Contemporary Popular Imagination

Saskia M. Tielens

Note: *This paper was originally delivered in conjunction with a slideshow of web-sourced images. These illustrative figures may be found at www.dialoguejournal.com/2012/the-gold-plates-in-the-popular-imagination .*

The gold plates occupy an interesting place in Mormon culture. Although they are an essential part of the Mormon foundational narrative, the plates have a peripheral place in Mormons' ordinary discourse. Take, for example, the 1989 Primary songbook.[1] According to the index, there are sixteen songs about being reverent in church, and an additional three concerned with the need for quiet. In contrast, only two explicitly deal with the gold plates. And when one thinks about Mormon material culture, sacred garments and temple art come more readily to mind than the plates. Yet in this paper I argue that the gold plates are actually prime examples of Mormon material culture, and that, in fact, the practice of invoking the gold plates in the popular imagination shapes and reflects Mormon culture in significant ways.

Material culture

An extensive treatment of material culture studies is beyond the scope of this brief paper. Instead, I offer illustrations of the power of material culture in everyday lived religion—starting with a Catholic and Protestant perspective and then ending with a Mormon view. The material dimension of religion is central to re-

ligious experiences, as religion is more than knowledge gained from saints or scriptures. Throughout history, the faithful of all religions have engaged in physical expressions of religious feelings, beliefs, and traditions.[2] The body is a central mediator of religious experience, and it is the physical nature of material culture that allows it to play a role in affirming those beliefs and experiences.[3] It is important to note that material culture is not a neutral byproduct of peoples' lives. Material culture, in the form of apparently inanimate objects, acts on people and is acted upon by people to realize social functions, control social relationships, and give meaning to human enterprise.[4] While material culture in general might be an indication of the particular subculture or class to which a person belongs, or the occupation and/or status they hold,[5] material culture that expresses religion has its own specific signifiers. It is through material culture than people learn the habits and discourses of their religious communities. After all, symbolic systems are not just passed down but must be relearned in every generation, through seeing, doing, and touching.[6] Catholic children are extensively prepared for their first Holy Communion at age seven, but it is when they kneel in their fancy, new, white clothes and touch, see, and even taste the body and blood of Christ that they begin to understand the power of the Eucharist and, in that sense, what it means to be Catholic (figures 1 and 2). Encountering the material in religion helps generate religious values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes. It is through images that one becomes religious in a particular manner.[7] A Catholic might wear a scapular (figure 3) or hang a picture of the Sacred Heart on the wall. A Protestant might have an organ in the living room (figure 4) or a lavish family Bible. A Mormon might prominently frame a "Proclamation on the Family" or have a small temple ornament hanging in the Christmas tree (figure 5). In all these instances, the material culture surrounding people is used to construct meaning. People from different faiths use religious objects in fairly similar manners, as a set of theological and cultural tools that respond to people's spiritual, psychological and social yearnings.[8] However, when comparing a Catholic First Communion at age seven to a Mormon baptism at age eight, the similarities in symbolism and doctrine (the white clothes, the age at which the ritual happens) do not preclude a different experi-

ence. Similar theological concepts, mediated by similar objects, will be experienced differently because the objects are acted upon and interacted with in a different manner. Material religious culture, therefore, is both ecumenical and highly specific. The specificity lies in the objects being invoked in radically different experiential frameworks. These frameworks and the resulting differences in self-understanding, rather than the objects themselves, make for the different experiences of the Catholic and Mormon children discussed above .

The power of a religious object, which Robert Armstrong calls "affecting presence,"[9] comes into being through the people who interact with it. Affecting presence is often closely tied to the emotion produced in a believer.[10] Let us take this family Bible into consideration (figure 6). It was sold at auction in 2011, and as one viewer said on her personal blog, "Despite loosing [sic] the Bible, it inspired me to want something so beautiful and meaningful in my future family. . . . I am determined to find one someday. One that will be filled with notes, papers, letters, and will be passed down from one generation to the next and hopefully preserved for many years."[11] For this woman, the meaning of the Bible lay not as much in its words as it did in the Bible as a repository for memories and a reminder of her love for her family.

Relationships are one of the primary ways in which objects become meaningful.[12] Take, first of all, the relationship between individuals and Christ. Although Protestant culture is known for being sober, the Reformation did not entirely eliminate images; instead, reformers sought to change the kind of relationships believers created with these images. Saints were felt to be too Catholic, so art exhibited figures from the Old Testament, placed within their narratives in order to downplay any sense of devotional use.[13] However, in time, close-ups of paintings were reproduced, like Hofmann's Head of Christ (figure 7). These were accorded a place of honor within the home and slowly began to be used to cultivate a personal relationship with Christ through his image. A similar thing happened with Sallman's Head of Christ (figure 8), an image that might be familiar to you. In her book *Material Christianity,* Colleen McDannell argues that Protestants "empowered [that image] in much the same way that Catholics find an affecting presence in home shrines."[14] Protestants consciously or un-

consciously felt that this image of a friendly, personal, involved Christ with such kind eyes could serve as a mediator between them and God.[15] But material culture also cultivates relationships between people. Giving religious goods as gifts in a social context can build up friendships, as it binds people to the sacred as well as to each other.[16] In that manner, giving a friend a bookmark on her birthday for use in her Bible affirms community affiliation and shared values. Displaying a religious object helps "embed individuals . . . within a social world."[17] Thus these religious objects represent culture and resonate culturally because the in-crowd, so to speak, recognizes them as their own.[18] A quick search of Pinterest reveals many, many religious goods given as gifts (figures 9–11). Giving and receiving these gifts not only demonstrates who is in the group (and who is not), but also teaches how to act and think like Christians through categorization.[19]

This brings us to another major use of material culture: namely, creating and sustaining collective memory. Through spaces, images, gestures, and objects, we embody memory and try to recreate an authentic past. Take the cross, for example. The presence of the cross in church, or the act of making the sign of the cross at home before meals, is in essence a "condensed commemoration, a narrative made flesh" of the foundational belief of Christianity.[20] Images and/or objects such as the cross operate as a link in the chain of memory; one scholar calls this the "religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future," and, in so doing, "enables a group of believers to demonstrate publicly and privately that they belong to a distinctive religion."[21] Because objects are highly visible assertions of lineage, in that sense,[22] they are excellent mediators of religious memory. In fact, material culture often functions to "create a continuous and personal narrative of the past,"[23] a narrative that is wholly individual. Taking home a souvenir from a pilgrimage, for example, allows its owner to partake of the power of the original experience[24] or pass it on to a third party,[25] thus perpetuating and expanding the chain of memory.

Material Culture within Mormonism

At first sight, Mormon culture seems to lack powerful symbols. Mormon meetings are rather low church in their liturgy:

there is no art in LDS chapels, for example, and the trays used to pass the sacrament of bread and water, as well as the sacrament itself, are very pragmatic. However, the simplicity of Sunday meetings does not tell the whole story of Mormon symbolism. One only has to look at a temple to see that (figure 12), as the soaring buildings are usually accompanied by extensively landscaped gardens and the celestial room is explicitly said to mirror the exalted and peaceful state open to eternal families.[26] But temples are not the only place where material culture comes into play in a Mormon context. Mormon cities are laid out in a particular way. Mormon homes usually contain an abundance of family photos, reflecting the emphasis on the family. Remembrance books (figure 13) can be found on the shelves. Mormons are likely to have food storage hidden away somewhere, a tangible reminder of the self-sufficiency ingrained in Mormon culture and a practice requiring Mormon cookbooks to learn how to rotate storage foods (figure 14). And let us not forget about funeral potatoes, whether they are made with some kind of cream-based soup or fresh gruyère (figure 15). It should be clear that identity markers abound.

While the LDS Church is structured and hierarchical in nature, and this institutionalization is reflected in Mormon culture when it comes to acceptable modes of behavior and beliefs, popular culture is still free to intersect with more sacred concepts, as it does within mainstream Christianity. In doing so, it creates a hybrid culture in which it is perfectly acceptable to spread the gospel by invoking a TV show, for example (figure 16). Although evangelical Protestants are particularly adept at this practice, Catholic lay members also participate in this, as you can see in this iPray t-shirt, with a design that is likely to be familiar to a lot of you (figure 17).

In a specifically Mormon context, some of you might be familiar with the "Hey, Girl" meme going around the Internet these days (figures 18–20). I found these on Pinterest, and Mormons are likely to repin them for a couple of reasons: obviously they're funny and slightly subversive in a Mormon context. They work very well to mark your Mormonism without actually saying, "I'm a Mormon" or pinning a picture of a temple to one of your boards. Repinning them from other Mormons strengthens that commu-

nity bond. Lastly, appropriating the meme allows its viewers to enter into a broader conversation (in this case about female desire) while staying safely within a Mormon context.

One final meme will lead us to the next section of my paper about the gold plates in Mormon material culture. I present to you Hipster Moroni (figure 21).

The Gold Plates in Mormon Material Culture

The gold plates tend to pop up in Mormon material culture where you would expect them, but also where you might not. Let me run you through a quick selection. I'll start off with some more institutionalized versions, like the Primary song (figure 22). The painting, too, is fairly expected (figure 23). The world's fair exhibit is slightly more unusual (figure 24), but seems a fairly good way to tell the world what makes Mormonism special. Crafts made to resemble the gold plates (figure 25) fall somewhere in the middle, as they are a domestic product that is very much linked to the institutionalized Church through the practice of Family Home Evening. Domestic recreations of institutionalized practices are central to material religion.[27] Take this early morning seminary activity as an example: the students were given "gold plates" on which to chisel their testimonies, to better replicate the original experience. Seeing their testimonies set in stone, as it were, was an added bonus. Replicating the gold plates, either at home or at a church activity, is a common part of Mormon culture. Displaying the gold plates at home, whether homemade or bought (figure 26), serves the chain of memory well.

However, my interest lies not so much in the institutionalized uses of the gold plates, but rather in the creative ways members use them to their advantage. The following story is my favorite, from the BYU special collections:

> The story is about "creative dating," of which Mr. M. was an aficionado during his days at BYU. Creative dating involves coming up with unique and outrageous ways to ask girls out. The story took place in fall 1986, before BYU's homecoming dance. "I made golden plates with each leaf having a word on it, asking her to the dance. I buried them in her back yard. Then I got her mother to let me in her home at 2 A.M. I dressed one of my friends up as Angel Moroni. We put flour and hairspray in his hair to make it white and dressed him in a white bed sheet. And we put a big spotlight behind him and

> snuck into her room and turned the spotlight on. He said something to her, but I can't remember what it was. He accompanied her to the site where the plates were buried at she dug them up [sic]. And she said yes.[28]

And while the image of a young man playing Moroni with flour in his hair kind of steals the show, the story illustrates how the gold plates work in Mormon culture quite neatly. By invoking the gold plates in such a manner, the boy demonstrates that he is not only creative but also a good Mormon. He counts on the scenario impressing the girl not only because of the effort involved in producing this mini-drama, but also because it speaks to their common religious knowledge and his apparent ability and willingness to incorporate that knowledge into their future lives.

Let's move on to another example. Baptism cakes (figures 27 and 28) use the gold plates to invoke the foundational narrative of Mormonism at an important milestone in a child's life. When one thinks of the implications of ingesting the gold plates and thus having them become part of a person, the fact that there are many examples of edible gold plates becomes significant. A group of women, when asked, recalled making Rice Krispie gold plates, with licorice rings to bind them together. This was at a church activity. Another remembered receiving two mini chocolates, glued to a piece of paper and modeled after the gold plates. Another made gingerbread gold plates with her family after finishing a read-through of the Book of Mormon.[29] The gold plates clearly invade domestic life and are able to serve as tangible links in the chain of religious memory, at least until eaten.

Or take this rubber stamp (figure 29). It may not have the added significance of being edible, but like the cakes, a stamp speaks to that part of Mormon culture that values domesticity, in this case through crafting. It also shows its owner's allegiance to Mormon culture, not only in use, but also just as a part of someone's stamp collection.

Action figures such as Moroni burying the gold plates (figure 30) offer parents toys that socialize their children into a particular religious mode of being by reinforcing the Mormon worldview and allowing for insularity of culture. Toys such as these are an important element of religious expression, allowing children to integrate religion into their play world[30] and permeate all of life.

Lastly, tie pins and tie tacks (figures 31 and 32) allow members to demonstrate their belonging in an understated way. They most likely belong to the Sunday uniform, thereby functioning as a signifier not only to outsiders, but also (and importantly) to fellow members. These are explicitly marketed as a missionary gift, which means they carry the hopes and dreams of many a proud grandma for her grandson that the chain of memory will not be broken and that the Mormon heritage will be passed on to new generations.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have offered a snapshot of material culture as it relates to religious experiences. We have seen how people surround themselves with objects that mark their identity, pass on religious memory, and differentiate insiders from outsiders. Although the objects that people interact with are different, religious material culture is used in surprisingly similar ways among Catholics, Protestants, and Mormons.

The focus of this paper was the function of the gold plates in material culture. While institutionalized, Church-sanctioned uses of the gold plates play a role in shaping what is seen as acceptable material culture within the Mormon world, we only have to think of a young Moroni with flour in his hair to recognize the creativity with which Mormons engage with the gold plates in their daily lives. Although the uses of the gold plates in the popular imagination are myriad, and often overlap, several things have become clear. Mormonism has a strong culture of domesticity, and this is reflected in its material culture. Gold plates are not just bought at Deseret Book but also made at home for Family Home Evening. They are made out of metal, but also out of Rice Krispies or cake batter and frosting, and then happily eaten. They are worn on clothing, played with, and shared on the Internet. In replicating the gold plates and mediating them into every day life, the gold plates become links in the chain of memory, helping dispense the original experience of the angel Moroni giving Joseph Smith the gold plates and pointing to everything that was to follow. Because material culture depends very much on relationships between people, memory is transmitted not only generationally, from parent to child, but also horizontally, from church member to church

member around the world. In this manner, a web is spun that connects members to each other through their common experiences of the gold plates. It strengthens community differently than, for example, a Fast and Testimony meeting or a ward service activity. I would argue that material culture—and specifically the gold plates—should not be underestimated in this regard. Material culture is free to move beyond boundaries, whether they are geographical in nature, based on language, or tied to ethnicities. Although material culture is connected to ideas of class, it may at times also move beyond class, offering its users a way to build community that is distinctive, crucial, and truly transcendent. Invoking material culture allows believers to participate in a conversation regarding community, history, and memory that asks the dynamic yet eternal question of what it means to be a member of a particular culture in a particular time. And although the gold plates clearly function as identity markers, delineating insiders from outsiders in what sometimes seems to be a fairly non-negotiable manner, they are also used in insider culture as well. Invoking the gold plates marks orthodoxy, perhaps, or a way of thinking, or at the very least a willingness to publicly announce yourself as a gold-plate-believing Mormon invested in the insularity of Mormon culture.[31]

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, as physical reminders of Joseph Smith's original experience, they act to bring the past into the present. Using the gold plates in daily life in that sense means aligning yourself with the story they represent. Otherwise said, invoking the gold plates means actively shaping your life's story to be a continuation of the story Joseph Smith began. Material culture, especially if it is slightly kitschy, tends to be dismissed as unimportant or banal. After all, what kind of value can inhere in a seven-dollar tie tack or a baking mold? But once we stop judging objects based on their artistic and/or monetary value or gendered position within daily life, it becomes clear that it is the everyday humdrum nature of these objects that gives them their power. By being present where everyday Mormon life is lived, these objects enwrap Mormons and remind them not only of their past, present, and future, but also of their place in the larger story of Mormonism and the world.

Notes

1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Children's Songbook* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1991).

2. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

3. E. Frances King, *Material Religion and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 5–6.

4. Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 3.

5. Ibid, 4.

6. McDannell, 2.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Robert Plant Armstrong, *Affecting Presence*, quoted in McDannell, 18.

10. McDannell, 25.

11. Rebecca, "Old Family Bible." *Living Nazareth*, May 16, 2011, http://livingnazareth.blogspot.com/2011/05/old-family-bible.html (accessed July 8, 2012).

12. McDannell, 4.

13. Ibid., 26–27.

14. Ibid., 28.

15. Ibid., 30.

16. Ibid., 45.

17. King, 56.

18. Woodward, 28.

19. McDannell, 45.

20. King, 15.

21. Danièle Hervieu-Leger, quoted in King, 15.

22. King, 16.

23. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), quoted in McDannell, 41.

24. McDannell, 41.

25. King, 3.

26. "Inside the Temple," http://www.lds.org/church/temples/why-we-build-temples/inside-the-temple?lang=eng (accessed July 14, 2012).

27. King, 16.

28. Jessica L. Barker and M (name withheld by request), Mormon Lore—Creative Dating: Angel Moroni and the Golden Plates, n.d. Folklore Archive, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library,

Brigham Young University, Provo. My special thanks to Christopher C. Smith.

29. "Creative Uses of the Gold Plates," posting to Feminist Mormon Housewives Society (Facebook group), July 17, 2012, printout in my possession, used by permission.

30. McDannell, 52.

31. I propose to start thinking of members that demonstrate their investment in Mormon culture in this manner as Gold Plate Mormons, echoing the well-known categories of Liahona and Iron Rod Mormons.

"For All Things Must Fail": A Post-Structural Approach to the Book of Mormon

Jacob Bender

Having been witnesses to the perpetual collapse of their buildings, their political systems, their churches—indeed of their entire civilization—the writers of the Book of Mormon might well have been peculiarly preoccupied with the collapse of structure, be it politically, institutionally, and even linguistically. In this paper, I argue that this preoccupation with structural collapse legitimizes a critical consideration of the way that language functions in the book, rendering the Book of Mormon particularly well-suited to a reading that employs the techniques of post-structural criticism. Let me be clear that when I suggest a post-structural approach to the Book of Mormon, I do not propose that the Book of Mormon is itself claiming to be a post-structural text; such a claim would of course be a hopeless anachronism, given the 1,600 years from Moroni to Derrida. Rather, what I suggest is that elements of contemporary post-structuralist thought may help to illuminate certain of the literary moves made in the Book of Mormon text. Specifically, I argue that the Book of Mormon's text participates in its own self-deconstruction, systematically undermining the

*The Annual Meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters is an opportunity for creators and appreciators of Mormon literature to gather and discuss their work. Jacob Bender's paper was presented at the 2011 Annual Meeting, and Scott Hales read his paper at the 2012 Annual Meeting. Both events were held on the Utah Valley University campus in Orem, Utah.

reader's confidence in the text while also engaging in what Derrida termed "freeplay" with words (i.e., their meaning shifts with context), all so as to ensure that faith is exercised in the referent, not the signifiers.

I must first risk summarizing the barest basics of structuralist and post-structuralist discourse. The body of thought that has come to be called "structuralism" originated in the early twentieth-century work of Ferdinand Saussure, who wrote that the relationship between the signifier and the referent is purely arbitrary—whether we call a tree "a tree," "un arbor," or "ein Baum," the word, or "signifier," does not itself somehow contain the essence of tree-ness. In Saussure's own words, "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image."[1] That is, it is only the concept of a tree, not the tree itself, that our minds encapsulate—there are no little trees growing in our brains when we hear the signifier "tree." In the 1960s, Jacques Derrida raised the stakes by stating not only that words have no intrinsic relation to the thing they represent, but also that words themselves have no fixed meaning, or "transcendental signifier," that can ground the rest of language: "The absence of the transcendental signifier extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*."[2] That is, because words can only be defined tautologically by other words with similarly non-fixed and slippery meanings, all words are inherently tautological and unreliable. Derrida's ideas help inform the discourse we generally (and provisionally) label as post-structuralism, since he posits that the structure of language ultimately collapses on itself. Every text, then, is inherently unstable, slippery, and in "freeplay," that is, open to re-signification through ever-shifting re-contextualization.

The early Christians understood language's slipperiness. Paul for example declared that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20), implying that words are mere representations, not purveyors, of the power they signify. No power is contained in words, just as no "tree-ness" is contained in the mere signifier "tree." One does not learn what salt tastes like from hearing the word "salt," but only from tasting salt. We can understand Paul's declaration, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7) as a tautology: since we are unable to bypass the senses, we must

perforce exercise faith that there is an external reality with which our poor senses interact and then, lamely, communicate to our brains. Yet still we must rely on our senses and sensation, since they are all we have. We cannot escape the mediation of our senses. The Book of Mormon also describes faith in terms that depend on sensation. Alma, for example, describes the "seed of faith" as something that "will begin to *swell* within your breasts . . . you *feel* these swelling motions . . . it beginneth to *enlarge* my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be *delicious* to me. . . . O then, is not this real?" (Alma 32:28, 35, emphasis added). Swelling, feeling, enlarging, deliciousness—Alma creates a constant appeal to the senses, for what else do we have but sensation to determine whether something is real? Paul calls the Holy Ghost "the unspeakable gift" for the simple reason that no mere sound-waves contain the referent. Consequently, our testimonies, such as they are, are not reliant on unreliable language for determining their veracity, but on feeling itself—just like everything else. If LDS testimony meetings often come off as clichéd and platitude-ridden, it's because the words we often use cannot hope to contain the experiences we wish to (and are unable to) communicate. Mormons often feel the inadequacy of words more keenly at the microphone than anywhere else.

Likewise, the near constant lament of the Book of Mormon's writers is that language is inherently inadequate and unreliable. Over and over, the Nephite writers assure us that their words cannot communicate even "a hundredth part" (3 Ne. 26:6; WoM 1:5; 3 Ne. 5:8; Jacob 3:13; Ether 15:33; Hel. 3:14) of their record. Repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon, people hear a "voice and . . . understand not" (3 Nephi 11:4), are "baptized with fire, and . . . know it not" (3 Nephi 9:20) and "hear it not" (Moroni 2:3). Words cannot hope to communicate the referents they represent without a prior experience to reference. "O that I were an angel," exclaims Alma, "that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth" (Alma 29:1) for his frustration is that shaking the earth is one thing his words can't do; when the angel shook the earth at the time of Alma's own conversion, the power derived from a source that accompanied his words but, was not part of them, for there is no intrinsic relationship be-

tween words and power. "Neither am I mighty in writing," cries Nephi, "for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men" (2 Nephi 33:1), implying that signifiers carved into plates do not in and of themselves intrinsically communicate the Spirit. Moroni himself likewise laments

> our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them; And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands . . . Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them (Ether 12:23–25).

Moroni's lament about the inadequacy of writing, as compared to speech that is mediated between speaker and hearer by God's Spirit, recognizes implicitly that words as a collection of symbols on a page (or a metal plate) have only an arbitrary and incidental correspondence to the referent; words about God do not contain power to create a relationship with God, apart from the wordlessly direct influence of God's spirit that conveys meaning between speaker and hearer. Joseph Smith believed that the things God reveals to us "are revealed to us in the abstract . . . revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all,"[3] affirming that God's power is communicated wordlessly, outside verbal discourse. Moroni knew that merely writing about something powerful did not *make* the words themselves powerful by association.

But then, truth *shouldn't* be based on text; LDS missionaries regularly preach of the plethora of churches that have been established based on interpretations of the inherently unstable text of the Bible, such that even young Joseph Smith lost "all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible" (JS-H 1:12). Language fails because, as Mormon declares, "All things must fail" (Mor. 7:46), language included. Nephi celebrates and even embraces the failure of text, as when he writes, "we speak concerning the law that our children may know the *deadness* of the law; and they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was

given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law ought to be done away" (2 Nephi 25:27, emphasis added). For the Nephite writers, words, laws, and language are already dead, and are not only expected to collapse, but are to be treated as though they already have. Nephi cares less about the law than he does about what the law points toward. Furthermore, it is not only the law that is dead; the words that express it are dead too. Abinadi for example accuses the priests of Noah of not having "the words of God . . . written in your hearts" (Mosiah 13:11); he acknowledges that they teach the Law of Moses and the Decalogue, but he also feels compelled to remind these priests that these words do not and cannot contain the salvation they signify. He also tells these priests that what they do to him "shall be as a type and a shadow of things to come" (Mosiah 13:10), for though his death is real, the written transmission of it points to another reality. The Book of Mormon is full of similar assertions that words can only point to, not contain or transmit, reality.

The Book of Mormon's attention to the limits of language brings to mind the way certain mid-twentieth-century writers played with a text's dependency on context for intelligibility. By placing quotations in new contexts, they radically re-contextualized the text in the process. One pertinent example is the Jorge Luis Borges short story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote,*" wherein the author reviews the work of a fictional Frenchman who rewrites Cervante's *Don Quixote* word-for-word, three centuries after the original. The reviewer prefers the Menard version to the Cervantes, saying "Menard's fragmentary *Quixote* is more subtle than Cervantes' . . . Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer."[4] Menard's *Quixote*, says the reviewer, shifts in meaning since it is now written from a modern, not a Renaissance, perspective. The exact same phrase in *Don Quixote*, "history, the mother of truth," is "a mere rhetorical praise" in Cervantes, but is an "astounding idea" in Menard, since Menard is informed by William James and other contemporary thinkers.[5]

In a similar mode of free-play, the Book of Mormon includes long passages from Isaiah, often word for word, but accompanied with the explicit instructions to "liken them unto yourselves" (1

Ne. 19:23), inviting the reader (as does Borges) to explore how meanings shift and read differently based upon time, place, reader, and context. Nephi and his followers read Isaiah differently than Lehi's contemporaries in Jerusalem could have: just as the identical text of *Quixote* reads differently when written by Menard instead of Cervantes, so also the very same words one prophet spoke shifted meanings entirely when hammered into brass by another, who understood Isaiah's words as prophecies of Christ. Those same words mean something else again when "likened" to modern readers, who look neither for the literal redemption of the tribes of Israel, nor the incarnation of Christ out of the stem of Jesse, but toward another kind of incarnation and redemption.

In 3 Nephi chapters 24–25, Christ himself quotes Malachi to the Nephites—that is, he quotes a prophet that he himself spoke to, thus calling into question the very category of authorship itself; as Roland Barthes writes,

> It is language which speaks, not the author . . . We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[6]

No writers write in a vacuum, but are constantly interacting, copying, and conversing with all writers that come before and after them. The text has no single Author-God directing its meaning, any more than God himself does. When Christ quotes Malachi quoting him, the speaker is not Christ or Malachi alone, but language, that is, Barthe's "tissue of quotations" drawn from a variety of interrelating sources, sources that Christ and Malachi participate in, but do not originate. Indeed, the Book of Mormon is a collage of polyphonic voices all conversing with each other at once. Mormon's is the dominant voice, but the text also features other strong authorial voices, such as Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, Zeniff, Alma, Helaman, Moroni, and even Christ himself, revealing a wide range of voices and personalities interacting with each other, speaking in the first, second, and third persons, likewise destabilizing the text by constantly keeping off-balance any con-

textual basis a reader might use to derive a single, authoritative meaning from the text. Since the text is no longer able to ground itself in a single meaning, all hope of settling any theological conviction based upon an appeal to text is out of the question, and the reader is left again to rely upon spirit, not signifiers.

The Book of Mormon itself is written in a collage of genres, such as sermons, prayers, coronation ceremonies (Mosiah 2–5), poetry (2 Nephi 5, Alma 29), epistolary, and Hebrew scripture. We might also term this collage what Derrida calls "bricolage, the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined";[7] Mormon himself certainly borrows not just his concepts but also much of his text from a heritage which had been coherent, and then became quite literally ruined. Mormon is not a creative innovator or originator, no matter how strong his authorial and editorial voice may be, but according to Derrida, that is at it should be; Mormon is instead the "bricoleur," the one who rearranges pre-existing articles into new formations. This collage of voices and genres calls attention to how meaning changes depending on context, inviting the reader to consider the ever-shifting signification of meanings swarming around, pointing toward, while never touching, the referent.

The Derridean move of acknowledging that there is no fixed center elucidates another important feature of the Book of Mormon text. (To be clear, Derrida makes explicit that there is *always* a center, but whatever occupies the center constantly shifts.) He writes that "the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself,"[8] and that "the center is a function, not a being—a reality, but a function."[9] Since the center is a function instead of a being, any being or object can fulfill that function. Hence, though one may rightfully argue that Christ is always the center of the Book of Mormon (Mormon has placed him there), for Nephite civilization, the structure is constantly being reoccupied by riches, fine clothing, gold, silver, covetousness, murder, hunger for power, and "the vain things of the world" (Alma 39:14). If the center were immutable, then the prophets would not have to constantly risk their lives in preaching a recentering in Christ. Instead, the Nephite prophets fully understand that the structure's center will shift inexorably—Christ *can* be the center of one's society, or life, or even one's discourse, but though one may

argue that Christ *should* be, there is no guarantee that he *will* be. In fact, it is necessary that Christ should not be held at the center of the discursive universe of the Book of Mormon, because Christ's incarnation must be read by Lehi's family as yet to come, by the Nephites at Zarahemla as immediately present, and by Mormon's anticipated audience as having occurred. The center must move as successive linguistic and religious structures collapse and are reconstituted "according to our manner of speech" (Mormon 9:32) and "altered . . . according to the minds and circumstances of the people, in every generation" (Alma 11:4).

This constantly shifting center is suggested early in the book, with Lehi's declaration that "there must needs be an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). He describes a productive tension between good and evil that enables agency. The rest of the book illustrates that such an oppositional structure is inherently unstable, and finds equilibrium only in righteousness centered in Christ's atonement. However, this equilibrium cannot become stasis—the great and last sacrifice must be made continually, because the possibility of righteousness implies the inevitability of sin. These tensions must remain lively and resist the kinds of reified categories that human beings are wont to create to give the illusion of stability and permanence: Nephite and Lamanite, rich and poor, hard-hearted and penitent, persecutor of Christians and missionary of Christ's gospel. In Derridean terms, these constructions are known as "false binaries," wherein two different sides are constructed in opposition to each other, with the implication that one side must be absolutely right, and therefore the other absolutely wrong.

The Book of Mormon is interested in deconstructing these binaries, thereby liberating us from the tyranny of a structure that has made itself more important than the reality it claims to represent. Various prophets constantly called the Nephites to repentance for this binary construction, from Jacob crying, "the Lamanites your brethren whom ye hate because of their filthiness . . . are more righteous than you" (Jacob 3:5) to Mormon lamenting, "notwithstanding this great abomination of the Lamanites, it doth not exceed that of our people" (Moroni 9:9). Furthermore, the fact that so many Nephites apostatized and defected to the Lamanites, while so many Lamanites converted en masse and

joined the Nephites, causes the entire false binary of Nephites/Lamanites to collapse, as thoroughly multi-ethnic squadrons battle each other throughout the war chapters in Alma. In fact, the Nephite/ Lamanite re-division in late 4 Nephi is along ideological, not ethnic lines. Thus, the easy apocalyptic binary established in 1 Nephi 12, wherein presumably-racial Lamanites are prophesied to wipe-out presumably-racial Nephites in genocidal war, is also surprisingly undermined. The final deconstruction of Nephite civilization is itself deconstructed. No matter how desperately we would like to impose a clean, easy binary on the Book of Mormon, the book itself won't allow it. The structures of the Book of Mormon perpetually self-deconstruct, as they must, in order for repentance and salvation to remain permanently possible.

Herein lies a key difference between much late modern and postmodern literature and the Book of Mormon. Since all structure must collapse and "all things must fail," much of this literature is written as though the structure has already collapsed, in much the same way that Mormon's editing is performed with a post-apocalyptic perspective (both the apocalypse of his own civilization, and the foreseen apocalypse of ours). Yet while this collapse is often occasion for despondency in much literature, in the Book of Mormon the collapse is salvific; every cause for despair in the former is a cause for rejoicing in the latter. For example, in the finale of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Aureliano finally reads the undecipherable book given by the gypsies at the novel's inception. As a final catastrophic storm destroys his town of Macondo, Aureliano realizes that the book he is reading describes the entire history of Macondo up to this final storm, ending with a description of Aureliano reading the book; that is, Aureliano is reading himself reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It is an ending of great melancholy, for reality must collapse because the text that represents reality must likewise collapse.

The Book of Mormon also has a book unreadable until the end of the world; as the angel said to Nephi, "But the words which are sealed he shall not deliver, neither shall he deliver the book. For the book shall be sealed by the power of God, and the revelation which was sealed shall be kept in the book until the own due time of the Lord, that they may come forth; for behold, they re-

veal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof" (2 Nephi 27:11). Nephi, as early as 1 Nephi 12, has already beheld the final destruction of his people, and both he and Mormon write as though their people are already dead—this apocalyptic melancholy is co-present throughout the entire Nephite narrative. Yet while Marquez despairs that all has been written down, for Nephi, this revelation is one of great promise and comfort. All has already been written, and what is written must collapse—yea, even this whole wicked world must collapse, and the mountains be made low, the valleys high, and all the elements melt with a fervent heat. But what is left then is not the words that represent, but the fullness of that truth which was (always partially and haltingly) represented. Along with Aureliano reading himself reading, we also read the Brother of Jared reading us when "all the inhabitants of the world" are revealed to him, but the effect is not one of final dissolution á la Marquez—quite the opposite, in fact.

For when Aureliano's words self-deconstruct, only emptiness is left. When the Book of Mormon is deconstructed, what is left is the mediation itself—specifically the Great Mediator, the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14). Christ is the word that mediates between God and man, just as words mediate between our sensual data and conceptualizations. The text collapses, but the great mediation remains, standing alone among the ruins of language as Moroni stands among the ruins of his people. The Book of Mormon's self-deconstruction results not in the destabilization but affirmation of meaning; the Nephite record does not mourn the inescapability of mediation, but celebrates and embraces the mediation.

Moroni writes, "whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these . . . were it possible, I would make all things known unto you" (Mormon 8:12). This text does not contain perfection; it falls short of the perfection it conceptualizes, as all words inevitably must. The Book of Mormon itself is un-interested in Biblical literalists—"if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ" (2 Nephi 33:10), cries Nephi, for what is most important to him is not the words themselves but the concepts that the words correspond to. The words, the signifiers, are

ultimately irrelevant, save that words alone are how we conceptualize much of reality. Moroni's promise in Moroni 10:3–5 is not that readers will know the truthfulness of the words on the page, but rather, that they will know what the words themselves point at—in this case, namely, "how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men" (Moroni 10:3). Hence, the record must remain imperfect, unstable, slippery, and self-deconstructive, to ensure that it continues to "point" toward the intended truth, and not be accused of possessing some essentialized truth that it cannot contain—to ensure that the text serves as a means to an end, and not an end unto itself. "For all things must fail," declares Mormon, this text not excluded, so that all that is left is precisely that which does *not* fail.

What's left, according to Mormon, is "charity—which never faileth" (Moroni 7:46), which is significant because charity, "the pure love of Christ," is characteristically relational in nature. Structuralism and post-structuralism alike are likewise concerned with not the words themselves, but the relationships *between* the words. It is through words' relationships with each other that context and meaning is derived—thus, it is in the empty absences between words that charity never faileth. Signifiers may be dependent upon their relationships with each other for their signification, and hence meaning is slippery; what is not slippery, however, is the fact that these relationships must exist in spite of words.

Once language collapses, it is only charitable relationships—between human beings reconciled to one another and to God by the mediating Word—that persist. In a sense, the Book of Mormon text is performative; for as this text repeatedly calls attention to the manner in which meaning ever shifts based on unstable context, it demonstrates that the relationships between the words themselves and between the words and us are the one sure constant in all these textual collapses. Since our relationships are all that are left us, it is paramount that our relationships be charitable. Moroni pleading with us to "not condemn [the text] because of the imperfections which are in it" is a plea to approach the text charitably—a hermeneutics that will hopefully transfer to our relationships with others and with our God, as well. If we ever do at last lay hold of the truth that the Book of Mormon points toward, namely the charity that allows us to become like and withstand the

presence of God (Moroni 7:48), it will be because this unique scriptural text has taught us to value charitable relationships above all the collapsing and self-deconstructing structures where we would instead place our faith.

Notes

1. Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 66.

2. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,* edited by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 249.

3. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 355.

4. Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," *Ficciones*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 37.

5. Borges, 38. Borges himself invokes William James in this story; he writes: "Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened."

6. Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

7. Derrida, 255.

8. Derrida, 248.

9. Derrida, 271.

Beyond Missionary Stories: Voicing the Transnational Mormon Experience

Scott Hales

In *The American Religion*, critic Harold Bloom begins his analysis of Mormonism with this well-known prophesy about the future of Mormon literature:

> A major American poet, perhaps one called a Gentile by the Latter-day Saints, some time in the future will write their early story as the epic it was. Nothing else in all of American history strikes me as *materia poetica* equal to the early Mormons. . . .[1]

While this prophesy is likely meant to be little more than a magnanimous compliment to the Mormon people, it is nevertheless interesting for how it assumes—without hesitation—that the future author of the Mormon story will be an American telling an American story. Why is that?

Perhaps the answer to this question is obvious. Those familiar with the Mormon story know of its American beginnings and the unique place America occupies in certain strains of Mormon doctrine and folk theology. Readers of Mormon literature also know that much of it is set in Utah or other states in the Mormon cultural region, which are not exactly famous for their cosmopolitanism. America seems to be not only the setting of Mormonism and its literature, but also its protagonist, love interest, and best friend. Every other place—be it Brazil or Ghana or the Philippines—is a minor supporting character only, a foil, or a digression.

But the Mormon story is not just an American epic. From the beginning, Mormons have been global players—so much so that while they were moving westward across the North American

continent, their missionaries were venturing beyond American borders to carry out the "titanic design . . . to convert the nation and the world."[2] And while Church policy was initially to encourage these converts to immigrate to the American "Zion," such action was not always practical, and policies about gathering converts to the United States changed gradually around the turn of the last century. As early as 1890, for example, Church officials were instructing missionaries to discourage immigration in order to strengthen Church communities in other parts of the United States and the world.[3] Since then, Mormonism's international presence has grown significantly. In 1950, for example, the Church had a mere 7.7 percent of its 1.1 million church members living beyond American borders. By 2008, that number had jumped to nearly 50 percent of 13.5 million church members, with Mormons living in some 170 countries or territories around the world.[4]

But even with this impressive international growth, the Mormon story still struggles to escape Americentric narratives. Critics have long lamented the narrow American landscape of Mormon literature. In 1974, for example, Bruce W. Jorgensen criticized the editors of *A Believing People*, the first modern Mormon literary anthology, for "implicitly [defining] Mormon literature as a subspecies of American literature." Citing the Church's increasingly international presence, he reasoned that while "most Mormon literature still [was] American in some sense . . . it would profit us to have an anthology that reflected" the voices of a world church.[5] Since then there has been no shortage of follow-ups to *A Believing People*, yet they are dominated by works of North American writers whose interests and concerns often play out against a canvas of irrigation imagery, red rock, ranching, and other aspects of rural Mormon life. Indeed, if transnational Mormon experiences occur at all in these anthologies, they generally occur within the framework of missionary labor.

Missionary fiction, to be sure, is an important subgenre of Mormon literature, especially for the way it has typically explored the tensions arising from American Mormons' interactions with non-American peoples and cultures. Recent examples include Coke Newell's *On the Road to Heaven* (2007) and Douglas Thayer's *The Tree House* (2008), although both of these novels tend to ex-

plore these tensions and interactions through a decidedly American lens, often viewing anything non-American as alienating or potentially hostile. Note, for instance, how Elder Kit West, the main character of *On the Road to Heaven*, introduces readers to Colombia:

> We got scattered all over western Colombia the next morning, two staying in Cali, one going south a hundred and fifty miles to Popayán, a couple heading north to a pair of little Cauca River Valley towns. I got on a bus heading halfway to the Venezuela border, eight hours north to the big city of Pereira. All alone. Okay, not all alone—there were probably forty other people on that bus with me, plus two piglets, five or six chickens, a horrendously ugly little dog, and a goat. But not another person was blond, *gringo*, or scared to death.[6]

For Kit, it seems, Colombia is less a real place than a series of indistinctly defined points on a map, possibly even a wrong turn waiting to happen. Moreover, it is populated with human and animal non-blond Others, "forty other people" whom Kit assumes could hardly feel as "scared to death" as he is.

This perspective, no doubt, accurately reflects that of many American Mormon missionaries, which is probably why it is so prevalent in missionary fiction. At the same time, however, it also continues a tradition of always presenting the transnational as something strange, hostile, and even violent. Later in *On the Road to Heaven*, in fact, Newell offers an extreme example of this presumed hostility of the Other when Kit, an avowed pacifist before his mission, becomes momentarily violent after a Colombian college student hits him over the head with a heavy textbook. Frustrated after nearly two years of being spit upon, berated, and called names like "son of a whore," "Yankee exploiter," and "capitalist pig," Kit lashes out in a way that is inconsistent with his call and the gospel message, leaving the college student sobbing and bleeding on the ground.[7] It is a horrifying scene, not only because of the violence, but also because of the way Kit smugly refuses to recognize how his brutal reaction to the Colombian's obvious resentment only validates the anti-Americanism so often directed at him. Rather than trying to understand the motives behind the Colombians' hostility, Kit allows himself to become the very thing he says he's not: an American bully. In the end, he even refuses to

take responsibility for his violent actions, blaming them instead on his experience in Colombia. "Sorry, man," he tells the student, "it's been a long two years."[8]

Kit's reaction to the Colombian student is but an extreme example of Mormon fiction's tendency to portray non-American (even non-Utahn) lands and their inhabitants as hostile and dangerous; the disturbing scene, nevertheless, is indicative of the problems that go with presenting the non-American, often non-white Other or Other-land from the perspective of a visitor, a transplant who may speak the language but does not understand the culture. What readers get in novels like *On the Road to Heaven* is a representation of a foreign land that is heavily mediated through the naïve eyes of a young American. Rarely do readers of Mormon fiction get the counterpoint: transnational stories that ask them to tread a foreign landscape that is as commonplace to its characters as Utah is to the characters in a Douglas Thayer or Levi Peterson story.

However, while such works are relatively rare in Mormon fiction, they do exist—often not without their own set of issues and ethical problems. Todd Robert Petersen's short story "Quietly" from his collection *Long After Dark* (2007) is a prime example. The story is set in Rwanda and follows John, a newly converted Zimbabwean, as he dedicates the grave of an African saint recently killed by the Hutus during the 1994 genocide. Throughout, Petersen uses a third-person limited point-of-view to ensure that the narrative unfolds from John's perspective alone, forcing readers to see Africa, the Church, and its local white leadership as John sees them. In doing so, he asks white Mormon American readers especially to do something rarely done in Mormon fiction: that is, gaze *at* the white American Mormon rather than *as* one.

Such a rare redirecting of the gaze can be disorienting and discomforting for some readers, especially when the gaze is as critical as John's. As a recent convert, John is still unsure about where he fits in the Church culture. For example, he tends to see the Church as an organization defined by binaries of white and black, American and African, and this view leaves him frustrated and resentful of white leaders who either do not understand his frustrations or dismiss them outright. Indeed, central to his frus-

trations are questions about "why Jesus Christ never came to Africa and why blacks weren't allowed the priesthood for so long and why God suddenly changed his mind."[9] Moreover, John is also troubled by the way the Church seems to privilege the "trials of the American pioneers" while remaining silent about the atrocities of the Rwandan genocide.[10] In the story, these frustrations are directed at John's white American branch president, who is sympathetic to John's questions but resistant to John's dualistic view of the Church, claiming that "John [is] too simple for the world of today." For John, however, the American is the simple one for not seeming to "understand that things were different for blacks than they were for the whites in the Church."[11]

Importantly, though, John is no heretic, no disillusioned Mormon with an angry ax to grind. While he is cynical about white American leadership, he nevertheless finds himself to be at once "oddly resistant and strangely compliant" to its guidance.[12] He wears his white shirt, says his prayers, learns his priesthood duties, and reads his Book of Mormon. Later in the story, when a woman challenges his belief that he "will *be* a God one day," he even bears his testimony, stating "I just believe it because it is true."[13] Still, despite these external observances and avowals, John remains (as the last sentence of the story indicates) one who is "quietly but decidedly torn" about his place in the Church and before God.[14]

For Petersen, John's ambivalence toward the Church—his "decidedly torn" state—functions as a way to address not only matters of race and ethnicity from an apparently non-American perspective, but also the tensions that come with trying to establish a church nurtured in Western culture in locations where any such effort would not only be logistically difficult, but would also smack of colonialism. Petersen highlights this tension midway through the story. John has a dream in which Marie, the widow of the man whose grave he has been asked to dedicate, emerges naked from a river like an Africanized version of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus." Although this is more explicitly stated in an earlier version of the story, published in *Sunstone* as "The Sad Truth of His Desire," the dream represents, on one level, the possibility of an eternal companion for John, a goddess who will spend an exalted eternity at his side in the Celestial Kingdom. On another level, though, with its allusion to Botticelli and its colonization and

eroticization of the African body, the dream is far more unsettling and suggestive of the difficult tensions at play both in John's mind and in Mormonism's efforts to negotiate cultural differences as it establishes the Church throughout the world.[15] Like John, the problematic Venus-like image of Marie is torn—in this case, between signifying hope for transnational Mormonism and despair over its seemingly insurmountable obstacles.[16] Indeed, by the end of the story, John's future as a Mormon appears uncertain, especially since being constantly and "decidedly torn" seems to be the price of exaltation.[17] Invoking the symbolism of the three degrees of glory, the narrative tells us that "[t]he sun burned above the trees" as John returned home, and "the brightness of it" bothered him. "The moon and stars," we learn, "were better for him at this point, the coolness of nighttime and the freedom of dreaming"[18] The suggestion, perhaps, is that John is considering the path of least resistance, the path that will bring him "peace of mind" in this life rather than worlds without end in the next. Petersen, however, ends the story with an ambiguous image of John "spinning in the wide mouth of infinity, stretching his hand forth and pulling it back" in a gesture of irresolution—leaving John's decision endlessly deferred.[19]

This unresolved ending tempts readers to make the decision for John, but what the story ultimately seeks from readers is not closure, but compassion. It asks that they strive to narrow the distance between John's subjective position and their own, internalize his experience, and even empathize with the sincerity and validity of his ambivalence and indecision. It also compels them to take seriously the notions that things are different for Mormons in Rwanda than they are for Mormons in the United States, and that applying the Western mythos of the Mormon pioneers to, say, an African genocide may be as unsuitable and inappropriate as superimposing the image of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" over Marie.

At the same time, though, in foregrounding these matters of difference and perspective, "Quietly" also raises concerns about its own authenticity as a depiction of the transnational Mormon experience. Indeed, as James Goldberg has recently argued on the AML blog, the story's portrayal of John's doubts about the priesthood ban seem more like "a vehicle for the white American author's concerns about race . . . than probable motivating con-

cerns of an actual elder from Zimbabwe."[20] One could argue, likewise, that Petersen's appropriation of Africa, along with his ventriloquy of African characters, places him in a position similar to that of the American branch president, whose efforts in the story are primarily directed toward influencing John's thoughts, words, and deeds. With this in mind, the altogether valid question is whether or not American authors ought to attempt to voice the transnational Mormon experience when doing so runs the risk of playing the well-meaning but ultimately misguided colonizer.

My own thoughts on the question are mixed. While I recognize that the appropriation of the Other's voice is always problematic, even when it is done with sensitivity and good intent, I resist the notion that even a good creative writer cannot attempt to channel the voice of difference without committing some grave ethical error. In a sense, I agree with Malaysian fiction writer Preeta Samarasan, who suggests that such appropriations are not necessarily unethical if they are done with empathy rather than with a desire to force the Other to speak as a puppet. After all, she writes, "We don't need fiction to learn to empathize with those who resemble us; the real challenge is to see ourselves—to find those sometimes comforting, sometimes terrifying shared kernels of humanity—in those who are nothing like us on the surface."[21] Writers who wish to represent the Other, she suggests, must seek for "that perfect balance of empathy and distance that is so hard to strike and so satisfying when struck."[22]

As I see it, Mormon literature will likely remain little more than a "subspecies of American literature" if it long resists seeking after these "shared kernels of humanity" and continues to think of the transnational landscape as America's foil, a place where American missionaries go to be tried and tested before they return home with honor. Mormon writers, of course, should not abandon missionary stories. However, as they create transnational Mormon worlds, they should strive for more empathy, building upon the strengths of stories like "Quietly," yet also improving upon their weaknesses and rethinking their cultural presumptions. In doing so, I think, Mormon writers can avoid the pitfalls of novels like *On the Road to Heaven*, with its culturally insensitive depictions of the Other, and thus ensure that Mormon literature remains vibrant and relevant to the world-wide Church.

Notes

1. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 79.

2. Ibid., 94.

3. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 139–140.

4. James B. Allen, "Mormonism in Historical Context: An Introduction," in *Mormonism: A Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by W. Paul Reeve and Ardis E. Parshall (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, LLC., 2010), xxiv.

5. Bruce W. Jorgensen, "Digging the Foundation: Making and Reading Mormon Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9, no.4 (1974), 51.

6. Coke Newell, *On the Road to Heaven* (Provo: Zarahemla Books, 2007), 188.

7. Ibid., 275.

8. Ibid., 309.

9. Robert Todd Petersen, "Quietly," *Long After Dark: Stories and a Novella* (Provo: Zarahemla Books, 2007), 40.

10. Ibid., 39.

11. Ibid., 40.

12. Ibid., 40.

13. Ibid., 42.

14. Ibid., 45.

15. Robert Todd Petersen, "The Sad Truth of His Desire," *Sunstone* 123 (2002), 51.

16. The image of Marie emerging naked from the river leads one to question the kind of hope it signifies. For John, the image suggests the possibility of finding and marrying for eternity "a woman who share[s] his faith," which would grant him a privileged place in his Mormon community and full access to the blessings of temple-centered Mormonism ("Quietly," 45). The image is troubling, however, in the way hope for Marie seems contingent on her embodying an erotic Western ideal of beauty. Why must her path to godhood be presented in these terms? Further, if the Botticellian image of Marie suggests hope for transnational Mormonism, are we meant to read transnational Mormonism as a kind of masculinist fantasy?

17. "Quietly," 45.

18. Ibid., 45.

19. Ibid., 45.

20. James Goldberg, "Race, Culture, White Guilt, and Mormon Letters," *Dawning of a Brighter Day*, Association for Mormon Letters, April 12, 2012, http://blog.mormonletters.org/?p=4305 (accessed May 8, 2012).

20. Preeta Samarasan, "Putting Words in Other People's Mouths: On Empathy and Ventriloquism in Fiction," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 46, no. 1 (2007), 217.

21. Ibid., 224–5.

Overcoming Technology: The Grace of Stuff

James Faulconer

We tend to think of technology as a way of producing this or that. Simple technologies produce obvious results: a match produces fire. More complicated technologies, such as computers, also produce things, though sometimes it is less obvious what they produce. Our messages may get lost in the ether, but that metaphor recognizes that I produced something using my computer, whatever it was that got lost. There are good reasons to understand technology in terms of production.

Martin Heidegger argued however that technology is less a matter of production than it is a matter of revealing: technology reveals something as this or that.[1] Heidegger uses Aristotle's example to make his argument that technology is essentially revealing: the craftsperson producing a silver cup.[2] He or she does that by revealing what is in silver and in this particular social and political context through smelting and pounding and carving and polishing. Through the work of the craftsperson, the cup appears. It is revealed, not only by the craftsperson, but also by the material from which it is made, the shape that changes in the process of the revelation of the thing, and personal and social needs that particular objects fulfill.

But, Heidegger argues, modernism has shown us that technol-

*Since 2007, Mormon Scholars in the Humanities has sponsored an annual conference for the exchange of ideas and collegial fellowship among LDS scholars in humanistic disciplines. These papers were presented at the 2012 Conference, held on the campus of Southern Virginia University in Buena Vista, VA, and organized around the theme of "Economies and Humanities."

ogy goes farther than it might have seemed to go anciently. It not only reveals things like the cup, the ends of production. It also reveals the world itself in a particular way, namely as powers in reserve available to be used,[3] powers waiting to be ordered (unlocked, transformed, stored up, distributed, switched about). Technology reveals nature as a storehouse of energies.[4] From the beginning technology reveals things in the world as good for something and ready to be used for that something. The match reveals sulfur and wood as good for lighting fire. The river is a reserve of raw power, a reserve revealed by its dam. The dam's turbines produce electricity that is circulated in a distribution system, another reserve. My computer draws on that system and uses the switching properties of electricity to perform a variety of acts. It too is a reserve, a potentiality to be used in the circulation of powers, each a thing that is good for producing some other thing. Each is a link in a continuing chain of production with no ultimate end but further production.

Not only tools and materials, but also the acts done with those tools and materials, such as the messages sent from my computer, are what they are within an economy of circulating powers of production, such as work management and arranging for conferences. My department and the conferences that I take part in are both products of production and parts of further productions. And that goes on, with each production from a reserve showing itself as a reserve for the next thing to be produced: everything is always good for something—something else. To be is to be in reserve for production.

This understanding of the world as powers in reserve for use in an economy of production isn't the result of some perversity on our part. It isn't a defect in our psyche, something to be changed by a change of attitude or by psychological or social therapy. Understanding the world as a resource to be used to produce other things and acts, things and acts that themselves then become a further resource, is a genuine way in which the world reveals itself.[5] In our lives within the world, we *find* the world that way. We don't impose on the world its being as Heideggerian reserve. It presents itself to us with that character. In fact, it presents itself to us as if being a reserve for resources is its only real state:

nature as storehouse. The world itself brings us to see and use it as essentially a reserve.[6]

That is a fact with which we live. In itself the being of the world as reserve is not a problem. In fact, it is not only not a problem, it is part of what makes human life possible. The problem is that the more we live in the world technologically—with the natural world revealing itself as energies in reserve to be manipulated for production—the less we are able to see that world and the things we encounter in it in any other way. The multiple ways in which things can show themselves (their truth, we could say[7]) are reduced to one: reserve. The truth of technology threatens to cover over any other truth of appearing. If it were finally to do so, then things would cease to be unique things, becoming instead merely entities replaceable for one another in the circulation of production. In a technologized world each thing tends toward being merely good for something else.

In this possible world, the pen with which I love to write, the mug from which (as a convert who loved his coffee) I drink my roasted barley or ginger tea, the flowers in my garden, all these would lose their identity as individual things. They would become merely one more thing essentially like another in being a reserve, however different they might appear to the eye or the hand. They would differ in their materiality and shape, but they would be the same in that the being of each would be that of readiness-for-production: readiness to produce notes, or hold my drink, or decorate my home. And those notes, my drink, and the act of decorating my home would themselves merely be further material in reserve for more production.

The further problem is that if ever the things that appear were to concern us *only* as powers in reserve, then human beings themselves would also appear only as things in reserve.[8] We would join the rest of the world as something to be held in reserve and ordered in chains of cause and effect in order to produce something. Sometimes that something would be material. We might be assembly line workers. Sometimes that something would be social. We might be good citizens of the putatively perfect state. In any case we would cease to be human.

The problem of technology, then, is two-fold: on the one hand, the natural world presents itself technologically; on the

other hand, the more we encounter it that way, the more we *and* the world are in danger of disappearing.

It is not difficult to see the danger of a completely technologized world looming ahead of us. Movie makers have often taken advantage of our ability to envision that danger. But the answer is not an anti-technology. No candidate for government office or program, whether conservative, moderate, or liberal, can undo this threat. No mythical power wielded by a superhero come to save us will do the job. Nor will we rid ourselves of the danger by donning our *lederhosen* or bib overalls and returning to the primeval forest or to the organic farm.

Indeed, the attempt to undo the danger of technology with an anti-technology (perhaps some as-yet unimagined invention, often some older but now outmoded technology) is not anti-technological at all. It is just one more technological move, governed by the same understanding of the world as ultimately a storehouse of manipulable, interchangeable entities ready to be used to produce another interchangeable entity. In an anti-technology, the choice of tools and powers may be different, but the world still appears as technological.

Heidegger points out, however, that the essence of technology is not, itself, something technological.[9] The happening of technology is not itself a reserve ready for production. That means that the essence of technology—revealing—contains not only the threat I have been describing. It also contains the possibility of saving us from that threat. If we can see, Heidegger argues, that every instance of revealing is revealing "in one way *or* another"[10] rather than just in one way, then we find ourselves already in principle outside of the threat we fear. Even if the revealing of modern technology shows us things as merely standing in reserve, the openness that is necessarily part of any revealing means that they also appear as possibly otherwise. That openness may allow us to see things *not* as merely standing in reserve.[11] Quoting Hölderlin, Heidegger says, "Where danger is / grows the saving power also."[12]

However, as much as Heidegger wants us to recognize that the resources for denying technology its revelation of everything as resource are part and parcel of the essence of technology, he suggests that there is something even better for avoiding calamity. He

says that the aesthetic offers an even "more primally granted revealing"[13] than the revealing that can occur with the essence of technology. Through art we see not only that things can be other than standing reserve. We see a revelation of appearing itself.[14] The givenness of the world shows itself, not as stuff for something else, but as itself in a world of things and non-productive powers: color as color and as revealing the light of day; granite as hard, smooth, and cool, but also as revealing the power and powerlessness of the wind against it; sound as sonorous as well as overwhelming.[15] As an aesthetic object, the painting shows us color that has no further purpose than its own appearing. The painting is, strictly speaking, good for nothing. It is not what it is merely in virtue of the fact that it is good for producing something else.

To use a word that is lately fashionable in French philosophy, art *interrupts* technology. It allows us to see the openness of the essence of technology and, thus, to see that there is something other than the technological. But surely a religious attitude toward the world is as interruptive of modern technology as are poetry and art. Heidegger insists on the beautiful as the savior of the true. Those of us with religious sensibilities are probably willing to agree with that insistence, but perhaps not on the limitation that Heidegger may implicitly impose. At least not at first.

In religious experience the world appears as ultimately more than resource for production because it comes, ontologically, before all production. We find ourselves in an already existing world, a world given to us by God. As a gift of God the world is irreducible merely to a storehouse of powers. Even when it is a reserve, it is also a gift. Appearing as a gift, the world shows itself as coming from somewhere else. The created world bears the mark of something more than itself. And if it appears with that mark of something more, as it often does when we are enthralled with the beauty of nature, then it cannot at the same time appear as merely a reserve waiting to be used.

The Mormon belief that the world was not created *ex nihilo* means that the world is also more than the gift of God. In some sense things give themselves to us, though what that sense is remains largely unexplored except perhaps by the Pratt brothers. But we can at least say that stuff gives itself as resistant. (The word "stuff" is particularly appropriate as a technical term for Mormon

thought because it doesn't carry the metaphysical, scientific, or common-sense baggage of words like *matter* or *substance*.) No state of what-is is reducible either to our will or God's. No process of production can keep things from returning toward mere stuff. Entropy is unavoidable; contingency cannot be permanently overcome. This aspect of the existence of things, often conflated with materiality, is that which resists any reduction to a reserve. The stuffness of things guarantees that there is no pure economy of production.

However one parses the teaching of eternal stuff theologically, for Mormons things have their own power to appear within the divine gift of God's creative work. That power is prior to any power of the world to reveal the things within it as standing in a reserve waiting to be used. In fact, it is prior to any power of the world to reveal things within it as any particular thing or for any particular end. The power of stuff to appear is power to be good for nothing.

I once referred to Heidegger's so-called paganism with tentative approval.[16] He is accused of paganism because he takes what-is to be of import in itself and not only because it has been given value by God or is given value by us. Stuff has being apart from either our or God's valuing of it. It cannot be reduced to value, whether that value is temporal or eternal. But that means that Heidegger's appeal to the aesthetic can be understood as not only an appeal to fine art, but (more so) as an appeal like ours to the obdurate character of things. (His two ways of overcoming the technological turn out really to be one.) In recognizing the eternally obdurate character of things, Mormons too might be accused of paganism.

Except for the rhetorical difficulties that accusation will get us into, rhetorical difficulties that I don't underestimate, I have no problem with seeing a connection of Mormonism to paganism. After all, as President Hinckley said, "We say to people [presumably including pagans], in effect, you bring with you all the good that you have, and then let us see if we can add to it."[17] To take what-is as having being in itself, apart from any production or valuing, whether by God or human beings, is of course to deny creation *ex nihilo*. But it is not to deny the inestimable gift of God in

bringing the elements together in creation. As Mormons we can have our Christian cake and eat our pagan one too.

Of course, in Abrahamic religions and western philosophy other persons also give themselves to us, and in doing so they in particular can appear as prior to the technological. Philosophers from Plato to Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Marion have thought about this "prior to." They have often disagreed about its particulars, but few have disagreed that human beings cannot be understood merely technologically. Kant expressed the point by saying that we should always treat other persons as not only means, but also ends.[18] In the terms I have been using, he tells us that human beings are ultimately good for nothing. Others may disagree with Kant's formulation or his arguments for the point, but they rarely disagree with the thought that imbues it: being human is a good rather than a good-for-something. Human relation itself can open a view of the world as nontechnological. And in its view of human beings, Mormonism could once again be accused of a kind of paganism since human beings do not owe the entirety of their being to God.

The answer to this second charge of paganism is less philosophical or theological than it is scriptural, from scriptures that we share with other non-pagans. For example, in Judaism and Christianity the biblical story of Adam and Eve teaches us the "more than" of humanity without the technical terminology of philosophy. It approaches the charge of paganism from a different direction.

Our creation accounts report God saying of the first couple, "Behold the man is become as one of us" (Gen. 3:22; Moses 4:28). We read this as implying that human beings have the same ultimate ontological status as the Father and the Son. Whatever else is true of us, we are also made in God's image (Gen. 1:27), *eikon* in the Septuagint. We are icons of God. There is some sense in which others ultimately reveal themselves to us as God reveals himself. So mortal persons also come before us and reveal something other than a world of mere resource.

What we see, then, is that in Mormon belief there are at least three ways in which technology can be interrupted: when the world reveals itself as God's creation, when something reveals itself as uniquely itself, and when I encounter another person as

both other than me and a person. By revealing a God beyond our mortal world and yet in some way the same as us, and by showing us ourselves in a world of other eternal things and eternal persons, Mormonism shows the possibility of these three interruptions.

Perhaps put too simplistically but in more traditional terms, Heidegger's answer to the problem of technology is the beautiful. If we can be saved, it is the beautiful that can save us from a world that threatens to annihilate humanity, whether by nuclear burst, by environmental disaster, by turning us all into things in reserve for use in circulating powers, or by some combination of those possibilities. Traditionally Jews and Christians reply that not only the beautiful can interrupt the truth of technology to reveal a prior, deeper truth. The tradition responds that salvation from the danger of technology comes in the conjunction of the true, the beautiful, and the good—types of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good. Both type and antitype are ultimately good for nothing.

Many Mormons will respond sympathetically to that Abrahamic response to Heidegger. My suspicion, however, is that if we take seriously the idea that there is eternal stuff, what-is in itself as well as what-is as valued by a person or Person, and therefore that nothing comes from nothing, then we come to a radical conclusion. If there is that kind of eternal stuff, then the good amounts to the true (the appearing of things themselves) and the beautiful (coherent appearings; at least some of them awe-ful events), taken together. And coherent appearing amounts to a particular kind of appearing.

If stuff is eternal, then neither the beautiful nor the good is a fundamental category. Truth is the appearing of what-is, stuff showing itself. The beautiful is the coherent self-showing of stuff. The good is the valuing of those appearings. This makes neither the beautiful nor the good merely subjective, for there can be natural coherence, like the nautilus shell, and natural valuings, such as life.

In response to the traditional triumvirate of truth, beauty, and goodness, Mormons propose instead that the true is sufficient to interrupt technology, without referring immediately to the beautiful or the good. But that takes us back to something like Heidegger's position: things and persons give themselves, and

that giving makes it possible for the interruption of the drive to order everything as only good for something. Often things and persons give themselves within the order of technology. They appear covered over by technology in Heidegger's broad sense of that term. But sometimes they also give themselves as beautiful, and sometimes they give themselves as good—or in the horror of evil.

Grace, the appearance of stuff that is good for nothing but itself, is the word that Heidegger has overlooked but that we must remember. And we remember it not merely by keeping it in mind, but by instantiating the recognition of its appearance in the world through our lives as God's children. On many occasions we do that by living merely technologically. Other times we discover more than the sameness of technology when we are overcome by the beautiful. And sometimes we are brought to our knees outside technology by things or persons giving themselves as overwhelming good or in overpowering evil.

Such lives of grace are seldom the lives of superheroes, political prodigies, or authors of new technological marvels. Instead they are the everyday lives of ordinary people. They are village and ward lives.[19] The lives of God's children are lives in a carpentry shop or on the job site in Sepphoris (Matt. 2:23). They are lives in which we comfort our friends faced with the death of a friend (Jn. 11:1-3, 17-44). In these lives we feast and celebrate marriages, and run out of food for our guests (Jn. 2:1–10). We get exasperated with our family (Jn. 2:4) and with co-workers (Matt. 16:5–11).

Of course there are transcendent moments in religious lives (Matt. 17:1–3), moments in which something outside the daily order of the ordinary reveals itself. But such moments are what they are only within a life that is not filled with them (2 Nephi 2:11). And if there is eternal stuff, then not every moment of transcendence is good. Transcendent evil exists as well as transcendent good.

Without the mundane, any transcendent would be meaningless. But the mundane is not merely counterpoint to the transcendent, the necessary background against which transcendence appears. Joseph Smith's vision of the eternities suggests that life, in this world and the next, is essentially constituted by the mundane, by a physical world of real family, friends, and work, a world in

which the good transcends the mundane, but a world that cannot escape evil. Thoughtful Mormons like Eugene England and Terryl and Fiona Givens take us back to our peculiar scriptures (Moses 7:29) and remind us that even God weeps.[20]

Taken together, the gift of God, the gift of things, and that of other persons—their grace—turns out to be the mundanity of the world as much as or more than it is the joy and surprise of the work of art or the sublime spiritual experience. Heidegger has forgotten both grace and the mundane. But grace and mundanity, in particular the grace *of* mundanity, reveal the world as more than a standing reserve of materials for production. The true and the beautiful, the experience of the good, and even the experience of evil, with and in the mundane, interrupt any possible totalizing world if we can allow them to.

That could easily stand as my conclusion, but at least two questions remain. First: suppose that we make this Heideggerian distinction of stuff before any appearing, on the one hand, and the event of appearing of the world, on the other, and then we locate the possibility of salvation from the possible doom of technology in that difference. Can we see stuff or its possibility of appearing anywhere but in an event of appearing? Presumably not. But if we cannot, then how do we see the *difference* between the potentiality to appear and the appearing? Where do we see the Kantian/Romantic "sublime" and its difference from everything else? The thinker who has done the most to consider this question is probably Jean-Luc Marion, in his discussions of the gift and of what he calls the saturated phenomenon.[21] Perhaps we can find at least the sketch of an answer there, but that remains to be seen.

The second question, one introduced in Jacques Derrida's interrogation of Emmanual Levinas[22] and continuing in David Bentley Hart's recent interrogation of postmodern thought:[23] can we think that difference without understanding the appearing of a thing or the appearing of a world as a kind of unavoidable primal violence? Is the difference between stuff and its appearance necessarily violent? Most postmodern thought says it is. Are the later Levinas, with Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and others right about that? If so, what does that primal violence mean for a Mormon understanding of the world? Is primal violence perhaps the same as primal chaos, for example?

As a Mormon I accept that Joseph Smith's insertion of the mundane into religion reveals the truth of our existence. But we need to think more deeply about that insertion and its implications without taking automatic recourse to the terms of the Abrahamic theological tradition, and we need to be able to answer questions like the one about the possibility of seeing or saying what comes before appearance, as well as that about metaphysical violence, if we are going to theologize that insertion. The stuff(s) of the universe demand(s) our thoughtful response.

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Levitt (New York: Garland, 1977), cf. 5–6, 11–13.

2. Heidegger expands on Aristotle's mention of the production of a silver cup when he explains causation: Heidegger, "Question," 6–8; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1013a26.

3. Heidegger's word is *Bestand.*

4. Heidegger, "Question," 14–17.

5. Ibid., 18–19.

6. Ibid., 19.

7. Cf. ibid., 12.

8. Ibid., 26–27.

9. Ibid., 4.

10. Ibid., 32; my italics. The German is "das so oder so": Martin Heidegger, "Die Frage Nach der Technik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfüllingen: Neske, 1954), cf. 36.

11. Heidegger, "Question," 32.

12. Ibid., 28.

13. Ibid., 34. For a more fully worked-out thinking of the appearing of the thing in the artwork, see Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, 2nd ed.*, edited by David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 143–212.

14.Heidegger, "Question," 34–35.

15. Cf. Heidegger, "Origin," 168.

16. James E. Faulconer, "Room to Talk: Reason's Need for Faith," *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture* (Provo: Maxwell Institute, 2010), 19–51.

17. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Words of the Living Prophet," *Liahona,* April 1999, http://www.lds.org/liahona/1999/04/words-of-the-living-prophet?lang=eng&query=bring+truth (accessed May 16, 2012).

18. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* G429 / 47.

19. I take it as significant that we call our congregations after the relatively arbitrary political divisions of a city. What could be more ordinary or more informative?

20. Eugene England, "The Weeping God of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 63–80; Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps: How Mormons Make Sense of Life* (Salt Lake: Ensign Peak, 2012).

21. For the best overview of Marion's understanding as it relates to other thinkers in the history of contemporary philosophy, see Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

22. Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference,* translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), 79–153.

23. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Mormons, Films, Scriptures

Joseph M. Spencer

I asserted without argument a few years ago at the annual meeting of the Association of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities that the Mormon film movement of 2000–2005 witnessed the production of only one truly Mormon film, namely, *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004).[1] The claim for which I did provide an argument was that the bulk of the movement launched by Richard Dutcher's *God's Army* (2000) and brought to its culmination with Dutcher's (thankfully-later-re-titled) *God's Army 2* (2005) was principally a study in the possibility of introducing into Mormonism, for ostensibly pastoral reasons but with theologically fraught consequences, an arguably non-Mormon sense of religious transcendence. What I did not note then, but would like to reflect on now, is the curious role scripture played—and did not play—in this short-lived movement.[2]

I want to consider both what I believe all would consider the movement's most impressive production, as well as what I believe all would consider the movement's least impressive production—respectively, Richard Dutcher's *States of Grace* (née *God's Army 2*) and Gary Rogers' *The Book of Mormon Movie: Volume 1, The Journey* (2003). By way of conclusion, I then want to say a word about *Napoleon Dynamite*—that most Mormon of films that, nonetheless, had not a word to say about scripture. If, as I suggested a few years ago, the Mormon film movement was as much a theological venture as a filmic one, what can be said about it in terms of specifically *scriptural* theology?

It is relatively easy to set up as polar opposites *The Book of Mormon Movie* and *States of Grace*, and not only in terms of aesthetic merit. Where the one is ostensibly conservative, the other is ostensibly liberal; where the one, not unproblematically, reproduces and reinforces Mormon culture, the other, also not unproblematically, contests and ultimately parts ways with Mormon cul-

ture. But despite such clear differences in both talent and approach, Rogers and Dutcher wrestle, in many ways, with the very same problem: What is the relevance of Mormon scripture to contemporary life?

Rogers poses this question in *The Book of Mormon Movie* in three different ways.

First, through the liberties automatically taken in any dramatization of a scriptural text, he introduces into the scriptural narrative distinctly modern concerns that arise in the setting of contemporary Mormon culture. The most poignant—and, frankly, painful—example comes in the portrayal of 1 Nephi 18:9–10, that less-than-memorable moment in Nephi's narrative when some of his party began, during the ocean voyage to the New World, "to make themselves merry, insomuch that they began to dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness." In Rogers' adaptation, this scene becomes less a worry about "forget[ting] by what power" the group had been brought out of Jerusalem and more a study in young women's modesty—with two of Ishmael's daughters dancing in quasi-ancient-looking denim skirts that do not reach their knees and not-at-all-ancient-looking tops that leave not only their arms and shoulders but also their midriff bare. Significantly, in Rogers' version, before Nephi chastises his brothers, Ishmael's wife, the rightly-concerned Mormon mother, intervenes, instigating a dialogue too precious not to quote: "What are you doing down here?" "We're just having some fun, mother." "Fun? Look at you! You're half-naked! You know better than this!" "Oh, mother. We're going to a new world. You're so old-fashioned." "The Lord would not be pleased with this." "We're out here in the middle of the ocean. Do you really think anyone cares how we dress?" "Yes. I do. And the Lord does." With this most-awkward scene and others like it, Rogers addresses the relevance of the Book of Mormon to contemporary life simply by projecting onto the scriptural text, in good Sunday-School-discussion fashion, distinctly contemporary and ultimately non-scriptural concerns.

The second way Rogers poses the question of the relevance of scripture to contemporary life is more subtle. Though reviewers of the film have often said that "much of the film's dialogue is taken directly from the *Book of Mormon*'s actual wording,"[3] that is

not, strictly speaking, true. The words of the Book of Mormon are more often adapted, abridged, or replaced, both in voice-over narration and in dialogue. Thus "As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us" (1 Nephi 3:15) becomes "No. We can't leave. Not like this. Just because we didn't succeed the first time doesn't mean the Lord won't provide a way." With so much adaptation, abridgment, and replacement, those instances where the wording of the scriptural text actually does make its way into the film are particularly interesting. Such instances are, almost universally, of two kinds. First, the most familiar or most-often quoted texts from Nephi's writings find their way more or less unedited into the film. Viewers are not alienated by a reworded "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents" or "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded." Second, whenever a divine figure speaks—God, the Spirit, an angel—the words are generally taken unaltered from the scriptural text. The double implication of Rogers' use of the actual words of the Book of Mormon is that there is a kind of immediate relevance at all times of both what is spoken by actually divine persons and what has come, by dint of constant quotation and repetition, to be recognized as always and immediately relevant.

The third way Rogers poses the question of the relevance of scripture to contemporary life weaves the first two ways together. On rare occasions in the film, well-known and culturally-affirmed scriptural passages are introduced into foreign contexts. A simple example of this is found in the slaying-of-Laban scene. In response to the Spirit's injunction to kill Laban, Nephi responds by asking, "Is not the word of God written, 'Thou shalt not kill'?" while the Book of Mormon text has Nephi say in his heart only "Never at any time have I shed the blood of man" (1 Nephi 4:10). A more interesting example comes when Rogers has Nephi quote himself in response to Lehi's announcement that his sons would have to return to Jerusalem a second time, this time in order to bring Ishmael's family—in particular his daughters—into the wilderness with them. After stating that Lehi's announcement followed "the best vision [he] ever had," Nephi quotes his own words at 1 Nephi 3:7 as a quasi-humorous response: "I will go and do the things the

Lord hath commanded," etc. To have Nephi parody himself is cute, but it makes little sense of the actual story, of course. It is only *we* who have privileged Nephi's words in such a way that the parody makes any sense. The most fascinating example, however, is to be found in the prefatory scene of the film, the introduction of sorts that explains how Joseph Smith became aware of and received the task to translate the Book of Mormon. In response to the angel's explanation of the record, Joseph asks: "But, who would believe that? A record such as this, delivered from an uneducated farm boy?" To this, Moroni answers: "There is a promise, Joseph, a marvelous promise found at the end of the record. Anyone—*anyone*—who reads this book and asks of God with real intent whether or not it be true will receive an answer to their prayer." Moroni thus, like any good missionary, turns directly to Moroni 10:4–5, to what Latter-day Saints generally regard as the *only* immediately relevant passage in the whole of the Book of Mormon because it provides the outline of a mechanical operation through which anyone can receive a testimony of Mormonism's truth.

What is the theological significance of Rogers' three ways of addressing the relevance of scripture to contemporary life? Despite the film's apparent conservatism, the obvious sense in which it was meant to bring the Book of Mormon narrative to life, there are important ways in which it effectively undercuts the Book of Mormon's relevance. In order to address contemporary concerns, it has, rather violently, to insert scenes and sequences into narratives where they fit uncomfortably at best. Moreover, the bulk of the narrative, as well as of the actual dialogue recorded in the text, is taken to be largely dispensable or made better through summary or rewording; only those passages that Latter-day Saints have collectively affirmed or that record the actual words of divine beings are sacred enough not to be altered. Finally, it makes clear that there is a sense in which the whole text of the Book of Mormon—as Terryl Givens taught us a decade ago[4]—can be set aside so long as one is familiar with Moroni 10:4–5. To the question of how relevant Mormon scripture is to contemporary life, Rogers' film, despite being a staging of precisely Mormon scripture, responds with the answer: "Not that relevant." The perfunctory production of the film thus mirrors the perfunctory relation-

ship Mormons too often have to the Book of Mormon—the book has to be read, the narrative has to be filmed, but nothing here is really supposed to change us or the world we live in. Indeed, I find it beautifully ironic that Rogers' plan to film the whole of the Book of Mormon petered out somewhere around the Isaiah chapters, just like most efforts to re-read the Book of Mormon do in January or February every year.

Much more critical—and in more than one sense of that word—is Dutcher's film *States of Grace*. The film is, on my interpretation, a double critique of the missionary program as an emblem for Mormon culture. First, Dutcher provides a critical study of what leads up to the moment of baptism—a critical study, that is, of how Mormonism, in the form of its missionaries, understands scripture. Second, he provides a critical study of baptism and its aftermath—a critical study, that is, of how Mormonism understands ritual.

States of Grace opens with a series of suggestions that scripture is completely irrelevant to contemporary life. The first word of or about scripture in the film comes from a homeless street preacher: "'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'—the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. Verse 2? I can tell you all about it, brothers and sisters, I can tell you all about it: one bible, two testaments, fifty-eight books, eleven epistles—and then the glorious book of Revelation, the glorious book of Revelation." The response is a chorus of different voices, all off-screen, saying "Shut up" in English and Spanish and culminating in someone saying: "No one is listening." Shortly afterward, the two Mormon missionaries who are the film's main characters are shown teaching discussions. In the first, in the middle of Elder Ferrell's reading James 1:5, the investigator falls asleep, snoring loudly; in the second, the same elder's reading of John 10:16 is interrupted by the beer-drinking beach bum that is their investigator with a too-hopeful question about Mormon polygamy.

This negative assessment is, however, complicated shortly afterward when Elder Lozano tells his companion his conversion story: he was converted when, while he lay in the hospital for six weeks, a Mormon missionary convalescing in the bed next to him made him memorize scriptures with him. The possible promise of scripture is then explained when the elders, a few days later, meet

with a new investigator—a gang member named Carl who had only just survived a drive-by shooting thanks to the elders. Carl begins their first real discussion with the following words: "I read some of this book that you gave me. It wasn't that easy to read—all that 'thee' and 'thou' stuff. But my grandma—she's religious and all, so she just changed it for me." "She translated it for you?" Elder Lozano asks. "Yeah. Just takes some getting used to. That's all." Given the first dismissive and then more subtly affirmative attitude toward scripture in the film, this exchange is crucial. Dutcher here proposes, finally, that scripture can and should be relevant, but it is necessary for it to be "translated" for it to have any real force. Only then, it seems, can one "get used to it."

This crucial moment gives way to a still more crucial one. Elder Lozano asks, "You have any questions about what she read?" But before Carl can answer, Elder Ferrell intervenes with "How did it make you *feel*?" to which both Elder Lozano and Carl respond by turning to look at him as if he were completely clueless. Here, in an almost passing moment, Dutcher distinguishes two apparently radically opposed understandings of scripture—on the one hand, scripture as signifi*ed*; on the other, scripture as signifi*er*, to put the point in Terryl Givens' terms. Elder Ferrell sees the Book of Mormon as a sacred sign whose truth, learned by attending to one's feelings, serves principally to identify for its readers which institutional church one should join. For him, translation of the book into contemporary life is not terribly important. Elder Lozano sees the Book of Mormon as a collection of sacred teachings whose truths, severally studied, can and should have a real effect in life. For him, clearly, translation is exactly what needs to be done with the book.

It is not difficult to guess which of these expresses Dutcher's own convictions. This is indicated powerfully when, not much later, Carl is shown reading James 1:5 and then kneeling beside his bed to pray. Whereas an earlier investigator had fallen asleep sitting up when this verse was read to her, the same passage brings Carl to his knees. But this is just an introduction of sorts to two subsequent "translations" of the Book of Mormon into a contemporary context Dutcher goes on to present.

The first happens when the street preacher from before is reading in the Book of Mormon while alone in the elders' apart-

ment. Borrowing, but of course without asking, a white shirt, a tie, and a name badge, he goes out into the street to beg for money while preaching from Mosiah 4:16–19: "But I say unto you, ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. Therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food. I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent. Do we not all depend upon God?" The scene is, largely, presented as a bit of humor: a homeless Pentecostal preacher using the Book of Mormon to guilt passersby into giving him money. Its poignancy, though, should be noted. Unsurprisingly, but in an ominous echo of the first part of the film, the preacher is still without listeners, and there is no suggestion that anyone passing by gives him a cent in response to King Benjamin's words.

More touching is the second "translation" of sorts. When Carl goes to have his baptismal interview, he has to confront the seriousness of his gang activity. In response to his worries, Elder Banks tells him the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies burying their weapons of war. To Carl's question about what happened after that, Elder Banks responds: "Somewhere out there, deep in the earth, those weapons are still buried. They all kept their promise, every single of them, even though it cost some of them their lives. But their children—their children grew up strong and happy and good." Later that night, Carl buries his own weapons—guns, magazines, knives—in his backyard, preparatory to his baptism the next day. Here, so literally it borders on cheesiness while remaining moving, Dutcher translates the ancient into the modern, the scriptural into the mundane. What makes this last scene all the more poignant is the fact that it follows on a brief confrontation between Carl and his little brother: "What is wrong with you?" his brother asks. Referring to the drive-by shooting that injured Carl but left others dead, he offers the sort of criticism that appears early in the film but by this point has lost its real force: "They killed Abe, and all you want to do is sit around and read the Bible." While his brother pushes Carl to *do* something, he has no idea that Carl is about to *do* the most difficult thing of all: *stop*. This is a literalism and a kind of translation that one could well "get used to."

But then all of this beauty is called into question. When, just

after being confirmed and given the Holy Ghost, Carl finds out his brother has been murdered by a rival gang, he digs up his weapons anew in order to exact revenge. When, with his gun pressed against the forehead of his brother's murderer, he hears his would-be victim both explaining that he has an eight-year-old sister and praying to God, he finds he cannot kill him, but his refusal to do so only leads to his friend's doing the deed. Tormented by what has thus taken place, he goes to the beach where he was baptized and throws his weapons irretrievably into the ocean. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies' act of burying their weapons in the ground was not enough—nor was, incidentally, the ritual of baptism. Bodies buried in the sea and weapons buried in the earth tragically give way to bodies buried in the earth and weapons buried in the sea. Only then can Carl see, as he puts it, how "messed up" everything is. Neither scripture nor ritual can face up to the violent reality of contemporary life, of life in a fallen world.

Dutcher's film thus ends more or less where it begins, in terms of its take on scripture. Though the first half of the film would seem to suggest that scripture can serve a redemptive purpose as far as it is translated into contemporary life, both of Dutcher's "translations" ultimately suggest that there is little reason to have hope in scripture. Right as Benjamin's words may be, they ultimately do little to turn people to the overwhelming need of the poor surrounding us. And beautiful as it might be to think of a gang member burying his weapons of war in a contemporary reenactment of an ancient covenant, it is more sentiment than solution in Dutcher's eyes. It thus appears that the first half of the film is aimed less at showing how scripture might be used rightly than at showing that most Mormon interpretation of scripture is shallower than shallow, so distantly removed from the real problems of life that it is more symptomatic of unthinking arrogance than of misguided or immature charity. The film is thus characterized by anything but the subtly despairing perfunctory element of Rogers' *The Book of Mormon Movie*, but it is not clear that explicit, outright despair is an improvement.

But I do not want to end on a note of despair, so let me conclude with just a word or two about *Napoleon Dynamite*. I lack the space to argue for its Mormonness or for its rightful place in the Mormon film movement—and others have already made that ar-

gument anyway. But what relationship does it bear to scripture? On the surface, none. It is arguably more *culturally* Mormon than anything else. And yet the hope that pervades the film is most crucial. It cannot be said to be culturally Mormon in anything like the sense that *The Book of Mormon Movie* is culturally Mormon. There is something more at work there. It outstrips the perfunctory while nonetheless refusing to assume a merely critical position.

What does *Napoleon Dynamite* present, then? Though I lack the space to spell out the details, I think it is a most beautiful filmic presentation of the so-called psalm of Nephi, a study—not anything like as powerful as Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011) but not for that reason unworthy—of Paul's theological self-interpretation in Romans 7. It traces the pathway every Latter-day Saint travels when she finally hears King Benjamin and all his talk about nothingness in the way Benjamin intended. Our worries that we are not good enough are all more than justified. But the problem is not that we are not good enough. The problem is that we think we are supposed to be good enough. And thus *Napoleon Dynamite* demonstrates, without ever stating what it is up to, the way in which scripture is the most relevant thing of all. It shows us grace.

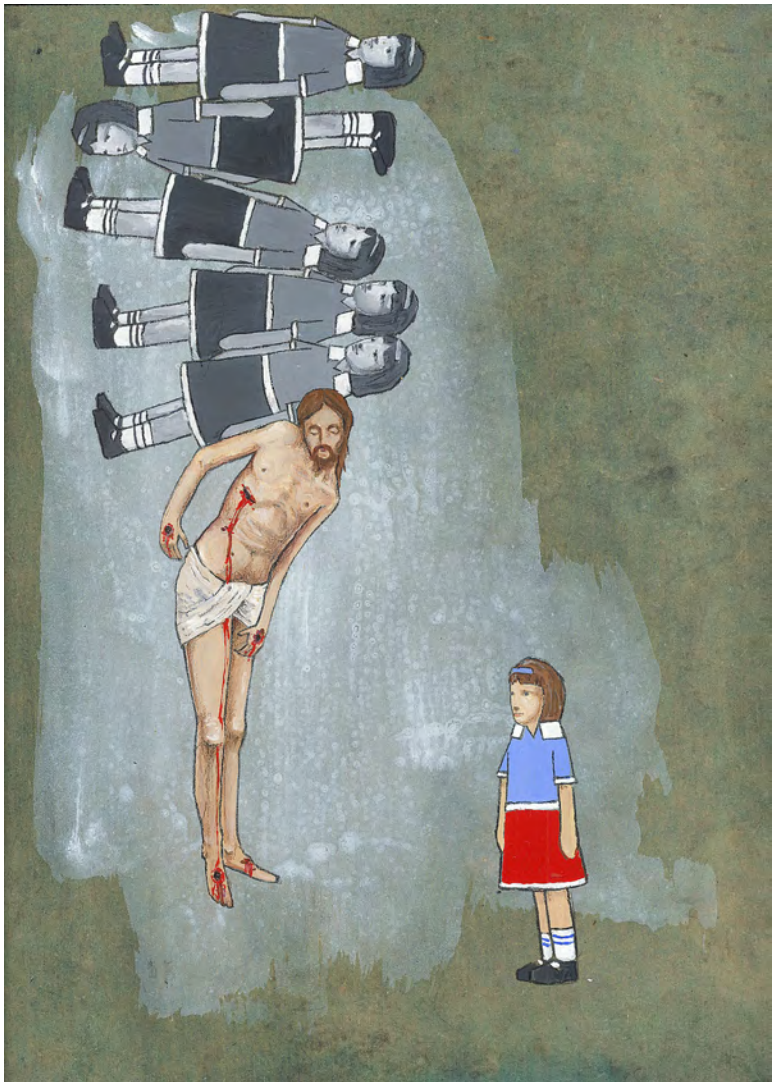
Notes

1. See Joseph M. Spencer, "Alfred Hitchcock in the Legacy Theater: Mormonism, Film, and 'Religious' Criticism," unpublished paper presented at the annual conference of the Association of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities, "Religions and the Practices of Criticism," Brigham Young University, May 8–9, 2009. See also Michael De Groote, "Dynamite, Dutcher, Hitchcock and the Failure of LDS Movies," *Mormon Times*, May 14, 2009.

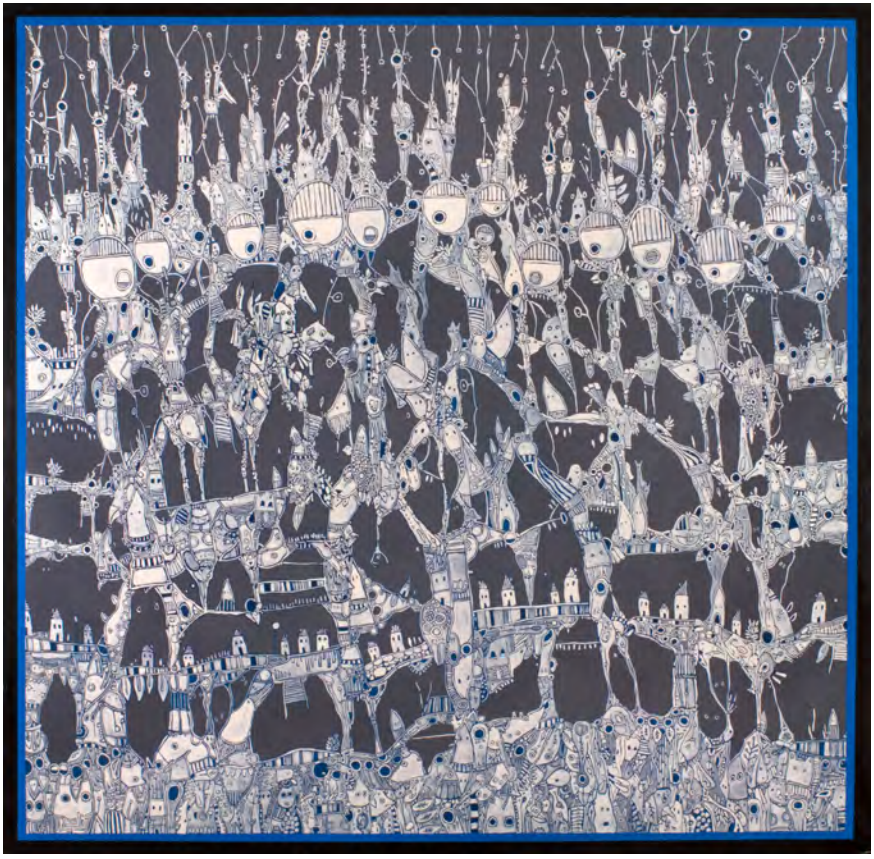
2. This paper was delivered as part of a panel on Mormon film at the 2012 annual conference of the Association of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities, "Economies and Humanities," Southern Virginia University, May 18–19, 2012. The panel, which included Matthew Bowman and Rachael Givens in addition to myself, was titled "Film and Community."

3. Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 186.

4. See Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).



David Ruhlman
They Have Come to Take Your Children Away (part 2),
gouache, 10"x 10"



David Ruhlman
If Our Souls were Frozen the Earth Would Be Covered Like a Starfish,
gouache, 48"x 48", 2005

Savior, silver, psalms, and sighs, and flash-burn offerings

Jonathon Penny

Note: *"Savior, silver, psalms, and sighs" was first presented at the annual meeting of the Mormon Scholars in the Humanities conference at Buena Vista, Virginia, in May 2012, under the title "What price, poetry?"*

Invocation

Lord, I believe.

Help thou mine unbelief[1] and I
Will give away my sins or keep them close to know you;[2]
Will seek you in the best[3] and brokenest of books;
Will cling hard, let loose, bring forth flesh and fruit,[4] if this will please;
Will more-than-tithe my time and talent, open windows;[5]
Make room for oil and balsam, if you'll pour;[6]
Will labor, useless, to admit,[7] but leave a spare under the mat,
Create diversions, throw down ropes;
Will pray and fast and follow and hope;

Will stand and wait.[8]

What price, Lord, poetry?

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1. Mark 9:24.
2. Alma 22:18.
3. D&C 88:118 and 109:7.
4. Genesis 4:3–5.
5. Malachi 3:10.
6. Luke 10:33–34.
7. John Donne, "Holy Sonnet XIV," line 6.
8. John Milton, "On His Blindness," line 14.

PART I: Read, love, write.

> *To read with intelligent charity . . . . [T]o speak of works rather than texts, of personal acts*–answerable *acts . . . . To read lovingly because of and in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the author and guarantor of love*[9].

> *Charity seeks to produce a banquet to which all are invited, a feast from which none will depart unfulfilled. However, it must also be said that while charity can be extended, its reception cannot be compelled; and those who wish to eat from the banquet without knowing the host may remain ever discontented.*[10]

I came to literature late.
Not reading, mind:
As a child, I read voraciously, like end-of-world.
I was a natural. A Burmese. I consumed,
I swallowed whole in great gulps hours at a time.

The selection wasn't great. My father, bless him,
was a reader of westerns: Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour—
whatever wrenched him from the great dull parade of life and chores and children
into some false history where he could be tall and lean
and out of the garden, out of the office, out of the car, gunslung, hatted,
not to be trifled with.

My mother, Lord love her, was more sentimental:
Jack Weyland, Anne McCaffrey, *Readers' Digest*, Carol Lynn Pearson
(no slouch, mind, but a bit much for a young boy to handle)—
the stuff of sweet and melancholy lives, wretched but lithely so,
romantic but morally so, bodices intact, at least as far as I know:
I never got past Weyland.

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9. Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 1.
10. Ibid., 41.

There were bright spots for a kid with polymathemagical pretensions:
Madeline L'Engle, Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper.
Later, from The Library: Ray Bradbury, who saved my life, and
Stephen King, who scared the devil right out of me. Twice.

Not much poetry except what I picked up
at school and sermon. The usual suspects:
Carroll, Seuss, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Frost,
The Conference Poet, indifferent footprints in indifferent sand.[11]

I turned tomato when it sang to me
in quiet, recess corners, with all looks askance;
or, more often, hunched and fidget-eyed and tense at a first-row English desk;
it sang to me the same.

I wrote it, too, self-consciously and on the bias.
Wrote stale and stilted, forced, instructive verse,
dishonest for its integrity, its faithfulness to the bright side.
My sense of righteousness made authenticity impossible.
The righteous manage merely doggerel.

This would not do, this would not do, dalmation foot in daschund shoe:[12]
So I pulled a late Hopkins,[13] and went down the rabbit hole.[14]

For ten years I cut my lengthening teeth on
shards of glass, fragments of iron, the promise of heart attacks,

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11. Mary Stevenson, "Footprints in the Sand."
12. Sylvia Plath, "Daddy," lines 1–2.
13. In the "terrible sonnets," written in Dublin during the final years of his life (1884–89), Gerard Manley Hopkins examines the limits of his faith, and reaches the limit of his characteristic enthusiasm as both a manifestation of a faith-oriented optimism and a deep, personal, and charismatic tendency to see God's presence omni-locally.
14. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Chap. 1.

on acid and bile, and my own fillings.
I took a turn in hell to hound the devils and bedevil the hounds.[15]
And it was easy.
Those dark places, the pits of all different colors
of despair and worry and doubt
are easier on the sensibilities than the pools of tranquil light,
than the better truths that speak so well to hearts
but fail to strum the fingers.

We say the dark things are unspeakable,
but speak them nonetheless, prolifically,
our mouths as pouring wounds, our tongues two-edged[16] to bleed them.

We say God is ineffable,
and duly mumble praises into clasped hands and folded sleeves
and into these we parrot and we plead.

Evil can be articulated, but good
evades articulation by hiding away in
the saccharine, the cliché, the musical arts.
You have to dig deeper for it—the silver, the gold.
Find it, brush it clean with the gentled caution of an archaeologist and then
prize it out with the rough-just violence of a dental surgeon.
It resists you all the while.
The light is timorous and strong.
It prefers the shroud of mystery, the distance, the comfort of silence,
the corners of the eye, the traitor's palm.[17]

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15. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, "Canto VI"; John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 11.65; and from Welsh and English mythology, *Cwn Annwn* and the Gabriel, Ratchet, and Yell hounds of the Wild Hunt.

16. Revelation 1:16; see also Isaiah 49:2, Hebrews 4:12, Rev. 2:16, Rev. 19:15, D&C 6:2.

17. With "silver": see Matthew 26:15 and Zechariah 11:12–13.

And so I worked at it, apprentice to the spirit voices in my heart and head.
(This is a list—not comprehensive—of things I wrote about:

Sex
Love
The difference
Desire
Other poets
Death
War
Arab women
Censorship
American women
Jealousy
Abinadi
God
Jesus
Satan
Going bald
Getting fat
Losing sleep
Sensuality
Hurrying up
The days of the week
Albatrosses
Vultures
Weather
Joseph Smith
Prayer
Altars
Sacrifice
Devotion
Doubt
Sin
Repentance
Grace
Pirates
Teeth

Tattyboogles
Fix-it Men)

This is what I learned along the way.

i.
Poetry is not merely verse, nor is it merely not-verse.
It is, rather, an introduction of language to the senses,
a point of access rather than a meaning,
an act of recognition, a precise imprecision,
an opening, and radiant.

ii.
This is why so much verse is not poetry.

iii.
Every poet is a rhythmatist, a taker of pulses,
a diagnostician of dis-ease and joy, of sorrow and exultation,
of despair and hope alike.

iv.
Poetry is a vocation, a drunk-dialing mistress, and fickle.
She requires, among other things,
pith,
presumption,
integrity,
impotence,
zest,
alertness,
facility,
sensibility,
hope,
humility,
and arrogance.

v.
Poets are bards and prophets, yes; but also
wastrels and pickpockets,
orators and clowns.

As often bawds as bards.
As often minstrels.

vi.
Poetry is Nonsense. Conscience. Science. Incense.

vii.
Poems are pearls.[18]

PART II: No man can serve two masters.

> *[T]he [literary] canonicity of the Bible becomes the matrix for the conscious, even programmatic, creation of a secular . . . culture. In the medieval and Renaissance tradition, any transvaluing of biblical texts is played out locally, hedged in by the limits of poetic genre. In the formative European phase of modern . . . literature . . ., the transvaluation is global . . . ; it involves, with the passage of time and for increasing numbers of . . . writers, an impulse to displace entirely the doctrinal canonicity of the Bible with its literary canonicity. . . .*[19]

> *From a doctrinal point of view, this is . . . blasphemy, substituting man for God in the biblical text . . . , but the poet does it without noticeable compunction, for in his sense of the literary canonicity of the Bible, considerations of doctrine are suspended.*[20]

You hazel mote![21] You hazel beam![22]
You cursing, crude, blaspheme machine!

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18. Matthew 13:45–46.
19. Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 50–51.
20. Ibid., 50.
21. Hazel Motes is the protagonist of Flannery O'Connor's *Wiseblood*. Motes, disaffected from the Church but drawn to preaching as a vocation, founds "The Church of Christ without Christ," blaspheming his way to an inexorable invocation of Christ, donning a barbwire cilice, and ultimately practicing a radical form of Catholicism despite himself.
22. Matthew 7:3.

You false and flimsy prophet with your false and flimsy dreams!
Profane the sacred, and
make sacred the profane!
Enshrine the word in magic! Compel a following!
Re-cast the Aleph word as if a foul and primal scream!
He'll, if He laughs, laugh last and long, for
Damn! was first His word and
Hell! was first His word and
Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the Saints! were first His words (and Jesus! first of all).
God! was his, and other words I dare but do not say
except in secret mind (not in that way);
All words were His and are and doubly so
and all words lead us home and you,
your hazel blindness, with your Christless reverie
cannot commit a faithless but a faithful blasphemy.

No man can serve two masters,[23] after all.
No man can serve at all, it seems to me, but used:
no fork-tongued minion, no eunuch-mute,
no blind waiter[24] for things is ever aught
but his.

Consider the portraits of poets:

one sits, a full and flowing text formed at his nib
gazes heavenward, beatific, illuminated, haloed
as a dove of Holy Spirit rays transfigurative
from a window or a corner of the ceiling;

one sits, half-slumped, despondent over work undone,
undoing, paper scattered, often blank, ink-blotted,
and a bottle of some spirit or other open on the desk
as if Jack Daniels were a djin and, rubbed, would grant a poem;

23. Matthew 6:24.
24. Milton again: "Blindness," line 14.

one looks, not gazes, masterful at the portraitist and
therefore at the viewer of the piece, across what time and space
there is between them, and assumes he is the better,
inspirited by his own Gift, Great, Narcissus at the pool.

Each has his weakness, each his gift and graft
But all are poets—revelator, drunkard, self-regarder—
And none can hide by twist or turn or suicide.
To be true to the gift if not the graft is to be true to the Giver-Grafter,
and
He knows them all, and by this shall all men know,
Shall know the righteous from the wicked,
Shall know the wicked from themselves and
The wicked in themselves, and the divine:
The poet, seer and prophet, most of all.

PART III: Monkey: wrench.

> *[T]he words of the biblical texts are willfully wrenched from their original setting and flaunted by the poet in a context that is disparate from, or even antithetical to, the biblical one.*[25]

> *Nevertheless, the imaginative response to the Bible of writers in a wide variety of languages bears witness to a power of canonicity that is not limited to doctrine or strictly contingent on belief in the inspired character of the texts involved.*[26]

> *[E]ndless interpretability rather than absolute truth [is] the principal criterion of the canonical.*[27]

I will not make strained, untenable, or senseless
comparisons between this work and work,
though poetry makes use of metaphors.

25. Alter, 45.
26. Alter, 60–61.
27. Alter, 77.

I will not deny that it is work, for it is not always opium dreams[28]
and givens; does not always come wrapped in a bow;
At times resists, especially faith.

For poetry isn't just
Assigning colors to things:

To say "pink expectation"
(Though the marriage there

Suggests the flush along
The neck and cheekbones

Of a young heart
Looking for its lover).

It isn't just
The parsing of a glimpse

Or feeling into figure,
The making of a shape.

It is the intersect
Of these things and

Of rhythm, the purblind
Consternation of the grammar

Of the mind, the languid,
Seasalt tripping of the tongue

In licking waves
And airborne keening songs.

It is a fallen craft and fierce.

28. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan."

It can be sullied, sure, and warped.

It can be wrested, wrenched, heaved ho and hollowed out,
Made pornographic, violent, and to, no doubt,
a range of other things may bow its head.

But if the gift is gift it will be said
She knows her way around a poem:
Can calibrate the senses like a drum,
Mete salt and cinnamon in pinch and dram,
And whisper all the while in flaming tongues.

For there is more in heaven and on earth, Horatio,
than your pinhead dreams conceive,[29]
are worlds in worlds and grains on grains,
are surplus joys and bounteous pains,
and each one needs a pitch and heart and host.

Consider Iris.[30]

Hale priestess, limber in tendon and synapse,
Loose of tongue and loose of clacking finger,
Unkempt and unkept by will or will,
She clambered down the ditches and the wells
Of human thought, and brought us back the skulls
Of clowns and princes, dense with soil still,
As if the fertile brains of them could linger
Or death were just imagination's lapse.

And then she left, her memory grown faint from feint
And with that memory all sane restraint.

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29. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.v.165-67.
30. Iris Murdoch—a writer, theorist, and philosopher—declined in her last years under the onset of Alzheimer's. Her last novel, *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), which bears the imprint of the progress of her disease more notably than anything else she wrote, is also the most interesting, free as it is of the constraints of thinking within which we all work.

She left a something richer, shorn of cover,
Bare and naked as an angry lover,
Her failing brain and tongue a revelation
Of the black, fragile soil of our condition:
The dilemma that awaits all kings and clowns.
Dear Iris, how we miss your trembling bones.

Dear Iris, how we miss that dark conceit of illness
that stripped you bare, and bare, made you more glorious
in ash and sackcloth evening; and you, in potsherd[31] final days,
were witness to innumerable ways.

Were witness, best, to this: that only life—
troublesome, meddlesome, quarrelsome life—is life,
and only life is word, and word is merely shard and shell
the skin and saint to graze and gall[32]
like God and Gilead.[33]

PART IV: The Incidental Jesus

> *Though the aim of many of the Christians who interpret Christ as the Messiah of a culture is the salvation or reform of that culture rather than the extension of Christ's power, they contribute greatly to the latter by helping men to understand his gospel in their own language, his character by means of their own imagery, and his revelation of God with the aid of their own philosophy.*
>
> *We cannot say, 'Either Christ or culture,' because we are dealing with God in both cases. We must not say, 'Both Christ and culture,' as though there were no great distinc-*

31. Job 2:8.
32. Acts 8:23 and Alma 36:18. In these verses, "gall" refers to "bile" or "poison," but the word is also synonymous with "bark" or "scrape," and thus conveys the sense of a painful wound. (See also "potsherd" above.)
33. Jeremiah 8:22.
34. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 103.

> *tion between them; but we must say, 'Both Christ and culture,' in full awareness of the dual nature of our law, our end, and our situation.*[35]

Some say he's fled the scene, our Yahweh god, our cow crib Lord and Savior,
gone off to ground or seed, gone off to exile on some pleasant beach to pout,
or to some bee-loud,[36] puttering place he tailor-made for his retirement.

Some say he never was, and what we have are remnants of blood-and-bone-old
and begetting need to track and trace our origins, to gloss our fretful lives.

I say He's there. He's ever there in archetype and myth.
Scrape away the vanity and whimsy of the Greeks and there,
the Sun God, Godson, bearded, blessèd Christ is hid beneath
Apollo's youthful face, and on the Aztec stone, and in the folds
of Buddha's flower and in that roughshod daddy dance of poems.[37]

The achtung[38] shout, the water-whisper:
both are His; and yes, the mighty wind
and the still small alike [39]
for He's a wild and wounded word
and for endowment knows the will and way of all
the cripple-scratch and low-lurk sons and daughters of the Fall.

He's there.
He's ever there.

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35. Ibid., 122.
36. William Butler Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 4.
37. Theodore Roethke, "My Papa's Waltz."
38. Again, Plath's "Daddy."
39. 1 Kings 19:11–13.

In churches that forsake or bracket or deny Him He's the hinge
and oil. That much we can surmise: the oil, the blessing,
consecrating Christ.

He's there in fumbling darkness and in horror, gain and loss.
He's in the prize and cost.

He's in the slave-built pantheon to lusting gods of seasons and of stars.
He's in blood-bought cathedrals not built to honor Him.
In notes of pain and praise He is, in brush-strokes right and raw.
He is in written word and spoken, word-possessing Word,
in ring of bell and chisel in places flung and far,
in Florida and Florence he is there.

I stand at the feet of the David
I stand at the feet of the David
I stand at the feet of the David
I stand at the feet of that Greek-limbed youth
Lovely of feature and form[40]
Earnest of gaze
Whose ill-proportioned hands—God's hands
Drop from his shoulder
Hang slack and ready about his thigh
The first things to grow to manliness, I guess
As they prepare to throw that fatal stone
And silence mocking millions

He has never killed a man
Has never killed a symbol or a sign
Just a bear and a lion on a rocky slope
Somewhere above the city that awaits his blessing and his name

Buonarroti[41] imagines him

40. Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies dráw flame." lines 13–14.
41. Michelangelo.

Mid-transformation
A youth regenerate
Starting with that loose right hand
God's hand that holds the stone
God's hand that fits it to the sling
God's hand that hurtles it
To pound Goliath's glaring flesh
Hands heavy now because
Goliath was God's son, too
And God's instrument

God's lyric hands at play
To soothe the troubled tempers of the king
God's heavy hands about the thigh
Because God's hands defiled by
Adulterer and liar
Instructing other hands to slay Uriah
Who was God's son, too
But not God's instrument
And later, hands that hollowed out Bathsheba's bed
That carved her body like two tongues of flame[42]
And shadowed her with Trojan subterfuge
And did her violence, too
Would lift to Heaven in grief
So heavy, oh, so heavy, oh
Absalom! O, Absalom, my son[43]
My Son! O, David! Samuel! God
Those hands are heavy with it all
But here rest loose and ill-proportioned
Dropping from the shoulder
Against the thigh of a Greek-limbed youth
Lovely of feature and form
Cradling a fatal sling and stone
As I stand at the feet of the David

42. Acts 2:3.
43. 2 Samuel 18:33.

He's here. He's the infection of a feeling for every thing, every one.
He's in ten thousand places, our Kingfisher Christ,
and playing,[44] virtuous.

PART V: What price, poetry?

> *[D]istinguish liturgies as rituals of ultimate concern: rituals that are formative for identity, that inculcate particular visions of the good life . . . . [E]xpanding our conception of what counts as "worship" is precisely the point.*[45]

> *Athletes, musicians, writers, gardeners and lovers all attest to the experience the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow"–the times when our work and play so absorbs and attunes our energies that we lose track of time. For a little while time seems to both expand and contract, becoming spacious rather than constricting, making room for our creativity and activity, and we lose the self-consciousness that wraps itself around most of our waking hours, even as we become fully awake and alert to the possibilities of what lies in front of us.*[46]

And if he plays in us, Creator Christ, moves in us as feast,[47]
what price, then, poetry? What's altar-bound, at least?

It's not all cheese and crackers,

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44. Hopkins, "As kingfishers," line 12.
45. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 86–87.
46. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 267.
47. The phrase "moveable feast" is owed most recently to Hemingway's eponymous novel, and in his sense suggests a rather Wordsworthian (as in "Lines") notion of a memory that nourishes; it originated, however, in Christian usage for a feast day whose date changes yearly because it must fall on a specific day or days of the week, like Easter.

nor laurels and sweet wine.[48]
Sometimes it's coalfire-burning lips[49] and tongues,
weeping and wailing and gnashing of knees.[50]
It's not all torch and temple,[51] nor moments sacrosanct.
Sometimes it's begging on the steps or poolside,[52]
sometimes transfiguration, and sometimes Pentecost.
In any case, *je me présente à l'altare*, *au bureau de change*,
Al cambio. Che cambio, *io*? *Das ist mein wort und wert*,
Das ist, *mm zain*, *mein sein*,[53] a sign I do not seek
that comes unbidden, searing making shattering,
potent from behind a thousand veils
and I am followed by, harrowed by, the sins of the world,
defiling a temple and shining a light on the defilement
on the danger on the dirt floor of the decrepit cabin in the hollow wood.
A poet lives with cockroaches and rats as often as with angels
and there are angels among us, even as there are cockroaches and rats
and perhaps these aren't exclusive categories.
That, too, is poetry.

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48. Found in Acts 2:13, among other places, the phrase "sweet wine" is used to mock the apostles at Pentecost, suggesting a state of drunkenness. I note that the word for "prophet" is, in Hebrew, very close to the word for "raver," so there may be something to the allegation. However, sweet wine—*tiyrosh* in Hebrew—means "new," and therefore non-alcoholic, wine, but it can also refer by association to the outpouring of God's Spirit.
49. Isaiah 6:7.
50. Matthew 13:42.
51. Genesis 15:17.
52. In John 5:1–14, the lame man waits at the pool in Bethesda in search of a miracle and receives healing from Jesus.
53. French, Italian, German, Arabic, and German, respectively: "I present myself at the altar, at the currency exchange,/At the exchange. What do I change? This is my word and worth,/This is, it is so, my being . . . ." The translation of "*mm zain*" from Arabic is difficult, as there is no direct equivalent. It is heavily idiomatic, and can be used for "okay," "no worries," "it's cool," and a host of other related expressions. I use it here because it works lyrically and suggests casual and therefore familiar assent.

Poetry is prophecy, sometimes.

And what is prophecy but funneled Word?
A narrow, sedimenting stream? A drought of possibilities?
What is poetry but prophecy gone slack, pricked, and let?
Blown back at God like kisses or like curse?
A ruminant verse in verse
that shakes the gleam and wink of what is golden
and opens the unopenable dark?
What is music but poetry given its head
and room to breathe and groove, inflected
With paroxysms of color, dressed in murmuring?
dressed in murmuring and praise?
dressed in praise and prayer?

What price, then, poetry? What pay, you paltry thing?[54]
Savior, silver, psalms, and sighs, and flash-burn offerings.

Benediction

O, May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish for us the work of our hands,[55]
establish us the work of His hands.
O, for a muse of fire[56] and the wish of my heart:[57]
That all people were poet enough to love the word
as I have come to love it—wistful, besotted, harrowed
and given to it as to covenant or virtue received and treasured like a gift,
a gift horse with a broken jaw that runs, when it runs, like fire

54. From Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium": "An aged man is but a paltry thing,/A tattered coat upon a stick" (lines 7–8). The line in Yeats is in turn evocative of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves/In a field" (lines 33–34).
55. Psalms 90:17.
56. William Shakespeare, *Henry V* I.Prologue.1–2.
57. Alma 29:1.
58. D&C 13:1, but also and especially 2 Cor. 5:21, one of the subtlest and most beautiful paradoxes in scripture.

and sings, when it sings, like an offering made in righteousness,[58]
crackling and sighing in foundry and flame.

Oh for a symbolic and a contrite act
that could break the wall and bridge the crack and doom,
forestall the Judge and clear the empty room.

What price, then, poetry?
It's a cliché, but sometimes it writes you,
makes creates you,
flings matter into null and void,
fills in the cracks and creases
heads down, palms up for blessing and for sup
but that, too, comes at cost.

What price, then, poetry? What its cost?
Though much is gained by it, what, too, is lost?
The same as any other gift or gain:
a friendship here and there, some naïve trust,
perhaps, or moments meant for other lusts.
And self, yes, self, is also altar-bound,
broke, blown and burned and bled upon the ground;
but, overthrown, made also rise and stand
then ravished[59] by the Better Maker's[60] steady, sudden hand.[61]

59. Again, Donne's "Holy Sonnet XIV," lines 1-3 and 14.
60. This expression, from the Italian "*il miglior fabbro*," originates with Dante's praise of Arnaut Daniel de Riberac, the Provençal poet (*Purgatorio* XXVI.117). It is repeated in the dedication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound, a multi-layered allusion indeed, as Pound was also fond of Arnaut Daniel's poetry.
61. While there is no explicit allusion here, I have in mind Blake's companion poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," especially the latter.

David Ruhlman
If Our Souls were Wooden the Earth Would Be Covered Like a Hobby-Horse,
gouache, 48"x 48", 2005

Loyal Follower, Bold Preacher

Terryl L. Givens, Matthew J. Grow. *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 396 pp. Appendices, Notes, Index. Hardcover: $34.95. ISBN: 978–0–19–537573–2

Reviewed by John G. Turner

In May 1857, a jilted husband finally found the man who had taken his wife. After tracking him to western Arkansas, he organized a posse to cut off his escape, followed him into a thicket of trees, pulled him from his horse, and stabbed him repeatedly near his heart. Hector McLean left to fetch a gun, returned, and fatally shot Mormon apostle Parley P. Pratt in the neck.

In *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*, Terryl Givens and Matthew Grow tell the dramatic story of Pratt's tumultuous fifty-year life. Since his death, Pratt has remained a beloved martyr to many Latter-day Saints, still admired for his *Autobiography*, his authorship of seven hymns in the current LDS hymnal, and his missionary zeal. While historians continue to debate his death's role in the Utah War and the Mountain Meadows Massacre, he is not well known outside the church, an oversight that *The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* may partly correct.

After years of spiritual seeking and dalliances with Baptists and Campbellites, in 1830 Pratt encountered the *Book of Mormon*, read it, believed, and immediately began preaching Mormonism across the northern United States. For the remainder of his life, Pratt impoverished himself and his family through his relentless commitment to missionary service on behalf of his church. Pratt's forceful defense of his faith—he often skewered his religious antagonists—gained a broad hearing for the fledgling religion and left behind a legacy of rich autobiographical and theological writings.

While Grow and Givens evidence a clear admiration for Pratt and explain his controversial actions sympathetically, they are not blind to his faults and convey the reasons why Pratt engendered opposition and controversy. Through Pratt's missionary travels

and torrent of writings, they also provide an accessible and colorful introduction to the first quarter-century of Mormon history, theology, and missions. Grow and Givens do not hesitate to discuss the uncomfortable episodes in Pratt's life, including his acceptance and practice of polygamy. Overstating the point somewhat, the *Deseret News* went so far as to deem Grow and Givens's biography "not recommended for readers under the age of 18." While hardly as graphic and salacious as that disclaimer would suggest, the authors do not whitewash the early history of plural marriage and Pratt's participation in it.

When Smith gradually revealed the doctrine of celestial marriage to Pratt, the latter still mourned the death of his first wife, Thankful Halsey, and was married to a second wife, Mary Ann Frost. The doctrine of celestial marriage reassured Pratt that both of his marriages would persist for eternity. In early 1843, Pratt returned from nearly three years in England, learned about plural marriage from Joseph Smith, and married Elizabeth Brotherton. He eventually was sealed to nine additional women, and his wives collectively bore him thirty children.

Pratt's practice of polygamy stirred several controversies, within and beyond the church. When he married Belinda Harden in 1844, she was already married to Benjamin Hilton, who was not a member of the church. Pratt also angered both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young by arranging sealings without their respective permission. Moreover, while Mary Ann Frost had accepted plural marriage, she became alienated from Pratt and was sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity at the Nauvoo Temple. In that same venue, Parley's own brother Orson Pratt accused him of adultery, a charge later repeated by Brigham Young in relation to unauthorized plural marriages. Increasingly estranged from her husband, Mary Ann eventually divorced Pratt in 1853.

Polygamy also led to Pratt's 1857 death, which sparked a mixture of outrage (mostly in Utah) and approval. In the 1840s, Pratt had warned Mormon missionaries to respect the "harmony of husbands and wives" and had taught that separated spouses could not remarry without a formal divorce. In the case of Eleanor McClain, Pratt disregarded such sensible advice. The apostle felt a strong admiration and affection for Eleanor, whom he termed a "soul . . . worthy to be loved by some good Son of God." Both she

and Pratt saw her baptism into the church, flight from San Francisco, and marriage to Pratt as an escape from an abusive marriage and as the replacement of a meaningless civil contract with an eternal covenant.

It is not surprising, though, that many Americans concluded that Pratt deserved his bloody fate. Mormon apostle George A. Smith had argued that "mountain common law" gave husbands the moral right to kill men who slept with their wives. The Utah territorial legislature codified such justifiable homicides in 1852 when it provided immunity for husbands to kill "in a sudden heat of passion caused by the attempt of any such offender to commit a rape upon his wife, daughter, sister, mother, or other female relation or dependent . . . or when the defilement has actually been committed." Similarly, in Texas a cuckolded husband could kill his wife's "ravisher . . . at any time before he has escaped from the presence of his victim." Neither of those laws suggested that a man could act with McLean's level of premeditation. Across the country, though, juries in a series of high-profile murder cases in the 1850s and 1860s used an "unwritten law" to extend that privilege to include premeditation.[1] In keeping with such conventions, Americans justified Parley's murder. While he lay dying, Pratt insisted that he hadn't stolen another man's wife. "[T]hey were oppressed," he said, "and I did for them what I would do for the oppressed anywhere." McLean defended his actions with pride and enjoyed his moment of fame. "I look upon it as the best act of my life," he stated. Neither Hector McLean nor Parley Pratt regretted his actions.

Grow and Givens also detail Pratt's occasional clashes with Brigham Young, which for the most part took place during the several years following Joseph Smith's death. In addition to the dispute over unauthorized marriages, Young lambasted Pratt for his (and John Taylor's) failure to adhere to his directives during their 1847 journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Although Pratt came to accept Young's preeminent position among the apostles after 1847 and repeatedly displayed his loyalty to the church and its new president, Pratt's actions in the mid-1840s gnawed at Young. Upon learning of Pratt's murder, Young placed the slain apostle among Joseph and Hyrum Smith in the growing ranks of Mormon martyrs. As Givens and Grow note, though, in 1865 Young

observed that Pratt's "'blood was spilt' as punishment for his earlier disputed plural marriages." The authors might have included a fuller version of Young's sharp comment: "Bro. Parley's blood was spilt, I was glad of it for it paid the debt he owed, for he whored."[2] Young might forgive the perceived transgressions of his subordinates, but he never forgot them, and he did not mince words.

Pratt also had an occasionally strained relationship with Joseph Smith. Grow and Givens take pains to emphasize that neither Pratt's conversion nor his continued faith in Mormonism rested on his personal connection to its prophet. In particular, Pratt bitterly accused Smith of betrayal during the painful collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society. For the most part, however, he was a loyal follower, and Pratt embraced and boldly preached the innovative theological doctrines Smith gradually revealed. Although they suggest that most distinctly Mormon theological and philosophical beliefs originated with Joseph Smith, Givens and Grow leave open the extent to which Pratt may have influenced the trajectory of the prophet's thinking. At the very least, Pratt "organized, elaborated, and defended them in a manner that gave them the enduring life and complexion they have in the church to this day." In particular, the authors admire Pratt for his forthright promulgation of doctrines such as the eternity of matter, the materiality of the soul, the corporeality of God, and the goal of theosis. Pratt did not shy away from theological battle, nor did he seek to make Mormonism more acceptable to its Protestant opponents by downplaying what Pratt saw as its most fundamental teachings. Rather, Pratt's own exhilaration over visions of heavenly glory and godliness infused his writing with vigor, excitement, and rhetorical flourishes. After Smith's death, Pratt—along with several other figures, including William W. Phelps, Orson Pratt, and Brigham Young—played pivotal roles in expanding upon and contending for Smith's theological vision, if all with their own distinct emphases.

At times, Pratt revealed more than Joseph Smith would have wished. At an April 28, 1842 meeting of the Nauvoo Relief Society, Smith complained about "great big Elders" who "had caused him much trouble, whom he had taught in private counsel; and they would go forth into the world and proclaim the things he had

taught them; as their own revelations."[3] Pratt was among several of the apostles identified as in need of a dose of humility. Smith did not want other men to take credit for his teachings, which he, moreover, was not yet ready to preach as forthrightly as Pratt had been doing.

There was a decided virtue in Pratt's bold proclamation of Mormon doctrine. Had they read Parley Pratt's tracts or listened to his sermons, mid-nineteenth-century outsiders to Mormonism (as well as church members) would not have endured any confusion about Latter-day Saint beliefs. Today, though, other Americans often have a great deal of difficulty figuring out what exactly it is Mormons believe about God, humankind, and salvation, despite the overviews of the "plan of salvation" available in church publications or from missionaries. Do Mormons believe in such things as human deification or God's own human existence? Church leaders have affirmed such standard Mormon doctrines in recent years, but they do not preach them with the same sort of robustness as did Parley Pratt (or, to take a more recent example, Bruce McConkie). The distance between God and gods-to-be, narrowed considerably by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Parley Pratt, seems much wider today. It is understandable why more recent Mormon leaders have taken a different tack, but Grow and Givens make it possible for Mormons and non-Mormons alike to miss the presence of a leader like Parley Parker Pratt.

The Apostle Paul of Mormonism will endure as a significant work that brings to life a pivotal figure in early Mormon history, a writer and missionary who bridges the Joseph Smith and Brigham Young eras of the church. Terryl Givens already has a reputation within the church as a beloved and forthright expositor of his faith's doctrines—one wonders if he detected something of a kindred spirit in the early Mormon apostle. Matthew Grow, who published an award-winning biography of Thomas Kane several years ago, recently joined the Church History Department as its Director of Publications. If he brings the same attention to detail and open discussion of controversial issues to his new post, all students of Mormon history will benefit. Since both Givens and Grow share Pratt's prolific ability to write and publish, we can anticipate much more from them in the near future.

Notes

1. Hendrik Hartog, "Lawyering, Husbands' Rights, and 'the Unwritten Law' in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 67–96.

2. May 1, 1865 minutes, Box 3, Folder 44, General Church Minutes, CR 100 318, Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

3. April 28, 1842 minutes, Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Church History Library, http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book (accessed December 8, 2011).

Proofed, Typeset, and Bound for Glory: The Material History of the Book of Mormon

Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter. *How We Got the Book of Mormon.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2011. 154pp. Hardback: $34.99. ISBN-13: 978–1–60908–062–4

Reviewed by Karen D. Austin

The appearance of Richard Turley and William Slaughter's *How We Got the Book of Mormon* suggested that the volume's intended audience might be investigators, new members and teens seeking to know more about the material history of this modern scripture. I opened the book with a bit of a knowing smirk, expecting that as a lifelong member of the Church and an avid reader, I would not find much new information. However, as I read the book cover to cover and dug through their footnotes, I learned many new things about the translation and printing process of the Book of Mormon. Turley and Slaughter present this information in a way that balances a compelling narrative with instructive images and persuasive archival detail.

Their book contains ten chapters, beginning with Mormon's compilation process, then describing the translation process performed by Joseph Smith and his scribes, and concluding with the publication history of the following editions: the first edition, 1830; the second edition, 1837; the third edition, 1840; the first European edition, 1841; the 1920 edition; and the 1981 edition.

Although the authors focus on the material history of these editions, Turley and Slaughter also give substantive attention to the people involved in the book's evolution—Joseph and his scribes as well as various editors and printers. One fact new to me was how portions of the Book of Mormon were first published not by Joseph Smith but by Abner Cole, a friend of the printer, Edgar Grandin. Cole had found uncut sheets of the Book of Mormon in Grandin's print shop and ran them in his (Cole's) newspaper, *The Reflector*, under his pen name Obadiah Dogberry. Early church leaders first confronted Cole and then had to seek arbitration in order to stop him from this piracy. I knew prior to reading this book that the first edition of the Book of Mormon did not break the text into verses. However, I had the mistaken notion that the Book of Mormon was broken down into chapter and verse just one time in a subsequent edition. Turley and Slaughter give a clear and systematic explanation for how the Book of Mormon was broken into smaller, more easily accessible chunks of text over a period of several editions—moving to smaller and smaller verses and then adding double columns for ease-of-reading and for parallel appearance to the Bible. I also learned that some of the chapter summaries were actually written by Joseph's scribes and can be found in the original manuscript. I thought all chapter summaries were a product of the 1920 edition. This book helped clarify the chapter summaries' origins.

The most important new information I gleaned was about the change of 2 Nephi 30:6 from "white and delightsome" to "pure and delightsome" in the 1981 edition. Not having studied the several earlier editions of the Book of Mormon, I thought this change was just an alignment with the 1978 revelation that eased discrimination by race in the church. Turley and Slaughter explain with clarity how the change from "white" to "pure" was actually made by Joseph himself as part of the many corrections he made to the 1840 edition. Unfortunately, the chaos suffered by the early saints during persecution, the formation of splinter groups and migration caused them to lose possession some of the earlier manuscripts. For years, the first European edition served as the source for republication, and that was based on the 1837 second edition. During the 1970s, officials from Church headquarters in Salt Lake worked with the Community of Christ (then

called the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) to exchange key documents, allowing access to Joseph Smith's corrections and clarifications.

The 154-page book contains over eighty images, including full-page representations of various translations as well as pictures of people and buildings central to the publication process. These images not only enrich the text but tell a story on their own. A reader might move through the whole book, just viewing the pictures and their captions and still walk away with a wealth of information. For example, a photo of the first and second editions, placed snugly next to each other, illustrates the benefits of moving from a bookshelf-sized edition to a pocket edition. This change helped missionaries more easily carry the Book of Mormon—both for their own reflection and for transporting additional copies for distribution.

Examining the footnotes also presented an interesting way to learn from the book. Turley works as an Assistant Church Historian and Recorder for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Slaughter works as an archivist and photograph historian for the LDS Church History Department. Their familiarity with the archives is apparent. They cite diaries, letters, newspapers, biographies, and autobiographies. They also consult contemporary scholarship that reviews the publication process in greater depth and focus. Extensive notes provide the serious amateur historian with an entry point into more scholarly work.

The footnotes also reveal the book's devotional nature. Most of the notes in the prologue, for instance, refer to the Book of Mormon, which would not be accepted by many non-LDS readers as adequate evidence for the discussion of this book's origins. Also, many passages throughout the book that refer to archival detail include a matter-of-fact reference to the numinous: the proclamation of angels, the unexpected pliability of Ebenezer Robinson (printer of the third edition, 1840), and the presence of many mysterious strangers who aid the early saints (implying perhaps aid by one of the three Nephites) among other events. In fact, as the book progresses, the narrative seems to shift in a pattern that suggests the Weberian "routinization of charisma": miracles that assisted the early, resource-poor saints diminish and the machinery of the larger, bureaucratic institution emerges. By the

time the 1920 and 1981 editions are published, the Church not only has the economic means to publish that the early saints sorely lacked; these last two editions have teams of editors, publishers, and scholars that add several layers of study aids to contextualize the content brought forth during the more charismatic and revolutionary beginnings of the church.

The book is by no means exhaustive. Topics such as the various translations of the book of Mormon into other languages, versions for the blind or deaf, oversized and pocket-sized versions are not addressed. Nevertheless, the authors present a work that highlights not only the faith but the works required to produce these six editions of the Book of Mormon. I recommend *How We Got the Book of Mormon* as a good overview of the process.

Part of a Bigger Story

Craig H. Harline. *Conversions: Two family stories from the Reformation and Modern America.* Yale University Press, 2011. 320pp. Hardcover. $27.50. ISBN 9780300167016.

Reviewed by Wilfried Decoo

Craig Harline, professor of history at Brigham Young University, needs little introduction. His award-winning previous books on European religious history include *The Burdens of Sister Margaret, A Bishop's Tale,* and *Miracles at the Jesus Oak.* Together with *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl,* these books have established Harline as an international authority. His latest book, *Conversions,* is part of a Yale University Press series, "New Directions in Narrative History." Already named a Top Ten Book in Religion for 2011 by Publishers Weekly, it was also a finalist for the Mark Lynton History Prize, part of Harvard University's Nieman Foundation annual awards in journalism and non-fiction.

I. Your story in their story

The Yale series is "intended for the broadest general readership" to "speak to deeply human concerns about the past, present, and future of our world and its people" (ii). This Harline certainly

does. He is eager to make the past as relevant as possible to the present, not only by telling the past in the most spellbinding way, but also by alternating the chapters with a parallel, modern story. This does not mean that Harline feels at ease with this daring endeavor. He frequently shares moments of his "making of" story to explain the leaps he takes as an author. In the postscript, he anticipates multiple criticisms of his methodology and his positions. He worries about the reactions from historians, Mormons, Protestants, Catholics, gays, and even his own parents. But above all, he wants the reader to connect to the characters: "You have to find your story in someone else's story, if it's to have any meaning for you" (268). He could not have found a more fitting reader than myself.

I was 17 years old, alone at home, when two Mormon missionaries rang our doorbell one Saturday afternoon in June 1964 in Antwerp, Belgium. I was eager to hear them out. They were not reluctant to teach me, though I was still a minor (the majority age being 21 at the time). My Catholic parents reacted fretfully when I told them of my interest in Mormonism. I was told to break off all contact, which resulted in secret meetings with the elders in a secluded spot in a nearby park. When I asked my parents if I could be baptized, our relationship became hellish. I had never seen my father in such wrath, nor my mother in such desperation. It would take two years of conflicts and pleading before they would consent, on the condition that nobody would know about it. They did not attend my baptism.

So, when reading *Conversions,* it was all familiar territory. There is the 17th-century Dutch story of Jacob Rolandus who, also still a minor, causes a heartbreaking rift with his Reformed family by converting to Catholicism and fleeing to Antwerp. I could visualize his experiences all the more as they happened in my own hometown, in streets and churches I knew well. Just like Jacob, I would study letters and philosophy at the Antwerp Jesuits' "advanced school," exactly 312 years after him. Next there is the 20th-century American story of Michael Sunbloom who, in 1973, at age 22, "broke his parents' Evangelical hearts by converting to the Mormon Church" (45). With just a few years' separation, Michael and I shared the same experience: he also was taught by Mormon missionaries without his parents' knowledge, faced his

parents' dejection when he told them of his intention to join the Mormon Church, and was baptized without them attending. Harline's description of the following years of struggle of both Jacob and Michael contains many details that are part of my own experience. A third story, limited to only one chapter, concerns Harline's great-grandparents, Carl and Mathilda, lonesome Mormon converts in Sweden in 1888. Mathilda was first to convert, after having listened to the missionaries and having received an overpowering spiritual witness. Such was also my own conversion, as well as the total isolation I found myself in in a non-Mormon and often anti-Mormon environment. Converts of any kind will indeed find part of their own story in this book.

II. Not just about conversion, not just about religion

In spite of its title, conversion as such is not the primary topic of the book. Relatively little is said about how Reformed Jacob became Catholic (83–87), or how Harline's Lutheran great-grandmother became Mormon (34), or how Evangelical Michael became Mormon (65–66). These narratives fill hardly ten pages out of 270, but that is enough to vividly illustrate the differences. Jacob's conversion was a long process. At first he became estranged from his Reformed faith because of tensions and conflicts, then found friends among Catholic peers. Finally, step by step, he became convinced by their apologetic literature. Mathilda's conversion, on the other hand, was swift and deeply emotional, confirmed by two visionary dreams. Michael's interest in Mormonism was triggered by a girlfriend who had joined the Church. He met the missionaries and liked what they taught him. Harline notes that conversion is not always "changing from one thing to another," but rather "discovering what you have always been, or believed" (66). Also important to Michael was the Mormon social network that welcomed him. Except for noting that young adulthood is the most likely age for conversion and that commonly "relationships come before doctrine" (66), Harline recognizes that identifying the deeper reasons for conversion is "all guesswork" as "unconscious forces" are also at work (92–93). So, rather than conversion as such, the extensive topic of the book concerns the developing relations between family members as a consequence

of conversion, which justifies the book's subtitle: *Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America.*

Moreover, this book is not only about religion. Conversion means a thorough alteration in viewpoints, which can also take place outside the realm of church membership. Thus another significant conversion deals with Michael's understanding and accepting his own homosexuality, and that of outsiders reacting to his coming out. But Harline frames this mental shift also in a religious realm. First, "it felt more religious to Michael to admit his feelings [of homosexuality] than to condemn them" (138). Years later Michael tries to explain his homosexuality to his parents. The confrontation is not different from the clash between opposing believers who want to convert each other. Harline refers to Michael's arguments as "sort of the 95 Theses of Michael Sunbloom" and lists a long series of these arguments (213–217). For the parents, the final response is also religious: the Bible condemns homosexuality as an abomination. Michael "had no answers for the Bible's passages on homosexuality." Harline notes that "Michael would have found it helpful to know that a few believers were in fact already beginning to incorporate the latest understanding of sexuality into their reading of the Bible and their religious traditions" (230). With reference to the Catholic John McNeill's *The Church and the Homosexual*, Harline shows how new Biblical exegesis puts the concepts of homosexuality, abomination, spilled seed, and "the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah" in the softer semantic and cultural perspectives of the original Biblical period, which greatly differ from the harsh stereotypes developed centuries later. When Michael's father finally gives in, Harline compares the process with Peter's vision of the unclean food where the apostle learns that no person can be called unclean—"those he'd assumed were unclean because of their eating habits and sexual habits and more" (240). To add sexual habits as part of Paul's understanding will not be evident to all readers, but it is how Michael's father can start to accept his son's nature. Harline next explains how his own study of history has convinced him of the reality of cultural change—values and practices which were once denounced as immoral but over time became acceptable: ". . . long-standing attitudes toward homosexuality might one day be questioned too, as new understanding emerged" (262).

III. Divergent stories

The stories of Jacob Rolandus and Michael Sunbloom are hardly parallel. Harline recognizes this discrepancy. Still, he claims, "in essentials they couldn't have been more alike" (44). In Jacob's story, religion is the central theme, from his conversion, through his theological studies and his apologetic correspondence, to his priestly life devoted to preaching Catholicism. The overall tone is somber, in tune with Jacob's permanent struggles. In Michael's story, it's about a jovial and talented man, fully engaged in real life, who converts to Mormonism (which creates a conflict with his parents) but drops out after three years (which restores the relation). The next thirty-five years are about his coming to terms with his homosexuality, his careers, his meeting his gay partner Stefan in Switzerland, the crisis with his parents over his sexuality, and his successful sandwich shop in Zurich. The overall tone is cheery, with memories of many fun moments, besides the difficult ones. In contrast to Jacob, who never reconciled with his family and never saw any of them again, Michael's parents finally come to terms with their son's sexual orientation. The Sunblooms' saga ends in family love and unity. The common theme of the two stories is family conflict as the result of one member breaking with tradition, but the conditions, the obstacles, the developments, the tone, and the outcome are dissimilar.

Moreover, by detailing the wonderfully creative character of Michael and his charismatic engagement in the happiness of others, it seems Harline wanted not only to make up to Michael for the cruel treatment by fellow Mormons, but also to show what kind of an enjoyable person a gay man can be. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek he describes Michael as the best teacher ever (94–98), the best Young Adult President ever (107–109), the best flight attendant ever (184–186), the creator of the best deli sandwiches ever (252–255). In contrast, Michael's marriage of convenience to a Swiss woman, for an appropriate fee, in order to obtain permanent residency in Switzerland so he could live with his gay partner, is brushed over in a few lines (186). Jacob Rolandus, on the other hand, does not obtain such sympathy. Jacob irritates even Harline because of his incessant "self-righteous stubbornness" (92) and his continuous venomous statements against the Reformed faith: "In

that sense Jacob too helped to break relations with his family" (209). Of course, the nature of the historical sources was very different. For Jacob, Harline had only centuries-old documents. For Michael, he had the man himself by hand as a close friend and was able to conduct live interviews with him and with first-hand witnesses. Still, we can understand Harline: "Getting to know Michael's full story helped me better understand what the Rolanduses were going through when I found their documents later. Because of Michael, I understood more profoundly than otherwise what was at stake in that family" (264). The living Michael helped Jacob come alive too.

IV. A sad book

Conversions is a sad book. The following quotations give an idea of the hurtful effects of conversion. Jacob Rolandus broke with his own blood, "hopelessly devastating his family" (17). As a missionary himself, Harline "saw firsthand the pressure that even the possibility of conversion could put on family relationships" (22), while a recent experience of his includes the case of a young student "whose conversion prompted his heartbroken father to send someone to take the boy's car, computer, phone, and everything but the clothes on his back, and to inform the boy that he was cut off" (22). For the Rolanduses, the running away of their son would "never be banished from their hearts and nightmares and sobs" (23). They were enveloped in "awful gloom" (28). When Michael converted to Mormonism, he had to face the "dismay" of his parents and "had never seen his father so angry" (75-76). Similarly, for his father, Jacob's disaffection was "an unalleviated disaster" (114). Next Michael passed through the "gut-wrenching" struggle to give up Mormonism as he came to terms with his gay feelings (138). Jacob's parents suffered over the loss of their son "just as parents suffered over the deaths of their children"—even worse because "Catholic Jacob was doomed" for eternity (146). Indeed, in the correspondence between Jacob and his sister there was "bottomless sorrow" at the thought of the assured damnation that waited the other one (155), while "their father was suffering constant death" (175). The reactions to Michael's outing, in particular from a former Mormon missionary, one for whom Michael had served as best man, were devastating. Michael was informed

that the man refused to further communicate with him and that he "had gone through the wedding album and torn up all the pictures that included Michael" (198). Faced with so much rejection and acting on the additional advice of a confidant—"don't tell your parents, it will kill them" (199)—, Michael kept the secret hidden from them. Then, when his parents finally learned the truth from someone else, the conflict with this parents became a "year from hell" (200). Michael got all the blame as his mother cried: "How could you do this to us?" (200). The confrontation between Michael and his parents peaked during one horrible, "heartstopping morning" (213). On the Rolandus' side, meanwhile, the letters continued to speak of "great sorrow and persistent ache" and "perpetual wounds" (206). It is true that Michael's story ends in reconciliation with his parents and many readers will rejoice in the happy ending. But the struggle to reach that point remains, and (as evidence around the world shows) intolerance toward homosexuals, as well as any person perceived as different, is far from solved.

The Mormon conversion story of Harline's great-grandparents, Carl and Mathilda, in Sweden is equally fraught with sadness. The year was 1888, at the height of anti-Mormon slander. "Her mother cried and said it was all of the devil" (35). Mathilda was baptized with bystanders insulting her. Two years later, Carl too joined the Church. The couple, with their four children, emigrated to Zion in 1891, unreconciled with parents and siblings, never to see them again. It is easy to imagine how much parents and siblings lamented the day Mathilda listened to those Mormon missionaries who altered all their lives to the core. Harline's ancestors suffered "ruptured relationships because of religion" (38). True, in the long run, things turned out fine among the descendants, but such remote prospect would give little solace for the present pain.

One would expect the new faith to provide the haven where those outside storms cannot reach. But even that is often an illusion. Jacob, in spite of his devotion and sacrifices, struggled for years to become fully accepted in his Catholic environment as he had to prove himself a true and trustworthy convert. Next, during his labors as a Jesuit, "he found himself struggling against his co-religionists" (227) to finally die in misery and loneliness. Mi-

chael, in spite of his boundless commitment as Young Adult President, was "stung by the public censure" (111) he had to endure over trivialities, followed by "the blatant crap" (138) of gossip about his evolving relations. Still, even as an "inactive" Mormon, he kept his sympathy for Mormonism for many years, until Proposition 8 "deeply upset" him and he decided to have his name removed from church rolls (259). Carl, Harline's immigrant ancestor, did not find religious happiness in his new land, as he lost his daughter to illness two days after arrival and never participated in the temple ordinances (36)—which was at the time one of the main reasons to emigrate to Zion.

A question that emerges from so much sadness is how to assess the appropriateness of conversion efforts by evangelizing faiths such as Mormonism. Harline does not raise the question explicitly, but his compassion for the hurt that conversion causes and his call for tolerance and mutual acceptance will raise the question for some readers. In chapter 33 he talks at length on the perception of common ground as the key to peace, rather than focusing on differences (which proselytism would imply). The Rolanduses failed to see that family bonds ought to supersede religious differences. "In the Sunbloom family, in contrast, Michael was no longer primarily gay to his parents, but becomes a loved one" (251). Harline points at a rabbi, a sheik, and a minister in Seattle who meet together "to seek mutual understanding, . . . to find commonality and respect, to correct misconceptions, and to soften disagreement. The process hasn't caused them to leave their traditions, but to leave a particular version of their tradition, and of other traditions" (251). Mormon missionaries, on the other hand, "were young on purpose, because their difficult task required zeal, energy, enthusiasm, and a little naïveté" with its disadvantages of "uninformed opinions, rigidity, and know-it-allism" (63).

V. Creative nonfiction

Finally, a most striking characteristic of Harline's work is the style. The Yale series, "New Directions in Narrative History," defines its publications as "creative nonfiction" (ii)—an oxymoron with its own challenges. Nonfiction implies that all we read has occurred as described. The creativity lies in the way the facts are

told. Harline is a master storyteller, taking the reader on a vivid journey across time. The opening pages, describing Jacob's flight from his parental home in the middle of the night, are worthy of a gripping novel (1-6). Moreover, the nature of the primary sources certainly informed the narrative style: a personal journal, correspondence with family and friends, and in the case of Michael, interviews. But it is hard to assess to what extent some details sprout from Harline's imagination based on his knowledge of the times and his understanding of the facts. In that sense some of the decor in Jacob's story is probably a little conjectural, while in Michael's case Harline speaks from personal experience with a friend and from a material setting he has been part of. Still, Harline regularly reassures us of his submission to the sources by putting direct citations in italics. These are like little beacons along the way reminding the reader that we are navigating in the wake of primary sources. There is, wisely, no attempt at recreating direct dialogues between the characters. Everything remains descriptive, with indirect speech to convey the content of letters or conversations. But "traditional" historians must accept that there are no usual references to sources in the book itself and must confide in the impressive amount of sources in the bibliographical essay at the end.

Jacob's story—the real "historical" account situated in the 17th century and the prime reason for writing the book—also sits in the broader framework of Harline's expertise with European religious history. It is not only sustained by directly relevant sources in the archives of the Jesuits and the Dutch Reformed Church, but also by comparisons with similar stories and events in various parts of Europe. The frequent use of "maybe" and "perhaps" does not undermine credibility, but rather expands our comprehension. E.g., "Maybe [Jacob] was as torn as Sir Henry James in England, who suffered so much stress during his conversion that he became mentally unbalanced, or as Madame de Fontrailles in France, who wrote of her deep interior agitations before her conversion" (89). Or: "Perhaps [Jacob] said nothing about Rome because of his disappointment at not getting the answer he wanted from either the Capuchins or the Jesuits" (203). Such an approach invites the reader to take part in justified conjectures, while Harline does not cross the factual line.

There are almost no footnotes in Harline's book. But one carries a lot of weight: "Michael Sunbloom is not his real name; neither are the names, and some of the places, in the rest of his story" (45). One can understand why Harline—no doubt in consultation with his friend—felt the need to protect the identity of Michael, but the artifice may leave readers with an uneasy feeling, as if the "ideal" Michael, whom we learn to love throughout the book, is finally less real than Jacob. Where would the Bellevue deli be to order one of his superior sandwiches?

VI. A book with a message

Conversions is a remarkable book, one many people will be tempted to read rapidly because of the absorbing storyline—how will this end for Jacob and for Michael?—but next need to read again, more slowly, to discover its depth and to ponder its message. *Conversions*, indeed, wants to be more than the tale of two families and more than a history book. Not only is Harline very much present throughout the book with personal reflections, but toward the end he moves the book to an ethical level. History must teach us vital lessons about life.

The last two chapters and the postscript are, foremost, a cry for tolerance, or rather for plain mutual acceptance, covering some 30 pages. Though not explicitly condemned, proselytism does not seem to have a place in this context: "The religious moment, or impulse, lies not in the drawing of lines or in the defending of a position but in crossing lines and inviting the Other to meet on common ground" (249). Reconciliation is the key. The Good Samaritan and even Alma 7 from the Book of Mormon, with its insistence on humility, patience, and long-suffering, are referred to (268). And so, "Michael's story wasn't merely a gay or Mormon story, and the Rolanduses not merely a Protestant or Catholic story, but that they might have even wider resonance than I'd supposed: they were part of a bigger story about anyone seen as Not The Same" (271).

The Feeling of Knowing

Tyler Chadwick, ed. *Fire in the Pasture: Twenty-first Century Mormon*

Poets. El Cerrito, Calif.: Peculiar Pages, 2011. 546 pp. Paperback. $17.99. ISBN-10: 0981769667; ISBN-13: 978–0981769660.

Reviewed by Brent Corcoran

For me, poetry's unique power is to hold in immediate suspension what we know and how we know it. Poets surpass philosophers in representing a harmonious tension of ontology and epistemology. We renew through the condensation of poetic language the *feeling* of knowing most authentically. The poems in *Fire in the Pasture* are not wanting. As a group of poems, *Fire* succeeds admirably in renewing our feelings of knowing.

With *Fire in the Pasture: Twenty-First century Poems,* editor Tyler Chadwick casts his net wide to offer readers some of the best LDS poetry produced since the millennium's turn. With his preface, along with Susan Howe's contextualizing foreword, readers are well-equipped to form their own opinions about the state of LDS poetry. Most readers will undoubtedly feel at ease browsing its pages, discovering old friends, and perhaps forming some new acquaintances. That is the typical way to read an anthology. As is also typical with any anthology, there is no way this single anthology will satisfy all readers all of the time. This, however, should not be an obstacle for serious readers.

To represent the interested reader, I begin by taking into account such things as copyright pages, tables of contents, prefaces, and forewords which all serve to place the work in its context. These preliminaries, specifically in the case of *Fire in the Pasture*, prepare us to sample "Mormon" "poetry." I put both words in quotes because in this relativizing, self-identifying twenty-first-century world, both terms are open to dispute. Chadwick himself has acknowledged that he erred on the side of broad inclusiveness when deciding where to set the boundaries of Mormon-ness:

> . . . poets are Mormon if they've been initiated into mainstream Mormonism, meaning they were at least baptized members of the LDS Church, even if they no longer actively practice the religion or have had their names dropped from Church records. So they at least have some sedimental relationship with Mormonism, even if they don't worship as Latter-day Saints anymore.
>
> In this light *Fire* is really more concerned with Mormonism as a

cultural construct and less as a purely religious system of doctrines, rituals, ordinances, and beliefs.[1]

With eighty-two representative poets, Chadwick provides an exhaustive look at the previous decade in Mormon poetry. For the obvious time and energy required both to assess available materials and to administer the project, Chadwick deserves high praise. He has also been active in promoting the cause of Mormon poetry through signings, readings, and many blog posts (see fireinthepasture.org). These engaging, thoughtful essays I recommend as counterpoint and anecdote to what will be my more widely focused view toward his anthology.

The "front matter" also situates *Fire* as a response to an earlier collection of poetry, *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems,* edited by Dennis Clark and Eugene England (Signature Books, 1989). Essentially a generation has passed away between the two anthologies. The Baby Boomers are retiring; Generation X is grappling the reins. What's to wonder that a new generation—a Facebook generation—wants a new anthology to represent their new poetic voices?

Here's what's to wonder: A comparison of the two anthologies seems to demonstrate that the terms *Mormon* and *poetry* have changed so dramatically over the past three to four decades that they no longer apply satisfactorily to both anthologies. The break which *Fire* exposes would almost seem to defeat its aim to be *Harvest*'s successor. In fact, nothing seems to tie the two together except the insistence on the terms "Mormon" and "poetry." Comparing the 1980s' "Mormon" to 2010's "Mormon" is like comparing apples to oranges. And comparing twentieth-century to twenty-first-century "poetry" is comparing apples to . . . no fruit I can imagine. There's no easy way to review a compilation of post-post-modern literature—especially poetry—without acknowledging the semiotic breakdown of terms over the past generation.

"It is true," writes Howe in her foreword, "that the majority of these poems don't have content that identifies them as specifically Mormon." Indeed, this is so broadly *not* the case with *Harvest* poets that reading the two volumes side by side is a jarring experience. *Harvest* authors enthusiastically incorporate biblical and Book of Mormon references and incidents from LDS Church his-

tory into their poems. With *Fire,* one is hard-pressed to thresh much sacred grain from secular tares. Of course, there are exceptions. However, at the point of these exceptions, when any poet draws strong attention to any doctrinal theme, it seems to interrupt more mundane homilies, such as those poems which linger upon the dreariness of chores or every-day, factory-grade existential angst. Barely a dozen poems within *Fire* even reference Jesus; and when they do, it's in an almost off-handed manner, as if he were a passerby.

Howe insists, however, that even when we can't easily recognize the Mormon in the poetry, we yet pick up on the Mormonism: "I find that the content of many poems" in this anthology, she writes, "suggests the Mormon identity of the poets, even when that content is not specifically Mormon." But do they seem like the "Mormons" of *Harvest*? How easily may they compare as poets? Has there not been a profound break even between us and our most recent past?

I believe that *Fire*'s answer is a resounding "Yes!" Modern communications has become almost entirely visual. This post-modern world is awash with a kind of "scopophilia"—or "love of looking" —whose advent French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his advocates might relate to inherent psychological instincts. A more culturally emergent turn of the concept might be found in the work of Walter Benjamin, especially within his terms of "*bildhaft*" ("image-making"). "Benjamin['s work] elicits the technological nature of modern experience:" observes Jaheo Kang, professor at the New School in New York City, "that of the big-city dweller and his characteristic uneasiness, brought about by an over-stimulation of the visual sense through the urban spectacle."[2] From an evolutionary perspective we hear, "We are primates—highly visual creatures—with minds that evolve around this remarkable sense."[3] That the Greek word has acquired primarily sexual connotations as a medical term is just the underbelly of the beast.[4]

The worlds of the oral bards are irretrievable to post-modern peoples. Poetry performance is limited to small gatherings of cognoscenti at coffee house slams. Published poetry is now the province of an even slighter market of silent readers. The old stan-

dards of poetry have been swept aside—"no more word inversions, multisyllabic words or Latinates, little rhyme and less form," say the new Grundys of post-modern verse. *Harvest*'s poets consistently employed the form poem and the traditional devices of poetry—rhyme, meter, or at least a whiff of self-conceit, but these standards have been largely expunged in the twenty-first century poetry of *Fire*. In the late nineteenth century, the liberation from stilted adherence to prescribed forms encouraged fresh creative flourishing. But surely we have swung the pendulum far enough and now are free to revive some of the pure musical delight of verse. There is some flickering in *Fire* of that sort of frivolity, but not much of a flame.

The phrase "form poem" contains its own irony, for the term can refer either to a traditional construction of a poem, such as a sonnet, limerick, or haiku, as well as to a poem meant to be formalized typographically on the page, to some kind of visual symbol. The inherent irony is that the former is expressive of old-school poetry while the latter is a mechanistic innovation made possible by modern printing technologies. Perhaps, as reading poetry has become less a matter of public performance and more a solitary reading of the printed page, the introduction of typographic effects has seemed a good idea to many poets. Perhaps it does expand upon the potentialities of language. But this is not a characteristic of conversational language and can provide nothing unexpected in return. There are too many variables exposed by trying to make a picture out of words. A prime instance of this typographic fetish is indentation as an informal device—to what?—create diversion? Is it to break up the monotony of left-hand margins? Or is it an indication of reading pace? Because there is no standard for indentation, the reader must imagination how such spaces or blanks should be "read." Does it indicate a pause or encourage greater speed in reading pace? I can think of good cases to be made for both diametrically opposed options. And because this habit of indentation leads only to greater confusion, I consider the practice overly self-indulgent on part of poets who practice it. Unfortunately, it's clear that Mormon poets have not entirely escaped this propensity for typographic flamboyancy, either.

Perhaps there is an unconscious impulse driving this modern

stereotyping of contemporary "Mormon" "poetry." Perhaps it's just another example of Mormon rapprochement with mainstream arts and scholarship. Modern poets have intended by disowning traditional devices, to celebrate the "deviousnesses," of poetry, but they have simply traded old devices for new. These modern devices draw heavily upon the plastic arts through the use of film, graphic arts, sculpture, and architecture (the scopophilic world). *Fire*'s poets must do more than merely write—they must paint with words. *Fire*'s poetry is rife with descriptions of essential color—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and all colors in between. Furthermore, paintings and painters themselves form the content of many of *Fire*'s poems. From artworks, thence, the Mormon poets' obsession with vision extends across all the beauties of (typically western American) landscapes and peoples, back down to the putrid excrescences and detritus of cities, of material culture, and finally back to the stars. The modern Mormon sense of choice is externally directed toward sight, and hence, more toward rational taxonomies. Why resist this modern visual emphasis? Simply because the ways of knowing which partly comprise "the feeling of knowing" are many, and the poet owes it to herself and her readers to cull from the entire field of that ontology and epistemology, relating to any *gestalt* or experience, to present a reasonably integrated renewal of reality—"The Proustian Moment" in all its citrus-tea freshness.

As presage to the obsessive preoccupation with categorization, Howe asks us to imagine personality types for each of *Fire*'s poetic voices. Such a suggestion implies that the voices one may hear in the poems are not distinctive, original, emancipated, or authentically individual voices. Chadwick hypothesizes that his poets' language is so consumed with community, which drives the requirement for perpetual self-reidentification, that solitude must be its abhorrence, its absence, its great blank. As *Fire* contributor Michael R. Collings observed in his review of this anthology: "Rather than being a compilation of 'Contemporary Mormon Poems,' with the implication that each of the poems contained therein will somehow reveal its inherent 'Mormon-ness' to a discerning reader, *Fire* shifts attention to 'Twenty-first Century Mormon Poets'—the difference being that this collection concen-

trates on the poetry (and thereby the *poetics*) of *poets* who are Mormons. On *poets.*"[5] Chadwick, in what can only be a coda, standing untitled as it does at the end of his work, prefers to identify each poet with another poet whose work is likely well known. For my part, I saw (perhaps because several poems take art works as subjects) each poet as coming from a different school of painting—Expressionists and Impressionists here, Fauvists and Cubists there, and Surrealists and Situationalists at the margins.

Interestingly, where both collections come together is in the lack of humorous poetry. In response to *Harvest,* the *Deseret News's* Jerry Johnston commented, "more humor could have been showcased without sabotaging the seriousness of the project."[6] Howe notes the absence, as well. Once again, there's always the exception to prove the rule. In this case, humor can be found in Nicole Hardy's "Mud Flap Girl" (202–203) duo of poems which are also distinguished by forming the closest things to the classic sonnet in the entire repertoire. (Glenn's "Ye Shall Be as Gods" [187], and Alex Rex Mitchell's "Road to Carthage" [285] are the rare others.)

These were my own thoughts as I pondered not just individual poems but the anthology in its entirety. Other readers will come to other conclusions. But what is beyond dispute is that while poetry's market share is drying up among the general populace, the composition of poetry is not in danger of dying out. Indeed, self-publication and on-demand books via Kindle and other media devices allow modern poets greater freedom to independently disseminate their works than ever before. This anthology is well worth its moderate price and it is easily accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. If readers want truly thoughtful and articulate expressions of and insights into the many voices with which modern Mormonism speaks one would be hard-pressed to locate a more convenient source.

If there are lines which seem to encapsulate the whole of *Fire in the Pasture*—which resonate long after with that feeling of knowing I'd mentioned in the opening—I would choose these from Sharlee Mullin Glenn's "Blood and Milk" (190), excerpted below. Within this poem many of the generalizations stated above coalesce: the post-modern preoccupation with self-identification, and, for peculiarly Mormon concerns, the horrors of mortal infertility or sterility versus the sacred imperative to reproduce, the

concordance of that idea with human creativity, and the "holy bondage" derived of the whole program, whether it be encouraging the fertility of corporeal kinsmen or of our "kinsmen of the shelf":[7]

> There's freedom in the bleeding;
> bondage in the milk
> Do not be deceived.
> Ah, but it's an empty freedom;
> A holy bondage,
> A sweet and holy bondage.

Notes

1. "Tyler Chadwick Uncut: 'Fire in the Pasture' and Mormon Poetry in the Twenty-first Century," http://www.low-techworld.org/2011/12/tyler-chadwick-uncut-fire-in-pasture.html (accessed April 15, 2012). That Mormons engage in attempts to control the term "Mormon" goes without documenting.

2. Jaheo Kang, "The Spectacle of Modernity: Walter Benjamin and a Critique of Culture (*Kulturkritik*)," http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8675.2010.00621.x/pdf (accessed April 17, 2011).

3. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (W. W. Norton & Co.: New York, 1997), 214.

4. This sexual application of the term is especially prevalent in the medical or psychiatric sciences. Most medical dictionaries explicitly define "scopophilia" as a sexually disordered state; or even more simply, as in the *American Heritage Medical Dictionary,* we read under the entry for "scopophilia," "See *voyeurism.*" http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/scopophilia; *The American Heritage Medical Dictionary* (Houghton Mifflin Company: New York, 2007).

5. "Fire in the Pasture: Gleaning after the Harvest," http://michaelrcollings. blogspot.com/2011/11/fire-in-pasture-gleaning-after-harvest.html (accessed April 15, 2012). Chadwick gave his endorsement to Collings's description in the interview "Tyler Chadwick 'Uncut.'"

6. "Reviews, *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems,"* http://signaturebooks.com/2010/07/reviews-harvest-contemporary-mormon-poems/.

7. R. W. Franklin, ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Reading Edition), 232, poem number 512, "Unto my Books—so good to turn"—(Belknap Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1999). "I thank these Kinsmen of the shelf— / Their Countenances Kid / Enamor—in Prospective— / And satisfy—obtained—."

David Ruhlman
The Left Hand of Edvard Munch is the Right Hand of God,
gouache on wood panel,
23"x 32"

Contributors

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David Ruhlman
A Natural History of the Hidden World,
gouache, 24"x 32", 2010

David Ruhlman
Rabbit Sees Radar,
mixed media on book pages, 13"x 24", 2011

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