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BOOK REVIEWS

JACOB'S TEMPLE SERMON AS REINTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE AND RETHINKING OF SEXUAL ETHICS

Spencer P. Greenhalgh

Someone turning to the Book of Mormon to defend their church's traditional teachings on sexuality would likely consult the sermon given by the Nephite prophet Jacob in the second chapter of his eponymous book. Indeed, LDS and RLDS figures have often referred to Jacob 2 when making arguments about sexual ethics.[1] For example, LDS apostle Mark E. Petersen quoted from this chapter in a 1969 address condemning the sexual revolution of that decade.[2] Likewise, Jacob's condemnation of polygamy was a favorite resource for twentieth-century RLDS critics of their church's policies (and, with Doctrine and Covenants 150, scripture) allowing polygamous men from the Global South to be baptized

1. I regretfully use the acronym "LDS" when referencing people, teachings, and beliefs associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although I am typically inclined to use the preferred adjective "Latter-day Saint," this essay also mentions the RLDS Church (the term I will use when referring to that tradition before 2001) and Community of Christ (the term I will use when referring to that tradition after 2001). Because members of this tradition have also referred to themselves as "Latter Day Saints," and because the capitalization and punctuation differences between the two terms are slight, I feel that "LDS" provides more clarity.

2. Mark E. Petersen, "The Dangers of the So-Called Sex Revolution," in *Conference Report* (April 1969), 62–66, accessed January 10, 2023, https://scriptures.byu.edu/#0cf0228:t694$25858:c0cf0228.

so long as they committed to take no more wives.[3] In both cases, Jacob 2 served as a prooftext that resisted a liberalization of sexual ethics.

Yet careful readings of Jacob's temple sermon suggest that its sexual ethic is more nuanced than a generic call to chastity (or even a simple condemnation of non-monogamous relationships). Perhaps most notably, a number of writers have found feminist themes in Jacob's sermon. Fatimah Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming describe Jacob's sermon as containing "some of the most overtly feminist messages of the Book of Mormon."[4] Carol Lynn Pearson points to the polygamous husbands of this passage as one piece of evidence (among several) of an "anti-female bias evident among the Nephites" that can be understood as "one of the numerous causes of their downfall."[5] Similarly, Deidre Nicole Green interprets "Jacob's references to women's chastity" as a reference "to women's sexual agency," and Kimberly Berkey and Joseph Spencer describe the sermon as a "relatively straightforward condemnation of certain elements of Nephite patriarchy."[6] These authors invite us to see

3. Matthew Bolton, *Apostle of the Poor: The Life and Work of Missionary and Humanitarian Charles D. Neff* (John Whitmer Books, 2005), 69. For more on polygamy and Section 150, see also Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People: The Era of Worldwide Community, 1946 to 2016* (Community of Christ Seminary Press, 2016); David J. Howlett, "Why Denominations Can Climb Hills: RLDS Conversions in Highland Tribal India and Midwestern America, 1964–2000," *Church History* 89, no. 3 (2020): 633–58.

4. Fatimah Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming, *The Book of Mormon for the Least of These: 1 Nephi—Words of Mormon* (By Common Consent Press, 2020), 111.

5. Carol Lynn Pearson, "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?," in *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*, ed. Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, and Hannah Wheelwright (Oxford University Press, 2015), 223.

6. Deirdre Nicole Green, *Jacob: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 88; Kimberly M. Berkey and Joseph M. Spencer, "'Great Cause to Mourn': The Complexity of the Book of Mormon's Presentation of Gender and Race," in *Americanist Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (Oxford University Press), 305.

Angela Ellsworth, *Lady Ties for a Line Dance* (2011), braids of linen, thread, brass, and artificial hair, 8′ x 7′9″ (courtesy of Angela Ellsworth and the Phoenix Art Museum)

Jacob's sexual ethic less as a self-evident list of sexual prohibitions and more as the natural result of some deeper theological commitment (in this case, gender equality).[7]

My objective in this article is to add to these readings an argument that Jacob's sexual ethic is also a clear departure from teachings found in the scriptures available to the Nephites. That is, it is not only the result of more foundational values but also a reinterpretation of previous teachings in light of those values. This reinterpretation allows Jacob to reject an established sexual ethic that is clearly present in scripture but no longer acceptable for the harm that it causes among his people. Once understood in these terms, the temple sermon is better read not as a prooftext for existing teachings on sexuality but as an invitation for individuals and institutions that accept the Book of Mormon to identify deeper theological values and reinterpret previous sexual ethics, no matter how anchored in precedent those ethics may seem.

Because the reading of scripture is an unavoidably subjective act, I begin this essay with a description of the assumptions and perspectives I bring to interpreting the Book of Mormon. This also sets the stage for the next section, where I will describe Jacob's approach to scripture and argue that it is key to understanding the sexual ethic he establishes during his temple sermon. Then, I will address the temple sermon itself, demonstrating how Jacob there reinterprets scripture and follows his father in rethinking the sexual ethic of the Nephite religion. Finally, I will consider ways in which Jacob's example might be relevant for Book of Mormon readers today.

7. For more thorough reviews of studies of gender in Jacob (and the rest of the Book of Mormon), see Joseph M. Spencer, "Scripture and Gender," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mormonism and Gender*, ed. Amy Hoyt and Taylor G. Petrey (Routledge, 2020); Joseph M. Spencer, "The Presentation of Gender in the Book of Mormon: A Review of Literature," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 29 (2020): 231–63.

My Approach to Scripture

I write from the perspective of someone who long practiced in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but who now practices in Community of Christ. As a result of my personal religious history, I am most familiar with (and remain sympathetic to) LDS approaches to the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, due to demographic differences and ecclesiastical evolution, there has quite simply been more writing on the Book of Mormon from LDS perspectives than from RLDS/Community of Christ perspectives, especially in recent years. While I do not claim to have read all scholarship on the Book of Mormon, my thinking is largely shaped by LDS writers—if not institutional perspectives. Indeed, my personal theology is presently closer to Community of Christ than it is to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and this also shapes how I read all scripture, including the Book of Mormon. In recognition of my present affiliation, I use the lightly modernized *Revised Authorized Version* of the Book of Mormon—first published by the RLDS Church in 1966—as the source for quotes and verse references (though I also include LDS verse references for broader accessibility).

This denominational history also affects the way in which I frame my conclusions in this article. My argument—that Jacob's temple sermon invites Book of Mormon readers to reinterpret scripture and rethink sexual ethics—can obviously be read in the context of how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints understands LGBTQ+ identities and treats LGBTQ+ members. Furthermore, although I am no longer practicing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I continue to claim membership in the Mormon community and remain, therefore, personally invested in how that church's teachings and policies affect that community. However, this reading of Jacob's temple sermon also has implications for *any* denomination that accepts the Book of Mormon as scripture, including the one in which I currently practice. In that context, foregrounding a critique of a church I no

longer attend might be seen as unfair. Rather than inadvertently wade into sectarian debate, I will focus on advancing my reading of Jacob's temple sermon and some possible implications, refraining from advocacy for any changes in any denomination.

On a more analytical level, I write with the assumption that the characters in the Book of Mormon have consistent personalities and motivations. This is not to argue for the historicity of the Book of Mormon or even that we should bracket questions about historicity; indeed, I confess that I am skeptical of the historicity of the Book of Mormon—and much of the Bible. Nonetheless, I believe—like Bruce Lindgren—that the Book of Mormon "has the capacity to illuminate and communicate the gospel."[8] More to the point I am making here, I am convinced by the writing of several authors that the Book of Mormon has important, valuable lessons to teach when one treats its characters as real people and approaches the text from a narrative lens.[9]

I also assume in this article that except where otherwise indicated in the Book of Mormon text, the portions of the Hebrew Bible implied to be on the brass plates read the same as the equivalent portions of our bibles today. This is, admittedly, a tricky assumption. For one, academic scholarship places the ultimate redaction of the Hebrew Bible after Lehi's purported exodus from Jerusalem. More pressingly, given my interpretive framework, the Book of Mormon narrative not only describes the brass plates as written in (reformed?) Egyptian rather than Hebrew (Mosiah 1:6; LDS Mosiah 1:4) but also suggests that the "original" biblical text may differ in important ways from what we have

8. A. Bruce Lindgren, "Sign or Scripture: Approaches to the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (1986): 69–75.

9. See, for example, Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (Oxford University Press, 2010); and Jared Hickman, "Learning to Read with the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 48, no. 1 (2015): 169–77.

today. Thus, it is possible to imagine that teachings and commandments on sexuality present in the brass plates are different than those in our version of the Hebrew Bible, contrary to my assumptions. From this perspective, these differences would allow for resolving any tension between the two texts.

However, I suggest that resolving tensions within scripture is not necessarily desirable. Indeed, some scholars of the Book of Mormon have shown what we can learn from being attentive to tensions within that volume of scripture alone.[10] Furthermore, whatever the actual differences between the brass plates and the Hebrew Bible, it is the latter text that the modern reader must bring into conversation with the Book of Mormon. Rather than use the possibilities offered by the brass plates to explain away what makes us uncomfortable in other scripture, I suggest that it is more productive to assume similarity except where difference is clearly indicated—and to face any resulting discomfort head on.[11]

10. Consider Hardy's description (in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*) of competing explanations for the destruction of Ammonihah. See also Spencer's discussion of differences between Nephi and Jacob's approach to Isaiah in Joseph M. Spencer, *A Word in Season: Isaiah's Reception in the Book of Mormon* (University of Illinois Press, 2023); and Joseph M. Spencer, "Learning to Read Isaiah with Jacob," in *Jacob: Faith and Great Anxiety*, ed. Avram R. Shannon (Religious Studies Center, 2024).

11. Of course, this assumption is also personally convenient, as the main thesis of this article would be much weaker without it. However, I also suggest that a broader danger in appealing to possible differences in the brass plates is that the Book of Mormon actually has relatively little to say about the scope or nature of those differences. Given these vast possibilities and sparse details, it is tempting for appeals to the brass plates to be self-serving, asserting a possible difference for the sake of a desired conclusion and despite scant evidence. While a narrative approach to Book of Mormon interpretation should acknowledge (and perhaps even explore) the possibility of difference, it should do so carefully and, I argue, conservatively.

Jacob's Reinterpretive Approach to Scripture

Just as I bring my own perspectives and assumptions to my interpretation of the Book of Mormon, Jacob seems to bring an intentional perspective to his treatment of scripture. Importantly, Jacob appears to share this perspective with his older brother Nephi, one of the most prominent narrators in the Book of Mormon.[12] This perspective emphasizes reinterpreting scripture and therefore lays the groundwork for the reinterpretation of sexual ethics that I will argue is present in his temple sermon. To help us better understand this perspective—and demonstrate that it is a key theme in his ministry—I consider Jacob's treatment of scripture in his first recorded sermon to the Nephites (II Nephi 5–7; LDS 2 Nephi 6–10) and his debate with Sherem, his final recorded act of public ministry (Jacob 5; LDS Jacob 7).

Jacob's First Recorded Sermon

Readers of the Book of Mormon are first introduced to the themes of Jacob's ministry in the record kept by his older brother. Indeed, as noted in Grant Hardy's *Annotated Book of Mormon*, Jacob begins both this sermon and his temple sermon by voicing concerns about "anxiety" and the "welfare of . . . souls" (II Nephi 5:5–6; LDS 2 Nephi 6:3; Jacob 2:3; LDS Jacob 2:3).[13] This already suggests a certain consistency in Jacob's ministry throughout the Book of Mormon. As I will demonstrate in this section and the next, this consistency also includes a willingness to reinterpret distant scripture for his immediate audience. Indeed,

12. For more discussion of the brothers' influence on each other, see Joseph M. Spencer, "Introduction," in *Christ and Antichrist: Reading Jacob 7*, ed. Adam S. Miller and Joseph M. Spencer (Maxwell Institute Publications, 2018), 3–6; and Joseph M. Spencer, *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*, vol. 1 (Greg Kofford Books, 2021). Note, however, that Nephi and Jacob are not identical in their approaches; see Grant Hardy, ed., *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (Oxford University Press, 2023); Spencer, *Word in Season*; Spencer, "Learning to Read Isaiah."

13. Hardy, *Annotated Book of Mormon*.

early in this first sermon, Jacob borrows a phrase more closely associated with his brother to explain to his audience that the Book of Isaiah "may be likened unto you" (II Nephi 5:14; LDS 2 Nephi 6:5).[14] Jacob's reliance on Isaiah clearly echoes Nephi's same reliance on these texts; more importantly for my purposes, Jacob joins Nephi in what Hardy describes as "providing creative interpretations of Isaiah's words."[15]

Yet Jacob's willingness to reinterpret scripture can be more than a midrash-like reinterpretation of Isaiah. Let us consider, for example, II Nephi 6:59 (LDS 2 Nephi 9:28), where Jacob condemns the "learned" who "think they are wise" and therefore "hearken not to the counsel of God . . . supposing they know of themselves." At least in LDS circles, this verse is popularly understood as an elevation of the word of God over human learning and could therefore seem to support a scriptural literalism that resists reinterpretation. However, paying close attention to context lends additional insight into the meaning of this verse—and suggests a reading that instead criticizes inflexible understanding of scripture. Jacob's condemnation of the learned is situated within a series of ten "woe" statements pronounced between verses 56 and 72 (LDS 9:27–38).[16] The repetition in these statements suggests that *they* provide the primary structure of Jacob's comments. If this is the case, any other remarks within this passage are better understood not as standalone observations but rather as *extensions* of preceding "woe" statements. In this case, Jacob's comments on the "learned" follow a critique of "him

14. See Spencer, *Word in Season*, for a detailed treatment of Nephi and Jacob's "likening."

15. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 65. See also Spencer, "Learning to Read Isaiah," for an argument that Jacob's interest in Isaiah (and its reinterpretation) may differ from Nephi's in important ways.

16. See Hardy, *Annotated Book of Mormon*; and Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, Maxwell Institute study ed. (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018).

that has the law given, that has all the commandments of God, like us, and that transgresses them" (II Nephi 6:56; LDS 2 Nephi 9:27).

Thus, reading this single verse within the broader context suggests that Jacob is not simply following a condemnation of disobedience with criticism of worldly knowledge. Rather, because both observations occur within a single unit of the broader structure, we are perhaps meant to understand the "learned" mentioned in the elaboration *as* those who have "the law given" to them in the "woe" statement. In this reading, "the counsel of God" would be understood as in opposition to *previously given law* (and not academic argument). Thus, Jacob seems to be speaking to those who are so confident in their understanding of scripture that they fail to "hearken" to God asking them to see things differently (indeed, I will shortly demonstrate how Jacob's challenger Sherem fits this description). Likewise, Jacob's concession that "to be learned is good, if they hearken to the counsels of God" (II Nephi 6:61; 2 Nephi 9:29) seems to encourage a deep understanding of established scripture *so long as* one remains open to further expressions of God's will—even those that might challenge previous understandings. Just as Jacob's reinterpretation of Isaiah echoes his older brother's, this reading of Jacob's sermon would be consistent with Nephi's later admonition that latter-day believers must be open to new scripture (see II Nephi 12; LDS 2 Nephi 29). Indeed, Nephi's comments echo language from both Jacob's sermon and the two prophets' extensive quotations from Isaiah, further emphasizing how important the reinterpretation of scripture is in their ministries.[17]

Jacob's Debate with Sherem

The perspective on scripture that Jacob lays out early in his ministry is also present in one of the final events that he records. In Jacob 5 (LDS

17. For examples of this intertextuality, see Hardy, *Book of Mormon*; and Spencer, *Word in Season*.

Jacob 7), a man named Sherem emerges to challenge the prophet; in doing so, he embodies the abstract, hypothetical figure whom Jacob had criticized years before. Indeed, Jacob repeats the word "learned" to describe Sherem (Jacob 5:6; LDS Jacob 7:4). In keeping with the reading I previously proposed, this is not a reference to a secular disregard for scripture but rather a deep, if rigid, familiarity with holy text. Indeed, as an ardent defender of the Law of Moses, Sherem also mirrors Jacob's description of "him who has the law given" (II Nephi 6:56; LDS 2 Nephi 9:27). Where Jacob and Sherem disagree is with the relationship of that law to a future Christ. For Sherem, the scriptures have nothing to say about Jesus; for Jacob, "none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ" (Jacob 5:19; LDS Jacob 7:11).

It is true that Christians have read Jesus into the Hebrew Bible for as long as there have been Christians. Nonetheless, it is important—both for my argument here and for avoiding anti-Jewish practice in Christianity—to establish that Jacob's insistence on this point is most responsibly understood as a willingness to reinterpret scripture in light of new revelation.[18] To take but one important example, Matthew's insistence that the miraculous conception of Christ was foretold in Isaiah is only possible because the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible widely used by early Christians, uses a word that can be understood as "virgin."[19] By contrast, the original Hebrew text more accurately speaks of a "young woman [who] is [already] with child" (Isaiah 7:7, NRSV) rather than of any future virgin. This is but one

18. Indeed, despite Jacob's emphasis on scripture, revelation seems to be the greater source of his faith in Christ. He hints at this in Jacob 5:20 (LDS 7:12), and earlier in his account (Jacob 5:7–8; LDS Jacob 7:5), it is clearly revelation (rather than the supposed clarity of the scriptures) that protects his conviction from being "shaken" by Sherem.

19. For an accessible, respectful treatment of other examples, see Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently* (HarperOne, 2020).

example of how "the language and theology of the New Testament writers are indebted far more to the Septuagint than to the Hebrew Bible."[20] There is, of course, no way to know whether the "Egyptian" version of Isaiah on the brass plates would more closely resemble the Hebrew original or the Greek translation, but Jacob's Christ-centered reading of Isaiah is likely as tenuous as that of the New Testament authors.

Of course, this does not mean that there is no value in reading Isaiah or any other scripture through the lens of Christ. Jacob's treatment of Sherem becomes harsh if we accept that his evaluation of scripture is based on personal conviction rather than objective analysis.[21] Furthermore, we must acknowledge that an insistence on reading Christ into the Hebrew Bible has helped fuel horrific anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic acts and attitudes. Nonetheless, Jacob's reinterpretation of scripture through a Christian lens can still be instructive for us. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 163:7b–c, members of Community of Christ are counseled that "God's nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit, provides the ultimate standard by which any portion of scripture should be interpreted and applied. It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings." Community of Christ's official Statement on Scripture likewise teaches that "scripture's authority is derived from the model of Christ, who came to be a servant (Mark 10:45). Therefore, the authority of scripture is not the authority to oppress, control, or dominate."[22] Although much depends on how

20. Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

21. Other authors have also commented on ways in which Jacob may have overreached. Some of these comments can be found in Adam S. Miller and Joseph M. Spencer, eds., *Christ and Antichrist: Reading Jacob 7* (Maxwell Institute Publications, 2018).

22. Community of Christ, *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs, Fourth Edition* (Herald Publishing House, 2018), 64.

one understands Christ, there are ways in which deliberately reading Christ into the text may be productive; in fact, this approach to reading scripture through a Christian lens explicitly invites us to push back against the original text in careful, considerate ways.

Jacob's Temple Sermon

Having demonstrated that Jacob repeatedly shows interest in reinterpreting scripture, I now turn my attention to how, in his temple sermon, he applies this interest to the subject of sexual ethics among the Nephites. Because Jacob later reveals that he is drawing from similar teachings of Lehi, other readers might understand this sermon differently—for example, as Jacob's *reinforcing* established revelation rather than *introducing* a new understanding of scripture. I favor the latter understanding for two reasons. First, while Lehi may have established precedent for the temple sermon, Nephi makes no indication that this was a priority of *his* ministry (a point to which I will return in more detail later). This puts Jacob in the position of reintroducing this sexual ethic. Indeed, he only acknowledges his father's teachings after establishing the foundation of his own; furthermore, he seems to expand what his father had previously taught.[23] Second, Jacob himself initially frames his concern as a question of scriptural interpretation. Although he references the "grosser crimes" (Jacob 2:31; LDS Jacob 2:23) of his audience, he does not even take the time to explain what those crimes are before announcing: "Thus says the Lord, 'This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures'" (Jacob 2:32; LDS Jacob 2:23). Although Jacob transitions to a discussion of sexual ethics, it is noteworthy that he begins this discussion by warning against misreading scripture. Indeed, Salleh and Olsen Hemming describe Jacob

23. On the subject of Jacob's addition, see Joseph M. Spencer, *1st Nephi: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 101.

as concerned that "the Nephites are manipulating scripture to excuse their own sinful behavior."[24]

However, while I am sympathetic to Salleh and Olsen Hemming's underlying point, I am not sure that the Nephites *are* manipulating scripture—at least, not in the sense of misrepresenting its contents. In the sections that follow, I offer another reading of Jacob's treatment of scripture and sexual ethics: First, I will describe how his reading of scripture does not seem to hold up to scrutiny. Second, I will argue that although scripture does not support Jacob, he draws on a specific value commitment to establish a new sexual ethic better suited for his context. Both sections further demonstrate the reinterpretation of scripture described earlier in this article as characteristic of Jacob's ministry. In a final section, I will discuss the possibility that Jacob is breaking from not only scripture but also his older brother's prophetic precedent.

Jacob Gets Scripture Wrong

As Jacob continues his temple sermon, he reports God's condemnation of the Nephites' "seek[ing] to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms because of the things which were written concerning David and Solomon his son" (Jacob 2:32; LDS Jacob 2:23). In short, as becomes clear later in the passage, Nephite men have begun (or are at least considering) taking additional wives and concubines and are turning to biblical precedent to justify their decision. According to Jacob—citing the voice of God—David and Solomon's decisions were "abominable" (Jacob 2:33; LDS Jacob 2:24). This, combined with God-through-Jacob's assertion that the Nephite men are misunderstanding the scriptures implies that Nephite men have no scriptural

24. Salleh and Olsen Hemming, *Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, 110.

precedent to turn to.[25] However, while the Nephite men in this story are clearly in the wrong, it is *not* clear that this precedent is as absent as Jacob suggests. Indeed, Wilda Gafney writes that after Lamech takes two wives in Genesis 4:19, "Lamech-style partnership (polygamy), rather than Eve/Adam-style monogamy, becomes normative."[26] At best, Gafney continues, God is silent about polygamy. Thus, despite Jacob's insistence that God condemns the Nephite men's interpretation of scripture, commands monogamy (at least as a rule), and sees David and Solomon's polygamy as sinful, there is not much scriptural evidence for his claims.

In fact, while Jacob describes Nephite advocates for polygamy as referencing David and Solomon in particular, there are far more compelling passages that they could have invoked to make their case. Just after Moses receives (one version of) the Ten Commandments,

25. These verses could conceivably also be read as a rejection of previous scriptural precedent in favor of new revelation (rather than an insistence that no such precedent exists). This reading would arguably provide a more useful lesson for modern readers of the Book of Mormon, since it is unproductive to insist that scripture does not say what it clearly says. However, as I will describe in the rest of this section, Jacob does not fully engage with the scriptural precedent for polygamy in the Hebrew Bible, making it difficult to determine which route he is taking here. Because I understand Jacob to be imposing a not-originally-present Christian message onto the Hebrew Bible in his debate with Sherem, I argue that he is doing something similar (if converse) here. However, because rejection of scripture is part of reinterpretation of scripture, I find this alternate reading equally compelling.

26. Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017). Critical readers of the Book of Mormon have drawn attention to biblical tension with Jacob's comments; see, for example, Robert F. Smith, "Textual Criticism of the Book of Mormon," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Deseret Book Company, 1992). Similar observations are alluded to—but not specified—in Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (Maxwell Institute, 2014), 980.

God's next conversation with him is to establish laws that govern—not forbid!—slavery (see Exodus 21:1–11). Implicit in these laws is divine permission for a man to purchase a woman as a slave to whom he has sexual access—and to purchase additional women if, as described by Robert Alter, "he finds anything about [the first] that disinclines him to keep her as a sexual partner."[27] Although Jacob quotes God as declaring that the Nephite men "shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people" (Jacob 2:42; LDS Jacob 2:33), there are no explicit references in Jacob 2 to Nephite advocacy for sex slavery.[28] And yet, modern readers of the Bible—like Jacob—must wrestle with the horrific truth that there is clear scriptural precedent for this; if Nephite men are asking for "mere" polygamy, they are asking for far less than what scripture allows men to do in the name of satisfying their sexual desires.

In short, Jacob's suggestion that the scriptures are on his side when he preaches monogamy does not seem to hold up to even a cursory review of what the Hebrew Bible has to say about polygamy. Rather, sexual laws in Exodus 21 alone clearly allow for a man to have multiple sexual partners—not to mention exercise ownership over those partners. Of course, I am not arguing that Jacob ought to be deferential to these laws! Rather, I believe that his failure to fully engage the conflict between scriptural precedent and his teaching does his audience (whether present at the temple or reading his sermon today) the disservice of papering over the contradictions in scripture that all believers must recognize and respond to.

27. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, *The Five Books of Moses* (W. W. Norton, 2019), 301.

28. That said, see Spencer, *1st Nephi*, 102 on "kidnapping" and "forced marriage" as later Nephite developments that result from failure to establish gender equality among Lehi's immediate descendants.

Jacob Defies Scripture

If Jacob does not fully explore the relationship between the scriptures and the sexual ethic that he promotes, he is more straightforward in articulating a value commitment that he brings into conversation with scripture. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is in keeping with how Christian sexual ethics are typically developed.[29] Jacob Caldwell, writing in the context of American Christians' debates about homosexuality late in the first decade of the twenty-first century, points to a conflict between appeals to *scripture* by conservative churches and appeals to *values* by more progressive churches.[30] While readers' interpretations of scripture can be influenced when they *unconsciously* "import a set of assumptions," other readers more *deliberately* read their values into the text.[31] For example, Lisa Sowle Cahill—herself an established feminist ethicist—describes how Catholic feminist Margaret Farley has deliberately invoked "concepts like moral freedom, common good, and social justice" (among other commitments) to establish her positions on sexual ethics.[32] Argentine theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid has been

29. In the rest of this paragraph, I emphasize the interplay between scripture and specific moral values. For a more thorough exploration of the sources brought to Christian sexual ethics, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics: How to Proceed," in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

30. Jacob Caldwell, "The Viability of Christian Same-Sex Unions: Why Scripturally Normed Faith Communities Must Support Homosexual Relationships," *Theology & Sexuality* 16, no. 1 (2010): 59–76.

31. Diana M. Swancutt, "Sexing the Pauline Body of Christ: Scriptural Sex in the Context of the American Christian Culture War," in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (Fordham University Press, 2006), 66.

32. Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Feminist Theology and Sexual Ethics," in *Just and True Love: Feminism and the Frontiers of Theological Ethics*, ed. Maura A. Ryan and Brian Linnane (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

particularly radical in her insistence on valuing the sexual experiences of marginalized populations in the ethics that she has argued for.[33]

Each of these examples helps illustrate the approach Jacob is taking here, even if his methods for developing sexual ethics are not explicitly stated—or, as I will return to later, his results very elaborate. In the rest of this section, I will describe Jacob's reinterpretation of scripture as driven by a commitment to the value of *minimizing harm.*[34] In this case, I suggest that Jacob is motivated to reinterpret a certain sexual ethic present in the Hebrew Bible because of the harm caused by its application within his community. Countering the Nephite men who claim to have scripture on their side, Jacob describes the "sorrow," "mourning" (Jacob 2:40; LDS Jacob 2:31), "cries" (Jacob 2:41; LDS Jacob 2:32), "broken . . . hearts," and "lost . . . confidence" (Jacob 2:46; LDS Jacob 2:35)—all indications of harm—of the Nephite women and children who have suffered the burden of their husbands and fathers' application of scripture. Jacob's value commitment provides a compelling criterion for when scripture should be reinterpreted; presaging the standard set in Doctrine and Covenants 163, Jacob refuses to allow his audience to "diminish or oppress" others, even when scripture seemingly grants them permission to do so.

In fact, as Salleh and Olsen Hemming have noted, Jacob interprets the Lehite exodus from Jerusalem in "overtly feminist" terms that are

33. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (Routledge, 2000); Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (Routledge, 2003). Cahill, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics," more generally discusses the role of descriptive accounts of human sexuality in developing ethics.

34. This may be unsurprising, given that principles of beneficence (minimizing harm and maximizing benefit) are common in many kinds of ethical framework. However, I also note that harm is a recurring theme in Farley's writing on sexual ethics. For examples, see Cahill, "Feminist Theology and Sexual Ethics"; Margaret Farley, "Sexual Ethics," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen G. Post (Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 4:2418–31; Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (Continuum, 2006).

particularly attentive to harm caused to women.[35] Jacob's references to "sorrow" and "mourning" are inclusive of Nephite women but first reference "the daughters of [God's] people in the land of Jerusalem" (Jacob 2:40; LDS Jacob 2:31)—where "Judah's kings . . . led the way in reducing women to objects of sexual possession and economic status"—and only then mistreated women "in all the lands of [God's] people" (Jacob 2:40; LDS Jacob 2:31).[36] While the latter phrase acknowledges that "damaging marital relationships occur globally," Jacob's references to Jerusalem—and to God's leading Lehi's family away (see Jacob 2:34; LDS Jacob 2:25, Jacob 2:41; LDS Jacob 2:32)—particularly frame this event in terms of freeing women from harm imposed on them within a broader religious culture and its sexual ethic.[37] Indeed, Jacob describes this exodus as God leading "the fair daughters of this people" out of Jerusalem (Jacob 2:42; LDS Jacob 2:32). According to Jacob's account, it is not that "God led Nephi and Lehi out of Jerusalem and the women followed" but rather that "God hears [women's] cries and leads them with revelation"—even if that revelation conflicts with scripture (or how men read it).[38]

Does Jacob Defy Prophets?

Jacob's account of the Lehite exodus is remarkable for how it stands in tension with his brother Nephi's telling of the same story. Although Nephi is elsewhere eager to critique the people of Jerusalem (e.g., II Nephi 11; LDS 2 Nephi 25), he never accuses them of imposing the sexual harm that Jacob mentions in his own critiques. Furthermore, as I have previously mentioned, Jacob's explanation that "commandments [against polygamy] were given to our father Lehi" (Jacob 2:44; LDS Jacob 2:34) would reasonably come as a surprise to a reader of the

35. Salleh and Olsen Hemming, *Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, 111.

36. Spencer, *1st Nephi*, 101.

37. Green, *Jacob*, 88.

38. Salleh and Olsen Hemming, *Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, 111.

Book of Mormon, given that Nephi says nothing about this.[39] Because we have already seen that Jacob is fond of reinterpretation, we may be tempted to assume that Jacob is reading into his family's history feminist messages that were not originally present. Yet, Spencer has suggested that "there's reason to think" the Book of Mormon's problematic treatment of gender "begins in 1 Nephi" with the eponymous prophet (and uses Jacob as a counterexample).[40] For all the evidence of overlap between the ministries of Jacob and Nephi, this is one point where the brothers seem to differ.

Although there is no way to definitively explain this difference, Hardy offers two observations about Nephi that inform a possible reading I will present here. First, based on a number of clues, including Jacob's ambiguous statement that Nephi "anointed a man to be [his successor as] king" (Jacob 1:9; LDS Jacob 1:9), Hardy suggests the possibility that although "Nephi had children and descendants . . . perhaps he only had daughters."[41] Nephi seems to have been anticipating his eventual kingship since before his marriage (e.g., I Nephi 1:94; LDS 1 Nephi 4:29); did he express concern during his father's lifetime that his wife was only producing daughters when he could only imagine a son as heir? I suggest the possibility that Nephi was a sort of Henry VIII figure, one who never considered divorce or execution but who shared with the English monarch the belief that another wife might be the answer to his problems.[42]

While speculative, this reading is reinforced by Hardy's suggestion that Nephi as narrator is less than forthcoming about awkward

39. Spencer—see *1st Nephi*, 104—asks whether this omission is significant, though he does not draw the conclusion that I do here.

40. Spencer, *1st Nephi*, 102.

41. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 48.

42. I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for pointing out that this reading would also lend a different understanding to Jacob's emphasis on "seed" (Jacob 2:39; LDS Jacob 2:30) in his infamous carve out for the possibility that God could command polygamy.

interactions with his father. Most notably, Lehi has nothing to say to Nephi after his violent encounter with Laban, and Nephi seems to be the only man of his generation whose blessing is not recorded before the patriarch's death.[43] In both cases, Hardy compellingly argues that Nephi may have wanted to preserve his own reputation by skipping over his father's criticism of him. Is this why Nephi does not record Lehi's commandment against polygamy? After all, if Laman or Lemuel had been would-be polygamists, it is difficult to imagine Nephi missing the opportunity to further criticize his brothers. Yet, Jacob 2:55 (LDS Jacob 3:6) clarifies that Lamanite society is monogamous;[44] indeed, much of the rhetorical force of this part of Jacob's temple sermon is that for all the Lamanites' supposed wickedness, they get this commandment right.[45] In contrast, Nephi's failure to record Lehi's commandment (or to frame his family's exodus from Jerusalem in the same terms as his brother) suggests a different set of rhetorical goals—one that, consistent with Hardy's observations, avoids bringing up old shames.

Thinking of Nephi in this way could provide additional context to the temple sermon. If the revered king were known to question whether polygamy was really all that bad, it would be unsurprising that his followers might be eager to revive the practice. Jacob's exasperation that

43. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 17–20, 50–51.

44. When referencing these verses, it is worth noting that the Community of Christ RAV does not correct an error originally introduced in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon that rendered "our father" in the printer's manuscript (which frames Lehi as introducing the commandment against polygamy) as "our fathers" (which mistakenly implies an older, wider prohibition). Royal Skousen notes that this is a convenient error in RLDS editions, given the church's traditional hostility toward polygamy; he also raises the question of whether the error's perpetuation was ever a deliberate editorial choice, given the evidence of other RLDS textual corrections based on the printer's manuscript. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 980.

45. Berkey and Spencer, "'Great Cause to Mourn'"; Green, *Jacob*; Spencer, *1st Nephi*.

his audience has forgotten Lehi's commandment could conceal a deeper frustration with his brother for muddying the waters on this point. At the very least, for all the similarities between Jacob and Nephi, Jacob is emphasizing themes in his ministry that his brother does not seem to have prioritized; if, more dramatically, Nephi had sympathies toward polygamy, Jacob finds himself in the unenviable position of defying not only scripture but also his immediate predecessor as prophet.[46]

Implications of Jacob's Sexual Ethic for Book of Mormon Readers

Up to this point, my purpose in this essay has been to argue that the sexual ethic that Jacob presents in his temple sermon is an act of scriptural reinterpretation. In the previous section, I demonstrated that despite Jacob's implications, his sexual ethic is not supported by what the Hebrew Bible has to say on the subject. I also showed how Jacob's commitment to a particular moral value led him to reject scriptural precedent and (re)establish a less harmful sexual ethic.[47]

46. Although Jacob's defense of Nephite women is in many ways laudable, I note here that it should not be spared from critical attention. Spencer (in *1st Nephi* and *Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*) argues for reading two instances of "female resistance" (*1st Nephi*, 107) in Nephi's narration as type scenes, contrasting Sariah's ability to resolve her complaint to Lehi with Nephi and Laman's appropriation of the complaints voiced by women of their generation. The Nephite women's complaints about polygamy could conceivably be a third scene following this trajectory, one where the narrator does not even allow them to voice their own complaint (at least, in his narrative) before intervening. See also Lynn Matthews Anderson's observation that Jacob's defense of the Nephite women uses language implying female weakness: Lynn Matthews Anderson, "Toward a Feminist Interpretation of Latter-day Scripture," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 2 (1994): 185–203.

47. Note, however, that Jacob does not outright reject prophets or scriptures as sources of authority. He clearly invokes Lehi's teaching in his sermon, and his suggestion that scripture supports his stance, while mistaken, can still be seen as an awkward recognition of the importance of scripture.

In this section, I will consider how the specific value identified by Jacob—*minimizing harm*—could serve as an example for readers of the Book of Mormon considering sexual ethics. However, as I have argued above, Jacob is not merely articulating an abstract moral value: He is also bringing it into conversation with scripture and even using it as a lens for reinterpreting scripture. In some ways, this may be the more important lesson from Jacob's temple sermon, and I will therefore focus on possible reconsiderations of sexual ethics that would involve challenging scriptural or prophetic precedent.

It is important to acknowledge that Jacob's example, while useful, is incomplete. In one thorough treatment of Christian sexual ethics, Farley uses harm avoidance as a starting point but quickly specifies that it is insufficient on its own, arguing for the importance of additional values (free consent, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, and social justice).[48] Because Jacob's ethic is built around a single value, it is not difficult to imagine more complex situations where it would be insufficient for answering pressing questions about sexual behavior.[49] Nonetheless, that Jacob's thinking overlaps with Farley's richer framework suggests that it also has potential as a starting point.

In the following sections, I will briefly describe some opportunities for institutions and individuals who accept the Book of Mormon to apply Jacob's example. I expect that my brief exploration is as incomplete as Jacob's sexual ethic—that there are other ways that his example could be applied. As I noted earlier, I will keep this description largely hypothetical and intentionally refrain from advocating for specific

48. Farley, *Just Love*.

49. That said, requiring any argument about sexual ethics (or related reading of scripture) to have universal application may be an unreasonable expectation. For example, Swancutt, in "Sexing the Pauline Body of Christ," provides a reading of Paul that productively challenges Christian assumptions about sexual ethics, but she also argues that it should not provide a universal standard. Likewise, although Farley's *Just Love* is a book-length treatment much more thorough than Jacob's sermon, she also emphasizes its incompleteness.

teachings or policies within specific denominations. Nonetheless, I believe in Lindgren's invitation to "ask questions and listen to [the Book of Mormon's] responses," and I believe that Jacob's responses are particularly worth listening to in the context of sexual ethics.[50]

Rethinking the Importance of Legal Marriage

To begin, I will consider an ethic that insists that any sexual behavior outside of a legal marriage is inherently immoral. There are several ways in which people might violate this ethic, ranging from two strangers having a one-night stand to common-law spouses whose immigration status prevents them from being legally married in their country of residence. Many Book of Mormon readers have drawn on some kind of scriptural or prophetic precedent (some clearer than others) to justify a declaration that all these behaviors are unethical. However, this example demonstrates how Jacob's avoidance of harm is helpful for determining when and how to consider reinterpreting scriptural and prophetic precedent. A carefully developed sexual ethic drawing from Jacob's example could still discourage casual sexual relationships where emotional commitment and, therefore, emotional harm are less salient factors. Yet the same ethic might still determine that it is permissible to allow for clearly committed but not legally binding relationships whose prevention or dissolution in the name of obedience would cause greater harm. Indeed, while demonstrating the importance of bringing values into conversation with scripture, this example also suggests the insufficiency of Jacob's single value on its own. Beyond the question of harm, the possibility that a sexual ethic might treat differently a one-night stand and a common-law marriage necessarily asks about the importance of an underlying principle of commitment (as articulated, for example, in Farley's framework). However, this principle is not explicitly articulated by Jacob in his temple sermon.

50. Lindgren, "Sign or Scripture," 74. Of course, Lindgren also acknowledges that "we will find ourselves arguing with the book's answers much of the time" (75).

Rethinking LGBTQ+ Relationships and Identities

Perhaps the most compelling contemporary application of Jacob's temple sermon in this way is with respect to LGBTQ+ identities and relationships. Most readers of the Book of Mormon espouse a sexual ethic that excludes as illegitimate any romantic or sexual relationship that is not between people of different sexes who respectively conform to certain culturally approved expressions of gender. While some readers might downplay the harm experienced by queer individuals (including their co-religionists) as a result of this sexual ethic, it seems to me that this harm is well documented and, therefore, undeniable. Other readers might apologetically acknowledge this harm but insist that prophetic and scriptural teaching must nevertheless be unfailingly adhered to in developing a sexual ethic.[51] Yet, according to the reading I have proposed here, the lesson of Jacob's temple sermon seems to be the opposite: It was the harm experienced by Nephite women that caused Jacob to (re)introduce a sexual ethic that diminished that harm—even if it meant defying scriptural and prophetic precedent.

Rethinking an Insistence on Monogamy

One interesting consequence of separating the deeper value informing Jacob's sexual ethic from the surface-level commandment he presents is the way that the former can be read *against* the latter. That is, if Jacob's insistence on monogamy is the natural application of *minimizing harm* to that particular context, there remains the possibility that the same value could be applied in a different context to reinterpret Jacob's surface-level insistence on monogamy. To be clear: Polygamy as practiced

51. It is important to note that the biblical prooftexts invoked to condemn LGBTQ+ identities and behaviors represent ancient conceptions of gender, sexuality, and other cultural norms and are therefore not the explicit condemnations that some modern Christians hope them to be; Swancutt, "Sexing the Pauline Body of Christ," and Caldwell, "Viability of Christian Same-Sex Unions," provide some examples, but the limited scope of this paper prevents a more thorough review of the rich literature on this subject.

by the Nephite men in Jacob 2 and by other men in various Restoration contexts has clearly caused harm and may therefore be judged as unethical despite scriptural or prophetic justification (indeed, I have described this as central to Jacob's argument). Yet a deeper reading of Jacob 2 requires Book of Mormon readers to consider the harm that a context-blind insistence on monogamy could potentially cause within relationships and families that do not conform to this teaching. Furthermore, this deeper reading even leaves open the possibility that a non-monogamous relationship that does not cause harm could be recognized as ethical despite Jacob's emphasis on monogamy. As previously noted, Jacob's sexual ethic is incomplete—if it is possible to distinguish acceptable non-monogamous relationships from unacceptable ones, it would presumably be necessary to establish other values first. Yet if Jacob's argument is, indeed, based on an underlying value rather than a straightforward commandment, his sexual ethic is perhaps not as universally insistent on monogamy as has traditionally been assumed.

Conclusion

In a 2003 address to the Mormon History Association, Grant McMurray—then serving as Community of Christ's prophet-president—warned Book of Mormon readers against "replacing a stifling biblical fundamentalism . . . with one of our own only somewhat expanded variety."[52] McMurray's point was that individuals and denominations who accept Restoration scripture's radical challenging of the established Christian canon miss the point if they themselves are unwilling to challenge the teachings of those same Restoration scriptures. In this article, I have hoped to demonstrate that a similar teaching is found within the Book of Mormon itself. Jacob does not describe his temple sermon as an act

52. W. Grant McMurray, "A 'Goodly Heritage' in a Time of Transformation: History and Identity in the Community of Christ," *Journal of Mormon History* 30, no. 1 (2004): 72.

of reinterpretation—I wonder if he is himself too uncomfortable with the idea to do so. Nonetheless, as I have argued, Jacob's teachings at the Nephite temple can be understood as a deliberate act of reinterpretation and as one element of a broader pattern of reinterpretation throughout his ministry.

Jacob's lesson on reinterpreting scripture is particularly important as a model for rethinking sexual ethics. Many contemporary readers of the Book of Mormon—and even more readers of the Bible—appeal to a purportedly straightforward and consistent scriptural precedent to uphold a "traditional" sexual ethic, even if that ethic can be demonstrated to cause harm. Jacob invites us to see things differently; indeed, few of the Book of Mormon or Bible readers who argue for that "traditional" ethic would disagree with Jacob's rejection of the Hebrew Bible's permissiveness in terms of polygamy and sex slavery. Understanding that this rejection *is* a reinterpretation invites us to further follow Jacob's example by engaging in value-driven reading of scripture and rethinking of sexual ethic for the contexts that we live and worship in. Perhaps more than anything, it is Jacob's sensitivity to the harm experienced by his people that ought to capture the attention of Book of Mormon readers. He gives us prophetic permission to prioritize that sensitivity above tradition and thereby opens the door for us to practice our discipleship in new ways.

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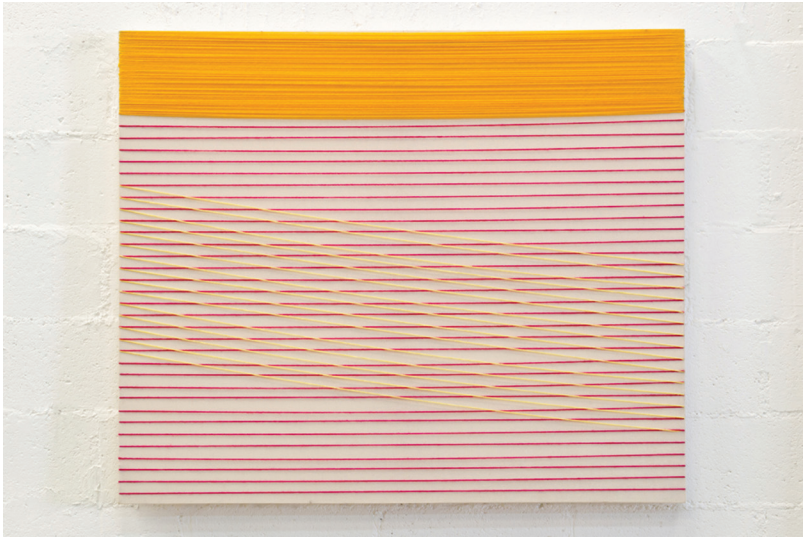

Georgina Bringas, *Trayecto de Minimo Recorrido 1* (2012),
cotton thread on fabric, 47″ x 39″
(image courtesy of Georgina Bringas)

WHY THE LATTER-DAY SAINT COMMUNITY CAN TRUST SCIENCE (IN THE SAME WAY SCIENTISTS DO)

Steven L. Peck

On June 30, 1860, Samuel Wilberforce, a fiery Anglican bishop, addressed the British Science Association at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History on the subject of Darwin's recent publication, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. This was the famous encounter between Bishop Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley, Darwin's "Bulldog," in which the bishop inquired of Huxley whether it was from his mother's or his father's side that he was descended from a monkey? And Huxley quipped back something like, "Better a monkey than a bishop who used his talents to obscure the truth." There might be some surprise to learn that Wilberforce had not been arguing from a religious perspective that the book was dangerous (although there may have been an element of that). He was arguing it was bad science and that the facts did not warrant the conclusions.

Something else happened at the meeting worth noting. During the gathering, an old man stood and held over his head a large, weathered copy of the Bible. He begged the audience to "believe God rather than man," telling the assembled spectators that *The Origin* had given him "acutest pain."[1] The audience shouted for him to be silent and sit down.[2]

1. Derek Barlow, "The Devil Within: Evolution of a Tragedy," *Weather* 52, no. 11 (1997): 338. *Weather* is a publication of the Royal Meteorological Society.

2. Diane B. Paul, John Stenhouse, and Hamish G. Spencer, "The Two Faces of Robert FitzRoy, Captain of HMS *Beagle* and Governor of New Zealand," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 88, no. 3 (2013): 219–25, https://doi.org/10.1086/671485.

The man was Robert FitzRoy, a former member of parliament, a one-time governor of New Zealand, and, in his most celebrated role, the captain of the history-changing expedition of the HMS *Beagle*, aboard which Darwin had his first intimations of the evolutionary theory that would change the world. Since his famous voyage, FitzRoy had become a biblical literalist. Still a man of science and member of the Royal Society at the time of this incident, he felt a growing discomfort at the implications of his former companion's book that threatened his view of God and the inerrancy of the Genesis accounts of the Creation and the Great Flood.

He would not be alone. Darwin's book became one of the principal targets in the rise of biblical fundamentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Darwin's *Origin* seemed to intrude on the territory mapped out as the provenance of God's creation. As a result, the relationship between science and religion has been and continues to be complex and often fraught. Recently, however, some scientists who embrace both science and religion have begun to argue that this conflict model is unnecessary.[3]

3. For more information, see M. Elizabeth Barnes, James Elser, and Sara E. Brownell, "Impact of a Short Evolution Module on Students' Perceived Conflict Between Religion and Evolution," *American Biology Teacher* 79, no. 2 (2017): 104–11; William S. Bradshaw, Andrea J. Phillips, Seth M. Bybee, Richard A. Gill, Steven L. Peck, and Jamie L. Jensen, "A Longitudinal Study of Attitudes Toward Evolution Among Undergraduates Who Are Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *PLOS One* 13, no. 11 (2018): e0205798, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205798; Jamie L. Jensen, Katie F. Manwaring, Richard A. Gill, Richard S. Sudweeks, Randall S. Davies, et al., "Religious Affiliation and Religiosity and Their Impact on Scientific Beliefs in the United States," *BioScience* 69, no. 4 (2019): 292–304, https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biz014; Katie F. Manwaring, Jamie L. Jensen, Richard A. Gill, Richard R. Sudweeks, Randall S. Davies, and Seth M. Bybee, "Scientific Reasoning Ability Does Not Predict Scientific Views on Evolution Among Religious Individuals," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 11, no. 2 (2018): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12052-018-0076-8; Steven L. Peck, *Science the Key to Theology* (BCC Press, 2017); Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz, *The Challenge of Evolution to*

To consider this conflict more thoroughly, a more complete understanding of science as practiced in the twenty-first century is useful. Often, science gets reduced to this simple four-step method: (1) find a falsifiable hypothesis; (2) test that hypothesis through experimental methods designed to detect or expose whether the hypothesis is false; (3) if the experiment fails to confirm, reject the hypothesis and start again at (1); or (4) try another experiment and see if one can reject the hypothesis this time. As it turns out, however, this is a far cry from the way science is practiced.

Scientific practice is more nuanced than this simple model would suggest. Science, although it has ancient origins, is an invention that appeared from investigative developments beginning in the sixteenth century and extending into the mid-eighteenth century. It framed a set of practices and attitudes that would generate knowledge about the physical universe.[4] It is a complex human activity that demands the very best humans have to offer in terms of trying to understand the world in all its complexity and generate knowledge about the physical world. Here's a short list of what science is: a human social activity based upon programs of study; the collective agreement on what counts as evidence;[5] research paradigms that define the theories and gather and present evidence obtained through various natural and apparatus-assisted observations or experimental manipulation of the same; the willingness to be open to criticism and critique by others who are

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Religion, Elements in the Philosophy of Biology (Cambridge University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108685436; and Ethan E. R. Tolman, D. G. Ferguson, M. Mann, A. M. Cordero, and J. L. Jensen, "Reconciling Evolution: Evidence from a Biology and Theology Course," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 13, no. 19 (2020): 1–8.

4. David Wootton, *The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution* (Penguin, 2015).

5. Michael Strevens, *The Knowledge Machine: How Irrationality Created Modern Science* (Liveright, 2020), 119.

qualified to examine what a researcher and those working with her have done;[6] a commitment to uncertainty;[7] the skeptical examination of the work that has proceeded and motivated what's been done before; years of education, training, and apprenticeships; and then presenting that work in papers that are scrutinized by peers and publicly published, with all comers able to examine the merits of all aspects of the science engaged to create the paper.[8] As a human enterprise, science is committed to certain values and subject to all the strengths and weaknesses that define what it means to be human—for example, bias, conceptual blindness, fear of being wrong, holding to certain opinions long after they should have been abandoned, and all the other limitations and missteps found in being human. I've done a bit of hand-waving, so let me give some details to help structure what I've just claimed for an abstract of what science entails, at least in part. In what follows, for ease or readability, "science" is used as a personified shorthand for what the practice of science entails. For example, "Science says" should be read as general practices and activities of trained scientists, not as a free-floating entity dictating scientific practices.

Science as a Way of Knowing?

It is helpful to pause in order to examine what science is not. It is not a formal monolithic activity with clear boundaries, procedures, and methods. Science is not a method, although it embraces certain methods. It is not a set of procedures that if one unfailingly follows, then one is doing science. It is not just a precise way of doing experiments, testing hypotheses, or framing questions, although all these things play a role.

6. Jonathan P. Tennant, "The State of the Art in Peer Review," *FEMS Microbiology Letters* 365, no. 19 (2018): fny204, https://doi.org/10.1093/femsle/fny204.

7. Kostas Kampourakis and Kevin McCain, *Uncertainty: How It Makes Science Advance* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

8. Naomi Oreskes, *Why Trust Science?* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 56.

Science is a social activity performed by humans for humans that carries with it certain cognitive, perspectival, and other limitations from which we cannot escape.[9] We are limited creatures in so many ways. To ignore this would be profound hubris. In addition, science is also a set of ethical practices that are committed to a careful examination of the world and its processes. It is this set of ethical practices that garner trust in its findings.[10]

In these ways, being a scientist is, in part, taking a particular ethical stance toward the world, with specific assumptions and values that condition your activities. These provide an agreed-upon certification of your findings. Science has been wildly productive, with major advancements in everything to which it has turned its attention, from establishing a basic understanding of how the large-scale universe works to discovering important insights into the microworld of quarks and electrons. Scientific practices have helped create everything from cell phones to frozen peas.[11] Not that this productivity has been a linear and constantly forward march in the advancement of knowledge. It has not been. Setbacks are common, reversals abundant, missteps and dead ends almost the order of the day. But despite these, science continues to advance, sometimes painstakingly slow of pace, but on it goes. Why is that? Why does it work so well?

To understand science, we must first understand its values, tools, assumptions, and guiding ethics. Practicing scientists generally hold

9. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2012); Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, trans. Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton (University of Chicago Press, 1979); Helen E. Longino, *The Fate of Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

10. Robert T. Pennock, *An Instinct for Truth: Curiosity and the Moral Character of Science* (MIT Press, 2019).

11. Susan Lindee, "The Epistemology of Frozen Peas: Innocence, Violence, and Everyday Trust in Twentieth-Century Science," in Oreskes, *Why Trust Science?*, 163–80.

that the universe is real and that the behavior of its constituting objects and processes can be rationally described with representations that aim at shedding light on that reality. In some fields, like physics and chemistry, there are law-like descriptions of nature. In others, like biology, the focus is on regularities and patterns that we find repeated in the natural world. These systems might be deterministic, bathed in chaos, or statistical distributions of genuinely random variables, but there are assumed to be rules we can discern and discover.

Values of Science

Truth

Science embraces several values that speak to our ability to confirm that we have an adequate grasp (always incomplete) on the things we study. Its primary value is truth. Uncovering the reality that underlies the objects and processes inhabiting the world, and getting the story right insofar as is possible given the limits of our perceptual abilities, is the target of the scientific enterprise. Science seeks knowledge that creates a match between our understanding of the world and whatever reality underlies our capacities for discovery. This is reflected nicely in Doctrine and Covenants 93:24: "And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come." In science, this is defined as a representation that reflects an aspect of the world that we are interested in understanding more fully. Science is committed to lining up our beliefs about the world with ontological realities or, as just stated, "things as they are."

Explanation, Prediction, and Objectivity

Objectivity embraces the idea that different observers can be led to the same conclusions about facts that scientific studies are trying to elucidate. If one scientist discovers how far a tsetse fly can move in certain types of savanna river forests in Burkina Faso, another independent investigator will come to the same conclusion about flight distances

under the same conditions. Conversely, subjective truths broker more flexible and personal perspectives. For example, we might disagree on the beauty of a sunset, the worth of a painting hanging in the Musée d'Orsay, or how we have come to a testimony of the Book of Mormon. Objectivity is described nicely by John Nolt: "Objectivity is a collection of virtues that aim to transcend self-centeredness toward a wider and truer understanding. To be objective is, among other things, to: seek to understand and compensate for one's own prejudices; accept the findings of adequately conducted scientific research; strive for consistency; suspend judgment on factual issues when the evidence is inconclusive; cultivate awareness of your own fallibility; and seriously consider the well-informed opinions of others."[12]

Objectivity is related to two other values of science: causal explanation and prediction. If the rules we propose are operating in the universe, we should be able to confirm them by making predictions about the phenomena we study. If we have causal explanations for the way things behave, then those explanations should allow repeatable and useful manipulations by others based on the causal structure we propose.[13]

Simplicity

Another value of science is simplicity of explanation. Simple explanations tend to be more useful and make it easier to find principal regularities and patterns. For example, if I want to explain the relationship between a volume of gas, its temperature, and the pressure that it exerts, I might try to simulate the momentum of every atom present and calculate the impacts of those moving particles on the container, which creates pressure. This might explain the entire process, but it is easier to

12. John Nolt, *Environmental Ethics for the Long Term: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2015), 31.

13. Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 190–201.

use the equation $P = \rho RT$, which gives the pressure P as a relationship between ρ the density, a universal constant R, and the temperature T. The equation is more parsimonious than a massive accounting of each and every atom in the container and therefore favored in most cases. If there are two explanations for the same phenomenon, the simpler is preferred if both capture all of the relevant facts, as in this equation capturing pressure exerted by a gas.

Repeatability

Repeatability captures a value based on the assumption that the rules that structure the universe hold anywhere in the universe where similar conditions obtain. Repeatability should be achievable at both different times (if my experiment works today, all things being equal, it should work tomorrow) and diverse locations (other researchers should get the same result when they try it under the same conditions—even if they live on different planets located on opposite sides of the galaxy).

Fallibility

Science values the ability to falsify predictions and explanations. When a scientist is exploring some aspect of the world, it is best practice to make some prediction in the form of a hypothesis about what they expect. If a hypothesis is falsifiable, when it is not rejected through some appropriate test, it lends some credence that the hypothesis might be on the right track. A rejection is evidence that the hypothesis is false.

Keep in mind, however, when it is not rejected, scientists often speak of the hypothesis not as being true but of having not been disconfirmed yet. It is also not usually just a matter of rejecting it out of hand. If a well-confirmed hypothesis fails a particular test, usually the matter is not put to rest on that instance alone. Other things could have gone wrong. The apparatus the experimenter was using might not have been set up properly; a student might have been singing loudly in the lab, causing vibrations unaccounted for; or a loose rat might have crept in and made some mischief. There are usually several ancillary

hypotheses and assumptions that go into any experimental setup. One must be careful that it was not one of these other possibilities that is responsible for the experiment's failure to confirm a hypothesis.

Diversity

Another value is diversity.[14] It has been found repeatedly that diversity of race, gender, or age, along with other aspects of human diversity, add to the success, originality, and advancement of science.[15] Science relies on creativity. Finding questions often turns out to be more important to the enterprise of science than the answers that it ultimately provides. Diversity probes problems with morevaried eyes, leading to better questions and ways of thinking.

Tools of Science

To realize the values above, science uses a standard set of tools. These have been embraced largely for pragmatic reasons: they work. Let's look at some of the most common tools used by a number of disciplines in science. This is not an exhaustive list.

Experimentation

Roger Bacon is credited with one of the first articulations of science's most ubiquitous tool—experimentation. The world is complex, but if one can simplify it enough that much of the complexity is tamed, eliminated, and controlled; if all the extraneous influences on the system are handled; and if one can manipulate just a few of the suspected causes and observe their effects, greater clarity on the role those causes play

14. Oreskes, *Why Trust Science?*, 55–59.

15. Laurel Smith-Doerr, Sharla N. Alegria, and Timothy Sacco, "How Diversity Matters in the US Science and Engineering Workforce: A Critical Review Considering Integration in Teams, Fields, and Organizational Contexts," *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 3 (2017): 139–53, https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2017.142.

can be ascertained. This is complicated to be sure, but experimentation has been one of the hallmarks of good science. By controlling all the important variables possible, randomizing what cannot be controlled, and noting the resulting effects, scientists have been able to verify some causal aspect of the world. Again, the way this typically proceeds is that one sets up experiments, based on falsifiable hypotheses, and tries to find ways to reject those hypotheses. The longer an individual hypothesis survives under this assault of repeated attempts to falsify it, the more warrant one has to suspect it is true.

Notice there is a severe weakness in this. When we abstract and isolate processes, we never get the full story because often—and, in fact, I'd argue usually—the processes we isolate do not behave the same way they would in the presence of all the variables we restricted to make the experiment manageable. Nancy Cartwright has written an influential book on the philosophy of science, *How the Laws of Physics Lie*.[16] She points out that even in the most law-like processes, we only get information about the particular regularities we are studying in a given situation. The laws we discern are likely only incomplete abstractions of processes reflecting multiple influences. She prefers the idea of regularities and capacities rather than "laws." Experiments always leave things out, so we are left with incomplete information. Still, these experiments can be useful. They can offer a high probability of representing a sound way to view the world, but it must be recognized that the factors being investigated might have other stories to tell in a different set of circumstances or under the influence of a larger set of factors.

This suggests we should have some humility in the presence of our experiments, but it does not let us get away with the sort of skepticism that would allow us to label it all worthless or uninformative. A well-designed experiment should eliminate many possibilities. If I drop cannonballs from towers and measure the rate of acceleration under

16. Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (Oxford University Press, 1983).

gravity, it is not advisable to argue we've learned nothing about gravity because there might be other forces at play—for example, nearby mountains, wind, surface anomalies on the cannonballs, a certain spin on the hunk of metal, inaccuracies in our timing device, and so on and on. Although we don't get the full picture, we still learn something about gravity. The skeptical claim that we have learned nothing because we did not capture everything is wrong. We have learned much about the general way gravity works under *ceteris paribus* (all things being equal) conditions as well as about the overall tendencies of things in a gravitational field. We also get a sense in the measurement of error about how much deviance from the norm we can expect. All of this contributes to our knowledge of gravity.

Observation

Observation is also critical to science, especially for systems to which we do not have direct access, like distant stars and galaxies. In these kinds of studies, the variables are not controllable in the same sense as in a typical laboratory experiment. For these systems, patterns are noted and quantified. Hypotheses take the form of speculating about how processes create the pattern, then looking for observations that support that possibility. For example, a hypothesis on how a galaxy of a particular kind forms might be confirmed by further observations that subsequently find a galaxy of the type predicted. As such are located, they provide evidence that a researcher is onto something. As further confirmatory observations of galaxies of the predicted type are found floating in the cosmos, they add weight to the hypothesis. Evolution by natural selection is like this. Such evolution is one of our most well-established theories and has contributed more to our understanding of life than any other single idea in the life sciences. Darwin predicted that fossils would continue to be found in a certain order from most primitive to more advanced, and that species ought to be more closely related if they are not separated by great distances from each other.

DNA as the genetic code of life on earth was a vital discovery confirming evolutionary descent from common ancestors. Geology and many of the ecological sciences also rely on this kind of observation and prediction strategy.

Modeling

Modeling is an important tool in science. It is often a form of theory generation and has been highly productive. Isaac Newton, for example, by making simple assumptions, was able to model the motion of heavenly bodies and make stunningly accurate predictions of planetary motion with some simple equations. Mathematical modeling (and its more recent sister tool, computer simulation modeling) has been very useful in performing quantitative experiments in systems that would be too messy otherwise. Modeling brings together observation and experimentation in important ways, allowing clearer mathematical, statistical, and other quantitative assessments of the universe's behavior.

Peer Review

Peer review is one of the chief tools that help science maintain its robustness and productivity. When a scientific paper is ready to be exposed to the world, the editor of a journal will send it to several others (usually three to five) in the same disciplinary area, often to those with whom the paper's authors are intellectually in disagreement, to evaluate the scientific work displayed in the paper. The reviewers will examine the methods to make sure institutional norms were observed or, if they were not, to validate the reasons for deviation (not everything is neat in science, and sometimes innovative approaches are necessary). The reviewers will also examine models used, how the data were analyzed, the rigor of the reasoning used by the researchers to argue for their conclusions, and how those conclusions impact and improve the discipline. Studies found wanting in any of these areas or findings that make trivial or too minor advances are rejected or sent back to the

author for clarifications or improvements, sometimes with the request for more data to be gathered. This can be a brutal process, but this policing ensures that best practices are followed and that each paper makes a genuine contribution to advancing open questions within the discipline.

The process is not perfect. Friends can end up as reviewers, despite the process being blind, and often one can recognize who the paper's author is from familiarity with their previous papers and not apply the rigor expected from peer reviewers. Detractors from a body of work might argue against a paper that threatens their own position. Or reviewers might not understand the discipline well enough to make a good assessment. But overall, peer review provides a screen that prohibits unworthy work from calling itself science. High-prestige journals might accept only from 2 to 5 percent of those submitted, with lower-regarded journals accepting 50 percent of papers offered. This creates a healthy hierarchy of scientific worth that militates against mediocrity. Often the number and prestige of journals in which one publishes weighs in academic advancement and retention decisions. This creates an environment in which scientists are highly motivated to produce excellent work that passes the significant hurdles that scientific claims need to leap to enter scientific discourse.

A Final Word on Epistemological Stances in Science: How Science Creates Knowledge

Ultimately science is about gaining knowledge. Jürgen Renn provides a description of how knowledge is acquired, used, and stored:

> Knowledge is a problem-solving potential, that is, the capacity of an individual or a group to solve problems and to mentally anticipate corresponding actions. Knowledge is based on experience and encoded in mental, material, and social structures. It is generated by reflection on environmentally embedded actions and serves as a potential for

> the anticipation and control of actions. Knowledge is internally represented by cognitive structures that enable the connection between past and current experiences. It is shaped (but not determined) by the material culture and existing social relations, and ultimately arises from experiences accumulated in socially constrained material practices.[17]

Two perspectives of scientific engagement with the world are often discussed, each with different assumptions about how science works.

Antirealism

One is constructive empiricism. Bas van Fraassen, one of the principal articulators of this view, argues that deep reality is largely unknowable; our models of things like subatomic structure are constructions that allow us to work with whatever realities underlie the observable universe, including observable with instruments.[18] He argues that when we represent electrons in our scientific models, we are only talking about those representations, not actual entities. This view suggests that if, for example, we encountered aliens with very different brains and methods of observation, they might have a different view of the subatomic world of electrons than we do. Their science of electrons might do all the same work that our electron-talk does.[19] They may look at our periodic table of elements and be completely baffled by what we are doing but have, what seems to us, an equally baffling conception of chemistry that works just as well for them, but one of which we can make neither heads nor tails. Our science would play the same role in making explanations

17. Jürgen Renn, *The Evolution of Knowledge: Rethinking Science for the Anthropocene* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 64.

18. Bas C. van Fraassen, *Scientific Representation: Paradoxes of Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 269–90.

19. Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 74–75.

and predictions as theirs, but theirs conceives of a universe made of radically different entities and processes.[20]

Realism

The second view, and more common among scientists like biologists, geologists, and engineers, is scientific realism. This is the view that, while our representations are always imperfect, they are capturing the truth of an underlying reality. All representations are about something, and in science we hope that we are capturing an accurate, or at least adequate, aspect of the physical world. When we try to represent a rabbit population in our model of the things we see while studying conies in the field, we aim to talk about aspects of genuine rabbit populations, not our model.

Methodological Physicalism

Another assumption science makes is methodological physicalism—that the things we have chosen to study have causal explanations involving matter and its associated fields, such as electromagnetic fields, and that data comes from a physical world that is measurable and objectively observable. Science assumes that there is a world and that its processes, regularities, patterns, capacities, fields, and materials act in ways such that we can discover rules of conduct for the stuff of the universe. By assuming methodological physicalism, science puts up front its stance that the physical world is causally constructed and that we can gain knowledge about the way it works. Science assumes that no ghosts or fairies or other ethereal powers act on the material aspects of

20. Emiliano Trizio, "How Many Sciences for One World? Contingency and the Success of Science," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39, no. 2 (2008): 253–58, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2008.03.017. Also see this collection of explorations of science that is contingent on its historical or developmental path: Léna Soler, Emiliano Trizio, and Andrew Pickering, eds., *Science as It Could Have Been: Discussing the Contingency/Inevitability Problem* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

the universe. This assumption is critical for science. If there are divine or genuinely miraculous influences, then they cannot be investigated by science and indeed should not be. However, a caveat is warranted: If there are phenomena in need of explanation, sometimes physical causes might not appear readily at hand, and some humility and patience might be necessary before a physical explanation is proffered. For example, an extrasolar object recently whizzed through our solar system on its journey through interstellar space. Dubbed ʻOumuamua, it had strange behavior not seen before in comets or asteroids. Avi Loeb, former chair of Harvard's astronomy department, prematurely declared the only explanation was an alien spacecraft and wrote a popular book on the subject.[21] However, more patient scientists, working with the data collected from the object as it passed by, made a detailed case that a fragment of a Pluto-like dwarf planet containing methane ice rather than water ice completely explained all of the strange behavior of ʻOumuamua.[22] The mystery was solved based on what we know about the universe without resorting to extraordinary and unlikely claims.

Do not confuse methodological physicalism with ontological physicalism, however. The latter assumes that material forces are the only kind of influences that there are—everything that does or can exist is only matter in motion and its associated fields. Methodological physicalism, in contrast, just uses physicalism as a working assumption to allow science to proceed. However, keep in mind that Latter-day Saints should be completely comfortable using methodological physicalism,

21. Avi Loeb, *Extraterrestrial: The First Sign of Intelligent Life beyond Earth* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021).

22. Alan P. Jackson and Steven J. Desch. "1I/ʻOumuamua as an N2 Ice Fragment of an Exo-Pluto Surface: I. Size and Compositional Constraints," *Journal of Geophysical Research: Planets* 126, no. 5 (2021): e2020JE006706, https://doi.org/10.1029/2020JE006706; Steven J. Desch and Alan P. Jackson, "1I/ʻOumuamua as an N2 Ice Fragment of an Exo-Pluto Surface II. Generation of N2 Ice Fragments and the Origin of ʻOumuamua," *Journal of Geophysical Research: Planets* 126, no. 5 (2021): e2020JE006807, https://doi.org/10.1029/2020JE006807.

because they make the same assumption as science in a host of daily activities. I would wager almost everyone fully expects their mechanic to be such a physicalist. When someone takes their car in to find out why it is not running, they are counting on the mechanic to talk in terms of pistons, carburators, belts, and straightforward mechanical causes of the problem. If the mechanic repairing the car says the problem is interstitial elves from the land of Fantomia, the customer would likely find a new mechanic. When a customer takes a car in for service, they expect it to be handled using only methodological physicalism. So do we in science. This does not mean that things like God, angels, divine interventions, blessings, or the grace we find in our relationship with God are not real. It just means science is not an appropriate way to study these things. They are outside its domain of concern. Harvard paleontologist Steven J. Gould called this idea nonoverlapping magisterium, which captures the idea that science and religion are often focused on different concerns.[23]

Scientific Ethics

To understand science, one must examine the ethical stances that undergird its activities. The normative activities of science condition how discovery proceeds. It is these, I believe, that give science its power to discover truths about the world and are responsible for the progress we see in science. There are three main stances I want to highlight: (1) Scientists ought to have openness to revision and to hold all results as tentative, allowing for the possibility that findings might be revised in light of new data or better analyses; (2) Scientists ought to be a part of discipline-specific research programs that provide institutional standards of rigor and training among its disciplines; and (3) All results should, after peer review, be archived in scientific journals that provide

23. Steven Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (Ballantine Books, 1999), 5–59.

details on all aspects of scientific research. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Transparency and Openness to Revision

Scientists are required to share their findings. All data and their analyses are open for inspection—for public and institutional review—once claims have been made in an appropriate scientific venue. This means that scientists are obligated to reveal how the data were obtained, what experimental protocols were used, how models were constructed and implemented, and how information was statistically analyzed. In short, the procedures for making scientific claims ought to be replicable by other competent scientists. Often, once data are published, they should be made available to other researchers qualified to understand the data, its generation, and its analysis, or at least archived so that such can be done at a later time if desired. Sometimes there are proprietary issues with data, such as when aspects of a scientist's own analyses might not be completed or when there are patent or security concerns that keep data from being released. This does not mean that hard-won data must be handed over to people who do not have the proper tools for their interpretation. This is especially true when complex datasets are used for multiple analyses, and papers may continue to be written for years on the same dataset. But for the most part, it should be crystal clear what went into making any scientific claim. This openness means that scientific findings never arise out of a black box that hides key features about where the claims come from. Another aspect of openness in science is revealing a research project's sources of funding. This helps ensure there are no hidden biases or influences that might affect outcomes. In addition, there is an especially strong effort to examine startling findings to ensure they are not anomalous and to find and expose attempts at fraud like the one perpetrated in the vaccine-autism deception.[24]

24. Sarah Geoghegan, Kevin P. O'Callaghan, and Paul A. Offit, "Vaccine Safety: Myths and Misinformation," *Frontiers in Microbiology* 11 (2020): 2.

All scientific claims are tentative. This means that scientific claims are continually challenged, reformulated, refined, and nuanced as new studies are made. Because science is a human activity, this is a messy process. People have favorite theories, perspectives, and biases. But as more eyes examine a problem, there is a trend toward progress and a better understanding of the world. In fact, nineteenth-century philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce argued that truth was just the asymptotic convergence of scientists doing their work and coming to an agreement.[25]

Maintenance of Research Programs

All science takes place within disciplinary research programs. These programs often have worldwide scope and stretch across multiple institutions such as schools, universities, private companies, and governmental agencies. These programs establish best practices for the way science is done within a given discipline. These practices are often established after long periods of trial and error and establish traditions of laboratory procedures that have been shown to produce robust scientific results.

These programs also establish how students are trained, apprenticed, and credentialed. These institutions dictate the nature of the formal, rigorous training found in obtaining advanced degrees. Also policed within programs is what counts as proper data gathering protocols, standards of exactness and cleanliness, which instruments are used and how they are calibrated, what constitutes a proper statistical data analysis, and what is to be reported in a standard scientific journal paper under assurances that disciplinary norms have been followed.

There is a temptation among those not involved in science to see these institutional and program boundaries as providing conditions

25. Charles Sanders Peirce, *Illustrations of the Logic of Science*, ed. Cornelis de Waal (Open Court, 2014), 79–107; Francis E. Reilly, *Charles Peirce's Theory of Scientific Method* (Fordham University Press, 1970).

to foster "groupthink." This is possible, and that is not an unreasonable worry. There are examples where such occurs. For well-established research programs, it is often hard to introduce revolutionary thinking that undermines entrenched ideas. For example, when continental drift theory was introduced and data analyses were slowly eating at the boundaries of the idea that continents are static and immobile, there was considerable resistance to change from dominant geological research programs.[26]

Two things protect research programs from this kind of conspiratorial sameness. First, research programs are in constant competition for things like funding, students, research grants, and space in peer-reviewed publications. This creates an interesting dynamic of collaboration and competition that requires constant disciplinary refinement and advancement and that improves every aspect of the scientific enterprise. A Darwinian selection-like process ensures that those institutions and individuals that are most innovative, productive, and able to show progress receive the lion's share of scientific research and prestige. Those whose inventiveness allows them to find new results and discoveries or those who can take down prevailing paradigms and expose wrongheaded ideas are generally rewarded with more opportunities for doing science. This selection process ensures that research programs are never static and are constantly making advances that improve our understanding of the world. In fact, one of the important ways that pseudoscience is recognized is by a static research program. For example, when was the last time an academic journal reported that someone discovered a new method or finding or analysis that improved astrological forecasts?

Second, programs are usually self-correcting. When things do not work right, it is from within the institution that corrections are likely to come. They are most aware of problems, and when those problems

26. Oreskes, *Why Trust Science?*, 80–87.

become obvious enough, investigations specific to the problems are explored. Because institutions are the ones with relevant expertise and are closest to the methods and the data, it is here that problems are most often recognized, tackled, and corrected. The many eyes on the scientific enterprise tend to uncover biases and methodological mistakes.

This is not to say research programs are faultless. They do have challenges. It is often hard to break into their purview with innovative ideas or novel insights and to be recognized if one is tackling problems outside of disciplinary boundaries. These considerations require discussion and acknowledgment within the scientific community.

Archiving

All results, after being peer reviewed, should be archived in scientific journals. This gives access to current researchers and future scientists about what data previous scientists have collected and analyzed. This is how ideas recorded are not lost to history. This is where our arguments, discussions, and thoughts are preserved in perpetuity. This allows scientists to build knowledge and ensure it is maintained and curated in ways such that hard-earned information is not lost. Libraries and data archives play a vital role in all aspects of human knowledge generation. In science this is no exception. Funding for this effort must be maintained if science is to remain the vital practice that it is to culture and society.

Conclusions

I have left out many things in my overview of science. A short list might include creativity, bouncing ideas off others near the water fountain, laboratory manuals, internships, education, pondering, accidents, serendipity, dreams, networking, long hikes in cool mountains, skepticism, doubt, belief, humility, reading groups, staying abreast of the literature, attending scientific meetings to report new work, offering new context or critique for older work, friends, being able to interrogate questions

on a long-held stance, imagination, integrating knowledge, detractors, understanding other fields, training students, keeping a notebook both formal and informal, and many, many other things that define what it means to be a scientist.

Science, even with all its imperfections, is the best thing people have invented to explain the natural world. Pillars of science—including evolution, major branches of medicine, and even Einstein's theory of relativity—are well established and unlikely to be overturned. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have nothing to fear from good science. I have argued that good science can be trusted by members of the Church at least as much as by scientists.[27] Science is always skeptical in the sense of embracing its findings tentatively, but enthusiastically when warranted, as they show us how to make a reasonable wager about how the world works.

27. Peck, *Science the Key to Theology*.

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LATTER-DAY SAINTS MEMBERSHIP GROWTH IN HAITI, 1978–2018[1]

Henri Gooren

Introduction: The End of Mormon Membership Growth in Latin America?

In 1984, sociologist of religion Rodney Stark predicted there could be 267 million Mormons in the world by 2080, after extrapolating the 1982–1983 Latter-day Saints (LDS) growth rates into the far future. "His optimistic projections have so warmed the hearts of the faithful that they are often quoted over the pulpit, even in general conference now and then," Armand Mauss dryly noted.[2] Stark argued that this growth explosion offered scholars a unique opportunity to witness the emergence of a new world religion that could achieve a following comparable to other major world religions.[3] Forty years later seems a good time to check up on Stark's scholarly prophecy. By year-end 2024, there

1. An earlier version of this article benefited much from the detailed critical comments and suggestions by Carter Charles, Alan Epstein, Sara Rahmani, and David Stewart. This thoroughly revised version was again critically reviewed by Carter Charles, and also by Amaechi Okafor—many thanks! Many thanks also to Jennifer Huss Basquiat for sharing her PhD thesis and to the two anonymous peer reviewers recruited by *Dialogue*, who did an excellent job.

2. Armand L. Mauss, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (1996): 1–7.

3. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 1 (1984): 18–27, updated in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

were 17.5 million Mormons worldwide.[4] After decades of spectacular membership growth, LDS expansion stagnated around 2000–2005 for two main reasons: (1) because the Church struggles to recruit new members and (2) because it struggles to retain the members who were born into the faith or converted to it later in life.

Nowhere is the current Mormon membership stagnation more visible than in Latin America. Massive Mormon membership growth occurred across the continent in the 1970s and especially the 1980s. But then something strange happened. Mormon membership growth slowly tapered off in the 1990s and virtually ended in almost all Latin American countries after 2000 (see table 1). What happened? And why did it happen?

One obvious indicator of Mormon expansion in Latin America is the average annual growth rate (AAGR) for its membership in each country. For 2016–2017, the Mormon AAGR was in the negative (Puerto Rico) to +2.5% range for no less than sixteen of the twenty Latin American countries. Only four countries had a Mormon AAGR above 2.5% in 2016–2017: Nicaragua (2.9%), Costa Rica (2.9%), Haiti (3.2%), and Panama (5.2%).

It is true that Mormon membership expansion across Latin America was always highly uneven, since some countries were more receptive than others.[5] The simplest growth indicator is the Mormon member-

4. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *General Conference Statistical Report*, April 2025, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/2024-statistical-report. Throughout this paper, I use the terms "Mormon" and "LDS" interchangeably. Both terms refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members.

5. See David Knowlton, "Mormonism in Latin America: Towards the Twenty-first Century," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (1996): 166: "In absolute numbers more than 80 percent of Mormons in Latin America congregate in just seven of the twenty countries that form the region: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru." Twenty-one years later, 78% of the Mormon membership on record in Latin America is still located in those same seven countries (see table 1).

Table 1. Registered Mormon membership in Latin America, year-end 2017

Country (year of arrival)	Membership	% Population	AAGR 2016–2017	HDI 2017 (Rank)
Chile (1956)	590,124	3.32 %	0.7 %	0.843 (2)
Uruguay (1948)	104,996	3.12 %	0.9 %	0.804 (4)
El Salvador (1948)	125,936	2.04 %	1.0 %	0.674 (16)
Honduras (1952)	175,028	1.94 %	1.7 %	0.617 (19)
Peru (1956)	590,121	1.90 %	2.0 %	0.750 (11)
Bolivia (1964)	203,073	1.82 %	2.0 %	0.693 (15)
Guatemala (1947)	272,449	1.76 %	1.9 %	0.650 (18)
Nicaragua (1953)	98,534	1.64 %	2.9 %	0.658 (17)
Ecuador (1965)	243,730	1.50 %	1.8 %	0.752 (8)
Panama (1941)	55,458	1.48 %	5.2 %	0.789 (5)
Paraguay (1939)	93,412	1.35 %	1.6 %	0.702 (14)
Dominican Republic (1978)	134,743	1.26 %	2.1 %	0.736 (13)
Mexico (1876)	1,417,011	1.15 %	1.6 %	0.774 (7)
Argentina (1925)	452,309	1.02 %	1.6 %	0.825 (3)
Costa Rica (1946)	48,841	0.99 %	2.9 %	0.794 (6)
Puerto Rico (1964)	23,234	0.69 %	–0.4%	0.845 (2015) (1)
Brazil (1928)	1,383,799	0.67 %	2.2 %	0.759 (10)
Venezuela (1966)	168,123	0.54 %	0.5 %	0.761 (9)
Colombia (1966)	158,954	0.42 %	2.0 %	0.747 (12)
Haiti (1978)	23,046	0.22 %	3.2 %	0.498 (20)
Total Latin America	6,339,875	1.48 %	1.8 %	0.750 [11]
Total Central America	776,246	1.64 %	2.6 %	0.697 [15]

Note: AAGR: Average annual growth rate (in percent)

Sources: Mormon country data from Cumorah.com, accessed July 19, 2021, http://www.cumorah.com/index.php?target=countries; HDI from United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *HDI Report 2018,* accessed January 16, 2019, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles.

ship on record as a percentage of the total population for each country. Based on this, Chile (3.3%), Uruguay (3.1%), El Salvador (2%), Honduras and Peru (1.9%), Bolivia and Guatemala (1.8%), and Nicaragua (1.6%) are the *most* Mormon countries of Latin America. By contrast, Puerto Rico and Brazil (0.7%), Venezuela (0.5%), Colombia (0.4%), and especially Haiti (0.22%) are the *least* Mormon countries. However, this indicator obscures the fact that across Latin America, only 15 to 20% of all members on record are active and go to church at least once a month.[6]

The Case of Haiti

Haiti can shed some light on the stagnating Mormon membership growth after 2000 in almost all Latin American countries. Haiti, whose national languages Creole and French make it unique in the region, has 11.8 million inhabitants and occupies the mountainous western one-third of the island originally known as Hispaniola (the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic fills the rest).[7] Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with unemployment between 20 and 40%, and almost 60% of the population living under the poverty line.[8] Haiti also has a highly uneven income distribution, with a 2012 Gini coefficient of 41.1.[9]

6. Seth Bryant, Henri Gooren, Rick Phillips, and David Stewart Jr., "Conversion and Retention in Mormonism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford University Press, 2014), 756–85. Activity is 30% in Haiti; see Matthew Martinich, "Mormonism in Haiti," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*, ed. Henri Gooren (Springer, 2019), 1020.

7. CIA, "The World Factbook: Haiti," accessed May 2, 2024, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/haiti/#economypip.worldbank.org/country-profiles/hnd.

8. CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti."

9. CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti."

The LDS Church gained its first Haitian member, businessman Alexandre Mourra, in 1977 in the Haitian diaspora; he received his baptism on June 30, 1977, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, before returning to Haiti. On July 2, 1978, twenty-two Haitians were baptized and a branch was organized with Mourra as president.[10] Following a complicated two-year process, the LDS Church was eventually officially recognized by the Haitian government of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier in August 1980,[11] officially recognizing the first LDS missionaries who had arrived in June 1980. The first LDS branch opened in October 1980;[12] the LDS Haiti mission opened there in April 1983; and the first stake was organized in September 1997.[13]

Although a planned Global Mormon Studies conference in Haiti in January 2019 was canceled over violent street protests in Port-au-Prince, I collected data on Latter-day Saint membership growth and seized the opportunity to apply my new country church growth

10. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Haiti: Overview," accessed June 26, 2024, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/global-histories/haiti/ht-overview?lang=eng.

11. Carter Charles, "Un nouveau culte réformé: Documents et raisons de la protestantisation de l'Eglise de Jésus-Christ en Haïti," *Haitian History Review* (summer 2024): 6.

12. Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture: Performing Mormonism in Haiti" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 75–76.

13. Carter Charles and Clorméus Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours en Haïti: De la présence médiatique à l'enracinement local (1853–2021)," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2022): 13–14. The LDS Church earlier ignored Haiti in its mission work because of the LDS priesthood ban for Blacks, which was lifted in 1978. See Armand Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaohs' Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (1981): 10–45; and Mark Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (1984): 23–34.

protocol to analyze these church statistics, even though collecting additional ethnographic data during a visit was not possible.[14] Hence, this is a *theoretical* article that uses my new country church growth protocol to analyze and explain Latter-day Saint membership church growth in Haiti between 1978 and 2018 by identifying the relevant factors, (missing) data, and periods.

This article first applies the country church growth protocol to delineate and analyze the main Mormon membership growth periods in Haiti. I correlate these periods to Emile Durkheim's anomie concept, operationalized here through external factors such as poverty, natural disasters, diseases, corruption, and political violence in Haiti's recent history.[15] Next, I analyze the internal factors in church growth by zooming in on Mormon members at ward level in Haiti based on the literature. The conclusion connects the internal and external factors of the country church growth protocol to the secular transition theory, which predicts low Mormon membership growth once a country's UN Human Development Index (HDI) value gets above 0.8.[16]

14. Reviewer 2 requested I add a brief positionality/limitation statement. I am a fifty-seven-year-old Dutch, white, male, middle-class cultural anthropologist working at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. I am not a member of the LDS Church. I tried to be mindful of these biases and to approach the research with a critical eye.

15. Analyzing LDS growth around the world, Lowell C. Bennion and Lawrence A. Young found that Mormonism grows more rapidly in volatile countries rather than in more stable countries. Their emphasis on political and economic stability is explored here by connecting it to Durkheim's anomie concept. See Lowell C. Bennion and Lawrence A. Young, "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950–2020," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (1996): 24–26.

16. Ryan T. Cragun and Ronald Lawson, "The Secular Transition: The Worldwide Growth of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Adventists," *Sociology of Religion* 71, no. 3 (2010): 349–73.

The UN HDI weighs life expectancy, years of schooling, and gross national income per capita for each country.[17] The value 0.8 is defined as the starting point for the "very high human development" category. This 0.8 value was first reached by Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, yet LDS membership growth across almost *all* Latin American countries sharply decreased after 2000.[18] The question is, Why? What happened? The country church growth protocol may provide some clarification.

The Country Church Growth Protocol

The original country church growth model, developed for Guatemala, analyzed church growth at country level as the result of four religious and four nonreligious factors, which could be both internal and external to the churches under study.[19] Here I develop an updated and improved version of this model: the country church growth protocol (see table 2).[20] The *internal religious factors* are (1a) appeal of doctrine, rituals, code of conduct, mystical experiences, healing, and liturgy (including music) and (1b) evangelization activities, missionaries, and public street prayer and preaching. The *internal nonreligious factors* are (1c) the appeal of the church organization, training, leaders, and social networks and (1d) natural growth, effective membership socialization, retention, and member demographics. The *external religious factors*

17. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *HDI Report 2018*, accessed January 16, 2019, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles.

18. Henri Gooren, "Comparing Mormon and Adventist Growth Patterns in Latin America: The Chilean Case," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 3 (2013): 47.

19. Henri Gooren, "Reconsidering Protestant Growth in Guatemala, 1900–1995," in *Holy Saints and Fiery Preachers: The Anthropology of Protestantism in Mexico and Central America*, ed. James W. Dow and Alan R. Sandstrom (Praeger, 2001), 169–203.

20. Adapted, with extensive changes, from Gooren, "Reconsidering Protestant Growth in Guatemala," 177.

Table 2. The new country church growth protocol

	(1) Internal Factors	(2) External Factors
Religious Factors	1a) Appeal of doctrine, rituals, code of conduct, morality, theology, mystical experiences, healing, tithing, liturgy	2a) Dissatisfaction with doctrine, rituals, etc. of parental religion and other competing churches
	1b) Evangelization events, activities, missionaries, public prayer/preaching	2b) Evangelization activities of competing churches/ leaders
Nonreligious Factors	1c) Appeal of the organization, skills, training, education, leaders, networks	2c) Appeal of competing secular organizations, clubs, parties, etc.
	1d) Natural growth, membership socialization & retention, membership demographics & generational effects	2d) Urbanization process; social, economic, and/ or psychological anomie (poverty, war, crime etc.)

are (2a) dissatisfaction with the doctrine, rituals, and so forth of one's parental religion and other competing churches and (2b) evangelization activities and so forth of competing churches and leaders. The *external nonreligious factors* are (2c) the appeal of competing secular organizations, associations, and so forth and (2d) social, economic, and/or psychological *anomie* stemming from the urbanization process, which uproots people and makes them more likely to join a new church,[21] and from poverty, war, and political violence.

This article develops the earlier country church growth model into the country church growth *protocol*, which also systematically analyzes

21. Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); Bryan R. Roberts, "Protestant Groups and Coping with Urban Life in Guatemala City," *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (1968): 753–67; Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (Lutterworth, 1969).

and assesses all available church growth statistics to establish the main church growth and decline periods for a country. The country church growth protocol details the operationalization of individual, institutional, and cultural-political factors from my earlier conversion careers approach.[22] The new country church growth protocol is then applied to analyze the case of Haiti.

Non-Catholic Church Growth and Incipient Secularization in Haiti, 1900–2015

Protestant and Pentecostal churches both arrived relatively early in Haiti. The available church statistics document that Protestant growth also started early in Haiti compared to most Latin American countries. As early as 1900, Protestants already made up 4.8% of the Haitian population, then 84.7% Catholic.[23] By 1970, the Protestant population percentage was already 12.9%, whereas the Catholic percentage had declined to 80.6% (see table 3). No data are available on the timing of the earliest Protestant booms, although these probably occurred after most Pentecostal churches arrived in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

After 1985, the first (recent) Protestant boom started, reflected in the Protestant population percentage increasing from 13.6% in 1982 to 17.2% in 1985 (*Operation World*), 22.3% in 1990 (*WCE2*), 22.7% in 1995 (*WCE2*), 25.7% (*Operation World*) or 22.3% (*WCE3*) in 2000, 20%

22. Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (Palgrave, 2010).

23. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 361. Hence, the strong presence of Protestantism already preceded the US occupation. Yet Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," reports that the US Marines "pursued with extraordinary vigor the destruction of Vodou and . . . heavily introduced and favored the practice of Protestantism in Haiti" (57).

Table 3. Religious affiliation by population percentage in Haiti

	1970	1980	1990	2003	2010	2015
Roman Catholic	80.6 %	82.6 %	72.5 %	54.7 %	69.3 %	67.8 %
Protestant	12.9 %	13.7 %	22.3 %	28.5 %	20.0 %	24.9 %
No religion	0.9 %	1.2 %	1.4 %	10.2 %	1.95 %	2.7%
Mormon	—	0 %	0.06 %	0.14 %	0.17 %	0.2 %
Other religions	2.4 %	2.0 %	0.5 %	4.6 %	2.9 %	2.9 %
Vodou	2.2 %	75 % (est.)	75 % (est.)	2.1 %	75 % (est.)	N.A.

Sources: David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 1982); David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001); CIA, *The World Factbook* (2024); Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (OM Publishing, 1995); Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Jason Mandryk, *Operation World,* 7th ed. (Biblical Publishing, 2010).

in 2010 (*Operation World*), and almost 25% by 2015 (*WCE3*).[24] After the January 2010 earthquake and October 2010 cholera explosion, non-Catholic church growth increased remarkably. The Protestant population percentage increased from 22% in 2000 to 25% in 2015. *WCE3* places this growth primarily among the Pentecostal churches: Church of God Cleveland (4.5% compound AAGR), Nazarenes (4.9% compound AAGR), Assemblies of God (5.9%), United Pentecostal Church (7.5%), Church of God of Prophecy (16.8%), and Church of God in Christ (20% compound AAGR). Independent Christian churches likewise grew strongly after the 2010 earthquake: Mormons (4.85% compound AAGR, yet lower than in 2000–2010: 6.2%), Witnesses 5.0%, and Adventists 5.3% compound AAGR. Yet Episcopals stagnated and Baptists decreased.

24. *Operation World*, *WCE2*, and *WCE3* refer to, respectively, Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (OM Publishing, 1995); David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001); and Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed.

There are *five main Protestant growth periods* in Haiti. Few data are available for 1900–1970, when Protestant growth advanced at a high rate of about 3.2% annually. Major recent Protestant membership booms occurred in 1975–1985, 1985–1990, and especially in 1990–1995. The compound Protestant AAGR in 1970–2000 was 4.3%. In 2000–2015, compound Protestant growth decreased to 2.2% a year, although some Pentecostal and independent churches experienced a boom following the 2010 earthquake and cholera epidemic.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church initially held on to its membership relatively well, as reflected in a stable Catholic population percentage of over 80% until 1980. Afterward, it went down considerably to 75–76% in 1982–1985, 72.5% in 1990, and 68% in 2015. A main factor aiding the retention of Catholics was the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which arrived in Haiti in 1972 and exploded in the 1970s and 1980s.[25]

Apart from the rise of Protestantism and Mormonism, and the decline of Catholicism, incipient secularization forms the third main change in the religious landscape of Haiti: the slow but steady rise of the nonreligious population. *WCE3* documents the increase of this population from 0.9% in 1970 to 2.4% in 2000, 2.7% in 2015, and an estimated 3% in 2020.[26] The biggest jump in the nonreligious population occurred between 1970 and 2000, which included a long period with high anomie (the economic crises and political turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s) but also a brief period of political stability and growing prosperity in the 1990s. Based on the 2003 census, another big nonreligious explosion occurred between 2000 (2.4%) and 2003 (10%). Could secularization now be starting in Haiti? I define secularization as growth of the nonreligious population, associated with a decline of the influence of religion

25. David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 349.

26. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 361. However, their main text ignores this statistical evidence of slow but steady secularization.

in the public sphere, including in government, politics, education, and the mass media.[27]

I review both internal and external factors from the country church growth protocol to analyze how the timing and continued rate of Mormon membership growth compare to Protestant growth and incipient secularization in Haiti.

External Factors in LDS Growth in Haiti: Assessing the Impact of Anomie

The church statistics in table 3 are sometimes contradictory, but three trends are clear. First, the Roman Catholic population percentage decreased especially after 1990, from 80.6% in 1970 to 72.5% in 1990 and 68% in 2015. Second, the Protestant population percentage strongly increased from 12.9% in 1970 to around 22% in 1990 and almost 25% in 2015. Third, the percentage of Haitians who say they have no religion jumped up from only 0.9% in 1970 to over 10% in the 2003 census or almost 3% in 2015. Much of this increase, as with the Protestant growth, occurred after the start of democracy in 1990.

How did anomie in Haiti influence non-Catholic church growth? And how do the LDS growth periods compare to the Protestant growth periods? I will analyze the membership growth of the LDS Church (see table 4) using the country church growth protocol, which identifies *anomie* as a key factor. French sociologist Emile Durkheim defined anomie as an absence or erosion of generally accepted norms and values in society that threatens to cause the breakdown of social bonds between individual and society.[28] Anomie resulting from poverty,

27. An excellent overview of definitions of secularization can be found in Isabella Kasselstrand, Phil Zuckerman, and Ryan T. Cragun, *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society* (New York University Press, 2023), 10–12.

28. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897; Free Press, 1966).

natural disasters, diseases, corruption, and political violence is a sad constant in Haiti's history.

Saint Domingue, "the pearl of the Antilles," was a prosperous French colony where enslaved peoples harvested sugar cane, cotton, and other crops and suffered from exceedingly cruel treatment. This caused a massive uprising of forty thousand enslaved persons in 1791, led by General Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803). L'Ouverture's fighters under his successor and former principal lieutenant Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1758–1806) defeated Napoleon Bonaparte's army in 1803 and declared the independent state of Haiti in 1804.[29] Haiti was the first independent nation of Latin America and the Caribbean, the second newly established republic in the Americas (after the United States), and the only country in the world that was born out of a successful slave revolt. Black and mulatto military warlords fought for power throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. US Marines invaded Haiti in 1915, ostensibly to protect US business interests, only to withdraw in 1934.[30] Since the 1930s, the United States has dominated the Haitian economy and influenced election outcomes.[31]

The Duvalier dynasty controlled Haiti from 1957 until 1986. Dr. Francois Duvalier was elected president in September 1957 and soon after declared himself president for life, extorting money from business owners. Duvalier's dreaded secret police, the Tonton Macoutes, tortured and assassinated thousands of dissidents. Economic stagnation and the collapse of tourism created a massive Haitian diaspora to France, Canada, and the United States. In 1971, Dr. Duvalier died and his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier took over the government. Using more subtle repression, the economy gradually improved and

29. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 21–25.

30. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 57–67.

31. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 361–62; CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti."

some tourism returned. Yet unemployment remained high throughout the 1970s and 1980s and combined with hurricanes to increase poverty and misery in Haiti. After an outbreak of swine flu, US agricultural authorities forced Haiti to eradicate its pig population in 1982, creating famine among Haitian peasants. The global economic crisis of 1982–1985 further exacerbated the existing poverty and hunger on the island. Pope John Paul II declared that "things must change in Haiti" during his March 1983 visit. In October 1985, street demonstrations and raids on food-distribution warehouses started in Gonaives and spread to other cities. On February 7, 1986, under pressure from a popular uprising (*Dechoukaj*) and the Reagan administration, Duvalier flew to France on a US Air Force plane.[32]

After some military transition governments, the first free elections in Haiti took place on December 16, 1990, and were won, with nearly 70% of the vote, by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest and social worker inspired by liberation theology.[33] However, a surprise military coup in September 1991 ousted the increasingly isolated and authoritarian Aristide. US, French, and Venezuelan diplomats saved Aristide's life by convincing the military to let him go into exile in France.[34] The Cedras military government increased repression, leading again to a massive diaspora. US pressure from the new Clinton administration allowed Aristide to return to Haiti in October 1994 and finish his term by December 1995. René Préval, an Aristide ally, won the December 1995 elections with 88% of the vote. Préval encouraged tourism and privatized many former state enterprises, leading to a boost in GDP growth and a decrease in unemployment.

32. For a detailed history of the Duvalier regime, see Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation* (Overlook Duckworth, 2011).

33. Anthony P. Maingot, "Haiti and Aristide: The Legacy of History," *Current History* 91, no. 562 (1992): 65–66.

34. Maingot, "Haiti and Aristide," 68–69.

Aristide won the December 2000 elections and returned to power again. However, Aristide's second government (2001–2004) faced economic sabotage from the United States and France, leading to a crippled economy and increased unemployment. A military coup on February 28, 2004, forced Aristide to leave the country on a US Air Force plane bound for the Central African Republic. Aristide later said he was kidnapped by the US military. US Marines arrived in March 2004 to restore order and a UN peacekeeping force arrived on June 1, 2004.

Following a military interim government, René Préval again won the February 2006 elections with 51.5% of the vote. Préval's second government (2006–2011) improved relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic. It also received financial and oil support from President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. A devastating magnitude 7 earthquake in January 2010 killed over 230,000 people and made more than a million homeless. The Préval government was heavily criticized for its inefficient response.[35]

Michel Martelly, a nightclub owner and former musician, won the second election round in March 2011 with 60%. The Martelly government (2011–2016) was likewise criticized for the slow post-quake reconstruction, although most houses were rebuilt. President Martelly was accused of corruption and money laundering, leading to violent demonstrations, but no judicial investigation ensued. After earlier being postponed twice, presidential elections were held in November 2016 and won by Jovenel Moïse with 55.7%. President Moïse was a businessman and banana farmer, a member of Martelly's party yet a political outsider, and thus not perceived as being corrupt (since he had no previous political experience). However, in late 2018, demonstrations started after many Haitians considered Moïse and his cabinet to be inept and

35. See CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti"; "Haiti," Encylopedia.com, updated August 13, 2018, https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/latin-america-and-caribbean/caribbean-political-geography/haiti; and Abbot, *Haiti*.

Table 4. Registered LDS membership in Haiti, % population, AAGRs, and HDI scores, 1977–2018

Year-End	Registered Membership	% Population	AAGR in %	HDI
1977	12	0 %	41.7 %	N.A.
1978	17	0 %	35.3 %	N.A.
1979	23	0 %	239 %	N.A.
1980	78	0 %	140 %	N.A.
1981	187	0 %	57.2 %	N.A.
1982	294	0 %	61.6 %	N.A.
1983	475	0.01 %	89.3 %	N.A.
1984	899	0.01 %	51.4 %	N.A.
1985	1,361	0.02 %	38.9 %	N.A.
1986	1,890	0.03 %	15.6 %	N.A.
1987	2,184	0.03 %	37.8 %	N.A.
1988	3,009	0.04 %	22.7 %	N.A.
1989	3,691	0.05 %	23.1 %	N.A.
1990	4,544	0.06 %	3.8 %	0.409
1991	4,717	0.06 %	3.7 %	N.A.
1992	4,893	0.07 %	2.6 %	N.A.
1993	5,020	0.07 %	1.0 %	N.A.
1994	5,140	0.07 %	–1.6 %	N.A.
1995	5,058	0.07 %	4.1 %	N.A.
1996	5,263	0.07 %	10.0 %	N.A.
1997	5,787	0.07 %	12.3 %	N.A.
1998	6,497	0.08 %	25.6 %	N.A.
1999	8,157	0.10 %	13.6 %	N.A.

Year-End	Registered Membership	% Population	AAGR in %	HDI
2000	9,266	0.11 %	9.6 %	0.442
2001	10,157	0.12 %	11.5 %	N.A.
2002	11,329	0.13 %	7.5 %	N.A.
2003	12,184	0.14 %	5.4 %	N.A.
2004	12,842	0.14 %	3.7 %	N.A.
2005	13,321	0.14 %	2.1 %	N.A.
2006	13,604	0.14 %	6.5 %	N.A.
2007	14,493	0.15 %	6.9 %	N.A.
2008	15,489	0.16 %	5.4 %	N.A.
2009	16,322	0.17 %	3.6 %	N.A.
2010	16,902	0.17 %	3.0 %	0.470
2011	17,407	0.17 %	4.4 %	0.477
2012	18,165	0.18 %	5.8 %	0.481
2013	19,216	0.18 %	6.2 %	0.486
2014	20,414	0.19 %	4.9 %	0.490
2015	21,414	0.20 %	4.2 %	0.493
2016	22,323	0.21 %	3.2 %	0.496
2017	23,046	0.21 %	2.9 %	0.498
2018	23,723	0.21 %	1.0 %	N.A.
2020	24,192	0.22 %	N.A.	N.A.
1981–2018	37-year compound AAGR		14.0 %	

Notes: AAGR: Average annual growth rate (in percent); N.A.: Not available.

Sources: membership statistics from LDS Church, Correlation Research Division, Salt Lake City (formerly the LDS Church Research Information Division); HDI from United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *HDI Report 2018*, accessed January 16, 2019, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/; calculations for compound average annual growth rates from https://calculatorbox.com/calculator/standard-cagr.

corrupt.[36] By January 2019, thousands of demonstrators turned increasingly violent, and four were killed by the police in early February.[37]

Below I list the periods after the official start of the Mormon mission in 1983 when anomie was either (much) lower or (much) higher than usual and also hypothesize how this affected LDS membership growth in Haiti.

1982–1985: A global economic recession hit Haiti hard (annual GDP growth: –2.7% to +0.2%), leading to increased poverty, increased unemployment (12.2% in 1982, see table 5, col. 2), increased urbanization, and a strengthening of resistance to the dictatorship of Duvalier junior. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

True: The average annual LDS membership growth rate was 61.6% in 1982–1983, 89.3% in 1983–1984, and 51.4% in 1984–1985.

October 1985–February 1986; February 1986–November 1990: Massive street protests eventually forced Duvalier to leave the country in February 1986; the army and various interim governments alternated power in a chaotic situation that lasted for almost five years. Annual GDP growth was still low in the –0.7% to 1.1% range (table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

True: The average annual LDS membership growth rate was 38.9% in 1985–1986 and 15.6% in 1986–1987.

December 1990–September 1991: Progressive priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide won the elections by a landslide, ushering in new optimism for Haiti. *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

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36. See Christian Antoine Girault, "Haiti in the 21st Century," Brittanica.com, accessed October 31, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/place/Haiti/Haiti-in-the-21st-century.

37. British Broadcasting Corporation, "Haiti Protestors Call On President Jovenal Moïse to Quit," BBC, February 10, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-47193837. In July 2021, President Moïse was killed in his house by a commando in a unit of twenty-five armed Colombian mercenaries; "Foreign Commando Killed Moïse, Haiti Claims," BBC, July 9, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57766749.

True: Only 3.8% average annual Mormon membership growth for 1990–91.

September 1991–October 1994: Political and economic optimism was crushed by the Cedras military government, leading to an economic crisis, increased unemployment (from 7% to 8%), and higher anomie. Annual GDP growth crashed from +4.2% to –13% annually (table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

False: Only 2.6% average annual LDS membership growth in 1992–1993 and 1% in 1993–1994.

October 1994–December 1995: Aristide was allowed to return to Haiti and finish his presidential term, creating more optimism. *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

True: –1.6% average annual LDS membership growth in 1994–1995.

1996–2000: The (first) Préval government brought political stability, economic growth, and increased optimism. However, unemployment remained high, in the 7% range, and annual GDP growth low, in the 1% to 4% range (table 5). *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

False: The average annual Mormon membership growth per year in 1996–2000 was a high 15.4%, ranging from 10% in 1996–1997 to 12.3% in 1997–1998, 25.6% in 1998–1999, and 13.6% in 1999–2000. Perhaps there is a time lag before a more stable government and improving economy lead to lower Mormon membership growth?

2001–2004: The second Aristide government faced economic sanctions from the United States and France, leading to higher urbanization, economic stagnation, and unemployment (increasing from 11% to 14%, see table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

True: The average annual LDS membership growth per year in 2001–2004 was a relatively high 8.1%, yet declining from a high 11.5% in 2001–2002 to 7.5% in 2002–2003 and a modest 5.4% in 2003–2004. However, these represented a downward growth trend.

February 2004–February 2006: Interim military governments struggled to improve the economy. Annual GDP growth improved

Table 5. Annual GDP growth, unemployment, and Protestant growth in Haiti, 1970–2018

Year	Annual GDP Growth %	Unemployment Rate %	Protestant AAGR
1970	N.A.	N.A.	2.1%
1971	N.A.	N.A.	2.1%
1972	N.A.	N.A.	2.1%
1973	N.A.	N.A.	2.1%
1974	N.A.	N.A.	2.1%
1975	N.A.	N.A.	8.9%
1976	N.A.	N.A.	8.9%
1977	N.A.	N.A.	8.9%
1978	4.8 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1979	7.3 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1980	7.6 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1981	–2.7 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1982	–3.4 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1983	0.8 %	12.2 %	8.9 %
1984	0.3 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1985	0.2 %	N.A.	8.9 %
1986	–0.1 %	N.A.	6.5 %
1987	–0.7 %	N.A.	6.5 %
1988	0.8 %	N.A.	6.5 %
1989	1.1 %	N.A.	6.5 %
1990	–0.1 %	11.25 %	14.1 %
1991	4.2 %	7.64 %	14.1 %
1992	–13.2 %	7.89 %	14.1 %
1993	–2.4 %	7.91 %	14.1 %
1994	–8.3 %	7.98 %	14.1 %
1995	4.4 %	6.95 %	2.3 %
1996	2.7 %	7.16 %	2.3 %

Year	Annual GDP Growth %	Unemployment Rate %	Protestant AAGR
1997	1.4 %	7.24 %	2.3 %
1998	3.1 %	7.26 %	2.3 %
1999	2.71 %	7.20 %	2.3 %
2000	0.87 %	8.59 %	0.7 %
2001	–1.04 %	10.11 %	0.7 %
2002	–0.25 %	11.37 %	0.7 %
2003	0.36 %	12.63 %	0.7 %
2004	–3.52 %	14.49 %	0.7 %
2005	1.81 %	15.03 %	0.7 %
2006	2.25 %	16.15 %	0.7 %
2007	3.34 %	16.80 %	0.7 %
2008	0.84 %	16.55 %	0.7 %
2009	3.08 %	15.47 %	0.7 %
2010	–5.50 %	15.95 % [32.7 % OW]	3.9 %
2011	5.52 %	13.72 %	3.9 %
2012	2.89 %	14.10 %	3.9 %
2013	4.23 %	13.85 %	3.9 %
2014	2.81 %	13.94 %	3.9 %
2015	1.21 %	14.05 %	N.A.
2016	1.45 %	14.00 %	N.A.
2017	1.17 %	13.99 %	N.A.
2018	1.4 %	13.53 %	N.A.
2019	–1.2 %	N.A.	N.A.

Notes: AAGR: Average annual growth rate; N.A.: Not available.

Sources: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); CIA, *The World Factbook* (2024); World Bank 2018 Database, accessed December 18, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2017&locations=HT&name_desc=false&start=1997.

from –3.5% to +2%, but unemployment exploded from 14% to 16% (see table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

False: The average annual Mormon membership growth in 2004–2006 was a very low 2.4%, ranging from 3.7% in 2004–2005 to 2.1% in 2005–2006.

September 2004: Tropical storm Jeanne killed over three thousand people. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

False: The average annual LDS membership growth in 2004–2005 was a low 3.7%.

2006–2011: The second Préval government strengthened both the economy and relations with countries in the region. Annual GDP growth was in the 2–3% range, only to crash again to –5.5% in 2009–10 and turn around again to +5.5% in 2010–11 (table 5). However, unemployment only marginally improved from almost 17% to almost 14%. *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

True: The average annual Mormon membership growth per year in 2006–2011 was a low 5.1%, ranging from 6.5% in 2006–2007 to 6.9% in 2007–2008, 5.4% in 2008–2009, 3.6% in 2009–2010, and 3% in 2010–2011. Moreover, this was clearly a downward growth trend again.

January 2010: A devastating magnitude 7 earthquake killed over 230,000 people and made over a million homeless.[38] October 2010–2018: A widespread cholera outbreak killed ten thousand people up to 2018. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted in 2010.

False: The average annual LDS membership growth in 2010–2011 was a low 3%, although it rose to 4.4% in 2011–2012, 5.8% in 2012–2013, and 6.2% in 2013–2014.

2011–2016: The Martelly government slowly strengthened the economy. GDP growth was –5.5% in 2009–10, improved strongly in

38. Possibly the only positive side effect of the earthquake was the renewed strength of interreligious dialogue in Haiti. See Clorméus Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise catholique face à la diversité religieuse à Port-au-Prince (1942–2012)," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 166 (2014): 169–74.

2010–14 in the +2–5% range, yet decreased to barely +1–1.5% annually in 2014–18 (table 5, col. 1). Meanwhile, unemployment remained stable, around a high 14% (table 5, col. 2). October 2016: Hurricane Matthew killed over five hundred people. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

Contradictory data: The average annual LDS membership growth per year in 2011–2017 was a lowish 4.8%, ranging from 4.4% for 2011–2012, 5.8% in 2012–2013, 6.2% in 2013–2014, 4.9% in 2014–2015, 4.2% in 2015–2016, and 3.2% in 2016–2017. Note that the trend in membership growth for 2011–2017 was clearly downward once again, especially after 2014. However, compared to other countries in Latin America, these Mormon AAGRs were quite high (see table 1).

Reviewing the evidence from the data, the value of anomie, operationalized as a combination of economic and political turmoil, as an *external* explanation of LDS membership growth in Haiti seems limited. Out of a total of twelve periods, the anomie hypothesis was true in six cases, false in five cases, and there was contradictory data for the period 2011–2016.

Anomie is also correlated with strong and chaotic urbanization. The urbanization process took off relatively late in Haiti, and urbanization has not reached as high a rate as in other countries in the region. In 1960, still only 15.6% of the total Haitian population lived in cities and urban areas. This gradually increased from 19.8% in 1970 to 20.5% in 1980, 28.5% in 1990, 35.6% in 2000, and 47.5% in 2010. In 2017, 54.35% of the total Haitian population of 11.8 million lived in cities and urban areas. In summary, the strongest urbanization increases occurred in the 1980s, 1990s, and especially early 2000s. Urban growth expanded considerably after 1982 and exploded after 2000.[39] Carter Charles and Clorméus Lewis-Ampidu report that most LDS members are concentrated in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and its suburbs, "and then in the

39. "Urban Population—Haiti," World Bank, accessed December 31, 2025, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=HT.

large cities of the country."[40] How does urbanization compare to the timing of the recent LDS membership growth periods?

The available membership data indicate the following *four main Mormon membership growth periods in Haiti* between 1977 and 2018 (see table 4):

1. 1977–1989: *growth explosion.* The AAGR for this thirteen-year period is 65.7%, ranging from a low of 15.6% to a high of 239%.
2. 1990–1995: *low growth.* The AAGR for this six-year period is only 2.3%, ranging from a (record) low of –1.6% to a high of 4.1%.
3. 1996–2002: *high growth.* The AAGR for this seven-year period is 12.9%, ranging from a low of 7.5% to a high of 25.6%.
4. 2003–2018: *modest growth.* The AAGR for this sixteen-year period is only 4.5%, ranging from a low of 2.1% to a high of 6.9%.

How do these recent LDS membership booms compare to the data on strong and chaotic urbanization in Haiti? The main LDS booms occurred in 1977–1989 (mean LDS AAGR 65.7%, although urbanization was very low), 1996–2002 (LDS AAGR 12.9%; urbanization high), and more modestly in 2003–2018, when the LDS AAGR was only 4.5%, whereas urbanization was extremely high. LDS membership stagnation occurred in 1990–1995, coinciding with high urbanization in the 1990s. Hence, strong and chaotic urbanization only coincided with LDS membership growth in the brief period 1996–2002. When urbanization was still low in the 1970s, LDS membership exploded right after its arrival in Haiti in 1978. By contrast, when urbanization was at its (recent) peak, in the period 2000–2010, the average annual LDS growth rate was only moderate: between 2% and 7% (compound LDS AAGR 6.2%). In conclusion, not only the explanatory value of anomie in Haiti, operationalized as a combination of economic and political turmoil, was limited. The same is true for anomie, operationalized as strong and chaotic urbanization, as an external explanation of LDS membership growth.

40. Charles and Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ en Haïti," 16.

Internal Factors in LDS Growth: Haitian Members Performing Mormonism in Port-au-Prince

Of course, national Mormon membership statistics and growth periods do not tell the whole story of Mormonism in Haiti. The country church growth protocol also delineates the *internal* factors in church growth, such as the appeal of the church's doctrine (rituals, code of conduct, morality, theology, mystical experiences, healing, tithing, liturgy), mission work, and appeal of the organization, including member education and training, skills, networks, and the role of the leadership (see table 2, factors 1a, 1b, and 1c). A closer look at ground level is required to get the complete picture: zooming in on the active Mormon members in the stakes, wards, districts, and branches of Haiti.

The first LDS branch opened in July 1978, the first LDS missionaries arrived in June 1980, the Haiti Port-au-Prince mission opened in April 1983, the Port-au-Prince stake was created in 1997,[41] and the first temple opened in Port-au-Prince in 2015. By 2018, Haiti had 23,723 official members in five stakes, four districts, twenty-six wards, and twenty branches.[42]

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Pétion-Ville, a Port-au-Prince suburb, in 1998–1999 for her PhD dissertation, Jennifer Huss Basquiat set out to study "How Haitians Do Mormonism," using key concepts such as performance from Marvin Carlson and *bricolage* from the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.[43] Basquiat writes: "The

41. Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Vodou, and the LDS Faith in Haiti," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 4 (2004), 3–4.

42. Cumorah.com, accessed July 19, 2021, http://www.cumorah.com/index.php?target=countries.

43. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 3; Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 1996), 49; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

bricoleur becomes a master at selectively crafting a performance from various sources."[44] Haitians are superb *bricoleurs* and so are Haitian Mormons, Basquiat argues.

In 1991, there were only 4,717 LDS members in eighteen branches, with 140 full-time missionaries (only twenty-six were Haitians: 18.6%).[45] Because of continuing political turmoil and violence in Haiti, the US missionaries were withdrawn between 1991 and 1996.[46] By November 1998, however, there were still only forty-eight missionaries (two-thirds were Haitians by now). Basquiat reports that in 1998–1999 the "prevailing stereotype" in Haiti was that the LDS Church and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) "are one and the same."[47] Consequently, many Haitians believed that "to join the Mormon Church is to 'sell out to the CIA!'"[48] Basquiat writes that several Haitian members, leaders, an ex-missionary, a key informant, and several nonmembers all believed that the LDS Church was part of the CIA.[49] She provides three main reasons: "First, the Mormon Church is extremely wealthy *and* the product of the United States; second, in reality, the CIA does have a disproportionately high number of Mormons in its ranks; third, the

44. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 7.

45. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 4.

46. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 78.

47. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 5. Dr. Carter Charles (BYU) consistently found as a missionary in Haiti that Haitians saw the LDS Church as "an opportunity to climb a ring of the social ladder." Charles also noted that Haitians associated Americanness with whiteness (personal email, August 23, 2021).

48. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 5.

49. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 84–86. The Haiti LDS mission president and several missionaries told Basquiat that "this particular stereotype" was "detrimental to Church membership."

very structure and appearance of the Mormon Church lends credence to images of governmental secrecy."[50]

Basquiat calls it "an unfortunate error in judgment" that the LDS Church and its missionaries evacuated from Haiti right after the October 1991 coup: "With the mass exodus of the Mormon Church the appearance was created that there was no longer a reason to stay in the country as the Mormons' work had been done. . . . Mormon leaders and missionaries took with them their leadership, their access to resources and their religious convictions, leaving Haitians to perpetuate a fledgling religious community on their own. . . . It is precisely this behavior that caused many Haitians to see the Mormon Church and the CIA as inextricably linked to one another. The CIA leaves the country (or at least reduces its numbers) and the Mormon Church quickly follows. . . . Wouldn't true missionaries have stayed if their primary goal were to teach the gospel?"[51] Still, despite this popular stereotype—or possibly because of it?—Haitians were joining the LDS Church in record numbers in the late 1990s (LDS growth period 3).

Rousseline's conversion story during this time period illuminates the perceptions many Haitians had about LDS missionaries, Haiti's poverty and governmental corruption, and elements of the LDS Church that young Haitians found appealing:

> The situation in my country is critical; corruption exists in all forms of government, especially at the top. . . . We were very fortunate to have

50. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 86. Reasons 1 and 2 fall under "guilty by association"; the subsequent section explains reason 3 by positing that the extreme wealth of the LDS Church makes it suspect and associates it with corruption in Haiti. Basquiat provides documented evidence that the CIA was behind the September 1991 military coup that ousted Aristide. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 88–89.

51. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 90–91. Basquiat also notes that the highly visible pairs of young white US missionaries everywhere on Haiti with "shortly cropped hair, pressed white shirts, ties, slacks and often sunglasses" fitted the international stereotype of CIA agents perfectly.

parents who sacrificed to make it possible for us to attend a Catholic girls' school. There we began to develop our faith in Jesus Christ. As we were growing up and attending catechism at the Catholic school, I had many unanswered questions about religion. . . .

In my country of Haiti, we heard many people saying that the missionaries are either FBI or CIA. Wanting to know the truth, when I was 17 years old, I saw the missionaries passing by my house and I called them to question them about their beliefs, and most especially, to ask if they were really FBI or CIA. The missionaries smiled and invited us—me, Rousseline, my sister, Rousselene, and our little sister, Rousseland—to go to church and see for ourselves. When Sunday came, I did go to their church, and that Sunday was a fast and testimony meeting. I became curious when a missionary bore his testimony and said: "I know that this is the only true church."

There are thousands of churches all over, so I thought how can he say, "this is the only true church?" So I decided to take the missionary lessons with my sisters in order to know more about "this only true church." The third missionary lesson, which is now the first one, is my favorite, because it talks about the prophet Joseph Smith. A prophet has been called for our time!! This is amazing. . . .

After that discussion with the missionaries, our Father did not want them to come teach us anymore. Father said to the missionaries: "My children have a Bible; they don't need any more Bible. . . ." Since the missionaries could not come over anymore to our house, we decided to have the missionary lessons at the chapel close to our house instead of basket lessons at school. We finished the missionary lessons, and a month later we were baptized without our Father's knowledge. Mother knew about it and approved. . . .

When Father found out about our baptism, and that we were going to the "Mormon Church," it was a really difficult time for us. It was our time of trial. Father became careless about his responsibility towards us as a provider and we lacked many necessities. We endured to the end because of the power of the scriptures. And from them we received what we needed to stay strong. . . . After much fasting and prayer, we were finally allowed to again attend Church. Father's persecutions weren't gone, they were just lightened. The Lord poured His blessings upon us.

> After I had found the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, I wanted to serve a full-time mission. Everything seemed impossible when I had that desire, but the Lord blessed me. He sent people who helped me accomplish the things that I wanted. On December 23, 2003, I left my country of Haiti to serve full-time mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission. This was the greatest experience of my life. I was able to see the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ change the lives of many people. . . .
>
> Our Father's heart softened over the years and he has since allowed our five younger siblings to also be baptized. My mother and father were also eventually baptized.[52]

Why was there strong LDS growth in the late 1990s? The majority of Church members in Haiti were "young, single men," unlike in Latin America where most (new) members were young families.[53] Basquiat concludes that "many Haitians ignore Mormonism's claim of absolute truth; instead, they borrow only what appeals to them and add it to already existing patterns of belief and behavior."[54] For example, Haitian Mormons were very fond of Joseph Smith; they could easily identify with him because of his humble beginnings, poor and uneducated, and his experience as a seer: "Haitians readily accept present-day revelation through visions."[55]

Basquiat's ethnographic fieldwork shows and analyzes how Haitian Mormons put a unique touch on the standardized markers of Mormon

52. Mark Albright, "Haiti: I Thought the LDS Missionaries Were All CIA or FBI," *Meridian Magazine*, January 31, 2016, https://www.latterdaysaintmag.com/haiti-i-thought-the-lds-missionaries-were-all-cia-or-fbi%E2%80%8F.

53. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 182–83.

54. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 3.

55. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 14. Alex, a recent LDS member in the Pétion-Ville ward, told Basquiat: "Joseph Smith is like me. He came from humble beginnings and was a simple man. He was not an intellect." Basquiat concludes: "Such a realization suggests that even the poorest and uneducated of Haitians is important in the eyes of God." Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 176–77.

membership:[56] baptism, testimony Sunday, family home evening (celebrated with other members at the ward chapel in Haiti), and experiencing the LDS general conference live through satellite link. Basquiat concludes that embodied Mormonism provides Haitian members "the ability to create personal cosmologies within the general framework of Mormonism. . . . Haitian Mormons, acting as *bricoleurs*, lift patches of Mormonism's tapestry and sew these individual scraps together with other experiences to produce something personal and unique to the user. What is perhaps most remarkable is that they have found space within the practice of Mormonism to do so."[57]

Basquiat explains: "Haitian Mormons, despite their faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often find themselves seeking the help and guidance of a *hougan* or Vodou priest. This reliance on more than one cosmology is not seen as oppositional, but complementary, again illustrating the skill many Haitians have in piecing together seemingly incongruous material."[58] The LDS missionaries did not understand this Haitian skill in piecing together "seemingly incongruous material," that is, Mormonism and Vodou, and certainly could not approve of it. As Basquiat recounts, Elder Vigliotti's companion, Elder Christensen, lamented the fact that Haitian Mormons "have no problem understanding that the Church is the only true church, but [claim] that there are just other true churches, too. You can ask them if they believe this is the only true church and they say yes. But then you ask them if other churches are true and they say yes. It doesn't make a lot of sense."[59] Basquiat adds: "What makes little sense to Mormon missionaries makes perfect sense to many Haitian members. Why would a

56. Charles made the important observation that such differences are also common in many other cultural areas where Mormons form a small religious minority (personal email, August 23, 2021).

57. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 25.

58. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 25.

59. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 25–26.

person rely on only one religious system or cosmology when multiple mythologies are available, especially when one of the possibilities is the culturally significant practice of Vodou?"[60]

Indeed, why risk your salvation on only one true church when you could rely on two or three?[61] Several ward members, who insisted on remaining anonymous, admitted to Basquiat that they "kept altars for Vodou worship in their homes consisting of small spaces devoted to particular *lwas* [gods], upon which they would place the *lwas*'s favorite foods, colors, images, and even monetary offerings." Basquiat suspected that they attend Saturday evening Vodou ceremonies that included *lwa* possession and consult neighborhood *houngans* "for spiritual or secular guidance as well as for homeopathic remedies for common ailments. Typically, these Haitian Mormons maintained that their allegiance to Vodou did not undercut their faith in the Mormon Church. They professed a strong belief in Mormonism and saw the inclusion of Vodou, not as oppositional but as complementary. In terms of shaping their own cosmologies, these Haitian Mormons select ideas and beliefs from both Mormonism and Vodou to create what they consider a better design for living."[62]

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60. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 26.

61. "Les croyants tentent de se protéger des menaces d'une Église en allant dans une autre église. Et lorsqu'ils se retrouvent à nouveau dans le malheur, ils retournent dans leur culte d'origine, pensant qu'ils ont été punis de changer." (Believers try to protect themselves from the threats of one church by going to another church. And when they find themselves in trouble, they return to their religion of origin, thinking that they have been punished for changing; author's translation) André Corten, "Pentecôtisme, baptisme et système politique en Haïti," *Histoire, mondes y cultures religieuses* 29, no. 1 (2014) : 126–27.

62. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 27–28. However, Basquiat expects that the LDS Church will adopt a more active policy of forcefully suppressing Vodou in the future "as the Church strengthens its roots in Haiti"; Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 226.

Basquiat's conclusion raises the valid question of whether a similar process of *bricolage* (creating what she calls *indigenous Mormonism*) could be happening with Mormonism in other cultures, particularly those with high levels of illiteracy in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa?[63] Or with the many Haitians who have affiliated themselves with the plentiful Protestant churches? Although Vodou was outlawed by the Catholic Church and actively persecuted by its clergy from the 1940s to the 1980s, President Aristide granted Vodou the status of an officially recognized state religion in 2003.[64] Combined with the lack of an official or even informal policy outlawing Vodou and its practices in the LDS Church, this newfound state recognition created fertile ground for Vodou to prosper among many Haitians—whether Catholics, Protestants, or Mormons. One important limitation of Basquiat's research is that it was conducted in the wealthy residential area of Pétion-Ville in a single LDS congregation, raising the question of how representative the views of her informants, and hence Basquiat's conclusions, are.[65]

A recent article by Catherine S. Freeman analyzes surprising parallels between Mormonism and Vodou in Haiti.[66] Apart from their obvious historical differences, she concluded they both shared "fundamental beliefs relating to rebelling against oppressive government, persisting in religious practices, and maintaining strong relationships

63. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 29.

64. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 31.

65. Charles did not think that that Basquiat's data and conclusions from a single Pétion-Ville ward could be generalized to all Haitian Mormons (personal email, August 23, 2021).

66. Catherine S. Freeman, "Drum Rhythms and Golden Scriptures: Reasons for Mormon Conversion with Haiti's Culture of Vodou," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 55, no. 3 (2022): 72–73. Basquiat also identified four similarities between Mormonism and Vodou: both believe in a celestial couple in heaven with multiple wives (polygyny), the possibility of deification, and both are living religions in constant change thanks to continuing revelation and strong local leaders (bishop and *hougan*); Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 226–36.

with the dead."[67] Mormonism and Vodou both stress that the world we live in is enchanted and that the thin veil between the living and the dead can be broken. But Mormonism has the additional unique features of eternal families and the exposure to American culture "as a path to social mobility" and also possibly geographical mobility as two strong conversion factors for Haitians.[68]

However, other factors might negatively impact LDS membership growth and retention in Haiti: its anti-Black history until the opening of the priesthood to all in 1978 and "the overarching whiteness of the leadership and institution."[69] Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks note: "Today, the church is experiencing tremendous growth in Africa, but church leaders have stumbled in limited efforts to move white North American Mormons to recognize and reject the racism of Mormon doctrine that excluded men and women of African descent from priesthood ordination and temple worship."[70] Harvard historian Janan Graham-Russell writes poignantly: "Something very curious happens when the images of the divine that reside in holy places don't look like

67. Freeman, "Drum Rhythms and Golden Scriptures," 72.

68. Freeman, "Drum Rhythms and Golden Scriptures," 73. A Haitian convert living in the United States told Freeman that "most Haitians are fascinated with America because of the socioeconomic possibilities this country can provide them" (50). Freeman further notes: "What seems to make Mormonism most noticeable in Haiti are the luxurious meetinghouses and the Port-au-Prince temple" with "modern plumbing, electricity, internet access, air conditioning, and other amenities . . . available only to the wealthiest Haitians" (51–52).

69. This is a direct quote from reviewer 2, who writes "there is a glass ceiling to inclusion" of Black LDS members that ultimately contributes to "dwindling activity in these countries" (such as Haiti).

70. Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks, "Introduction: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion," in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, ed. Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks (University of Utah Press, 2018), 6. However, Basquiat reports that "most Haitian members of the Mormon Church in Haiti are unaware of this racial tidbit of Mormon history [the priesthood ban]"; Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 83.

you. Moreover, though the restrictions dissolved, the revelatory voices continue to come from white Western lips. . . . Ask yourselves, do representations of Blackness and deep skin tones in Mormonism embody the call that 'all are alike unto God'? How would you react to a depiction of God with black or brown skin? Would you find comfort? Representation—not in pursuit of managing a quota or the placation of guilt—is the counter-narrative to the construction of race within the Mormon imagination."[71] The LDS Church has recently made efforts to promote a handful of Black Caribbean men into area and general leadership, most notably Elder Kevin G. Brown of Jamaica, who was sustained as a General Authority Seventy in 2025. However, Graham-Russell's point continues to be compelling—the top echelons of the LDS Church remain overwhelmingly in the hands of white American men.

Basquiat likewise points to the troubling implications of the LDS Church's texts, talks, and religious reflections—exported throughout the world—that emerge largely from or through white men. She writes: "Haitian Mormons are asked to read a plethora of written texts to prepare themselves for eternal progression, written texts that are the product (externally guided or not) of privileged white men. However, they are also asked to adopt a history that is not their own, but based exclusively on the trials and tribulations of privileged white people in the United States. Consequently, this celebration of the written word renders white, Mormon text superior to the black, Haitian body."[72] Nevertheless, despite these systemic racial problems noted by scholars,

71. Janan Graham-Russell, "A Balm in Gilead: Reconciling Black Bodies within a Mormon Imagination," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (2018): 190–91.

72. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 164–65. Basquiat next mentions the famous quotes from Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* [1963], 42) about Black people still being encouraged to "join the Church of the white man" and to scorn Black experience to find salvation: "The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's way, but to the ways of the white man." Basquiat then writes: "Ironically, it is precisely this calling that draws some Haitians to the Mormon Church."

Basquiat reports that most Haitian members in the late 1990s thought of the LDS Church as "lack[ing] a history of racial discrimination."[73]

Ironically, the fact that the LDS Church emerges from America (even white America) may be a central source of its appeal to Haitians. Basquiat quotes Haitian physician and cultural critic Frentz Large, who says that "for privileged and literate Haitians," this is the main reason to join Mormonism: "It is *the* motivation: to be American, to have some part of the West here."[74] Obviously, more ethnographic fieldwork research is required to analyze the dynamics of this process.

Conclusion: Analyzing (The Future of) LDS Growth in Haiti

There are *four main Mormon membership growth periods* in Haiti (see table 4):

1. 1977–1989: growth explosion. The AAGR for this thirteen-year period is 65.7%, varying from a low of 15.6% to a high of 239%.
2. 1990–1995: low growth. The AAGR for this six-year period is only 2.3%, ranging from a (record) low of –1.6% to a high of 4.1%. This stagnation exactly coincides with the withdrawal of US missionaries for security reasons from late 1991 to early 1996.[75]
3. 1996–2002: high growth. The AAGR for this seven-year period is 12.9%, ranging from a low of 7.5% to a high of 25.6%. After the US missionaries return, growth explodes again.
4. 2003–2018: modest growth. The AAGR for this sixteen-year period is only 4.5%, ranging from a low of 2.1% to a high of 6.9%.

I concluded earlier that the explanatory value of anomie in Haiti, operationalized as a combination of economic and political turmoil, was limited. The same is true for anomie, operationalized as strong and chaotic urbanization, as an external explanation of LDS membership growth. Table 5 showed no correlations between the unemployment rate, the annual GDP growth rate, and the average annual Protestant

73. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 83.

74. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 166.

75. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 78.

membership growth rates. The only clear correlation was between strong Mormon and Protestant membership growth in the 1980s and high anomie resulting from a devastating economic crisis, unemployment, poverty, as well as political turmoil and violence. Most LDS members are concentrated in the capital Port-au-Prince, its suburbs, and other large cities.[76]

What about demographics as an explanatory growth factor? The percentage of the population under fifteen years old in Haiti has fluctuated: 39.6% in 1950, 40.3% in 1960, 41.8% in 1970, 41.1% in 1980, 43.1% in 1990, 40.3% in 2000, and 36.2% in 2010.[77] While still relatively high, it rose slightly to 37% in 2020. Haiti has a relatively young population, but the percentage of people under fifteen is projected to reach 30% by 2033 and to keep decreasing steadily after that.[78] The main LDS and Protestant boom periods occurred in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when the youth percentage was still high in Haiti: between 40% and 43%.

I identified *five main Protestant growth periods* in Haiti. Few data are available for 1900–1970, but Protestant growth advanced at a high compound rate of 3.2% annually on average. The major recent Protestant membership booms occurred in 1975–1985 (AAGR almost 9%), 1985–1990 (6.5%), and especially in 1990–1995 (14%; see table 5). After 1995, however, Protestant growth decreased considerably, although a fourth, more modest, Protestant boom occurred in 2010–2015 following the 2010 earthquake and cholera epidemic.

There is some overlap between the timing of LDS membership growth periods and the Protestant booms, especially for the periods 1977–1985 and 1985–1990. In 1990–1995, both Protestant and LDS

76. Charles and Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ en Haïti," 16.

77. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2022: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion, and Country, Annually for 1950–2100," accessed July 17, 2022, https://population.un.org/wpp/.

78. See statista.com, "Demographics of Haiti," accessed May 30, 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/795192/population-total-age-haiti.

membership growth sharply declined, leading to stagnation. Between 1996 and 2002, there was another LDS growth explosion, with an average annual growth rate of almost 13%, ranging from a low of 7.5% and a high of 25.6%. In 2000–2010, both Protestant and LDS growth were low and seemed headed toward stagnation. Between 2003 and 2018, LDS growth stabilized at a lower, more modest rate (4.5% AAGR), ranging from a low of 2% to a high of almost 7%. By contrast, in 2000–2010, all Protestants combined increased by only 0.7% (*WCE3*) or 1.9% (*Operation World*), compared to 6.2% compound annual LDS growth. Yet by 2010–2015, all Protestants combined increased strongly by almost 4% (*WCE3*), slightly below the LDS AAGR of 4.85%.

What about a possible correlation between incipient secularization and Mormon membership growth in Haiti? The biggest jump in the nonreligious population occurred between 1970 and 2000, which included a long period with high anomie (economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s; political turmoil until the 1990s) but also a brief period of political stability and increasing prosperity in the 1990s. Based on the 2003 census, another big nonreligious explosion occurred between 2000 (2.4%) and 2003 (10%). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arrived in Haiti in 1978 and experienced spectacular growth in 1978–1985, with AAGRs fluctuating between 35% and 239%, only to suddenly see a membership stagnation in 1990–1995, strong growth again in 1995–2000 (with AAGRs in the 10% to 25% range), and relatively consistent moderate to high growth after 2002 in the 2% to 7.5% AAGR range. After 2016, annual LDS growth is around 3% (see table 4).

In summary:

1. In 1975–1985 (1978–1985 for the LDS) and 1985–1990, annual Protestant and LDS membership growth were both very high. At the same time, there was a slow but steady increase of the nonreligious population in Haiti.
2. In 1990–1995, Protestantism exploded (AAGR 14%), whereas LDS growth markedly decreased. The Mormon AAGR in 1990–1995 was only 2.3%, ranging from a low of –1.6% to a high of 4.1%. This period included the political optimism and economic recovery of the early

1990s. Meanwhile, the slow but steady increase of the nonreligious population continued.

3. In 1996–2000 (1996–2002 for the LDS), Protestant growth decreased sharply while Mormon growth recovered. Nonreligious growth exploded between 2000 (possibly even earlier) and 2003, according to the 2003 census.
4. In 2000–2010, all Protestants combined increased by only 0.7% (*WCE3*) or 1.9% (*Operation World*), whereas the compound Mormon AAGR was 6.2%. Nonreligious growth also exploded between 2000 (or earlier) and the 2003 census.
5. In 2010–2015, Protestant growth picked up again to an almost 4% AAGR, reflecting strong growth especially among some Pentecostal churches (with 4% to 20% AAGRs!) and the Seventh-day Adventists (5.3%) and Jehovah's Witnesses (5%), while the Mormons also continued their earlier growth from 2000 to 2010, now down only slightly (4.85% compound AAGR). Meanwhile, the nonreligious population grew strongly from almost 2% to 2.7%.

For the future, *WCE3* projects the steady increase of the nonreligious population from 3% in 2020 (336,000 people) to a projected 5.4% or 762,000 people by 2050.[79] Yet the 2003 census already reported 10% nonreligious Haitians, almost double the projected 2050 rate! *WCE3* conservatively projects there will be 26% Protestants in Haiti in 2020 and around 30% Protestants by 2050, which would make another major Protestant boom on the island unlikely.

What about the future of LDS growth in Haiti? The secular transition theory established a clear correlation between church growth and socioeconomic development, operationalized in the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI).[80] The UNHDI weighs life expectancy, years of schooling, and gross national income per capita for each country.[81] Cragun and Lawson demonstrated that low Mormon membership growth becomes the norm once a country's UNHDI value

79. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 361.

80. Cragun and Lawson, "Secular Transition," 367–370.

81. UNDP, *HDI Report 2018*.

gets above 0.8, the starting point for the "very high human development" category as defined by the United Nations.[82] In Latin America, this happened first in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.[83] Is the secular transition theory confirmed by the recent data on Mormon membership growth in Haiti? Does it explain why there will be neither 267 million LDS members by 2080, as Stark predicted, nor thirty-five million by 2020 (as Bennion and Young projected)?[84]

Haiti appears somewhat anomalous with regard to the secular transition theory. Haiti's UNHDI value of 0.498 was much lower than the next-lowest Latin American country: Honduras (0.617). Yet, Haiti's average annual Mormon membership growth rate of 3.2% in 2016–2017 was, while higher than Honduras (AAGR 1.7%), quite comparable to Nicaragua (AAGR 2.9% with a low HDI of 0.658), Costa Rica (AAGR 2.9% with a high HDI of 0.794) and especially Panama (AAGR 5.2% with HDI 0.789).[85] No data on Mormon evangelization activities and missionary distribution are available (factors 1b and 1c in the country church growth protocol). Factor 2c (anomie resulting from poverty, natural disasters, diseases, corruption, and political violence) thus became a main factor to explain the Mormon growth periods in Haiti—although its value proved limited. Anomie from an economic recession, urbanization, poverty, and political violence explained high Mormon growth in 1982–1991 well, but the results were contradictory after the start of formal democracy in late 1990. Political violence, poverty, diseases, hurricanes, and earthquakes had little or no impact on the annual Mormon membership growth after 2001, which hovered between 3% and 7.5% a year and after 2013 never reached 5%.

Surprisingly, Haiti had only moderate average annual Mormon membership growth in 2016–2017 (3.2%), despite having the lowest

82. Cragun and Lawson, "Secular Transition," 370.

83. Gooren, "Comparing Mormon and Adventist Growth Patterns," 47.

84. Bennion and Young, "Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion," 29.

85. UNDP, *HDI Report 2018*.

UNHDI value of the Western Hemisphere: 0.498. This value is still far removed from the 0.8 that delineates the start of the UN "very high human development" category and is correlated with low annual LDS growth. To explain this contradictory trend, more in-depth (ethnographic) fieldwork research is needed on the Mormon Church in Haiti to explore why the same factors that supported high growth in the 1980s and 1990s no longer do so after 2001. Rousseline's LDS conversion story highlights Haiti's poverty and corruption, having a living LDS prophet for our time, and her unique mission experience in Florida. Basquiat emphasizes the bricolage of Haitian Mormons, some of whom continued Vodou practices while simultaneously loving the humble Joseph Smith as a prophet, accepting present-day revelation through visions, putting their own unique touches on the standard Mormon markers of baptism and testimony, and celebrating the Church's US connection. Freeman also explores surprising parallels between Mormonism and Vodou, while adding eternal families and the US connection as pull factors in conversions among Haitians.

If Haiti's HDI stagnates around 0.5, stronger LDS growth remains likely. Looking at other Latin American and Caribbean countries, one would expect LDS membership growth in Haiti to eventually decrease to the 1% to 3% per year range that is currently common in almost all countries of the region. If that indeed happens, and if Haiti's UNHDI value slowly keeps moving closer to 0.8, then the secular transition theory would be confirmed. And if it does *not* happen, then the secular transition theory would be falsified by at least one country case.

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VOICES AS BELLS

Hadley Duncan Howard

They told us she'd be dead by morning. Just like that, "dead by morning," as if they were speaking about mail delivery or some such. To them, she wasn't yet emergent. She was just another patient, another assessment, another case to file before the end of shift in this thrumming ER.

They told us she might last as long as forty-eight hours, through the weekend, if we checked her into the psych ward. Is that down in pediatrics? I asked. No, I was told, there is no pediatric psych ward. It's for all ages and all conditions. Can I go with her? my husband asked. She's only eight years old. No, they replied. No parents allowed.

We told them if our young daughter was going to die, she wouldn't do it alone in the terrifying, reverberating hell of a psych ward.

They nodded and wished us well.

She first introduced herself to me three weeks after the birth of her sister. I'd had several miscarriages, a horrific pregnancy, and a near-death delivery, and we'd decided to cut our losses and gratefully accept the gift of one child. No more, we agreed. Never again. She must have known we meant it, and would have none of that nonsense. She wanted to join us, and she clearly had no intention of being denied.

She took matters into her own hands, as it were, and made her presence very much known. She got in my face, almost literally.

She was considerate about it, this supernatural loitering, staying just out of my direct line of sight, at about ten o'clock, on my left side, about an arm's length away. Hi there, she said, gazing steadily, as if to twinkle with a shared secret. She presented herself to me less than a month after her sister was born, and stayed right there at ten o'clock,

all day, every day, until she, too, was born, three and a half years later. Another gorgeous girl, all ours.

Somehow, it wasn't strange, this heavenly haunting. I knew, immediately and always, who my visitor was: I knew she was ours, and I knew she was a girl. And through the nature of our introduction, I knew she had a powerful spirit capable of giving orders to time and space, capable of bridging realms of eternity, and doing it with humor and good manners. She was the dearest Pick Me ever.

And we did pick her. Inviting her to join us was a deliberate choice, extended with the love we already had for her. We didn't want another baby; we wanted *her*. We wanted her because we knew her. She wasn't a stranger. She was ours. She was us.

Oh, but that first pregnancy, that delivery. The courage required to do it all again. We told her she had one chance, a Friday night in late September, the sole opening we had for her. It's now or never, friend, we promised. This invitation is for one night only. Now's great for me, she eagerly replied. I can't wait.

Thanks very much, she said, and made good time.

While we awaited her arrival, she declared her own middle name, in all its import, to me in a dream. She was to be called Bell, she said, in reference to her "clear, distinct voice, used with purpose." Absolutely, we agreed, that's just the thing. It sounded just like her.

We knew exactly who this girl was long before we met her in the flesh. She was and is in every way our better, an empathetic and engaging force of life. A lover. A creator. A leader. Herself.

A spirit of immense strength. A voice, clear as a bell and all her own, that cannot be silenced.

It was eight years later, and my husband had given me a priesthood blessing every Sunday night for the last twelve months. I'd been working for a man so toxic, so narcissistic, so delighting in the misery he

Emily Christensen McPhie, *Madonna and Child* (2019), oil on panel, 16″ x 20″ (image courtesy of the artist)

caused, that a regular call upon heaven was needed to simply survive the week ahead. The buttressing, the fortitude: I had never been closer to God as I sought His unceasing assistance to endure. Every week, He told me I was being strengthened for a reason. That Sunday night, hands laid on my head, I received not comfort but the urgent, unmistakable instruction to resign.

Do it first thing tomorrow, God said. Walk away now, He said. Do not delay.

I did as I was told. I gave two weeks' notice and was directed to "enjoy" those two weeks as PTO. What was offered in spite was received with relief.

That very same afternoon, when my husband picked her up from school, she was trembling and covered in vomit not her own. In the last hour of the day, the child in the desk behind her had heaved forward and lost his lunch. It covered her back, her neck, her hair. The teacher, busy with the sick boy, left her to stew and retch and cry alone.

She was eight years old, powerless in her own body, unable to protect herself or exert control. She was wearing the sick of another, but the horror and humiliation were hers.

The next day, much too close to the one prior, she lay on the sofa with blankets and popsicles and a bucket nearby. The next day, too, and the one after that. She overheard a neighbor say that an empty stomach prevents vomiting. Better an empty house than a bad tenant, he said.

It didn't matter that the neighbor was wrong. It didn't matter that the neighbor was talking about something else entirely. A plan, unformed and nowhere near understood, was hatched in her grade school mind. To avoid horror and humiliation, to exert power and protection, the body must be controlled, the stomach must be empty.

And that was that. She stopped eating. But it wasn't about her stomach. It was about control.

She did not eat for thirty days. Not a bite or a nibble or a slurp for thirty days. Her father and I spent that month tempting, cajoling, begging. Praying and blessing, praying and blessing endlessly; not fasting. She did not go to school, but stayed with me, her newly unemployed mother, at home to care for her. In the earliest days of the month, we'd taken walks and done puzzles, but as the days passed, and only ice chips crossed her lips, her demeanor changed. Starvation changes a person.

The twinkle disappeared, and then the light in her eyes went missing altogether. Her hair was dull and thinning, her skin was sallow. She looked ravaged. She did not sleep, night or day. She read no books, watched no shows, did no projects, saw no friends. She took to rocking back and forth, muttering. Dad, my stomach is hurting, she said, over and over again, with increasing distress. Her agitation grew each day, each hour. Dad, my stomach is hurting. Dad, my stomach is hurting.

It was as if she was surrounded by invisible vultures, furiously pecking.

By day thirty, we were desperate for intervention. The doctors we'd seen had told her to cheer up and have a snack. No one took us seriously, believing that our daughter had not eaten a single bite in days, then weeks. Surely not, they scoffed. You've miscounted days, they assured. She's eating in secret, they said.

But we hadn't and she wasn't. Her frantic rocking, the rocking, that rocking back and forth didn't cease, the fevered chanting, that incantation, Dad, my stomach is hurting, did not end. My husband and I took turns keeping vigil; our older daughter watched in soundless dread as her sister faded maniacally, frenetically away.

The next day, Sunday, was my husband's birthday. We spent it driving aimlessly for hours around the county, a panicked, ineffective plea for calm and respite and salvation, our daughters strapped beside one another in the backseat of the car—one dying, wound within her frenzied mind; the other, wide-eyed, gaping at death as it ripped and slashed and mauled her only sibling.

Unhinged, untethered, we again begged for help at the emergency room. We can take her from you, they offered. We can strap her down and force feed her when it becomes an emergency. She'll be dead by morning, they said.

We'll take her home, we replied.

I sat with her in the dark all night, on the sofa in our family room, my husband not sleeping down the hall. Our baby was still for a few moments; death was coming for her. With her head in my lap, and in a state of exhaustion I've no way to describe, I entered into a meditative state, a twilight of the mind. In the hush I felt a question: What have you learned in the temple about mental health? it asked.

Come again? I returned. What have I learned in the temple about mental health? Nothing, as far as I know, I said, and I'm in no frame of mind for a quiz.

Again, I felt a question: What have you learned in the temple about mental health? it asked. Fine, I sighed. Let's see, well . . . I've learned . . . that . . . I think I've learned that . . . now that You mention it, I've learned that our spirits can be messed with and made vulnerable through our bodies, I answered.

And what can be done about that? it asked. We can use the priesthood, I said, to straighten these things out. Tell the vultures to stop their pecking.

Yes, it said. Yes, you can. You can do that.

You can do that.

In the morning, quite early, my mother called from out of state. Hear me out, she breathlessly implored. I have to tell you about a question I felt in the night. What have you learned in the temple about mental health? she said.

We're on it, I said.

We gathered our daughter, our dear, dear Bell, the girl who made herself comfortable in my peripheral vision for more than three years, the girl who named herself, the girl whose spirit is so broad and so deep and so tall, whose soul is so strong and whose voice is so clear that metaphysics takes orders from her; the girl who so much wanted a body that she carried and bore herself into this mortal sphere—we gathered this girl in our arms, flailing, wailing, howling, so precious to us, and carried her to a living room chair.

She was shrieking, keening, rocking, rocking, rocking, faster, faster, wild. Chanting, shouting, groaning, Dad, my stomach is hurting, Dad my stomach is hurting, Dad, my stomach is hurting. Chanting, Dad, my stomach is hurting.

We laid our hands on our perfect daughter, my husband and I, both of us bearers of priesthood power. If ever there were a time to claim heavenly authority for myself, this was it. My husband spoke the words of liberation. It took only a moment, just a couple of sentences, but required such faith that he collapsed onto the floor behind the chair.

Instantly, there was stillness, utter quietude. Miraculously, there was peace.

Our magnificent child, the girl who hell cannot overcome, the girl whose voice rings like a bell, clear, distinct, full of purpose—breathe and receive the grandeur of the miracle!—our glorious, faultless daughter spoke in a soft voice.

Dad, she calmly said, my stomach is hungry.

Yes, it is, he murmured. Would you like something to eat?

And on that Monday morning, early, with the power and protection of angels all around her, she ate half a sandwich, and lived.

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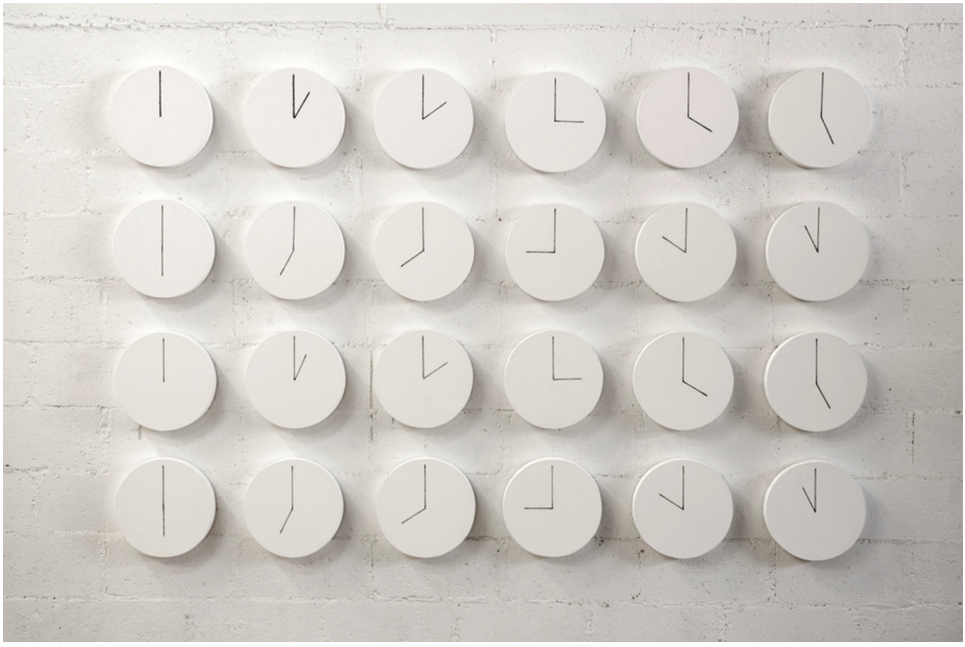

Georgina Bringas, *Todas las horas de hoy* (2010),
wax on canvas, 12″ x 12″

AGENCY IS NOT THE ENEMY

Name Withheld

I have spent much time contemplating my journey as a mother, a religious educator, and an aspiring historian. There are moments where I have felt pride and hope, while also moments of discouragement and sorrow. Where I am today, the good and the bad are preceded by the long path of historical precedent. The paving stones of that path can be coalesced into one word: agency. There have been times when agency is embraced and wielded with beauty and strength. More often, it is the lack of women's agency that captures my attention. Why have women not been allowed the whole exercise of their agency, and what have been the results? This is not an academic study of the topic; rather, it is the musings of a proud and very often frustrated woman who hopes for a future where women may, like men, be equal owners of their agency without the shame and fear that is attached to female agency today.

I cannot speak to broader global history and experiences, but women in the United States and my sphere have been ruled by ideas and practices such as coverture and the Cult of Domesticity. Coverture created a cloak of invisibility for women legally and religiously. A woman was known by her husband's or father's name. His voice spoke for her. His legal identity protected her. Male identity covered her existence. The idea was protective, but it resulted in the invisibility of women. The Cult of Domesticity partnered well with coverture. It created the rationalization for coverture. The Cult of Domesticity held that women are inherently more pure, moral, and virtuous than men. Their purity and virtue were so central to the stability of society that they required protection from the world of hard manual and intellectual labor, the divisive realms of politics, and the competitive individualist industrial

workplace. To preserve the moral purity of society, women must be protected. Their sphere of safety was the domestic sphere of home and motherhood. Coverture and the Cult of Domesticity have resulted in the silence and invisibility of women. Those effects are still felt today.

These historic ideals of womanhood have created a world where women's agency has been treated as a threat. While men were given the freedom of experiential agency through fallibility and veracity, women have been denied this latitude. Every time women have sought to expand their agency and own their identity, there is resistance. Why? Fear. Fear that women may choose to exercise their agency in a way that does not support or validate societal norms. They may choose to reject cultural ideals of womanhood, motherhood, and the role laid out by the Cult of True Womanhood. She may reject her role as the source of morality and identity as a wife and mother. By using her agency, she may upend the culture and, more importantly, the family, which is seen as the foundational unit of society. Women's agency must be limited and controlled to protect the cultural family and moral foundations for the greater societal good. She must submit to male agency. This sounds like a harsh, extreme pronouncement, but let us look at a few examples from history that illustrate the claim.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the women's suffrage movement was debated. Resistance to giving women the right to vote centered on their identities and roles in the home. Giving women the chance to exercise political agency would corrupt their moral nature and pull them away from the moral protection of their homes. This, in turn, would harm families and society. Coverture allowed for a man to exercise political agency for her, so she wouldn't have to. In 1911, State Senator J. B. Stanford summed up the argument well when speaking against giving women the vote in California. He said:

> Statistics go to show that in most equal suffrage states . . . that divorces have greatly increased since the adoption of the equal suffrage amendment, showing that it has been a home destroyer. Crime has also

> increased due to lack of the mothers in the home. Woman is woman. She cannot unsex herself or change her sphere. Let her be content with her lot and perform those high duties intended for her by the Great Creator, and she will accomplish far more in governmental affairs that [sic] she can ever accomplish by mixing up in the dirty pool of politics. Keep the home pure and all will be well with the Republic. (Argument Against Women's Suffrage, 1911 Prepared by J. B. Sanford, Chairmen of Democratic Caucus)

Sanford was not alone in his concern regarding suffrage. He and other anti-suffrage advocates feared that giving women political agency would endanger the family and the republic. For the good of society, their political voice must be silent. Granting agency was too great a risk. Though women currently have political equality according to the law, I felt echoes of this past when I was a party leader in Utah politics. When trying to recruit women to participate in Utah's caucus system or attend political events, more often than not, women would tell me that their husbands attend so they can be home to care for the house and family. There was a sense of relief in some of their voices. The man exercised political agency so she would not have to. She was more valued and comfortable in the home. Engagement by Latter-day Saint women in my district was extremely low. These women were voting, but their votes were mostly informed by their husbands' hands-on engagement in the system.

The shadow of male exercise of political agency in the place of women still exists. Institutionally, the Latter-day Saint leadership now encourages women to engage politically, and some women are responding. However, the shadow of the past and the lack of women modeling leadership and authority in the Church make it difficult for women to see themselves as leaders and for men to acknowledge women as figures and voices of authority in the political sphere. Just as in nineteenth-century Utah, my twenty-first-century Utah political experience was one where male church authority garnered respect and authority that a woman could never attain. The cult echoes were heard when women's

choices regarding work outside the home and child-rearing came up as concerns for supporting a woman candidate. If a woman does not have ecclesiastical experience, can we trust she will use authority wisely? Does involving her in the political realm cause her to neglect her home duties? Is she exercising her agency as we would like her to?

The practice of coverture in America created a marital dependence of women on men. A man could own property, make a living, and have a legal identity with or without a woman. This was not the case with women. The culture and laws based on coverture created a system where women were dependent on marriage. There are examples of women who chose not to marry, but in general, women wanting financial status, security, legal legitimacy, and stability needed to be connected to a man through marriage. However, once married, her identity and autonomy were tied to her role as wife and mother. Until recent years, women in church history, such as Emma and Lucy Smith, were only known because of their connection to a prominent male leader. When I quiz my students on women in church history that they know, this is still the case. Responses are almost always "wife of . . ." or "mother of . . ."

Divorce was a risky and difficult venture for women in the nineteenth and into twentieth centuries. Early divorce laws favored men who had a legal voice and access to the resources needed to leave a marriage. Under coverture, men also owned all property, even if acquired through a wife's inheritance or dowry. He also owned custody of his children. In leaving a marriage, a man risked very little, while for a woman, it meant losing practically everything. This system created limits on women's options. If she chose to leave a marriage, there was a strong incentive to remarry as soon as possible, often putting her in vulnerable relationships. Divorced women also risked being seen as immoral. Her cultural identity as the source of morality and virtue created a higher standard for women, and any perceived violation inflicted more social harm.

My grandmother was tied to an abusive temple marriage for years while raising her children in a Latter-day Saint community. She could not afford to leave the man who cheated on her, controlled every penny she spent, and was verbally abusive. It also was not socially acceptable to leave unless she was being physically abused. Her inability to divorce saved a marriage, but it was not a marriage worth saving. She separated from her husband after her last child left home, but she never legally divorced him. Divorce was not financially or socially an option. She died of cancer not many years after her separation. Her last years were in pain and close to poverty, but she was free to exercise her agency.

During the 1970s, divorce laws loosened throughout the United States, and no-fault divorce became the norm. Coverture ended in the financial world during the 1970s. These changes finally gave women more agency regarding divorce. Since then, divorce rates have risen significantly in the United States. This has caused many in the Latter-day Saint community to lament the loss of family stability. Providing women the agency to leave a marriage and have their own identity is to blame for the increase in divorce.

In an April 2007 general conference address entitled "Divorce," Elder Dallin Oaks stated: "Unfortunately, under current no-fault divorce laws, it can be easier to sever a marriage relationship with an unwanted spouse than an employment relationship with an unwanted employee." He then amended his condemnation with seeming approval for no-fault divorce in some cases, but blamed most divorces on selfishness. He said, "When a marriage is dead and beyond hope of resuscitation, it is needful to have a means to end it. . . . Often, the cause is not incompatibility but selfishness."

When I think of my friends and family members who have experienced divorce, it was never a selfish, easy decision. It was not a simple choice of convenience. Spousal rape, emotional neglect, verbal cruelty and humiliation, domineering control, and a husband's infidelity are

not selfish reasons to divorce. Before no-fault divorce laws, these marriages would still be intact, but they are not marriages worth saving. The numbers don't tell the full story. I would rather trust a woman's agency regarding her safety, security, and health in a relationship than have low divorce numbers. Individual over institution.

When I teach my modern United States history courses, the feminist movement is the lesson that causes the most friction and receives the most negativity from Latter-day Saint students. Why? For many, this movement represents the disintegration of the ideal family touted by United States cultural media in the 1950s. The feminist movement was not a movement against the family; it was a movement to improve women's agency. Women sought agency in their education, work options, finances, and most controversially, agency over reproduction. However, this movement received strong resistance from church leaders. In the May 18, 1993, All-Church Coordinating Council of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apostle Boyd Packer warned that the feminist movement was a danger to the church and its members. Some prominent Latter-day Saint religious educators still demonize the movement as an assault on the family. I would counter by saying that forced, conformist family structures are not worth saving at the expense of women's agency.

The Cult of Domesticity has dominated women's educational experience in America since colonial times. Since a woman's realm was home and motherhood, education focused on skills connected to motherhood, such as childhood education, nursing, and homemaking skills. Women were discouraged from educational pursuits beyond domestic-based spheres. Careers were also limited to those associated with or closely related to motherhood—teacher, secretary, nurse, and domestic worker. If a woman married, her husband would provide for her. She should be at home creating a safe moral environment for him and his children. Pregnancy could be grounds for firing. The feminist movement sought opportunities for women beyond the domestic

Emily Christensen McPhie, *I FELT a Funeral in my Brain* (2020), oil on aluminum panel, 18″ x 24″ (image courtesy of the artist)

sphere and cultural restrictions of the past, leaving the home for the workplace.

The resistance to these changes was and is strong. In a fireside address in San Antonio on December 3, 1977, Spencer Kimball warned, "Numerous divorces can be traced directly to the day when the wife left the home and went out into the world into employment. . . . Two spouses working prevent the complete and proper home life, break into the family prayers, create an independence which is not cooperative, causes distortion, limits the family, and frustrates the children already born." I remember as an undergraduate at Brigham Young University, President Hinkley teaching that women leaving home to work was the selling of one's birthright (a reference to the story of Jacob and Esau). This affected my educational choices. Instead of a career mindset, I pursued my education based on eventually becoming a stay-at-home mother. My dreams of career-based education ended. There are many women from my generation who, like me, feel frustration in the lost opportunities based on our lack of educational and career choices. I returned to school after my sixth child was old enough to attend pre-school and have since entered the workforce working in a Church Education System environment. I still get questions about how I juggle home and work life, a question my husband has never been asked. I still hear gender stereotypes, like the time another educator called diaper changing a "spiritual gift" granted to women. I have seen hesitation around hiring a married woman because family may interfere with her career. And when a single woman is hired, there is always the unspoken (and sometimes spoken) question of why she isn't married. Cults are slow to die, and trust is hard to gain. Women are still working to be trusted when using agency outside the cult.

The most controversial area of a woman's agency is agency over her reproductive abilities. As long as women have had bodies, they have sought ways to exercise reproductive agency. During the subsistence eras of the past, survival hinged on women's ability to reproduce. This placed a large burden on them. Childbirth was difficult, dangerous, and

life altering. The pressure to bear children was great, but the fear and pain were real. As a result, women have been using birth control and abortion for millennia, though not safe or dependable. Women were willing to take the risk. With industrialization and medical advances, human survival was no longer dependent on women producing as many children as possible. Some of the burden was lifted, and women sought more ways to control reproduction. The backlash was hard. Birth control was criminalized in the United States until the 1960s.

Safer, more available birth control enabled the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Women were able to disconnect sex from pregnancy and begin to experience it in a way men had for millennia: sex as a social and pleasurable experience, not primarily a reproductive one. The Victorian taboo surrounding sex began to fade. Out-of-wedlock sex has existed forever, but the sexual revolution brought it into the open from the shadows. Like any social movement, there were excesses. Even our restoration story has stories of excess. However, this should not demonize the entire program.

The resistance to sexual and reproductive freedom has been hard and heavy, especially for women who have borne the burden of sexual purity for men and women. The use of birth control was discouraged in the Church's General Handbook up until the 1990s. Early twentieth-century leaders were the harshest in their condemnation. In the July 1916 *Relief Society Magazine*, Joseph Fielding Smith stated, "Those who attempt to pervert the ways of the Lord, and to prevent their offspring from coming into the world . . . are guilty of one of the most heinous crimes in the category. There is no promise of eternal salvation and exaltation for such as they." However, like in the Victorian era, most Latter-day Saint women quietly used birth control against the advice of male leadership. This is a historic trend. In this immensely personal realm, women have always fought to maintain their sexual agency, even when law, religion, and culture shame them for doing so. Bodily and reproductive agency are immensely personal and important for women.

Men have enjoyed a great deal of latitude sexually. Though not always openly accepted, a blind eye was often turned when a man engaged in extramarital sex. Whereas a woman's reputation and future could be destroyed when she engaged in sex outside of marriage. Ideas of female consent were rarely considered outside of marriage and did not exist at all within marriage. She was a passive participant who bore the moral and reputational burden. It was not until the sexual revolution and feminist movement that women began to gain sexual agency. Women are still dealing with the repercussions of this change, and the fight continues as women work to overcome social stigmas connected to their sexuality. Sexual agency for women is extremely personal and elusive, yet when obtained, it is very empowering. The Church no longer forbids birth control; however, as is evident in Elder Neil Anderson's October 2011 general conference talk, there is still a strong emphasis on having children and a subtle encouragement to have large families while deferring judgment to the "husband and wife." I have a dear friend who took this counsel very seriously. She gave birth to nine children. It was financial, physical, and mental stress that has continued for decades. Though she loves each of her children, she feels bitter over the pressure she felt to provide bodies for as many spirits as she could. She always believed God would provide a way but felt betrayed when she was stretched beyond her limits. My obstetrician in Provo, Utah, once told me Mormon women stop having babies after they have had at least one too many. Larger families like my family of eight and my friend's family of eleven are harder to find. As hard as it was to raise a large family two decades ago, the task has become even more difficult and complex today. Pressure from men in authority to have children should not be why a woman gives birth. We should trust her to decide. It is her body, time, life, and heart that she gives to every child she has birthed. She may decide to have none, but that may be better than pressuring her into having children she is not able or willing to care for.

Actions and ideas of the past have created a scenario where the moral foundation of society and the family's functionality depend on women and how they use their agency. Throughout history, the exercise of political, familial, educational, and sexual agency by women has been considered dangerous. Movements where women have sought agency have been vilified. Women who have sought out increased agency have been stereotyped as angry, unfeminine, immoral, unattractive, radical, and prideful. Clearly, female agency is to be feared. If a woman exercises her agency in a way that does not conform to expectations, the family, society, and church are at risk. Women kept in a box are safe, and society is secure. Coverture and the Cult of Domesticity are the walls of the box of protection. Not as much protection for her, but protection of the social orders and power structures built upon the box. If given agency, she may choose to leave the box. She may seek her own identity and sphere of influence. Her agency is an enemy of a moral, religious, family-based society built upon her box. Her agency is perceived to be safest when confined to the domestic sphere and expressed in moral, submissive, humble, and pious ways.

However, maybe full exercise of her agency is the solution, not the problem. Maybe when women are given full access to their God-given agency, true progress can be made. Maybe restoration isn't just a theological exercise, but it is also a restoration of choice and autonomy to half the population whose agency has been restricted primarily out of fear. Maybe Zion is about equity and balance, not boxes and cultural expectations. How can we be of one heart and mind when hearts and minds bear different weighted values, are confined, and are held to different standards? Boxes do not make for strong foundations. Agency is not the enemy. Agency is the plan. Agency is the solution.

Georgina Bringas, *COMPOSICIÓN MÉTRICA 5* (2012),
tape measures on a wooden
and MDF frame, 20″ x 20″

November

Reed Richards

for Klyd Watkins

A nighttime hour came when I drove out and found a haven in the late year weather.
The rest of the world boozed and fought and laughed
but mostly slept, and the year kept its schedule dreaming, and I stopped on a quiet hill
and watched the still town under the low and moving sky,
and watched the leaves flurry from one place to another and rest and go again, and it was you, November, turning in your sleep, and it was your threat of fury and your promise of calm.
The clouds came lower, making a thing comfortable and stirring,
a vast room without walls, dressing midnight in its tender gibbous, and extending from the summit of this rise
a vision of a still and dark and sufficient world.
I saw the trees shivering in the wind;
I saw the dark, locked houses.
On this night dreams were reaching into the air—wants and satisfactions humming in the wires, ghosting out from vents and chimneys.
I restarted the car and drifted down, a silent stranger, through gales of yellow leaves.
Tomorrow the noisy streets will be filled with strangers who mostly live somewhere between the word and the act, and rarely venture awake, as I rarely do,
to places where time lingers briefly in its corridor. A moment I meant to remember will pass,

but it's all right.

Every moment is a desire for a sufficient world, a prayer for the sufficiency of every world

every silent stranger leaves in his wake.

REED RICHARDS {evanrichards62@gmail.com} lives in Nashville, Tennessee. He attends the Harpeth Ward and plays the organ for the Providence Ward. He has published poetry, fiction, and nonfiction in *The Time Garden*, *Nashville Scene*, *Dialogue*, *Radio Beds*, and *feathers* (Time Barn Produce I).

Stefani Manning, "Spiral Jetty" (2012), digital photo
(image courtesy of Stefani Manning)

The Spiral

Britta Adams

They said that shape held meaning,
the men in starched shirts: some symbol of eternity
or devotion. The spiral. I don't mind
those messages, but they don't fit a religion so linear
with a single path, an iron rod, a right
to choose, a steeple adorning
rectangular buildings. No room
for circles there.

Only circles tracked in brains:
the rabbit holes down which we tumble,
floating and falling between
right and wrong. Slide down
the banister into compulsion
to ensure salvation. It is the only way
so pray morning and night, and tie
your apron just so. No, like *this.* Grasp
bread and then water in your right
hand only, and offer your naked palm
to shake the hand of the apparition
just to be certain. These spirals exist
surely. In fact, the structure sustains
them with raised arms at least twice
a year. Even in that, though, there are squares.

They put spirals in temples,
and that's part of the significance.
Plenty of symbols in the temple that appear
nowhere else. As if the Protestant

scaffolding was chucked out the window
just before they placed the stained glass
in the celestial room. Liturgy litters the walls,
curtains, even the auditorium-style seats
come equipped with springs. Circles abound,
if you have eyes to see: the stars,
elaborate rings round
woodwork roses, patterned
swirls in carpet and crown
molding, polygamous
marriages, time-tunnels
in perpendicular mirrors,
the path one walks from start to finish.
And, of course, the spiral staircases
leading to some untouchable thing:
a second anointing or a vestibule,
embodying an outstretched hand.

BRITTA ADAMS is a poet living in Utah with a master's degree in English literature. She has previously published work in *Exponent II*, *Soft Union New Literature*, *Boats Against the Current Magazine*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *wildscape. literary journal*. In addition to writing, she has a passion for bingeing documentaries, playing video games, and taking long walks.

Stephanie Northrup, "Samuel the Lamanite" (2008), acrylic on canvas, 16″ x 20″ (image courtesy of the artist)

Samuel Returns

William Morris

The call to go back. After days preaching, raising his voice to a people become for themselves. A people who mocked his warnings (fools mock), saw him as filthy and loathsome. Mistaking cankering riches for rightness, whiteness for delightsome; heritage for righteousness; ignoring

your dual inheritance—

your two traditions,
the intersection of promises:
to blossom
after days prolonged,
to speak from the dust
after cycling to extinction.
You
called Lamanite
yet
a child of
the covenant.
You knew your tradition.
You were cast in the mold.
Raised up
after the ancient pattern.
Called out,
filled with visions,
given to see,
and sent forth
among strangers
to testify.

And it came to pass that after days ignoring his preaching, they cast him out. And he, eyes heavy with sorrow, but fixed homeward—he,

there on the road ready to return to his own land—he, weary as sin,
heard the voice of the Lord and the call to go back
back to a people
with hearts chiseled
from flakes
of brittle
pink
sandstone.
This people with those hearts: they had suffered his upbraidings long enough. Having already been cast out, he now tries to return? They will not suffer him to enter their prosperous city: they have no need of such sanctimony, such doomsaying. And so you are welcomed back with shut gates,
but shut gates
have never deterred
you—you covet
to prophesy.
You turn
your gaze
towards
the city wall;
find an unguarded stretch;
pray for strength
and stealth,
a veiling of
the Holy Spirit.
And as your
fingers and toes
find purchase in
the crumbling mortar
you begin
to climb,

all too aware
that like Abinadi
(he the roots; Alma the trunk;
Lamoni the grafted branch;
and you the bud)
you must deliver
a final,
damning
testimony,
a sealing witness.
That old
repentance or doom dialogue.
A triple wo.
At the wall, Zarahemla's watchtowers stand empty. No sentries posted; no one to overlook the land and see the enemy from afar off—well, sure, Nephi upon his garden tower but he is much more talked about than listened to—what need has one of prophets when there is delicate living at hand, when there are the softest raiments, the finest apparel to wear, and vanities to babble, and boastings to proclaim and treasure to heap up, and what warnings are needed when society is secure within stout walls
and as you climbed
the city wall
was there fire on your mind?
Knowing as you know
what the Lord
has required
of his servants in times past.
Wondering if
your blood
would be required
to seal

your testimony
against
the blind minds
below—the earth
crying out, your sojourn
cut short,
your soul saved, but elsewhere;
your mortal
eyes unable
to witness
your beautiful family
one
more
time
in this life.

The news spreads like wildfire, like disease, like envying and pride and strife: the Lamanite has returned. Has the gall, the poor taste to resume his warnings, to stretch his hand forth in judgement; to shout down on the people from on high, the city wall his Rameumptom. At least Nephi had the good taste to stick to his own property. And what sorcery is it that this man's voice is so loud, so piercing; and why does he speak of curses and slippery treasure; and how is it

the words you are given
—these mysteries
and peaceable things
that
flow
from your
mouth
like rain
rushing
to fill

a dry
creek bed
—how is it
that these
words are
not
yours,
yet sound so
familiar, issue forth in such
startling
abundance
as if your tongue
had been touched
by a hot coal
or by angels?
And still he will not cease. This Lamanite, this self-righteous fool, this man who is not from our city and knows not our ways and yet dares accuse of such horrible things. This man must be stopped. Pry up stones; run and fetch my bow. Grab a couple of slings while you're at it. We don't want to dirty our beautifully woven sashes. And as the people of the city fling stones and loose arrows like doves or darts or warnings at the foreigner standing brazenly atop the city wall, a hail of fire swarming, clotting, converging
like rumors or bees
                did you shrink
from
their biting touch
or did you
stand firm: braced
for consequences,
for martyrdom,
for a deserving,

triumphant
return
but not
the one
you had
wanted.
And when you realized
they could not
harm you,
did you wonder
if you, the good and faithful
servant
would yet have
his reward?
And did
a seed
of hope
enter your breast,
and begin to swell?
And did you dare
nourish it?
Or
were you intent on
scanning the faces
of the mob,
searching
for some soul,
even
just
one
who had listened to
your words—

or rather
the words
that had been
given
to you—and
was now
ready
to repent?

WILLIAM MORRIS writes, edits, and writes about Mormon fiction. He is the author of *The Unseating of Dr. Smoot*, *The Darkest Abyss: Strange Mormon Stories*, and *Dark Watch and Other Mormon-American Stories*. William also edited the anthologies *Monsters & Mormons* and *States of Deseret*. He lives in Minnesota with his wife and daughter. More about William and his work can be found at motleyvision.org.

Grief Is Not a Task

Dixie L. Partridge

Grief is not a task. . . .
—Gwen Flowers

to be moved out of, finished.
Grief is like lichen on the north side of trees
in forests of your childhood, subtle
with color, some very drab.
Month by month it will change
little, but

today a spiral shape has come
to this ridged trunk of Scots pine:
mustard seed color . . .
and you've stopped to look—
as you stopped as a child—

remembering Father's words
about lichen on tree trunks:
it will always point you home.

Living Alone at High Elevation, After Loss

Dixie L. Partridge

Winter is toward knowing.
—William Stafford

Overnight, snow has deepened;
there's this sense of it mending anything broken—
the slight roof-sag on a garden shed next door,
a riven support wall under back fence,
and something more. . . .

In the forest, insulated stillness
comes closer and closer to consolation;
the white soft rind of earth's orb
mellows the sound of too loud ways.

Five winters adapting, and now
I can drink from a stream slowing to ice—
water too cold for most thirsts.

You of the warm climes reading these words—
I was once you: will our geographies
keep us separate here on the page?
Can the horizon of your mind
apprehend morphologies of snow
drifting night after night?

How the white mountains grow—soft fold
on soft fold—with hardly a rock face showing,
plumed waterfalls turned milk glass?
How from enough distance, even the violence
of avalanche is silent and beautiful?

Venturing out, you meet the sound
of white breath in your lungs.
Among frosted firs and pine, no bird
or coyote call, no tremble of leaves—
only needled, frozen wilderness
and a kind of pain relief.

From overhead, the sudden dive of a hawk,
like a knife blade, startles me,
and I wonder at its prey.

I've always found it easy to be fearful,
but attend willingly to the cold
and quiet here—and even the hazards—
under instruction.

Past noon, skies clear, and by dark comes
sub-zero and the lit slush of constellations
beyond any we can name.

Nothing has instilled in me
a hope of riding out any weather
more than this silver flute of moonlight
over new fields of snow.

DIXIE L. PARTRIDGE grew up in Wyoming and lived most of her adult life along the Columbia River in Washington state. Her poetry has appeared in many journals and reviews, including *Poetry Magazine*, *The Georgia Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and most recently *Ars Medica*, *Kaliedescope*, *Blueline*, *MacGuffin*, *BYU Studies*, and *Dialogue*. Her two published books are *Deer in the Haystacks* (Ahsahta Press) and *Watermark*, recipient of the Eileen Barnes Award. Personal impact of landscape is often at the root of her writing.

NARROW IS THE GATE

Danny Nelson

No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith.

—Brigham Young

The alien ship was beautiful.

Ornately encrusted with organic shapes glowing with subdued mauve lighting, it looked like a series of pink cathedrals emerging from the clouds. The ship arrived over the Pacific Ocean near San Francisco and began a leisurely glide toward the shore. The coast guard hailed it. The air force hailed it. Californians fished dusty ham radios from their attics and hailed it. The alien ship sailed on, mute and stately, clouds swirling around its buttresses.

An hour after the first sightings, the president of the United States flew to San Francisco, holding press conferences the whole way. Times were difficult and her once fresh face had accumulated the wear of years with each month in office. World politics were nearer a breaking point than usual, and there was an election coming. In one press conference, she shook her head gravely when the topic of military action against the aliens was raised. Americans are calm, brave, and welcoming to visitors, she said. No one bothered to fact-check these claims.

By the time the president and her press junket landed in San Francisco, the ship had made landfall and was sailing serenely east over the scrubby deserts and mountain peaks. The president had a photo taken of herself listening to the city's overexcited mayor while wearing a serious frown and then boarded the plane again.

The ship sailed on. Satellites tracked its movement. The internet roiled with speculation. Conquest and annihilation. Scientific

expedition. Diplomatic envoy. The ship would land in Denver. Las Vegas. Area 51. There was no hope left. This was the salvation of the world.

Fifteen hours later, the ship came to a stop above Salt Lake City.

~

Herbertson was prophet that year. He was short and soft-spoken; gray and grandfatherly. The Church had enjoyed a contented period during his tenure. He did not thunder, as did his first counselor Holyoke, that the world had dragged the Saints' standards down. When he spoke, he relied heavily on the Book of John. He often ruminated, publicly and personally, that God is Love. Those Saints whose religion originated in the Old Testament found him weak, but his vague goodwill made him an excellent spokesperson for the modern Church. He had the unflappable gentleness of a former middle school science teacher turned spiritual leader. His earnest modesty blunted the most pointed interview questions.

Unlike many prophets before him, Herbertson's appeal stretched beyond the Saints. The Church may be a paranoid, controlling hotbed of outdated prejudice and petty cruelty, said those the Church used to call gentiles, but at least it was run by Herbertson and not Holyoke. To the gentiles, when he remembered to speak to them, Herbertson replied that the God of the Church was physically and materially incapable of being cruel to anyone. His sedate kindliness was such that few bothered to fact-check his claims.

It was a hazy evening in late spring when the aliens set down in Salt Lake City. The sky was smeared with white and gray, the air hot and dry. There was construction on North Temple, a narrow river of orange safety cones. A youth group was walking to the Family History Museum, their faces blank and cheerful. They pointed as the ship approached the spine of the Wasatch, its turrets and spires eddying the

clouds as they boiled through. The ship slowed and came to rest fifty feet above the wide promenade between the temple and the tabernacle.

La Paz, the mayor, called the church offices. The call was not answered because the Church Office Building was emptying. A steady stream of men in blue and gray suits and women in knee-length skirts flowed up the hill to the Avenues. One of La Paz's aides had a niece who worked for one of the senior staffers at the Church, so eventually the connection was made. The situation was a matter of city security, said La Paz, and the city would handle it with utmost respect for the Church's property. The senior staffer who took the call was relieved. He had been promoted past his competence, and like many in his position, he was grateful to be told what to do. With genial force, he declared that the evacuation was officially sanctioned and organized his managers to make sure the masses of people proceeded calmly. At the last moment, someone remembered to call Herbertson and let him know the situation.

Herbertson took the call as he looked out the windows of his apartment, just across from Temple Square. A segment of the alien ship served as a pinkish backdrop to the familiar spires of the temple. He thanked the caller softly and hung up the phone, already planning what he would say if the public relations office asked him for a quote. "The truth of our religion speaks of a universal experience" and "we have faith in the security forces of our city" would be part of it. Or, rather, "the men and women of our city's security force."

Before the sun set, the aliens descended.

~

They came down on little hovering discs which seemed to wobble under them like hooked fish, but the aliens stayed still as statues. Drones buzzed them from every direction, frantically videoing, but the aliens were unperturbed by the bee-like activity. When they touched down,

each seemed to genuflect, but it could have just been the impact of their landing. There were five of them, standing like conquerors in front of the temple wall, tall enough to easily see over it into the grounds.

The aliens were as beautiful as their ship. They had broad, thrown-back heads with three to four black, shining eyes. Their skin had the smooth vibrance of rainforest reptiles—olive green, mustard yellow, and ruddy purple. They wore flowing, colorful gowns of a material somewhere between cotton and feathers. On some, the gowns closed in the back under a hairy, sea-blue collar. They had short arms with many oddly jointed fingers and a retractable bone spur that seemed to function as a thumb. They walked with an eerie, swaying grace.

The city had cordoned off Temple Square and the surrounding streets, so the square was empty. It was impossible to tell what the aliens thought of the abandoned grounds. They looked around them with inscrutable expressions, blinking and winking their black eyes. One reached up and touched a jointed finger to a tree leaf with what looked to some observers like reverence and to others like hunger. The setting desert sun shone dramatically on the colorful, organic curves of their heads.

The president was in Salt Lake by then. In the calculus of elections, Utah was too predictable to be interesting, and she hadn't campaigned there. She made cheerful noises to the press about the situation being a unique opportunity to see "this jewel of the West," but in truth, she would have traded significant political favors to move the meeting with these interstellar visitors anywhere else. Religion was divisive, and despite its origins, most Americans were not quick to claim the LDS Church.

Her staff set up a small camp just north of Temple Square near the Conference Center. The media took pictures of her speaking, the spiky trees of the Conference Center's rooftop gardens ringing her head like a crown. She said she would send a decorated general to speak to the aliens. A woman.

"Do you see this as a way to promote women's profiles in the military?" asked one member of the press. The president pointedly looked right through him as she called on the questioner behind him. Being rude to reporters was the only portion of her job the president truly enjoyed.

The general, Margoyles, marched into Temple Square flanked by two young, burly military men dressed in dark fatigues. She was bone thin and rigid, cutting through the cheery ambiance of the square like a hot saber through a butter sculpture. She stopped a safe distance from the aliens and hailed them. One of the burly young men carried a computer meant to help with translation. The aliens were prepared, however. With great solemnity, they handed Margoyles a twisted box with several delicate coruscations. While holding it, which she did stiffly and uncomfortably, Margoyles could understand the aliens' speech. It was not the sort of understanding that translates words into other words. It was like dream-understanding, the strange certainty of knowing impossible things. Holding the translator, Margoyles's mind opened and fluttered like a papery flower, but it never showed on her face. She was an excellent soldier.

The people of Earth welcomed the aliens, said Margoyles. The aliens showed polite goodwill. The people of Earth were happy to meet the aliens as peaceful visitors, but they should know that the Earth was defended, said Margoyles. Of course, of course, replied the aliens, sending swirls of impatience through the device Margoyles held. If the aliens would reveal their purpose in visiting, perhaps the people of Earth could help, said Margoyles.

There was a disagreement among the aliens about their response. They each had two voices, a high reed and a low flute; they harmonized with themselves and each other as they spoke. They argued together for a moment in swift tonal snatches. At last, the one with blotches of yellow and mauve in lines along its elongated head responded.

Earth was very kind to offer help, it said through the box, which throbbed in Margoyles's hands. Fortunately, human help was not needed. No—not that. Margoyle sensed that their meaning was closer to *Earth's help would be ludicrously insufficient.* The aliens were not after anything material.

One of the aliens fished in its robes and pulled out a thin, metallic-looking square. Etched in lines of glowing blue was a picture of a man. He had a hooked nose, a high collar, and a strange, archaic bouffant of hair.

We must speak to the successor of Brother Joseph, buzzed the translator in Margoyles's hands. *Take us to the prophet.*

~

The drones recorded the picture on the metal square in crisp clarity. It was unmistakably the image of Joseph Smith Jr., now long dead and—as far as anyone knew—as Earth-bound as any other religious figure from history. Frantically, the president declared a total media blackout. It didn't work. ALIENS SEEK LDS PROPHET blared the news scrolls, followed by ads, and then TEN THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MORMONISM—#5 WILL SHOCK YOU.

In truth, very few people who clicked through were shocked. For good or ill, public opinion about the Church was set—congealed like over-refrigerated gelatin. Those who were already inclined to be incensed about the Church found energy to be angry again, while those already inclined to approve smiled in serene satisfaction. Most were merely puzzled. The LDS Church, that minuscule branch of a decaying Christian tradition, seemed the most random and specific thing the aliens could have chosen as their entry point to all of human expression.

"It's like," said a popular comic to his late-night audience, "going to a buffet and asking to have a closed-door session with a green bean."

The apostles called an emergency session. Holyoke was the loudest voice in the room. It was a confirmation of the universality of the

Restoration, he said. It would lead to a flowering of missionary work. What a testimony to the foundation of the Church. An ensign—not just to the world, but to the universe. The Church was justified—not that it sought justification, but just the same! No human soul could doubt the truth now.

In the heat of inspiration, Holyoke was impressive and beyond questioning. Under the soft lights of the meeting room, his bald forehead shone like a halo. The Brethren prayed together and, as was so often the case, a sweet sense of rightness and comfort prevailed in the room.

Herbertson, his stomach uncertain, visited the bathroom after the meeting. It had a picture of the First Vision. Looking at the familiar painting, Herbertson wondered. No matter how he tried, he couldn't insert aliens into his understanding of the scene.

~

The government brought Herbertson to speak to the aliens. They had no choice. The aliens refused to communicate anything substantive without him.

Herbertson knew the layout of the temple complex more intimately than his own apartment. He knew the order of the yearly flowers that bloomed and then were rooted out to make way for the next season's flora, knew the cheerful *Holas* and *Ni Haos* from the smiling sister missionaries, knew the slightly medicated smell of the standing pools and fountains. Swarmed by military personnel, though, the temple grounds suddenly seemed strange and overlarge. Herbertson himself felt shrunken and old, leaning heavily on his cane while the two guards walked with careful steps to match his pace.

The government had set up a white pavilion in the grass between the Lion House and the Church Office Building. Its spires soared to the sky, a little sister to the granite temple to the west. It hosted the aliens, shading their uncannily curved heads from Utah's relentless sun.

Electrical cords snaked everywhere along the ground, feeding into boxy machines—translators and bio-indicators, radar machines and a full field hospital kit. Someone had set out a folding chair facing the aliens for Herbertson. The aliens stood in a grand, multicolored group. As far as anyone had seen, they didn't sit.

The chair was uncomfortable, but Herbertson was grateful for it. Years of going from apartment to temple tunnels to private airplane made the heat of the day unfamiliar and unpleasant. And he was old. His knees complained as he gripped them in hands mottled with russet spots. Steadiness was one of Herbertson's virtues, though, and he willed the irritation of the sweat away. He would meet these emissaries of the stars with serene goodwill.

The aliens turned toward him with the unnerving collective grace of a flock of birds as he sat. They raised their hands and rattled at him. Herbertson smiled blandly. He had visited Ghana, India, Peru. He knew how to arrange his face when he didn't understand the local customs.

Perhaps the aliens' culture deemed the translator box inappropriate for first meetings, for they did not offer it. Instead, they merely spoke to Herbertson, first the one with yellow and ochre on its head, then the one with deep-sea blue and turquoise. Their two-part voices dipped and swelled. At a certain point, they paused impressively.

Herbertson, sensing it was his turn, replied with a short speech he had prepared during his morning shower. The church of Earth was pleased to welcome the guests from the stars—fellow believers. What a joy it was to see that the good news of the gospel had touched more than this tiny planet, to know that God could transcend the narrow limitations of man's sight. There was much that each group of—he stumbled on the word souls, recovered—could teach each other. The unrelenting rules of gravity were like a tether keeping humanity's feet planted on Earth, but their faces were pointed to the stars, grateful to meet fellow travelers in God's vast creation.

The exchange was being taped by the government and Herbertson didn't notice the camera technician, whose lips quirked at his final

sentence. Those who paid attention to these things would recognize the line as inimitably Herbertson's. He tended to start practical and crescendo into floridity. The pattern was more pronounced under stress. The blank stares of the aliens were oddly aggressive and discomfiting. Herbertson wished for a glass of ice water and a teleprompter but reined in his expectations. Brigham Young had stood on a stump and preached to a crowd boiling tar—he could sit on a folding chair and speak calmly with aliens.

The ritual seemed to be complete, if it was a ritual at all. The aliens rattled again, snapping their bone spurs against their hands like castanets. Then the translator was handed to Herbertson, and for a second, he was overcome with nausea as the alien communiques soaked into his mind through his fingers. He gripped the translator too tightly and the messages swirled over him in see-sawing pulses of urgency.

We are pleased to meet Brother Joseph's successor, the aliens intimated between Herbertson's fingers. He felt their pleasure—their utter delight, alien and consuming and pure—and wondered at it. It made him think of snowball plants blooming, of popcorn popping on the apricot tree. He shook his head, and his glasses slid down his nose. Of course, he was pleased to see them as well, he thought back, hoping to use the same mechanism. To his unease, the thought traveled through his fingers into the machine like a physical thing, and with it trailed all sorts of other thoughts, like fish swimming in the wake of a shark—his pleasure, his unease, the discomfort of the flat planes of the chair against his buttocks.

The aliens accepted the confused response with dignified inclines of their heads. Perhaps they expected this muddled reply. Kindly, they sent, *It takes some time for purity of thought to be achieved. No doubt you have more elegant ways of sharing your [something] with your own kind.* That *something* was a concept near to *soul* but also, somehow, close to the concepts of *kidney* and *doormat*. Herbertson nodded patiently and realized the action was likely to be as inscrutable to them as the hand-rattling was to him, so he sent his willingness to keep listening through

the machine. This thought went through more cleanly, though a regret from his teenage years bubbled up before it sent. The sweat was heavy on his forehead now.

The aliens conversed among themselves, their dual voices sounding like a flock of flamingos arguing with a herd of cows. Was there dissent in the group? Herbertson blinked. There didn't seem to be disagreement, exactly, but the aliens certainly had personalities. The yellow-tinted one piped up when no one had spoken to it for several breaths, and the turquoise one's voices sounded harried and business-like. There was a larger alien in blue and black that rarely spoke, staring instead at Herbertson with unreadable eyes. The two whose heads were slashed with green spoke to each other with the easy back-and-forth of couples or siblings.

The aliens' conference stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The turquoise one turned again to Herbertson.

We abase ourselves, it sent through the translator. *It is our planet's never-ending honor to be in your presence.*

Herbertson gasped a little at the intensity of feeling that coursed through him with the alien's words. An emotion like exalted reverence radiated like a tiny sun from the machine on his lap. The aliens, pulsed the translator, *believed.* Such deep love, awe, and esteem poured from it that Herbertson blushed and tried to clean his glasses—an old trick from his teaching days to cover discomfort—nearly dropping the translator in the process. He resettled everything carefully but left his glasses askew on his nose, giving him a slightly drunk look.

At last, uncomfortable, Herbertson sent *I am honored to meet you as well.*

The aliens glanced at each other, their throats swelling and pulsing and—in the case of the two green-headed ones—flushing purple. It took a moment for Herbertson to recognize the flood of feelings, but then he saw clearly. The aliens were crying for joy, or rather, the alien equivalent of that human action.

Herbertson had been to Ghana, India, Peru. He knew how to turn the adulation of those who saw him as a savior back toward God. Without hesitation, he sent *The Lord loves you.* It was the cleanest thing he'd sent through the translator, and he meant it.

The aliens sent the feeling back to Herbertson fivefold. Herbertson felt his eyes grow wet. The translator between his hands buzzed with a transcendence of certainty and divine love.

Please, give me the message you have brought with you, sent Herbertson, still rapt.

The sending turned the moment sour. Spiky waves of uncertainty and confusion shot through the translator. The turquoise alien again stood as spokes-creature.

We have no message, it said—or was it, *It is impossible for us to have anything to tell you*?

Herbertson blinked, his own confusion swirling around the aliens'. *We have questions,* pulsed the translator in his lap. *We have so many questions.*

~

The president felt that the military and the Mormons had the alien visitation handled. She wanted to be in Washington planning infrastructure, not stuck in a Salt Lake Marriott running attendance on these very foreign dignitaries. She had plans for a transcontinental network of supertrains.

Americans don't want supertrains, said her advisors. They want to know someone is taking control of the alien situation.

Irritated, the president followed their advice. She held press conferences, visited Hill Air Force Base, gave visiting lectures at the University of Utah. She even went to a BYU football game, though she sensed the entire stadium had voted for her rival in the last election. The marching band played "I Love You, California" in her honor, and she smiled and waved while the crowd cheered part-heartedly.

The president was not comfortable being confined to Utah. There were too many surprises, little backward eddies in the way the people behaved. She would settle into conversation with some Utahn, sailing forward on the small talk of politics, and then, suddenly, there it would be—some conversational artifact from another age, some impression or attitude untouched by the twenty-first century, bobbing up into the conversation as if it belonged. If she called attention to it, the Utahn's face would smooth over, wide, friendly, blank. They couldn't hear the anachronism in their own voices, couldn't process her discomfort. She spent longer than she should in phone conversations with her husband, enjoying the direct East Coast tones of his voice, his total lack of circumlocution.

So, it was not her favorite state. She strongly suspected it had never been any president's favorite state. But the president had three children, and not all of them were her favorite, either. That didn't mean she didn't care. She made an effort. She toured Temple Square, spoke to the protesters standing in their small clumps outside the walled grounds. She took easy hikes up the mountain, learned to know the smell of the Great Salt Lake tainting the air. She discovered, surprisingly, that there was excellent coffee to be had if one was willing to search for it. And she learned to love sipping that coffee while standing in front of one of the wall-length windows in the Marriott, watching the sun pulse pale yellows and pinks over the edge of the Wasatch early in the morning.

There are compensations for everything, she typed into the document where she kept notes for the inevitable book she would write following her presidency. The thought buoyed her through almost three meetings with representatives of the local legislature.

~

Herbertson was, broadly speaking, looking forward to answering the aliens' queries. He was a great answerer of questions, and he had lived in the soft-edged universe of the Church long enough that there

were very few subjects he didn't have answers for. In his younger days he had spoken with the pope, and during one of the rare occasions when the camera's gaze didn't force them to be friendly and noncommittal, the two gray-haired men had talked theology. Herbertson had initially been nervous to speak with the pontiff but had since felt he had won the conversation. It was, of course, difficult to tell when working through translators, but he trusted his instincts. He felt some of the same thrill of confident apprehension when he contemplated his interviews with the aliens.

The scores of attending military and scientific experts were less confident. It was time, they said, that the aliens made some concessions to the rest of the population of Earth. By this, they meant America and, more specifically, their own fields of expertise. Religious conversations were all well and good, but Earth had some very pressing questions about the aliens' visit. The scientists wanted to know *how,* the military wanted to know *why,* and the president's PR representatives wanted to know if there was an approved term for the species, because the word *alien* sounded a little nineteenth century and was exciting the sort of people who scream on cable news shows.

If they could have insisted on having their questions answered, the experts would have done so. But the aliens didn't so much refuse to communicate with the scientists and generals as ignore them. If they managed to get a question mediated through Herbertson, the aliens would answer it to the best of their ability, but they had little patience for any matters outside their faith. At one point, pressed by the head of the scientific team, Herbertson had asked how the spaceships were fueled. The answer that swam through the translator was incomprehensible and terse—something about gathering a foam or mist that swirled around certain kinds of stars, then compressing and distilling it as fuel. The aliens said they didn't know the details, and the feeling pulsing through the translator was that they weren't at all interested in learning them. There were engineers who knew these things, but they hadn't

been brought on this most important mission. Their ships worked; that was the main thing. If something went wrong, there was a station not too far from Earth's solar system that could solve mechanical problems.

The military and scientific leaders wanted to know a great deal more about *that,* but the aliens were already plying Herbertson with their own questions. The most the scientists and soldiers got after that was a short statement from the indigo alien who, with stately but clearly manufactured patience, pointed out that they had traveled a long way and that civility (a confusing concept in the translator, teetering between the ideas of *wind tunnel* and *box of souls*) dictated that they be able to complete their mission before gratifying everyone's idle curiosity.

The scientists and military experts withdrew, not entirely graciously. At least, they told each other, they were allowed to record the proceedings. And who knew, perhaps some snippet of the religious discussion would reveal something important about the alien's biology, technology, or whether (as the military experts believed) they were the advance scouts of an invading army.

Transcripts of the aliens' questions to Herbertson were therefore dutifully filed away in a smooth black safe, though the transcribers were uncertain about their usefulness. Herbertson did his best to describe the questions coursing through the translator, but was generally at a loss to comprehend, let alone put into English, the alien concepts flooding his brain. A typical sequence of questions punched into the transcription went like this:

The prophet said that hot drinks are to be avoided. Does the [unintelligible] *count as a hot drink, or does the fact that it* [unintelligible] *and sometimes* [unintelligible] *make it safe to drink, no matter its temperature?*

We are supposed to hold things in common, but [unintelligible] *cannot be split among* [unintelligible] *without negative effects to* [unintelligible]. *Is it right for us to decline to share* [unintelligible] *with other believers, or is this sinful?*

Many [unintelligible] *may be joined as* [unintelligible] *but does* [unintelligible] *or* [unintelligible] *counteract* [unintelligible] *or confirm it?*

This last question turned out to be about polygamy, and that was where the trouble began.

The aliens reported themselves to have three biological sexes—though the number was possibly four. There was debate on their planet as to which of the two or three "attendant" sexes should be a plural partner for the "presiding" sex.

As far as Herbertson, gripping the translator with sweaty fingers, could understand, some theorists in the alien culture claimed that one particular sex—was it those with green striping on their heads?—was the only acceptable one for polygamy, while others argued that the other attendant sex was the true polygamous one. Still others argued that any sex that wasn't a presiding sex was available for polygamy. No one in the aliens' culture seemed to question which sex was the presiding one.

The question was further complicated because the aliens couldn't clearly communicate their concept of marriage to Herbertson. It was somewhere along the lines of *legal contract of affection* and *life partnership* but it snarled together with other concepts such as *a severed root,* and *the flash of sunlight on a pane of glass, only eternal,* and *the ache of the bone of the back after sleep.* Even more confusingly, these barnacle-like meanings shifted around depending on which alien was speaking. So, for the turquoise alien, the *root* aspect was more pronounced and carried along the dizzying idea that *the fruit is the seed is the fruit is the seed.* The yellow alien also spoke of *butchery* when it spoke of marriage. For the dark alien, marriage was primarily *the war that has no enemies.* And hidden deep within the green-striped aliens' concept of *marriage,* so slight it was almost imperceptible, was *air escaping from a biological sphincter,* though whether that meant whistling, farting, or some process unavailable to humans Herbertson couldn't tell.

It took several hours of intense decoding for Herbertson to arrive at an understanding of the question, and he gave himself a few moments

to consider it. The aliens peered at him as he sat sweating in the Utah heat, their black eyes expressionless. Inwardly, Herbertson prayed for guidance, but no immediate answer came.

I am sorry, but there is much that I still do not understand about your question, he sent through the translator.

The aliens looked at each other. *Perhaps you can use your own translator,* they sent through the device in Herbertson's hands. *A communication of Earthly design may provide you a more accurate picture.*

We sadly lack your powers of technology, Herbertson sent back with a rueful smile.

Flickers of uncertainty radiated between the tall alien forms and seeped into the translator. *But the translator is Brother Joseph's design,* it thrummed.

Herbertson sent back a blank wall of ignorance.

Something like panic surged beneath the aliens' communications. The flashing, black-eyed glances they gave each operated in concert with the feelings crawling into Herbertson's hands, giving him an almost native understanding of their facial expressions. At last, the dark alien pulled its personal translator from a knapsack slung about its shoulders. Pressing at its edges, the alien opened the translator, which came apart in two halves like a cracked egg. Embedded in its glowing blue machinery was a set of wire-rimmed spectacles, stones where the lenses should be.

~

ALIENS USE MORMON MAGIC TRANSLATOR blared the headlines, followed with BUILDING A URIM AND THUMMIM—IS IT POSSIBLE? AN ENGINEER AND RELIGIOUS HISTORIAN WEIGH IN. More reputable and less popular news sites showed the president in an unguarded moment, pinching the bridge of her nose with a pained expression as she read the news.

The apostles called another emergency meeting. They had to find the original Urim and Thummim used by Joseph Smith. But it had been kept so safe—packed up with seer stones, dowsing rods, and other nineteenth-century bric-a-brac that had become embarrassing over the years—no one really knew where it had ended up.

After a frantic search, the artifact was located. They brought it to the apostles on a white cloth. It sat on the table, inert, the lamplight reflecting dully on the cut stones. Herbertson regarded it with trepidation. When he was a young apostle, he had thought of searching out the history of Joseph's Urim and Thummim, but it was the sort of project that gets shoved aside by other, more pressing matters. He wished now that he had made the study a priority.

Holyoke insisted that the Urim and Thummim be used—it was inconceivable that the aliens could make use of one of God's artifacts while they, his Earthly inheritors, could not. One by one the apostles tried on the Urim and Thummim, peering through the milky stone lenses, and one by one they reported no additional inspiration or influence. Finally, it was Herbertson's turn. He settled the glasses on his nose, feeling foolish and oddly transgressive. The spindly wires of the nose- and earpieces dug into the flesh of his face, and the stones were opaque and poorly cut, presenting his eyes with faceted, but blank, walls. He did not feel the familiar warmth of inspiration. Slowly, he took them off and forced himself to face the apostles' expectant faces.

Undaunted, Holyoke suggested they bring the Urim and Thummim to the next interview with the aliens, to demonstrate that the Earthly Church was equal to theirs. Herbertson nodded noncommittally, but when the Brethren disbanded he quietly asked an aide to return the artifact to storage. He was a prophet of the modern Church and had found from long experience that these items were much more comfortable when they were out of sight.

~

After nearly ten days, the president was fighting the feeling that she was going to spend the remainder of her presidency in Salt Lake. Rather than depress her, however, the feeling galvanized her. She was a remarkably resilient person, but inaction made her anxious.

She woke early one morning with the familiar, crushing "Utah" feeling hovering around her thoughts, and resolved as she curled her hair to accept the feeling and do something with it. For whatever reason, she was halted here—trapped like the smoggy air that lay some mornings like a blanket, straining at the lip of the mountain peaks, unable to disperse. The forces keeping her arrested couldn't be changed, so they were inconsequential. There must be something she could do, even in Utah. She sent one of her aides on an errand, pressing a folded square of notepaper into his hand. He returned three hours later laden with enormous maps of the state and sacks of markers and rulers. Overjoyed, the president canceled her afternoon meetings.

In the quiet of her Marriott room, she sorted through the maps and selected the largest: an almost archaic map that covered most of the floor when she unfolded it. The president kicked off her heels and stood astride the map for a few moments like the Colossus. She traced the delicate lines of streets and rivers with her eyes, noting the sprawling jumble of the Wasatch Front; the wide, empty deserts studded with minuscule towns; the southern-border growths of retirement havens. Having seen the whole, she focused on Salt Lake City. Though she didn't know their history, she appreciated the utopian grids lying cheek by jowl with the curves of prosperous western subdivisions, saw in her mind's eye the self-assured, self-righteous suburbs' drain on the city proper.

At last, she nodded in satisfaction. Utahns had been clever in the way they solved their city's transportation difficulties, but they had not been so clever that their designs weren't blatantly, laughably wrong. Here, at last, was something she could do.

The president sat cross-legged on the map and leaned over Salt Lake City. Drawing out a thick red marker from the sack, she put

her tongue between her teeth and began to design a transportation infrastructure.

~

The aliens were willing to move on from the Urim and Thummim discussion, but they were less willing to drop the subject of polygamy. As far as Herbertson could ascertain, the debate about the proper configuration of the attendant sexes was the closest their culture had come to religious strife. From the glimpses he had of the historical roots of the question, the promise of a resolution to the polygamy problem was one of the ways the aliens had justified the expense and complexity of their interstellar journey. They would not leave Earth without some sort of definitive answer on the subject.

Other prophets in the Church's history might have relied on spiritual promptings to arrive at a concrete answer and been perfectly comfortable giving an edict with no real understanding of the situation. But this was not Herbertson's style. He believed in detailed research, reflection, and serious contemplation—intermingled with prayer—before making any sort of prophetic pronouncement. He would not give the aliens a decree until he understood its implications and impact. And so, the discussions dragged on, both parties growing more and more befuddled.

At last, the indigo alien, who had been taking over more and more of the conversation, sent with characteristic impatience, *Perhaps you can tell us the Earthly Church's approach to the problem of polygamy.*

This was a question Herbertson was prepared to answer, and he leapt for it. In fact, it was so well-worn in Herbertson's mind—honed after years of being asked by reporters, religious leaders, and the faithful alike—that he began sending the answer almost before he realized it. He told them of the Saints' expulsion to Utah, the years of political strife, the 1890 Manifesto, and then—with some habitual pride—the Church's current strident policies against polygamy. He told them more

than he meant to, fumbling a bit with the translator, of the success the Church had in distancing itself from this embarrassing chapter of its history.

Suddenly he faltered as he recalled his audience.

The aliens stared at him, black eyes wide, horror and confusion crashing through the translator in Herbertson's hands.

You—countermanded—Brother Joseph's prophecy? came the first articulate question, *countermanded* flirting with *treason* and *blasphemy.* Herbertson, stung from an unfamiliar corner, replied too swiftly and too much by rote: *It was a political necessity at the time. Those who opposed the Saints would not let us live peacefully unless we adapted.* He was sweating heavily now, his fingers twitching nervously around the translator in his lap.

The aliens continued to stare at him, their contempt for the concept of *political necessity* welling up through the translator.

There must, thought Herbertson desperately at them, *have been those in your culture who resisted Joseph's prophecy?*

Again, horror and confusion bled through the translator.

At last, the indigo alien stepped forward in a swaying, mammoth movement. *Why would anyone resist the Prophet's words?* it sent. *What he spoke was the Truth.*

Truth in the translator was rocklike and impressive, as solid a fact as the certainty of gravity or the heat of the sun.

Not everyone can see the Truth for what it is, sent Herbertson uneasily.

The indigo alien blinked at him. *Then what good is the Truth?* it sent. There was fear and confusion in its words, but something else was growing beneath it, something hard, apprehensive, and accusatory.

Herbertson stared at the alien, his fingers hovering above the translator.

We are confused because two opposing Truths cannot exist simultaneously. Either Joseph's words are the self-evident Truth, or your adaptation

is. In the translator, *adaptation* was neither a lovely nor congratulatory concept.

The Church must adapt to survive, sent Herbertson. His communications were becoming messy and inconsistent again—his deep, unexamined feelings slipping out as he attempted to gain control of the conversation. *Surely, on your planet, adjustments had to be made—*

This thought went through the aliens like a sea swell. They flashed glances at each other while shock, worry, and befuddlement burst like fireworks through the translator. At last, the indigo alien quelled the others with a single sweep of its arm.

This is our people, it sent. Herbertson gasped as a vision of the alien planet and its inhabitants burst into his mind. He could not make sense of the alien architecture, culture, and ecology that roared through his head. But he could manage the religion, for it was familiar in its nineteenth-century formation—its orders of administration, its fascination with the mythic past and the patterns of the universe. The aliens were not mindless drones in their faith. He saw flashes of genius and individuality—artists and architects, politicians and poets—but in one thing they agreed, and that was the divinity and accuracy of Joseph Smith's words. The uncountable billions of aliens that lived and worked and sang and died on that faraway world would be as likely to deny Joseph Smith as they would to declare that water and food were unnecessary. The aliens *believed*—uniformly, passionately, and securely.

Herbertson found himself clinging to the metal frame of his chair as the vision passed. *How is it possible,* he sent, *that all of you believe?*

How is it possible, sent the indigo alien, and Herbertson had the crawling feeling that it was looking at him the way a doctor might look at a pathogen under a microscope, *that all of you* do not *believe?*

~

The aliens called for the president. TAKE US TO YOUR LEADER, SAY ALIENS reported the news sites, though in fact what the aliens

had sent was *We must speak to the foremost representative of your culture,* which the military and scientific representatives figured meant the same thing.

The president was unprepared for the interview. She had stumbled upon a casual club of women city planners in Salt Lake Valley and had gotten herself invited to their weekly bar night. Two glasses of red in, she had—with uncharacteristic bashfulness—told them of her sketched-out plans for the Wasatch Front's infrastructure. The evening had ended with the five women in her hotel room, speaking in excitable and too-loud tones about how *clever* her plan was, and how with a few modifications it could revolutionize the snarling traffic corridors, reduce the persistent smog, and even—after a few more glasses of wine—raise the profile of the state. The president suspected the city planners were buttering her up, but that was something she was used to.

So, it was a dangerously hungover president that met with the aliens, sitting carefully on Herbertson's former seat with her legs crossed—something she only did when her head and stomach were uncertain. She had no idea what she was going to say. All she could gather from her advisors was that something had broken between the aliens and the Mormons, and she was supposed to fix things so that the military and scientists could finally ask their burning questions. How she was supposed to do that was not touched upon.

"You'll be amazing," the aide had said instead as she propelled the president toward the tent. "Focus on collaboration. Ways we can be mutually beneficial. Our shared—um—whatever we share." Even hungover, the president made a mental note of the aide's exact phrasing. It would be an excellent anecdote for her book.

She had been under the impression that the aliens spoke democratically, so she was surprised when the alien with dark indigo and blue patterning stood forward while the others huddled together, stroking each other's backs with their strangely jointed arms.

Are they alright? the president sent through the translator, struggling to master it though she'd been talked through the process by scientists and Margolyes alike.

The indigo alien's communication was short and brusque. *They are*—What? *Lost? In mourning? Betrayed?* The president shook her head empathetically. Whatever the exact meaning might be, it was bad. *I am sorry,* she sent.

The alien made a movement with one of its fingers, and the translator beamed the concept of a resigned shrug.

I'm ready to speak as a representative of Earth, said the president. *Sorry, I should have started with that.*

The indigo alien stared at her, dark eyes flashing. At last, with a weird sort of articulation that the president interpreted as very considered communication, the indigo alien asked, *Why has your planet perverted the words of Brother Joseph?* Every concept coming through the translator rang with raw hurt.

Who? the president sent back.

The alien reacted as if it had been slapped. *Brother Joseph,* it repeated.

Through the haze of her aching head, the president remembered. *Oh, the Mormon founder. Yes.* She wracked her brain for any information. She had done her master's thesis on the Quaker influence on American politics. Perhaps there was something there. But—no, nothing beyond some footnotes that were mostly snide. She bit her lip and tried harder, her head reeling.

The indigo alien was aghast. *You don't know Brother Joseph?* it sent. In the translator, *know* was *understanding* and *love* and *reverence* and *gratitude.*

The president laughed.

The indigo alien stepped back. Shock, outrage, and offense bubbled up from the translator. If her last comment had been a slap, this was a body blow.

I'm sorry, sent the president swiftly. *I was unprepared for the question. I didn't mean to be disrespectful. It's just—*. She fumbled, trying to force herself to think diplomatically. *The church that Joseph Smith founded is—what word is best? Small? Inconsequential? Comically backward? A joke? Unsettlingly ludicrous?*

A hissing sound caught her attention, and she glanced at the aliens, realizing too late that she had poured all her true feelings into the communication—shared how *tiny* the Church was in her estimation, how the powerful, important people of the world would laugh up their sleeves at the thought of her trapped in the myopic, fanatic world of Mormonism.

I'm sorry, she said again, casting about for the right thing to say. *I am not good with this—communication.*

The aliens stared at her with black eyes, their throats pulsing.

~

The aliens left Earth the next day, rising on their strange boards. Their ship lingered above Temple Square for a few hours and then, stately and slow, soared straight upward and out of sight. The images sent by the drones showed that not one of the aliens looked back down as they departed. Herbertson watched the ship rise from his apartment window, strangely hurt that the aliens had not bid him farewell.

There was a period following the aliens' arrival in which Mormonism was in vogue. A few well-known celebrities converted, and baptism numbers (as tracked on a graph in the Church Office Building) ticked upward for several months. But the popularity was brief. The celebrities discovered, surprisingly late, about the restrictions on alcohol and coffee and either renounced their newfound faith or had their publicists quietly bury evidence of their baptism. Shortly after, conversion rates dipped back down to the slow decline common to all churches in the West.

The president returned to Washington, relief making her muscles shaky as she deplaned. She would set up a task force, she announced to the country, so that Earth (but more importantly, America) would be prepared for any future visitations. But for the task force to do its job properly, American infrastructure needed a dramatic overhaul. Most Americans stopped listening after the words "task force," but it turned out that the network of superfast trains the president had developed actually did improve their lives. Herbertson sent the president a kind note in spidery handwriting when she was reelected, which she meant to respond to but inevitably forgot.

Herbertson died later that year. His death echoed his life. Turning over in bed, he said, "Oh! Pardon me," loudly enough that it woke his wife. Then, he was gone. His funeral was well attended, and they wept for him as far away as Ghana, India, and Peru. At the next conference, Holyoke was sustained as the prophet. His first talk to the Saints was titled, "Continuing Revelation: A Blessing to All Mankind," and it was observed that he stressed *mankind* throughout his speech. He had become convinced that the aliens had been sent as a sort of trial for the Church; a warning against clinging to the traditions of the past. The rest of the Brethren did not share their opinions about the aliens' visit, but they did voice their support for Holyoke's plan for an extended manifesto that would, yet again, delineate the Church's stance on important issues such as marriage and identity.

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It was five years after Holyoke's sustaining that Elder Paulo Silva Araújo left his companion in their sweaty-walled apartment and wandered up the hill behind the row of tenements they lived in.

There was a stand of jungle at the crest of the hill, an island in the midst of Curitiba's sprawl. Feeling his companion's eyes on him through the oily windows of the apartment, Paulo set off for the seclusion of the

trees. They'd had a fight—a stupid one, but one that left them shouting. Paulo couldn't stand another minute of staring at that pinched, white face.

He was asserting his power over the situation by breaking the rules, flagrantly and with a carefully contained casualness. Elder Crump would probably be on the phone with the mission president as soon as he disappeared into the gloom beneath the trees. Paulo bared his teeth at the stands of green as he passed them, resenting the eventual conversation, already imagining the mission president's smooth, conciliatory tones, the cheerful, patronizing way he would say, "The Lord wants you to have harmony in your companionship."

Paulo sat on a mossy rock, idly snapping twigs off nearby bushes and tossing them at the beetles and ants at work in the soil. Not for the first time, his thoughts wandered into something that was not quite a prayer: *God, but this is a colossal waste of my time.*

There was a sudden pillar of light around him, coming from directly overhead. Paulo looked upward, squinting into the sunlike brilliance. A figure was descending in the light: a giant, dark figure, with a thrown-back head that bore lines of indigo and blue patterning.

Paulo stood as the figure descended. It looked at him, its black, expressionless eyes flashing. Wordlessly, it handed Paulo a twisted box with delicate coruscations.

The figure spoke. *We have a task for you,* boomed the translator through Paulo's fingers. *What task* and *Why me?* bubbled uncleanly through Paulo's translator.

The figure gestured in what the translator communicated as a long sigh. *We are disappointed in the Church, which has*—was it *lost?—the fullness of Brother Joseph's words. But we cannot leave our—kin?—on Earth to suffer in darkness.*

The indigo figure reached into a satchel hanging about its shoulders and pulled out a gleaming metal square on which were etched dense lines of an alien language, the script glowing with hidden light.

The figure's black eyes bored into Paulo's brown ones, and the translator throbbed with love and concern. *You will translate and bring the Truth of Joseph's words again to the Earth. A Restoration is needed.*

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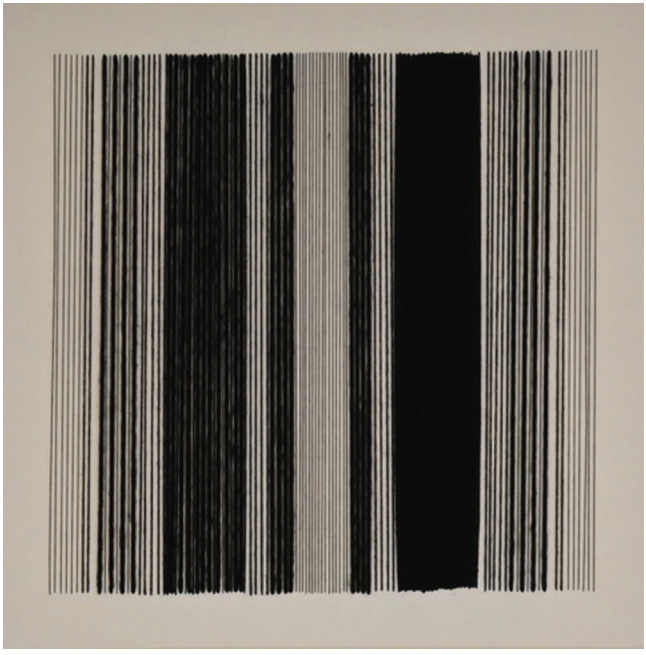

Georgina Bringas, *Horizonte de eterno retorno II (estructura de gradación alternada)* (2024), cord and darned thread on canvas, 47″ x 47″

Conclave, Priesthood Ordination, and God's Spirit in an Evangelizing Church: A Review Essay

Robert Harris. *Conclave: A Novel*. New York: Vintage, 2024. 304 pp. Paperback: $18.00. ISBN: 978-0593689585.

Reviewed by Gordon Shepherd

On May 7, 2025, the Roman Catholic Church's College of Cardinals sequestered themselves in conclave to elect a successor to deceased Pope Francis of Buenos Aires, Argentina. After only two days in conclave, white plumes of smoke billowed from a chimney atop Rome's Sistine Chapel, signaling the election of a new pope: *Habemus Papam!* Robert Francis Prevost, a dark horse American candidate, born in Chicago, had surprisingly become the conclave's choice as successor to Francis. Henceforth, he will be known to the world as Pope Leo XIV.

As fate would have it, two months before the succession of Pope Leo, the film *Conclave* was in competition for best motion picture at the 2024 Academy Awards. *Conclave* was based on a 2016 novel of the same name, written by British historical fiction author Robert Harris. Both the book and the movie have received well-deserved accolades, and both are worthy of review. My review essay here, however, is of the book, and it features my personal reflections on Mormonism's priesthood hierarchy, generationally sustained through missionary service and progressive lay advancements up the ecclesiastical ladder.

Historically situated at some unspecified moment of time in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, *Conclave* is a novel concerning the death of a pope and the election of his successor. In what ways is this subject matter relevant to *Dialogue*'s primarily Mormon readers? We could, of course, compare the venerated religious offices of the

Catholic pope and LDS president/prophet, assess the contrasting ways these offices are filled in their respective faith traditions, evaluate the analogous authority prerogatives they bestow in top-down priesthood organizations, and consider issues of advancing age among top echelon leaders. But these were not the first thoughts that jumped to mind when I began reading *Conclave.* Oddly, from the first few pages forward, I was stimulated instead to reflect on my youthful motivation and experience as a Mormon missionary in 1960s Mexico.

How does *Conclave* resonate with my motivation and experience over fifty years ago as a callow Mormon missionary? Most of the characters portrayed in *Conclave* are old men, professing ultimate obeisance to the mysteries of the faith, but they are also long inured to, and skillful at, negotiating the worldly and arcane politics of the Vatican. In stark contrast, my missionary companions and I, who also believed ourselves to be commissioned to perform God's holy work on earth, were barely past adolescence. But let us also remember, the old cardinals of the Universal Church who converge in *Conclave* were once young too, possessed of an idealistic religious vision—not unlike ours as Mormon missionaries—of building God's kingdom on earth. And, like us, as young men they too embraced what they believed was a sacred call to render sacrificial service in devotion to God's will for the salvation of humankind. Perhaps more accurately said, in chronological time, we youthful Mormon missionaries, much like the aging Roman prelates, commenced our religious assignments believing we were chosen by God to minister on his behalf. In my case, this meant accepting a proselyting assignment to go to Mexico and fall in love with its people who were looking for something that would bring hope to their lives.

In Mexico, my missionary companions and I did not, of course, expect to make religious ministry an occupational profession. Unlike Catholic priests, we were not trained, professional clergy. We expected to return home after two years of missionary service, recommence our secular education, get married, have children of our own, and support

them and ourselves by landing decent paying jobs. Vows of poverty and lifelong celibacy were absolutely not part of the deal. But we did expect to continue pursuing lay religious careers as adults in the organizational structure of the LDS Church—a hierarchical organization which, like Roman Catholicism, claims God's divine direction in promoting male religious advancements in ecclesiastical authority, both endorsing and sustaining a male gerontocracy. For us, like the Catholic prelates in *Conclave*, the Church—its doctrines, laws, traditions, and rituals—was a transcendent, reified entity that claimed our highest loyalty and devotion. The Church, we believed, was God's ecclesiastical instrument for disciplining and perfecting his children and, in turn, we were the Church's designated human instruments for bringing God's Truth to the people. To idealistic youth, there could be no higher calling or duty. Ask any novice Catholic priest.

Did *we* really believe this? Yes, but not quite. Not quite because our inherited missionary faith was untested. While we righteously testified to the authenticity of our inherited beliefs, most of us simply parroted what we had been taught in church and by our parents growing up, and assumed it must all be true. We were reassured by admired adult religious role models that through self-purification and sincerity of purpose, we would merit a personal witness bestowed by God's spirit, which would sustain us through our missionary trials and seal our own faithful adult service to the Church for the remainder of our lives. Many of us—some more quickly than others—professed a spiritual witness that this too was true and cast aside our doubts to faithfully serve the Lord by conforming to the sacrificial requirements of missionary life. Others of us failed to obtain any supernatural confirmation but continued learning and performing our missionary roles anyway, with varying levels of effectiveness.

Even though I was in the latter group, I never became a cynical or disillusioned missionary in the field. The Church and its message of the restored gospel still seemed entirely plausible to me and I took

righteous pride in continuing to diligently perform my missionary duties without a spiritually burning witness or testimony to sustain me. I assumed the latter would eventually be bestowed but, in the meantime, I had already committed myself to do my best. On the threshold of adulthood, I was determined to reverse my adolescent aimlessness. At that turning point in my life, serving a mission to Mexico seemed the right way, the right place, and the right time to do so. And indeed, that turned out to be the case. Even without a confirming spiritual witness, the mission's organized structure, the professions of faith and commitment of other missionaries whom I admired, the efforts of investigators to change their lives, the good will and support of Mexican Mormons, and my own development of language and leadership skills gave me a sustaining sense of purpose throughout my mission.

I speak here about expecting the sealing power of God's spirit to inspire and anoint the performance of one's religious duty because of the way this is regularly emphasized in Harris's *Conclave* novel. Even though the most ambitious among them undisguisedly connive and politic against one another to assume the Papal throne, virtually all of the assembled Cardinals believe that through strict compliance with the esoteric electoral rules and rituals of their society in conclave, it will be God's Spirit that ultimately signals St. Peter's successor as bishop of Rome.

In my old age cynicism and unbelief, this secretly surprised me and led me as a reader to appreciate the fidelity with which Harris portrays the story's religious protagonists. He portrays them with unflinching realism. Although they represent an elect college of the most eminent churchmen of a worldwide religious organization that claims divine moral authority over a billion souls, we plainly see the familiar spectrum of humanity present in virtually all human communities: the truly selfless and humble, the bombastic and self-serving, the mean-spirited and narrow-minded, the magnanimous and forgiving, progressives and traditionalists, optimists and pessimists, and even mendacious

liars in pursuit of their own ambitions in concert with self-reproaching doubters.

As a novelist, Harris renders a realistic portrait of the range of individuals to be encountered in almost all societies, including the holy orders of God. But he does not write satirically or judgmentally or with the ultimate objective of producing a ridiculing exposé of organized religious nonsense and folly. Instead, he writes with verisimilitude, in a way that instructs readers' understanding of the protagonists' own understanding of themselves, what they are doing, and why it matters to them. Notwithstanding the revelation of human failings and shameful secrets among the Church's spiritual elite as the story of a transformational election unfolds, readers must also appreciate the shaping constraints and guidance that the ecclesiastical institutions of the Holy See impose on the religious aspirations of these ambitiously powerful men. Whatever else organized religion is, it is a human system that depends on rules that both prescribe and proscribe the actions of religious adherents. When organizational rules become institutionalized and historically maintained by religious authorities in a religious tradition, they are imbued with a sacred character that demands of believers their unquestioned personal submission and paramount devotion. System rules also provide for organizational oversight, reinforcing rituals and official standards for maintaining individual compliance.

It is these kinds of organizational and ritual mechanisms that Harris competently describes, giving arcane credibility and heightening knowledgeable readers' interest in the unfolding of his story's plot. LDS general authorities are presumably no less human than their Vatican counterparts, and the hierarchical structure of the LDS Church and its organizational rules and institutions no less guiding and constraining on the personal ambitions of its leaders.

For me in Mexico the mission organization was a microcosm of the larger ecclesiastical priesthood structure of the Church. Mormon missions not only function to recruit new members but also serve to

preserve the lay priesthood organization of the LDS Church by socializing youthful missionaries in the performance of adult callings and encouraging leadership skills and advancements up the ecclesiastical ladder. In my own missionary experience, hard work and proselyting success were rewarded by leadership advancement that stimulated personal ambition in compliance with mission norms and rules. This is the basic template for generational replacement of religious leadership in a missionary church.

Determined to reform my heretofore lackadaisical approach to adulthood, I gratefully flourished in the LDS missionary system without the supportive benefit of a personal, spiritual witness. It wasn't until I left the affirming plausibility structure of the mission organization in Mexico and began pursuing an academic career that my taken-for-granted Mormon faith eventually evaporated. As a university student, I fell in love with sociology, an academic discipline whose explanatory concepts for understanding the world made more sense to me than dogmatic religious teachings. With this switch in my thinking, I felt neither the need to regain or strengthen my religious faith, nor disillusionment in losing it. I have always regarded my missionary days as a positive learning experience that acquainted me with Mexico and its people, contributing in a major way to my eventual career as an academic sociologist.

Conclave is a novel about religion, but it is not, strictly speaking, a religious book. It is not written with the purpose of inspiring young readers to pursue sacrificial lives of religious devotion or of ascending ecclesiastical ranks to assume the burdens of guiding God's work on earth. Its fantastical conclusion concerning the fulfillment of God's will through the politicking and rituals of the conclave may appeal to nonorthodox readers while simultaneously offending the religious sensibilities of many orthodox Catholics (as well as many Mormons and other orthodox Christians). At the same time, true believers and experienced advocates of clerical religion—whether Catholics or

Mormons—may plausibly interpret Harris's novel as an implicit testament to the way God always works through fallible human beings to achieve his ultimate purposes on earth.

This conclusion, of course, requires a religious leap of faith. It's just as plausible (and much simpler) to argue that Harris's story merely depicts human actors performing their religiously mandated duties in predictable ways in the context of personal ambition and constraining rules in a humanly constructed organization. But for liberal readers, the story's ending also offers an unanticipated spark of hope. Hope is the mysterious essence of religious belief, but humanists traffic in hope as well. One need not be a religious believer to harbor idealistic hopes for making the world a better place.

Without knowing what Robert Harris's personal beliefs are, I would call *Conclave* a novel that humanizes its religious protagonists and the ecclesiastical structures that shape their motives and actions, while optimistically projecting a kind of humanistic faith in the reformative possibilities of transforming even our most conservative institutions. Maybe this is one of the reasons why *Conclave* strangely resonated and appealed to me. This appeal leads to an interesting question for religious believers, if not for humanists: Can conservative religions—like Roman Catholicism and the LDS Church—be changed for the better without God's help? For example, with or without God's help, will either the Catholic or LDS Churches ever admit women into their orders of the priesthood, potentially setting the stage for a woman pope or Latter-day Saint prophet, seer, and revelator?

Certainly not in my lifetime, it's safe to say (I'm eighty-two), but there are still many younger Latter-day Saints, both women and men, who retain hope that the Church and its elderly hierarchy of male leaders will eventually be inspired, or otherwise acknowledge the twenty-first century wisdom of ordaining women to the LDS priesthood. By way of comparison, the Community of Christ has already taken this step by ordaining women since 1984 and, forty years later in 2024, by elevating

Stassi D. Cramm to the office of Church president. Though sharing overlapping historical origins, the developing doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences between the Community of Christ and LDS Church are significant. Many disillusioned Mormons and detached scholars are not optimistic that the much more conservative LDS Church will ever surrender its theological premise of an all-male priesthood. Unhappily, I'm inclined to agree with the pessimists. But, as many of my Mexican investigators liked to say, *solo Diós sabe*.

I have premised my review of Harris's *Conclave* novel by saying it stimulated me to reflect on my youthful motivation and experience as a Mormon missionary in 1960s Mexico. Looking back, it's fair to say that I gained as much hope for my own youthful future as any of my proselyting efforts may have done for the hopes of Mexicans seeking a better life by investigating and joining the LDS Church. When I left Mexico, I went home prepared to become a responsible adult. For this—and in spite of my subsequent loss of religious faith and rejection of the Church's theological claims—I remain appreciative of a religion which, like Roman Catholicism in Robert Harris's hopeful novel about the election of a pope, provided idealistic youth like me an ecclesiastical organization that imposed requirements of self-discipline in pursuit of causes greater than oneself.

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(Re)Grounding Complex Legacies of Culture, Identity, and Faithscapes in Jason Palmer's *Forever Familias*

Jason Palmer. *Forever Familias: Race, Gender, and Indigeneity in Peruvian Mormonism.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024. 324 pp. Paperback: $35.00. ISBN: 978-0252087950.

Reviewed by Brittany Romanello

Jason Palmer's *Forever Familias: Race, Gender, and Indigeneity in Peruvian Mormonism* offers a profound ethnographic exploration of how race, gender, and indigeneity intersect within the Mormon community in Peru, the migration process, and the United States, namely Utah. Through a meticulously detailed account of his seven years of fieldwork, Palmer unpacks Peruvians' multifaceted religious identity in a context marked by colonial histories, migration, and challenges that counter dominant narratives within LDS theology and Mormon studies. Palmer's work is not only a profound reflection on how Mormonism operates in a globalized, still-colonial world but also an examination of the uncomfortable racial and gendered realities that Peruvians face in their own religious lives as they navigate multicultural, multidimensional spaces of place and identity-making in Peru and the United States.

In a June 2024 interview with the University of Illinois Press, Palmer shared the resistance he encountered while writing this book, particularly from LDS peer reviewers: "Resistance from active LDS peer reviewers became an interesting case in point for some of the arguments I made in the book. . . . Experts on Mormonism . . . found most aspects of the manuscript intellectually and spiritually compelling, but refused to recommend publication even after I incorporated their

revisions." This pushback reflects the tension between Mormon studies as an academic field and the institution's historical entanglements with racial and gendered dynamics that Palmer interrogates.

As someone who has also navigated pushback within the Mormon academic space, especially when examining the complex realities of Latina women's experiences, I find Palmer's challenges unsurprising. Like myself, Palmer occupies a liminal space, close to but not entirely immersed in the communities he studies. His positionality as a white citizen adjacent to and entrusted with the intimate lives of the communities he works with is crucial, as it highlights the responsibility and limitations of an outsider's gaze while also emphasizing the complexities of white supremacy, nationalism, and androcentrism within Mormon studies and in anthropology as a social science discipline. Palmer's work challenges the comfort of mainstream LDS narratives and forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths about white Mormonism and the US colonial legacy. Throughout *Forever Familias*, he provides a critique of the LDS Church's power structures, the racialized dynamics at play, and the consequences of a globalized Mormonism that almost always marginalizes Indigenous perspectives and knowledge pathways that have existed since time immemorial.

Part I: Pioneer Indigeneity: Leaders, Government, Legacy, and Holiness

Palmer's ethnography, consisting of hundreds of interviews and thousands of observations and interactions, would have never been easy to unpack. However, he starts strong and direct, beginning with examining colonial and anti-Indigenous power structures in Peru and focusing on how the LDS Church replicated colonial hierarchies that already existed there. One particularly striking example occurs when Palmer reflects on the division of labor in the LDS community, especially in terms of gender. In Peru, men and women often occupy different yet equally important roles within the community, and these gendered

expectations are not automatically tied to notions of male superiority, as they are in Anglo-American Mormonism. Palmer highlights a moment when he was asked to police a female congregant's modesty. This request deeply unsettled him, given the culturally ingrained notion in Peru that leadership should not be gendered in the same way it is in Anglo Mormonism. He writes, "In Peruvianess, gender, and stewardships did not overlap automatically. Leadership . . . was not seen as automatic, natural, or God-given" (54). This tension between Anglo and Peruvian gender norms is crucial to the power dynamics Palmer traces throughout his work.

These chapters also engage with the symbolic and material realities of Mormon "pioneering" in Peru as Indigenous Peruvians navigate the imposition of Mormon practices that often clash with their cultural traditions. For instance, Palmer draws attention to the problematic outsourcing of temple design to a white American architect despite the presence of qualified local professionals (68). This reflects the broader colonial dynamic in which Indigenous knowledge and leadership are not recognized within the LDS hierarchy, reinforcing the racialized infantilization of Peruvian members.

Part II: Forever Familia: Future, Marriage, and Independence

Part II of Palmer's book focuses on the context of LDS marriage, kinship, and migration complexities. He examines how Mormon ideals of family and eternal marriage collide with the realities of life in Peru and migration to the United States. For many Peruvian Mormons, the ideal of an Anglo-American family, with retired couples serving missions and leaving their children behind, is both distant and painful. Palmer recounts a conversation with participant and friend Bishop Paucar, who acknowledged the impossibility of such aspirations for most Peruvian families, given their interdependent kinship structures: "He harbored no illusions that he and his spouse may one day be able to be like Anglo

Mormons . . . living increasingly, not decreasingly, interdependent with their children" (177).

Palmer explores how these tensions manifest in the migration experience of Peruvian members, many of whom view their move to Utah as a way to provide a better future for their families. However, the reality of migration is fraught with legal, racial, and economic challenges. The migrant experience becomes a complex negotiation of religious ideals and the harsh realities of undocumented status. Palmer reflects on how these dynamics are gendered, noting that "being single was more socially and economically dangerous for females than it was for males" (216). This is especially true within Mormonism, where marriage and family formation are central to one's religious identity, social capital, and "worth."

The racialized hierarchies in the Church, both in Peru and the United States, become painfully apparent in the migration context. Palmer provides examples of how Indigenous Peruvians are often excluded from leadership positions in the Church while also being subjected to discriminatory attitudes from white American leaders. The pressure to conform to an Anglo vision of family, marriage, and service often leads to painful sacrifices for those involved in cross-border marriages or second marriages, with the hope that these unions might create an eternal "forever familia."

A Witness *To* and *For* the Power of Discomfort in (Un)Learning

In the conclusion of *Forever Familias*, Palmer addresses the discomfort of confronting the deeply embedded whiteness within Mormonism. For Peruvian Mormons, this whiteness is a constant source of tension as they navigate their faith, given that they are subjected to racialized power structures that undermine their Indigenous identities, while also being exoticized in US church spaces and white Mormon gazes. Palmer argues that this discomfort, both personal and institutional, compels

a reckoning with the enduring legacy of Mormonism's colonial past. Palmer's work is a powerful testament to the resilience and agency of Indigenous Peruvians who, despite the barriers placed before them, continue to find ways to overcome them in pursuit of spiritual fulfillment. Palmer, in that same 2024 University of Illinois Press interview, shared that his hope for this book is that it helps readers understand the destructive role that the United States, and by extension the LDS Church, has played in global colonization. But he also seeks to challenge the myth of "victimhood," demonstrating how victims of colonization can reclaim and transform the tools of oppression into instruments of liberation.

Forever Familias is an impactful contribution to Latin American ethnography, sociocultural anthropology, and religious studies, particularly for its focus on race, gender, and indigeneity within Mormonism. I will not try to convince you this is an easy weekend read. It's the opposite: heavy, challenging, and complex. It took me months to absorb the book's multidimensional historical and ethnographic messaging. I knew the word count limitations for this review would not provide sufficient space to explore the deep investment in Palmer's approach, grounded in personal relationships and years of fieldwork, which gives readers an intimate, complex portrait of how Mormonism functions within a Latin American, distinctly Peruvian context. The book's power lies in its ability to reveal the intricate ways in which faith, race, gender, and migration intersect in the lives of Peruvian Mormons in a greater context of Latin American history and social forces, asking us to confront uncomfortable truths about the Church's global impact and where it relies on those made vulnerable by the State for greater power and influence. Palmer's transparent reflection on his positionality and the challenges he faced while writing this book also illuminate the power of ethnography, the necessity of critical engagement with colonial structures, and the potential for Indigenous and migrant communities to forge new paths within and beyond them.

Palmer's work is not just an academic study but also a testament to the power of ethnography and its capacity to challenge deeply ingrained narratives, even within his own multicultural family structure, which he willingly analyzes alongside other participants. His analysis offers a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Peruvian Mormons' collective ingenuity, global reach, migration dreams, and life goals. Palmer also makes a tangible effort to recognize his own biases and never misses an opportunity to humanize Peruvian LDS romanticization and disappointments with the US Church. It is a compelling call for reflection and transformation, urging readers to consider how complex, often painful histories shape cultural, religious, and family identities and how they might be reimagined to pursue a more just and equitable future, including a more holistic representation of Peruvian and Indigenous realities within religious, academic, and transnational Mormon spaces.

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Reenvisioning the Spiritual Authority of Women

Susan Hinckley and Cynthia Winward. *At Last She Said It: Honest Conversations About Faith, Church, and Everything in Between*. Signature Books, 2025. 265 pp. Paperback: $24.95. ISBN: 978-1560855217.

Reviewed by Lisa Torcasso Downing

The intersection of Mormon feminism and faith deconstruction among Latter-day Saint women is well established. That intersection has hosted a chicken or egg debate for as long as I can remember, often centering on which pops first into the female mind—religious doubt or feminist ideals? These are the questions of religious patriarchs who pause at this intersection, full of concern for themselves and their system. The answer they seek is one which, they hope, will explain how to keep women participating in a system that consistently overlooks and ignores them. For women who come to this intersection, the questions that arise are sometimes initially performative as they hope to satisfy the male voices burned into their psyches which have told them to stay small and, for their eternal well-being, safely inside the patriarchal box. However, the LDS women who reach this intersection face an internal wrestle with God that eventually drowns out the tomfoolery of living for an eternal life of submission to male dominance, a wrestle that allows them—us—to discover a truer voice in the divine cosmos—our own—and to understand more fully what it means to be a daughter of God. Today, women gather at this intersection and openly talk about our concerns, saying them out loud, without shame, under an open sky.

Enter podcast hosts turned authors Susan Hinckley and Cynthia Winward, who have taken the internal struggles of women living under LDS patriarchy and given them voice in their breakout book *At Last*

She Said It: Honest Conversations about Faith, Church, and Everything in Between. The authors, who self-identify as "women of faith, discussing complicated things," challenge the status quo of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its culture while laying claim to LDS Mormonism as their chosen faith practice, their heritage, and as an identity they love. Having both been raised in LDS homes, Hinckley and Winward were handed a familiar life script, a one-size-fits-all plan for women to follow that promises them an eternal reward. And follow that script they did. But life often leads us to unexpected intersections, as it did Hinckley and Winward. Every page of their new book flips that one-size script this way and that, candidly examining it for its strengths and weaknesses, and yet they never disparage the chosen path of any woman. Their book, like their podcast of the same name, is, in its own way, a fresh gathering place for the new LDS woman.

The authors separate their text into five sections: "Dancing with the Patriarchy," "Outside the Box," "What about . . .?," "It's Complicated," and "Embracing Your Journey." Each section is fleshed out with several titled subsections that brim with personal stories and insight. Their explorations include, but are not limited to, grappling with the doctrine of the heavenly mother, the often painful lifestyle of women who live under patriarchy, the ordination conundrum, the place imagination and creativity have in developing spiritual understanding and connection to the divine, as well as the inadequacies they've found in the typical framing of Mormon concepts like obedience, blessings, repentance, and worthiness. Winward, in particular, offers their readers a stellar treatise on grace, a vital gospel tenet that often seems buried under the weight of LDS dogma. "Forgotten," she writes of grace, "but delicious." Indeed. On every page, their love for both the Mormon story and way of life is ever present. They practice the grace that Winward salutes.

The book's greatest strength is in the authors' vulnerability and their firm insistence that their shifting beliefs are a sign of spiritual

growth, not backsliding (or, in Mormonspeak, not "choosing a lesser eternal kingdom"). They have embraced their "not knowing" as open space in which there is infinite room to explore, discover, imagine, and grow. Their prose often reads as the psalms which are part celebration of life's journey and part confession of tensions that have expanded their understanding of both God and themselves. Their tone, however, is casual, even chatty as they strive to mirror their podcast's conversational format. They volley essays back and forth, often giving us two perspectives on a given topic.

Hinckley, a gifted wordsmith, demonstrates the book's vulnerability as she shares how her faith life was upended when her adult children left the church she had raised them to love, thus shattering her expectations:

> And now, what good was a church that was not big enough to hold my own beautiful children? Without my family, the box I'd expected to always contain our shared god felt hollow, echoing and suffocating all at one. . . . It seemed I'd invested a lifetime in guarding the box only to find that what I assumed was inside maybe wasn't there at all. Once my children left the God Box we'd all lived in, they somehow took everything I recognized as God with them. . . . I found myself alone, unable to breathe there.
>
> *Did* I ever really know God at all? What about my decades of careful observance, my willingness to swallow big questions rather than endanger myself, and everyone around me, by speaking them out loud? Suddenly I felt I'd been grasping at god-straws forever, knowing all along they probably couldn't save me. Had my own potential ability to experience the Divine in the way my spirit yearned to—as large and small and mysteriously both personal and universal—been hampered by the box that my religion had built? A result of one man's very specific experience with God? A box I'd not only been willing to accept on faith but had spent a lifetime trying to make my own? (48)

Hinckley's yearning to discover how God would show up for her, a woman, as opposed to an early nineteenth-century boy prophet, felt like exploring a garden in its varied seasons. The foliage is brittle at the

start, as in the above passage, but, when watered with introspection, soon buds and then blooms into new hope and understanding.

This book is a gift to today's LDS woman who claims for herself her own authority over her spiritual life. It may feel like first aid to women who've been bruised and broken living under LDS patriarchy, but it's not a how-to guide, not some fix-me manual that explains how to erase the tensions women experience through their association with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as presently structured. Rather it is a we-can illustration that empowers its readers to trust their own compass, their own process, and their own ability to reimagine a theology that lifts them rather than subjects them. Importantly, it is a thoughtful text that will benefit readers, regardless of their gender. Men, after all, shouldn't be the only ones heard talking at the intersection of theology and feminist thought.

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Agency and its Aftermath in Three Recent Poetry Collections

Sharlee Mullins Glenn. *Brighter and Brighter Until the Perfect Day.* Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2025. 94 pp. Paperback: $9.99. ISBN: 978-1961471207.

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton. *We Wore Dresses.* Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2025. 128 pp. Paperback: $9.99. ISBN: 978-196147124.

Stephen Peck. *Experiments in the Fading Light.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2025. 144 pp. Paperback: $19.99. ISBN: 978-1560855200.

Reviewed by Alixa Brobbey

"What will you do with your one wild and precious life?"[1] What will you do with your agency, your desires, your very body? These questions repeatedly came to mind as I read three recent poetry collections by Latter-day Saint authors—*Brighter and Brighter Until the Perfect Day* by Sharlee Mullins Glenn, *We Wore Dresses* by Marilyn Bushman-Carlton, and *Experiments in the Fading Light* by Stephen Peck. Each collection, with its own themes and poetic styles, grapples with and answers these questions in its own way.

Brighter and Brighter Until the Perfect Day

Glenn's book *Brighter and Brighter Until the Perfect Day* is a poetic epic written in blank verse. In the Miltonian style, it tells the story of the plan of salvation with fierce imagination, thoughtful language, and meticulous craft. The blending of an old form with new ideas makes

1. Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day."

the book particularly memorable. Her use of two specific theological speculations in particular further a thoughtful exploration of agency, the idea that "You will make mistakes— / for one must practice to become a God" (4) within the context of God's eternal plan for their children.

One theological speculation is an envisioning of the Holy Ghost as Heavenly Mother, an idea that has been circulating in LDS feminist circles for years. In Glenn's rendition, however, the impetus from this idea comes from Ora (meaning light, brightness, or prayer), one of Elohim's daughters who first envisions a need for a sacred guide during mortal life and then "brought her plan before the throne" (19). In awe of her brother Jesus's sacrifice, she questions, "what is my part in this hallowed plan?" (21). Ora takes an active part in the plan of salvation, going so far as to participate in its co-creation, and opening up avenues for LDS women to see themselves in additional roles throughout the plan. So, too, does the use of the plural Elohim to refer to both Heavenly Mother and Father. The poem frequently emphasizes the sacrifice Heavenly Mother has made and also addresses her absence from much of scriptural canon and established theology. Although her role is different from that of Heavenly Father, there is hope for finding her, as

> My children, you will see me in the clouds,
> in fire, and sunrise, and the breeding dove.
> You'll hear me in the cry of newborn babes,
> the sweet and pushful whisper of the breeze.
> You'll find me in the tops of ancient peaks,
> in whirlwinds and hot pillars of pure light,
> in wombs, and tombs, and slender blades of grass. (25)

The second theological shift I was struck by was Glenn's transformation of the forbidden fruit into "the flesh of beasts" (36). In the poem, Adam and Eve are warned that

> Partaking of their meat would introduce
> brutality and bloodshed in this space
> and would beget corruption, sin, and death. (38)

In this telling of the plan of salvation, the serpent kills a lamb, to the surprise of Eve who sits

> eyes wide and welling, comprehending not
> the spot of crimson seeping like a stain
> across the milky fleece of quiet lamb. (45)

Not only does the lamb function as an image of Christ, but it is striking to reenvision the fall not as a calm event, such as the biting of a fruit, but something involving violence, blood, and hunger, precipitating an entry into a violent, bloody world.

The image continues to impact throughout the retelling. As Adam and Eve are thrown out of the garden, "Evicted from the nurtur'ing womb of God" (50), as Glenn masterfully puts it, the lamb turns to a symbol of protection and hope. Mother God promises to

> make a coat of skins for you to wear
> as you embark upon your mortal quest.
> This coat, made from the fleece of that slain lamb,
> will cover and protect you on your way
> as you enrobe yourselves in mem'ry of
> the Lamb of God, who'll give his life for you. (50)

For LDS readers, the idea of being cloaked in a protective skin may take on additional meaning.

The text of the poem is short—only sixty pages long, including several illustrations. The poem can easily be read in one sitting, allowing the epic to unfold in one quick breath. By the end, one may wish that it was slightly longer, taking some additional time to delve into Christ's life on earth. However, it leaves much for readers to ponder, enriching the canon of LDS writing.

We Wore Dresses

While Glenn's collection focuses on centering women's choices in an explicitly eternal context, Bushman-Carlton's collection *We Wore Dresses* catalogues a woman's life on earth—from girlhood through

adulthood—and all of the messiness, desires, choices, and hardships that it entails. Among the free verse poems, she also includes pantoum, sestina, haiku, and ghazal to great effect.

The opening poem and several thereafter are full of a girlhood that is constricted by social norms and conventions. The titular, opening poem, which functions as a bit of a prologue, chronicles ways in which dresses shape childhood experiences. The speaker notes, "In dresses we were careful, won free scars or bruises, / collected even fewer tales of swift licks, shattered bones." Despite the physical constraints of dresses and the wider societal constraints they symbolized, the girls in these poems are brimming with dreams and with desires. In "Desire" (8),

> The Mia Maid teachers pretend girls don't have it,
> even though we reek of it,
> even though it oils the fasteners of our necklaces,
> stains the buttons of our blouses,
> skids on our shoes to dances in church parking lots.

These hungry girls grow up to be wives and mothers, to deal with pregnancy, breastfeeding, adoptions, the loss of identity that can come with giving up one's maiden name. In "Cleave" (24) the speaker describes her son's early days, and the ways in which it shapes their bond. She describes how she "Finger-trace[s] his features," looking at "His innocent face not fully knit together." Rich with double meaning, the poem describes bringing the baby home from surgery:

> At first,
> we are cleft. I cannot press him breast to breast—
> now the closure must hold its seal—
> and have to improvise,
> cleaving his body back to my front, his body's heat, his beating heart
> against my own.

In "Quickening" (27), Bushman-Carlton describes the first moment of becoming aware of a pregnancy through a series of stunning images:

> the faintest ripple a spilling whisper
> a soap bubble dispersing

a flutter a ruffling a flicker

a scratch from inside an egg; from inside me
a bashful tap: your announcement your hello.

Here, the theme of agency also is apparent in the last line of the poem, "the first time you chose me."

Several of my favorite poems deal with embracing aging bodies and the passage of time. In "My Body in Motion" (36), Bushman-Carlton describes leaning into her own body "like I'd lean into a lover, / my face flushed and lusty." In "The Solace of Letting Go" (100), the speaker describes how she is "eschewing tall shoes, unstable tools, / skinny jeans, being told what to eat." Rather than a life of abundance, she is reveling in less: "Give me what's empty—ladles, palms facing up, / the well of a magician's black hat." In "Breadbox Ghazal," (74) the speaker ruminates on that household object, and how it is unfamiliar to her children (and likewise this reviewer): "My children don't use rabbit ears, clotheslines, root cellars, / ice cube trays, iodine, diaries with keys, a breadbox." While breadboxes housed the "staff of life" during the speaker's youth, the symbol means nothing to her children.

Along with aging, the collection ponders the importance of touch. In "Learning to Touch" (66), the speaker describes how her daughter "arrive[s] at the dying" of a relative and "with lotion and unambiguous care / hydrated the dying flesh." She catalogues her daughter's medical school experience with learning to touch:

Gradually,
they touched the stomach, the chest,
easing their way to the consecrated place
where they would deliver babies. They practiced
until they could touch without revulsion or shame,
until it was as natural to spread the petal folds
as it was to deliver the new life
to the mother to put to her breast.

Later poems hark back to these images. In "At the Nail Salon" (104), the speaker describes being tenderly touched by a nail salon employee, after

"her nails are finished." The employee "embraces / each used hand, and kneads." She is described as

> sweet,
> alive intimate. She is not frightened by the ruins
> of my long journey,
> nor of the tithes a body must make.

Several poems near the end of the collection deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, discussing, for example, the sudden solitude it brought, the ways we reached out for human connection. In a particularly memorable poem including several synonyms for "boomer" (codgers, biddies, old coots, Vietnam veterans, etc.), she calls back to the effort to vaccinate children for polio ("Polio," 92). All of the poems in this collection are brimming with the senses, reminding readers of both the joys and sorrows that come with traversing earth in mortal bodies.

Experiments in the Fading Light

Peck's *Experiments in the Fading Light* is divided into various sections, each constituting "an experiment." This allows him to delve into wide-ranging and various themes and styles without it feeling disjointed. Among the various poetic forms there is prose poem, free verse, ode, haibun, sonnet, and ghazal.

From the first poem, "Additions to St. Hildegard's Physica" (1), this collection also raises questions of agency and choice. Like the classic work, this prose poem contains sections delving into various animals and plants—here, mule deer, opossums, coyotes, aspens, harvester ants, ravens, vesper bats. The ants, Peck notes "are gifted with unsullied freedom" and "epitomize the embodiment of agency." He muses on the idea of them one day "just head[ing] off in a random (to us) direction, peeling off into whatever adventure strikes their fancy," noting that "there are universes in which that very thing happened today, but not this one." Throughout the rest of the collection, this same wild imagination, grounded in scientific fact, is on display. The final poem begins with

"What Comes Out of the Hardship and Difficulty That We Are Willing to Say 'Yes' To?" (128) and contains early on the image of "A blessing of grandmothers gather[ing] in a complex fractal." Peck traces his lineage back to his animal ancestors, noting that "My fishy grandmother was fierce." From this lineage he draws strength ("I contain multitudes. It's more than the survivors. It's the cosmos. It is all of us.") and questions ("Stand with me toe to toe and answer. Did I agree? / To this place? To the pattern of what I am? To the structures that define and constrain me?" "What is at my center? / If anything beyond this flesh?")

Like Glenn's volume, Peck's collection also explicitly deals with the theme of agency in the context of the story of the fall. In the poem "Eden's Cur," (62) he reenvisions this classic story. Rather than the fruit being meat, here he has Adam kill the snake,

> bashing its head against
> that fruit-laden tree
> which tempted you so.

The story is unmoored from time, allowing for rich and new language, such as the phrases

> After the Fall you played piano in a hotel bar
> smoky, filled with lusty travelers, empty-souled sots,
> drunk, stuffing dollars into your jar hoping
> to lure you back to their shabby earth.

Like Bushman-Carlton's collection, some poems deal with the consequences of the fall—with aging, mortal bodies, and with the aging, struggling earth. In "Ode to My Ringing Ears" (29), Peck skillfully uses free verse structure to allow the reader to experience the speaker's experience with tinnitus, through the use of repeated colons in lines such as

> ::Silence::honor::to::you::
> my::quivering::ears::
> my::buzzing::absence::
> my::noisy::quiet ::/

There is a brief reprieve in the poem, marked by clean lines of prose, "Once it went away . . . It was like breathing clean mountain air after this summer's fires . . . I thought I was cured." The tinnitus eventually returns, and with it, perhaps a fresh perspective, with the speaker noting, "I'm::alive:: / vibrating::"

Several of the poems deal with the changing climate and its effects on the earth, including forest fires. "Ghazal on the Ash Left by the Troublesome Fire" (119) uses the repeated language to emphasize the consequences of the fires which lead to the earth "retaining ash," "ordaining ash," "waning ash," and so forth. In another poem, "California Fires Feed Our Utah Sunsets" (120), Peck opens with references to various extinct birds. As the speaker watches a hazy sunset, "each particle of the haze maps to / an individual burned to dust" leading them to conclude that "*the number of species we have inhaled becomes too much.*" Through these poems, natural disasters become tangible and urgent—reading Peck's poems one can smell and taste it in your throat.

Like the fall poem, other poems in the collection also discuss religious themes, blending them with scientific language and ideas. In "Natural Theology" (19), Peck writes, "Neither microscopes nor telescopes can contain, compress, nor bring God near nor drive God away." He describes God "a predator" and "parasite," who is "unrelenting in pursuit." This God "cares for her own" and "can be scarred and has been." This God can "be studied, but you can't control all the variables."

In contrast, in the poem "What If When You Got to Heaven" (108), Peck imagines a merciful God. The lines open,

> God did not care if you had student loans
> or what projects you finished,
> or left undone.

After proceeding through a list of various images, the poem ends "And what if when you asked, What about my sins? / God said: "

The breathtaking last line of this poem invites readers to rethink the nature of God, of sin, of shame. Altogether Peck uses poetic conventions,

both old and new, to take readers on a journey where creatures, man, and God alike are carefully dissected and described, revealing them to be far more complex than we may have originally thought.

Conclusion

These collections are striking in both their differences and similarities. All employ formalistic elements—meter, rhyme, metaphor—to great effect. All deal with themes of choice and with the passage of time. All include references to the LDS theology of Heavenly Mother. All are a great choice for someone looking to spend an afternoon of their wild and precious life reading thoughtfully crafted poetry that opens up new avenues for discussion.

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A Crossing of Boundaries

Laura Stott. *The Bear's Mouth.* Spokane, WA: Lynx House Press, 2024. 85 pp. Paperback: $18.95. ISBN: 978-0899241999.

Reviewed by Heidi Naylor

The first poem will break your heart. It's the shakedown start of a pilgrimage into loss and beauty that speaks in tough, physical language of the collecting—the "plucking"—of "an abandoned nest / from a red

dogwood's spindly arms" during a mother and child hike through a "slim canyon." The family has recently lost a daughter and sister. Here, the poem sets up the narrative of *The Bear's Mouth*: how to inhabit a world that is immediate in brutality and tenacious in wonder. The trick, it seems, is to find a "guide [that] shows us how to do it" (11).

Laura Stott is that tender, insistent escort.

A myth about a little girl leaving her parents and her two sisters to cross a meadow becomes a metaphor of longing for this sweet baby daughter. She falls inside a glacier . . . she runs through woods into a wild meadow . . . she crawls inside the feral bear that guards the underworld. The mother climbs in too, "past [her] own monster" (15). We as readers are left breathless.

The collection is structured in three sections—trimesters come to mind, resurrection springs to heart—each filled with sorrow for the lost little girl, but also with the dance of life that insists on moving forward, in going on. United States poet laureate Ada Limón says that "poetry is a place where both grief and grace can live," and it feels like she is speaking about Stott's own poetic voice.[1] In "Dance," the state health department can't find a record of the speaker's stillborn baby. "8 thousand dollars say I spent 22 hours in Labor and Delivery," this voice notes. In the next line, "bees are drinking juice from the concord grapes . . . each [grape] looks like a planet" (22). The speaker's younger little girl is stuffing September strawberries into her mouth, "her hand flat and like a star over her lips." Whales, deer, owls, fish . . . even "Monster"-y spiders get a nod of note and recognition of the "earth [they] are waiting to be born into—dream of the wings you'll eat, and kingdoms between roses" (24).

The second section belongs to the lost little girl, and the anguish at her passing is linked with other sorrows, such as those of "children

1. Ada Limòn, "A Poet's Take on Looking to Language for Radical Hope," interview by Judy Woodruff, *PBS News Hour,* Dec. 18, 2018, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/a-poets-take-on-looking-to-language-for-radical-hope.

taken at the border," for what was the baby's loss but a crossing of boundaries gone terribly wrong? (49). "Soon the entire world will fit inside the brown bear's mouth," laments the speaker (51). She wants "more faith in the wind to send [prayers] to God" and more hope for the little "bird [their daughter is named for] . . . that dives and dives and dives" (47).

The third section's poems about Alaska, about family life, are joyful: an outing with friends to watch the Perseid meteor shower. A little girl's lost pink pony—"Where's Heart? Where's Heart?"—which turns out to be clutched "tight in her small hand." A mama deer appears, with her "two speckled fawns . . . what luck we get to see them. What life we have to live here" (68). A birthday party features "a mandolin, a violin, a bass, a banjo, a guitar . . . [yet] from all the strings, the saddest song rises like happiness in all of us" (69). A "restless baby [is] only calmed by cold air" (81). *Pay attention*, our speaker reminds us, never discount the most ordinary of gifted moments: "There goes my first born, gliding past me at the pool with her dad in a man-made river, smiling and carrying the sun like she was born to do," while—also—"beneath all . . . Sharks dance in the light, then disappear. There, a flash of iridescence. A fish. A silver school of them a mile long. A song yawns out of the deep" (72).

"O slobber of child kisses on a window . . . O afternoon sunlight . . . O *wild and precious life"* (83), our speaker sings. Bereft, yet not broken, she "will always try to crawl back in[to the bear]" (85). But she "can't fit into . . . that shadow place . . . Not yet" (85). The "other sister is with us" still and somehow (75). And before their reunion, there is almost too much of a fierce, yet ordinary, beauty to endure.

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Secret, Not Sacred

Cheryl L. Bruno, ed. *Secret Covenants: New Insights on Early Mormon Polygamy.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2024. 450 pp. Cloth: $39.95. Ebook: $9.99. ISBN: 978-1560854715.

Reviewed by Joseph W. Geisner

Cheryl Bruno's edited volume, *Secret Covenants: New Insights on Early Mormon Polygamy,* gives us an important resource about Mormonism's early implementation and practice of Joseph Smith's secret practice of polygamy. As Bruno points out in her introduction, "[She] found that the majority of people discussing the topic academically happened to be male identified. For an area that had and still has such impact on women, there is a great need for female points of view" (x). While the large majority of authors in this volume are male—despite Bruno's efforts to incorporate more chapters by women—Bruno hopes that this volume will encourage women writers to tackle this topic. I too hope that the rich variety of voices, approaches, and insights contained in this scholarly volume will inspire further research by women, as well as other scholars whose voices have historically been largely missing from this conversation.

In the first chapter, Clair Barrus shows that the 1843 polygamy revelation (now D&C 132) was not the only revelation on the subject that Joseph Smith received. Barrus provides primary (though often decades later) evidence that themes found in D&C 132 were taught privately and earlier than 1843. For example, Barrus gives a number of examples of teachings about God appointing a plural wife to a husband. These include statements to Sarah Pratt, Mary Elizabeth Rollins, and Marinda Johnson; with Nancy Rigdon being warned against taking an unappointed partner (39).

Next, Mark Tensmeyer's contribution to this volume is important for understanding the polygamy skeptic movement. Tensmeyer explains two of the popular narratives underlying the "Monogamist Model": that Joseph Smith never taught or practiced polygamy, but that it was introduced by others in the last years of Smith's life (47–49). On pages 96–100, Tensmeyer has done pioneering work in placing together contemporary evidence of Joseph Smith's polygamy. This chart has already been utilized and refined by others, with some additions and subtractions, but remains invaluable as a starting point for researchers.

Christopher C. Smith and Don Bradley each contribute chapters that make important contributions to the study of pre-Nauvoo polygamy. Using available sources and historical events, Bradley has definitively dated Joseph Smith's relationship with Fanny Alger as beginning in early spring 1836 (after priesthood keys were delivered to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple) and ending on or about July 22 of the same year (186–89). This dating will be essential in any subsequent work done on Alger. Smith adds to our understanding of Joseph's marital relationships by shedding more light on his primary relationship with Emma, which, Smith says, provides a pattern he followed in his subsequent proposals. Smith connects these marriage practices to treasure quests, secrecy, and mystery, making innovative connections that others have not heretofore realized (119–26, 138–41).

Smith and Bradley, in a coauthored chapter, speculate about possibilities of the early meaning of priesthood sealing. Perhaps, they argue, Fanny Alger was sealed to Joseph Smith in an adoption relationship before "the relationship's transition from filial to marital" (192–94). This is probably the most controversial subject that *Secret Covenants* addresses, with some historians disagreeing with the authors' conclusions, and others reserving judgment for the time being. Regardless, the analysis is tight and well reasoned, making a fascinating new reading into Joseph Smith's sealing system.

Susan Staker and Mary Ann Clements have provided rich feminist insights on Mormon polygamy, a vitally important aspect when studying this theme. Staker does this by analyzing the Book of Abraham, tracing the development of Joseph Smith's thinking on women's sexual and religious power. An interesting section introduces Kahtoumun, a female character in Smith's Egyptian project, on whom he spends "significantly more time . . . than any female in his dictation plot," including Sarah (227). Clements does pioneering work by studying Theodore Turley's Nauvoo plural marriages through close genealogical evaluation of three of the women he married: the Clift sisters. Clements gives an example of how studying the women of Mormon polygamy can provide a more thorough understanding of the motivations and lived experiences of participants (349–50).

Another important contribution set forth in this book is an understanding of the legal environment surrounding marriage in 1840s Illinois. John Dinger has taken a somewhat technical subject and made it interesting and thought-provoking. By telling stories of Mormons and non-Mormons and how the law was applied, Dinger displays a thorough mastery of his subject. For instance, he follows several Illinois couples to demonstrate how laws on adultery and fornication were applied (278–79). He also gives examples of how the laws were applied in Nauvoo (282–90).

Todd Compton's chapter offers an important response to the question of whether there were "eternity-only" marriages in Nauvoo. Some doctrinal shift in the idea of Mormon polygamy has occurred as a result of more writers promoting a view that many or most of Smith's marriage did not have a sexual or temporal component. Compton scrutinizes the available sources on this subject. Pages 299–301 feature a synopsis of some of the historiography on eternity-only marriages, including its use as a defense for Smith's polyandrous marriages.

Joseph Smith's polygamy seems to have differed in many ways from Brigham Young's more authoritarian and patriarchal version. Because

of this, Devery Anderson's investigation of Willard Richards's plural marriages, many of which duplicated the more peculiar aspects of Smith's, is notable. One example is Richards' polyandrous marriage to Susannah Liptrot, who was married to and cohabiting with her husband, John (363).

Cheryl Bruno, relying partially on research begun by the late Johnny Stephenson, gives an important case study of a late and problematic claim of plural marriage by Emily and Eliza Partridge. She connects this with Emma Smith's denials of Joseph's polygamy, and suggests possibilities for understanding discrepancies. Such close analyses of non-contemporaneous polygamy claims are sorely needed.

A final notable contribution to the polygamy discussion is William V. Smith's summation of the influence the plural marriage revelation has had upon the LDS church through the years, up to the modern era. The theological impact alone has been enormous, as he describes on pages 425–427.

I did find a few typos with dates. The first example does include a small error in transcription of an entry in the Wilford Woodruff journal. Chapter 2, p. 73 places Woodruff writing in his diary on August 2, 1846: "had some instruction on the priesthood by Brigham Young." Dan Vogel's "The Wilford Woodruff Journals" records Woodruff writing on August 2, 1846: "President Young deliver[e]d an interesting lecture upon the priesthood And the principal of sealing there being present." Tensmeyer's note 91 states "Woodruff Journal, August 2, 1844," which should be the year 1846, as he noted above. Chapter 3, on page 131, places the date for the Agnes Smith marriage as January 6, 1841, but it should be dated as January 6, 1842 (see Compton, 153). In chapter 4, on page 178, note 113, the author has Smith fleeing Kirtland on December 22, [1837]. However, on page 181, in the second paragraph, the author identifies the correct date of Smith's fleeing Kirtland as January 12, [1838]. In chapter 5, on page 211, the authors have the angel quoting Malachi 3–4 as early as 1824, but Smith's 1839 history has the date as

1823. In chapter 6, on page 242, note 50, the author has the year for the publication as 1844, but it should be 1842. In chapter 8, on page 302, the author places Sarah Ann Whitney's marriage date with Smith as 1843, but the year should be 1842, per her affidavit.

Some would say, and people actually have said to me, that I am being picky about dates. I would argue that dates matter in history. At the same time, none of these errors take away the importance of *Secret Covenants.* Smith and Nauvoo polygamy have been and continue to be a hotly debated subject in the Restoration community. This book tackles many of the issues that are currently being discussed and debated. With this in mind, people can find information and scholarship that can help them formulate an understanding about the past and help them seek out further study. This is a must-read for any student of Joseph Smith's polygamy and Restoration studies.

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GEORGINA BRINGAS is a Mexican contemporary artist whose practice spans video, installation, drawing, and sculpture, with a focus on exploring the perception and representation of space and time through everyday units of measurement. A graduate of La Esmeralda, she has been active since 1996 and has received international recognition, including honors at the Vidarte International Electronic Art Festival, participation in the IDB Electronic Arts Festival in Washington, DC, and residencies in Toronto. Her solo exhibitions include shows at Museo Universitario del Chopo and Le Laboratoire Gallery in Mexico City, as well as venues in Bogotá and Toronto, while her work has also been featured in major institutions worldwide such as the MUAC, Museo de Arte Moderno, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), and Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid).

ANGELA ELLSWORTH is a multidisciplinary artist traversing disciplines of drawing, sculpture, installation, video, and performance. She has presented work nationally and internationally. Ellsworth was born in Palo Alto, California, grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, and resides in Phoenix, Arizona, where she lives with her partner, Tania Katan, and is a professor in the School of Art at Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts-School of Art at Arizona State University.

STEFANI MANNING is a multidisciplinary designer whose work spans photography, UX, and graphic design. Exploring composition and storytelling through natural landscapes first sparked her interest in photography and laid the foundation for her creative work today. She now works in digital design but continues to nurture her artistic roots by photographing with her children and encouraging them to see the world through a creative lens.

EMILY CHRISTENSEN MCPHIE grew up at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains in a home where creativity and curiosity were considered virtues. Feeling the need to decipher truth and a yearning to create, McPhie's paintings draw on symbolic meaning and figurative expression to explore conundrums, dichotomies, and avenues for gathering wisdom. Her work conveys the duality of swimming in the deep waters of an eternal story and trudging through the messy realities of the everyday.

STEPHANIE KAY NORTHRUP creates abstract pieces about faith. Northrup has shown in the LDS International Art Competition on Temple Square, the Washington, DC, Temple visitor's center, the children's book *A Boy's Guide to Heavenly Mother*, as well as several other faith-based exhibits and magazines. Northrup wrote an article for Mormon Arts Group titled "Mormon Abstract." Northrup resides with her filmmaker husband and five daughters in Colorado, USA.