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Five Impulses of the Joseph Smith Translation of Mark and Their Implications for LDS Hermeneutics

Julie M. Smith

WHEN JOSEPH SMITH PRODUCED a new translation of the Bible, he did not work from ancient texts but rather claimed inspiration as his source. The result of his efforts is now known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST).¹ Only about one-third of the verses that the JST changed are included in the LDS edition of the King James Version (KJV);² Robert J. Matthews describes the criteria used to determine what was included: “It was anything that was doctrinal, anything that was necessary in the Old Testament to help us understand the New Testament, anything that bore witness of Christ, anything that bore witness of the Restoration. . . .

1. Joseph Smith and his contemporaries normally referred to this project as the New Translation. When excerpts of it were added to the LDS edition of the Bible in the late twentieth century, it required a new moniker (since “NT” was already in use as the abbreviation for the New Testament), so it became known as the Joseph Smith Translation. Because this term is now in wide use, it is used in this paper despite the anachronism. Note that this paper always uses the KJV versification—not the JST versification, which sometimes differs. (The JST did change verse numbers, but that system is no longer in use. Where the JST versification differs from the KJV, it reflects a system adopted by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [now known as the Community of Christ]. Since it is not original to the text and since it can create confusion, I have not used it here despite the fact that it is used in the LDS Bible.)

2. See Thomas E. Sherry and W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Precious Truths Restored: Joseph Smith Translation Changes Not Included in Our Bible,” *Religious Educator* 5/2 (2004): 61.

Also anything that clarified the role of the tribe of Joseph . . . paramount to the work of the Lord in the last days; . . . there was one other item, and that is anything that was clarified in the JST which no other scripture would clarify.”³ Thus the JST verses that appear in the LDS edition of the KJV are not a representative sample of the JST. This paper examines five underappreciated aspects of the JST of the Gospel of Mark and considers them as potential trajectories for LDS biblical interpretation. Currently, there is great debate but no consensus regarding LDS hermeneutics. I suggest that these impulses of the JST could be treated as an interpretive framework that would be useful for LDS New Testament scholars. I’ll also briefly explore how I am attempting to engage these impulses in my own approach to the Gospel of Mark for the BYU New Testament Commentary (hereafter BYUNTC).⁴

1. The impulse to amplify Mark’s unique tendencies

Scholars have identified a harmonizing impulse to the JST;⁵ while this tendency does exist in JST Mark,⁶ there is simultaneously a deharmonizing

3. Quoted in Fred E. Woods, “The Latter-day Saint Edition of the King James Bible,” in *The King James Bible and the Restoration*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, in cooperation with Deseret Book, 2011).

4. The hermeneutical approach of the BYUNTC received extensive discussion in the 2014 volume of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*. This article is, in part, a response to that roundtable, particularly its criticisms of the approach of the BYUNTC.

5. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, the harmonizing impulse deserves more nuanced consideration. Most interpreters of the Bible—at least until very recently—have read Mark through the perspectives of Matthew and Luke, but sometimes the JST reads Matthew or Luke through the lens of Mark. (For example, JST Matthew 9:18 changes “dead” to “dying” and thus conforms Matthew’s account to Mark’s.) Analyzing the JST’s harmonizing tendency in terms of which gospel is prioritized requires more examination; it may even have interesting implications for the synoptic problem.

6. This harmonizing impulse is evident in both style and content. For example, JST Mark harmonizes Mark’s style by changing the historical present tense to the past tense in over two dozen instances, a tendency also found in Matthew and, particularly, in Luke. One instance where the content is harmonized is the shift in JST Mark from a “young man” at the tomb to “angels” (see Mark 16:5–6).

impulse⁷ since the JST extends some of Mark's unique tendencies. One of the most distinguishing features of Mark is the portrayal of the disciples: they frequently make mistakes, experience inappropriate emotions, say foolish things, and thus merit rebuke from Jesus.⁸ The JST amplifies this portrait of the disciples in over a dozen instances:

1. In the report of the disciples' ministry, the JST changes "healed them" to "they were healed"⁹ (see Mark 6:13). This shifts the credit for the healing away from the disciples and to, presumably, God (via the use of the divine passive).
2. By changing "and" to "as if he" in Mark 6:48, the JST intimates that Jesus was not intending to pass by the disciples as he walked on the water, but rather that the disciples misunderstood Jesus's intentions.
3. To the comment that Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus up the Mount of Transfiguration, the JST adds that they "asked him many questions concerning his saying" (see Mark 9:2), which implies their lack of understanding.
4. The JST adds "with great astonishment" to the disciples' response to the transfiguration (see Mark 9:8), adding emotion and likely heightening the impression of the disciples' lack of understanding.
5. The JST adds "being afraid" to explain the disciples' silence when Jesus asks what they were disputing about (see Mark

7. The JST's preservation of each gospel writer's voice has been discussed by Robert Millet and Robert J. Matthews. See Robert L. Millet, "The JST and the Synoptic Gospels: Literary Style," in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 147–62. See also Robert J. Matthews, "A Plain Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, a History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 239.

8. See, for example, Mark 4:10–13; 6:52; and 8:14–18, 32–33.

9. All JST citations in this article are from Thomas A. Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament: A Side-by-Side Comparison with the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012).

9:34). This makes the disciples look even more timid than in Mark's text.

6. After Jesus says in Mark, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last first," the JST adds "this [Jesus] said, rebuking Peter" (see Mark 10:31–32). Now that Jesus's statement is labeled a rebuke of Peter, the fact that the JST also changed "many that are first" to "many *who make themselves* first" (emphasis added) becomes more evidence of the disciples' flaws since it implies that Peter had made himself first—not that he was made first by Jesus.
7. Mark 11:13 describes Jesus looking for figs; the JST adds "and as [the disciples] supposed" to suggest that the disciples thought Jesus was looking for figs when Jesus was doing something else. Once again, they do not understand Jesus.
8. In JST Mark 14:29, Peter's denial is changed from "yet will not I" to "yet I will never be offended." This heightening of the language means that Peter's boast is all the more misguided.
9. To the scene in Gethsemane the JST adds that the disciples "complain[ed] in their hearts, wondering if this be the Messiah" (see Mark 14:32). By registering a complaint with doubt about Jesus's identity, this addition is a very strong example of showing the weakness and lack of understanding of the disciples.
10. Also to the Gethsemane scene, the JST adds a rebuke of Peter, James, and John.
11. The JST changes the scene in Gethsemane so that the disciples—not Jesus—are sore amazed and very heavy (see Mark 14:33), emphasizing their outsized emotions.
12. The JST adds "and they said unto him" to Mark 14:38, which means that not Jesus but the disciples say "the spirit truly is ready but the flesh is weak." This makes it sound not as if Jesus understands their weakness but rather that the disciples are rationalizing it.

13. To the depiction of Peter's denial of Jesus, the JST changes "thought thereon [and] he wept" to "went out, and fell upon his face, and wept bitterly" (see Mark 14:72), expanding on the picture of Peter's emotionality.

Thus, Mark's portrait of the disciples is maintained and amplified. In all of these instances, the portrayal of the disciples in JST Mark is decidedly less positive than it is in Mark. Significantly, the JST did not make changes to the parallel stories in the other gospel accounts to match any of these instances where the disciples are presented as more flawed in Mark.

In addition to the portrayal of the disciples, there are other ways in which the JST extends Mark's distinct material:

1. Use of irony. The JST for Mark 7:9 adds "by the prophets whom ye have rejected" to Jesus's response and thus increases the irony of Jesus's statement.
2. Symbolic use of narrative space. Many scholars believe that Mark gives narrative space symbolic significance;¹⁰ the JST adds "turned away from him" to Mark 14:28 and "went out" to Mark 14:72.
3. Varying responses to Jesus. Mark shows that the common people supported Jesus and it was the religious leadership who were opposed to him; this is made clearer in JST Mark 12:37 (which adds "but the high priest and the elders were offended at him") than it is in Mark.
4. Use of the word "immediately." The word "immediately" (Greek *euthys*) is characteristic of Mark; the JST adds it to 5:17 and 9:8 but not to the synoptic parallels (although it is added elsewhere to Matthew, so the evidence here is somewhat mixed).

10. See, for example, Elizabeth S. Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

5. Use of repetition. The addition of “saying” to Mark 9:12 creates a third verb referring to the action of speaking; this kind of duplication is very Markan.
6. Use of provocative questions. The addition of “who art thou?” in JST Mark 12:34 is similar to Mark 3:4; 4:41; and 8:21, 29 and is thus in line with Mark’s penchant for allowing important questions to dangle in the minds of the audience.

The JST preserves or extends each evangelist’s distinct concerns in other instances. For example, the JST adds details about Jesus’s childhood to Matthew (see Matthew 2:22–3:1), despite the fact that Mark’s text might be considered a more likely candidate for additional material on that topic since it has no discussion of Jesus’s childhood. Similarly, the JST adds nine quotations from the Old Testament to Matthew but only one to Mark, which amplifies Matthew’s tendency to include references to the fulfillment of prophecies.¹¹

Not only is each of these changes important in its own right, but together they suggest that preserving and enhancing the unique voice of the writers was an important impulse of the JST. It was theoretically possible that Joseph Smith could have followed the harmonizing impulse of much of Christian history and produced just one gospel,¹² yet he not only preserved all four but also enhanced some of the distinct aspects of each writer. This suggests that canonized diversity and multivocality are important. LDS interpreters can follow this impulse by paying careful attention to the narrative boundaries between the four gospel accounts and treating each one as a unique portrait of Jesus. The BYUNTC Mark honors this deharmonizing impulse by taking care to avoid reading the other gospels into Mark, which was written first

11. The JST also adds five Old Testament allusions to Luke and three to John. See Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 239–40.

12. The closest the JST comes to collapsing the narratives is with the “little apocalypse” in Matthew 24/Mark 13, which are extremely similar, but even in that case—and despite the incorrect notation in the current LDS scriptures—the text of JST Mark 13 is not identical to JST Matthew 24.

and should therefore be interpreted on its own terms. For example, in John's Gospel, Jesus's temple action is presented as a criticism of those selling merchandise (see John 2:13–17), but it is debatable whether the same is true of Mark's iteration of the story. Similarly, in Mark, it is not clear whether only the twelve accompany Jesus up the mountain before their call or if there is a larger group present; interestingly, Matthew and Luke resolve this ambiguity in different directions.¹³ Interpreting Mark requires maintaining the ambiguity. In these and other instances, the BYUNTC attempts to read Mark on its own terms and thus to maintain, as the JST does, the distinct voices of each evangelist.

2. The impulse to foreground women

On ten occasions, the JST of Mark either highlights the role of women or makes a passage gender neutral:

1. To the story of the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (see Mark 1:30–31), the JST adds the words "came and" before "ministered unto them." This change initially doesn't seem to add much to the text, but it creates a parallel to Jesus's earlier action, when he "came and took her by the hand." The JST makes a similar change in Mark 14:3–9, which parallels the actions of a woman with Jesus's actions (see number 8 below). Thus the JST emphasizes the woman's ministering role by paralleling it with Jesus's role, a move made in Mark's Gospel but enhanced by the JST. (Note that the JST does not add other instances of ministering, which is therefore still only done by women, angels, and Jesus—never other males—in the JST.)
2. In Mark 8:4, the JST changes the word "men" to "so great a multitude." This makes the passage gender neutral and fits

13. Compare Mark 3:13–14 with Matthew 10:1–2 and Luke 6:12–13.

with the analysis of the passage, which suggests that, unlike the first feeding miracle, women are present.

3. The word “him” becomes “the child” in JST Mark 9:36, making it possible that the child is female, which makes sense in context since Jesus is emphasizing the low social status of the child. Because the JST also changes “whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name” in verse 37 to “whosoever shall humble himself like one of these children and receiveth me, ye shall receive in my name,” if the child is imagined as female, it is significant that Jesus is inviting the audience to model the child.
4. In Mark 11:32, the JST changes the word “men” to “people,” which implies that there were women who believed that John the Baptist was a prophet and that the religious authorities feared these women.
5. In Mark 13:3, the JST changes the reference to Peter, James, John, and Andrew to “the disciples,” which, in the Markan context, includes women (compare Mark 3:31–35 and Mark 15:41). This change is significant because it means that women are included in the audience for the remainder of Mark 13;¹⁴ these important prophecies were not restricted to a male-only audience and Jesus envisioned women occupying important roles in the early Christian church. The JST reading also makes better sense of Mark 13:17 than imagining an audience of four male disciples; see also number 7 below.
6. In Mark 13:32, the JST changes “no man” to “no one,” implying that women may well be included among the angels of God.
7. In Mark 13:37, the JST adds “two shall be grinding at the mill; the one taken, and the other left.” Because grinding was

14. Note that neither here nor elsewhere is it my contention that Joseph Smith deliberately made a change for the purpose of foregrounding women; rather I am arguing that that is the effect it has on the text, irrespective of his intentions.

generally women's work, this adds a reference to women to the Markan text.

8. The JST adds material to Mark 14:6–9 so that Jesus's words create a chiasmus.¹⁵ The effect of this structure is to emphasize the centrality of the anointing woman's words and thus emphasize her role and prominence. Further, the JST changes "spoken of for a memorial" to "spoken of *also* for a memorial" (emphasis added) to Mark 14:9, which means that her story is told for reasons other than just simply to memorialize her. This further emphasizes the woman's importance.
9. The JST changes the description of the Simon who carried Jesus's cross (see Mark 15:21) so that his child is named "Alexandria" instead of "Alexander" and thus is a daughter and not a son. It is possible that this situation parallels that of Junia (see Romans 16:7), where discomfort regarding the important role given to a woman resulted in later scribes performing a grammatical sex change on her.¹⁶ It is possible that something similar happened in this situation; of course, in the context of Mark's text and the JST, this is very speculative, since no role other than daughter is occupied by Alexandria. However, given that most scholars think that the reason Simon's children were mentioned at all is because they were personally known to Mark's earliest audiences, it is nonetheless possible and perhaps the most likely explanation for this enigmatic change.
10. The JST changes "he" and "young man" to "angels" in Mark 16:5 and 6, which makes the messengers at the tomb gender neutral and, when read alongside JST Mark 13:32, opens the possibility that the angels were female.

15. See Julie M. Smith, "She Hath Wrought a Good Work': The Anointing of Jesus in Mark's Gospel," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013): 31–46.

16. See John Thorley, "Junia, a Woman Apostle," *Novum Testamentum* 38/1 (1996): 18–29.

Unlike the dual harmonizing and deharmonizing tendencies, there is no tendency to limit women and their roles in JST Mark.¹⁷ The impulse to expand the roles of women is found not only in the JST but in other aspects of Joseph Smith's work as well. For example, when he addressed a group of women in 1842, he told them that he would make of them "a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day—[and] as in Paul[']s day."¹⁸ There is no indication in the Bible that women were priests in the time of Enoch and only the faintest hint that they might have occupied such roles during Paul's time, and yet Joseph Smith taught that they had in fact occupied broader roles than the extant records reflect.

LDS readers of the Bible can honor this impulse to foreground women and their stories by ensuring that, when women are mentioned in the canon, close attention is paid to the text. Due to the traditional neglect of women's voices, this will often require analysis that builds from the ground up after clearing away centuries of myopic interpretation. For example, I note in the BYUNTC that sewing was, in the biblical world, women's work, and so when Jesus employs a parable about sewing old patches on to new garments (see Mark 2:21), his rhetoric is a natural fit in the world of women—and thus recognizes and honors their labors—while simultaneously requiring male audience members to see through women's eyes. Similarly, when Jesus requires a woman with extended menstrual bleeding—a woman who very covertly sought healing and was content to melt back into the crowd—to take center stage and talk about her medical condition in front of a large crowd, the topic is not one which, to put it mildly, would have been expected or at all comfortable for a male audience (see Mark 5:33). Mark nonetheless codes this woman's bodily experiences as a proxy of Jesus's own suffering.¹⁹ These are but a few of the many, many ways in which Mark's

17. The only JST variant that comes close to limiting or erasing women occurs when "her branch" (referring to the fig tree of the parable) is changed to "his branches" (see Mark 13:28), but this is probably not significant.

18. See the Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, March 31, 1842, available at josephsmithpapers.org.

19. See Julie M. Smith, "A Redemptive Reading of Mark 5:25–34," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 95–105.

text foregrounds women, an impulse heightened by the JST and which should therefore be of interest to all LDS interpreters.

3. The impulse to read closely and critically

The changes in JST Mark suggest that the text should be read closely and with a critical eye—and was read by Joseph Smith the same way. For example, Mark 4:10 relates that Jesus was “alone” when those with him asked about his parable. But he obviously wasn’t alone if there were disciples around to ask him questions! The JST changes “alone” to “alone with the twelve and they that believed in him.” Similarly, on several occasions, the JST eliminates or changes the word “answered” when the statement following is not a reply to a question;²⁰ the JST also eliminates hyperbole (see JST Mark 1:5; 2:12; 5:20; and 9:23). These changes indicate that neither Joseph Smith nor the JST’s reader should read passively and acquiescently; rather, the text should be approached with a critical eye. This tendency is also evident in the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that resulted from the questions raised by work on the JST (see, for example, D&C 77).

LDS scholars should, similarly, approach texts with a hermeneutics of suspicion, at least some of the time, since reading against the grain can yield new insights. Sometimes tough questions are rewarded with profound answers. I’ve attempted to bring a deliberate and somewhat critical eye to the BYUNTC. For example, a careful study of the exorcism of the man possessed by the legion of demons shows that Mark alters the chronological sequence of events in order to obscure the fact that Jesus’s first attempt at exorcism was not successful. Chronologically, Mark 5:8 comes before Mark 5:7 (hence the “for” at the beginning of Mark 5:8), but the placement downplays the fact that Jesus’s command to come out of the man was not immediately followed, perhaps because Jesus was not aware that there was more than one demon. Once Jesus is aware of the dimensions of the problem, the exorcism is successful. This

20. See JST Mark 9:19; 10:24, 51; 11:14, 22; 12:35; and 15:12.

kind of observation becomes an important element in understanding Mark's story of Jesus.

4. The impulse to modernize

Quantifying the JST is more art than science, but by my rough estimate²¹ about seventy-five percent of JST Mark does not change the theological meaning of the text but rather makes it easier to read by modernizing, clarifying, or simplifying the language. Examples of this tendency include changing "river of Jordan" to "river Jordan" (see Mark 1:5), "of the age of twelve years" to "twelve years old" (see Mark 5:42), and "so shall it not be" to "shall not be so" (see Mark 10:43). The word "saith" is replaced by the word "said" in three dozen instances,²² while other modernizations include swapping "hath" for "has" (see Mark 10:52 and 14:8), "wist" for "knew" (see Mark 9:6 and 14:40), and "twain" for "two" (see Mark 10:8, twice in this verse). While this trend has been commented on previously, it has not received the attention that it deserves, given that this impulse constitutes about three-quarters of the work of the JST. (Note that it is not unique to JST Mark.)

21. This figure is the result of my own tally and should be considered an approximation only. To arrive at this percentage, I counted not the number of verses changed by the JST but rather the number of changes; sometimes there are several changes in one verse. (For example, Mark 10:24 is counted as having three changes: "that" becomes "who," "saith" becomes "said," and "answereth" becomes "spake." These are counted as three separate changes because they reflect three different tendencies in the JST: changing the relative pronoun to comport with modern usage, modernizing archaic endings, and eliminating illogical phrasing.) I then divided these changes into three categories: (1) those that did not change the meaning of the text, (2) those that may or may not change the meaning (depending on how they are interpreted), and (3) those that clearly change the meaning of the text. The process of both counting and categorizing is somewhat subjective; other readers would surely arrive at a different number than I did. The purpose of my rough estimate is solely to give a sense of the proportion of changes that do not involve doctrinal shifts.

22. See Mark 1:44; 2:10; 3:3, 4, 5; 4:35; 5:19, 36, 39; 6:38, 50; 7:18, 34; 8:1, 12, 17, 29; 9:19, 35; 10:11, 23, 24, 27, 42; 11:2, 21, 33; 12:16, 43; 14:27, 30, 32, 45, 63; 15:28; and 16:6.

LDS scholarship should take this modernizing and clarifying impulse seriously, especially since this tendency also reflects the Book of Mormon's celebration of the virtue of "plainness" in scripture (see 2 Nephi 25:4, 7 and 31:2–3). Indeed, the LDS Church itself has adopted this impulse to an extent in the changes recently made to its English Bible.²³

The BYUNTC contains what is called "The Rendition," which renders the Greek text into modern English. With the Mark volume, I've attempted to honor the modernizing impulse of the JST by translating Mark into unadorned, common English and letting this new rendition reflect Mark's awkward—and sometimes even ungrammatical—Greek, which, of course, is also a way of preserving Mark's unique voice in the canon.

5. The impulse to revise

The idea that the JST displays an impulse to revise is so self-evident that it may not seem to deserve consideration, but this impulse merits examination both for its details and its implications.

First, some of the details of the production of the JST are suggestive. Joseph Smith began his work on the Old Testament until he felt called to work on the New Testament (see D&C 45:60–62), which he then translated before returning to the Old Testament. His new translation had included new chapter headings, but only for a while.²⁴ He and his contemporaries apparently labored under an unwarranted suspicion of italicized words. He initially had his scribes copy the entire new translation—including passages that were not changed from their KJV iteration—but then adopted a different system that involved making notations in the Bible with only the changes copied out by hand. This

23. In the 2013 update to the English scriptures, the church modernized the spelling of about two dozen words in the KJV. See "Summary of Approved Adjustments for the 2013 Edition of the Scriptures," accessed March 24, 2015, www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/scriptures/approved-adjustments_eng.pdf.

24. See Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 146.

system itself underwent evolution. The scribes switched from ink to pencil because the ink bled through the pages of the Bible.²⁵ And in two instances, Joseph Smith accidentally translated the same passage twice, apparently not realizing that he had already translated it. A comparison of the two translations shows that his changes are similar but not identical.²⁶ Combined, these details of the translation process support the conclusion of Robert J. Matthews, who explains, “The translation was not a simple, mechanical recording of divine dictum, but rather a study-and-thought process accompanied and prompted by revelation.”²⁷ Apparently Joseph Smith was given general impressions that he needed to turn into words and general guidelines that he needed to execute. Joseph Smith also revised the JST during his lifetime.

These details of the translation process suggest to most historians and interpreters that the JST is less analogous to stone tablets carved by the finger of God and handed down from on high and more akin to the idea of learning “line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12).

Further, it is instructive to see how Joseph Smith used the JST in his own ministry: in many instances, he would refer to the KJV, not his new translation. For example, JST Job 1:6 and 2:1 change “sons” of God to “children of God,” but Joseph Smith, on at least two occasions, referred to Job’s account and mentioned the “sons of God.”²⁸ Sometimes he would offer alterations to the KJV that were *not* included in the JST; Thomas E. Sherry and W. Jeffrey Marsh find that Joseph Smith’s “sermons from 1833 to 1844 are filled with numerous interpretations about

25. See Paul W. Lambert and Thomas A. Wayment, “The Nature of the Pen and Pencil Markings in the New Testament of Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 47/2 (2008): 87–106.

26. See Kent P. Jackson and Peter M. Jasinski, “The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 42/2 (2003): 35–64.

27. Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 39.

28. See “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons* (April 1, 1842): 745, and “Sons of God,” *Times and Seasons* (January 16, 1843): 75. Credit for this observation belongs to Rico Martinez.

Bible verses not found in the JST.”²⁹ Later teachings of Joseph Smith that were not part of the JST include:

1. Priesthood keys were given to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.
2. Robert L. Millet explains:

The second verse of the King James Bible describes the state of things in the morning of the creation: “And the earth was without form, and void” (Genesis 1:2). The JST of this verse is exactly the same as the KJV. In a sermon delivered on January 5, 1841, in Nauvoo, however, Joseph Smith taught that the words “without form and void” should be translated “empty and desolate.”³⁰

3. Grant Underwood describes the change made regarding the idea of the Holy Ghost as a dove:

The correction came as part of Joseph’s later public teachings rather than in the JST or other Restoration scriptures. Twice in the Book of Mormon, Nephi says the Holy Ghost descended upon Christ “in the *form* of a dove” (1 Nephi 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:8, emphasis added), and D&C 93:15 reports that “the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the *form* of a dove, *and sat upon him*” (emphasis added). Subsequently, Joseph elaborated, “The dove which sat upon Christ’s shoulder was a sure testimony that he was of God. . . . Any spirit or body that is attended by a dove you may know to be a pure spirit.” This insight was given more detailed formulation two years later. “The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a Dove,” Joseph reportedly explained, “but the sign of a Dove was given to John to signify the Truth of the Deed as the Dove was an emblem or Token of Truth.”³¹

29. See Sherry and Marsh, “Precious Truths Restored,” 57–74.

30. See Robert L. Millet, “Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: A Historical Overview,” in *Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, 23–47.

31. See Grant Underwood, “Joseph Smith and the King James Bible,” in *The King James Bible and the Restoration*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 215–33.

4. Robert L. Millet describes a change concerning the language about there being “many mansions”:

Just five months before his death the Prophet clarifies another biblical passage which had received no alteration on the JST. “The question is frequently asked, ‘Can we not be saved without going through with all those ordinances?’ I would answer, No, not the fulness of salvation. Jesus said, There are many mansions in my Father’s house, and I will go and prepare a place for you. House here named should have been translated kingdom; and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too.”³²

This record of doctrinal development independent of the JST, combined with the fact that Joseph Smith later studied Hebrew and Greek, implies that he never regarded the JST as a perfected text and still found an important role for the original languages of the Bible, the KJV, and continuing revelation.

So in both process and product, Joseph Smith regarded the JST as subject to revision, and re-revision. The implications of this are very significant for LDS interpreters—not only in their approach to the JST but to all scripture. There are four important implications of the impulse to revise.

First, in contrast to the impulse of popular Mormonism, the JST must not be regarded as a perfect text by LDS scholars. Sometimes the language of D&C 35:20 (“the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect”) is used to elevate the status of the JST. As this paper proposes, an approach suggesting that the JST nears a state of perfection is not sustainable. And a closer analysis of D&C 35:20 suggests the same. To begin with, the only biblical use of the phrase “own bosom” is Psalm 35:13, where the context is that the unanswered prayer of the psalmist has returned to his “own bosom.” When read in this light, the language of D&C 35:20 might very well imply that the perfected iteration of scripture that resides in the

32. See Millet, “Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible,” 23–47.

heavens cannot be perfectly conveyed to earth. Additionally, the verses leading to D&C 35:20 present Joseph Smith as a very human messenger: verse 17 speaks of his weakness, verse 18 warns him that his calling is subject to his obedience, and verse 19 contains a command to “watch over him that his faith fail not.” Combined, these three statements contextualize Joseph Smith’s abilities as limited and contingent. Nonetheless, the passage assures that his work will be adequate, if not inerrant. So treating the JST as an indisputable solution to a problem in the text is not hermeneutically legitimate when it is recognized that Joseph Smith himself did not deploy the new translation in an absolutist way. This is why, in the Mark BYUNTC, the JST is treated in an appendix and not in the exegetical notes.

Second, if an inspired translation by the lead prophet of the Restoration is not to be treated as inerrant, then how much more must LDS scholars approach other canonical texts—and uncanonized interpretations of texts, even those offered by church authorities—with an eye to their limitations, lacunas, and lapses. Joseph Smith prayed to be released from “the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”³³ LDS interpreters recognize the limitations of communication and of texts by avoiding the tendency to want to harmonize all revelation, under the recognition that different texts will reflect different levels of knowledge and thus might not be reconcilable. This also implies a duty to avoid reading certain beliefs or doctrines into a text in which they might not have been initially present. It also requires avoiding the tendency to treat statements by modern church leaders as if they can definitively and absolutely solve or explain issues within any ancient text. In the BYUNTC, I’ve tried to follow this principle by focusing the commentary on the question of what a particular passage meant in its original context, which normally mandates that implications and applications voiced by later interpreters are not germane.

33. Joseph Smith, Kirtland, OH, to William W. Phelps, [Independence, MO], November 27, 1832, in JS Letterbook 1, p. 4. Accessed via josephsmithpapers.org.

Third, one of the premises of modern textual criticism is that earlier iterations of a text are preferable. But in LDS hermeneutics, this point merits reexamination if the interpreter grants any level of inspiration to the work of the JST. The incident in the Book of Mormon where Jesus asks that the Nephites' record be revised in order to include the account of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies provides another case where the newer iteration of a text should be preferred to the more archaic version (see 3 Nephi 23:9–13). The story of the woman taken in adultery (see John 8:1–11) may be another instance in which later additions to a text should be favored. At the same time, it is not the case that LDS interpreters should always prefer the newer version since we know that novelty can introduce error. So there is a tension in the Restoration tradition: LDS interpreters must not automatically assume superiority for the older or the newer text but rather have to engage each iteration on its own merits. As historian David Holland notes, "The Book of Mormon itself reinforces the message that when heavenly light mixes with human messengers, God's treasure is to be found in earthly vessels. It repeatedly warns its readers not to discard the things of God because of the flaws of men. . . . The notion that later generations may improve upon the scriptural text—even be 'wiser' than its inspired authors—brings the Book of Mormon closer to the most radical elements of America's emerging culture of biblical criticism than to its long tradition of biblical conservatism."³⁴

Fourth, this requirement to engage the iterations without assuming that older is better implies that LDS scholars cannot assume that a text can be perfect, stable, or unchanging. This dovetails nicely with the newest trend in the interpretation of Mark, performance criticism, which sees the Gospel as primarily an oral recitation that would have changed over time.³⁵ The existence of multiple canonized accounts of

34. David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 155–56.

35. See, for example, Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).

the creation³⁶ and of Malachi 4:5–6³⁷—not to mention of Jesus’s mortal ministry—should encourage LDS interpreters in this belief. The restoration is ongoing, an idea that the presence of a perfected text would deny. The JST illustrates that inerrancy is not a reasonable expectation from scripture. Brigham Young shared this view: “Revelations, when they have passed from God to man, and from man into his written and printed language, cannot be said to be entirely perfect. . . . Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation.”³⁸ At the same time, it is regarded as inspired, so in LDS readings, we need to accept the idea that inspiration and imperfection are equally yoked.³⁹ This paradoxical concept is also found in the Book of Mormon, a text that makes two claims: first, that it is an inspired and true text,⁴⁰ and, second, that it is a flawed text.⁴¹ So the reader who accesses the Book of Mormon on its own terms must read it as inspired and erroneous, sacred and imperfect. Since the text is neither exact nor expendable, the

36. Latter-day Saints recognize three canonized accounts of the creation (Genesis 1–2; Moses 2–3; and Abraham 4–5) as well as granting quasi-canonical status to the oral retelling of the creation in the temple ceremony.

37. See D&C 2:1–3; 27:9; 110:13–15; 128:17–18 (note especially the language “I might have rendered a plainer translation to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands”); and JS—H 1:36–39.

38. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:310–11.

39. As David Bokovoy notes, “Joseph Smith himself models this approach when on the one hand, he identifies the Bible as the ‘word of God,’ yet on the other, he states that the Song of Solomon is ‘not inspired.’” See “The Divine Word Made Flesh: A Fundamental Mormon Paradox,” accessed March 24, 2015, www.patheos.com/blogs/davidbokovoy/2015/01/the-divine-word-made-flesh-a-fundamental-mormon-paradox/.

40. See 1 Nephi 1:3; 14:30; Mosiah 1:6; Alma 3:12; 3 Nephi 5:9; 18:37; and Moroni 10:29.

41. See the title page (“if there are faults they are the mistakes of men”), 1 Nephi 19:6; Jacob 7:26; Alma 10:5; 3 Nephi 8:2; Ether 5:1; 12:23–40; Mormon 9:31–33; and Moroni 1:4. One could also argue that passages such as Helaman 7:7 reflect clearly erroneous notions, but lack awareness of the error.

reader must approach it from a perch of anxious engagement, continually contemplating and weighing the text.

Taken together, the implications of this unending impulse to revise—which is also a natural consequence of a belief in continuing revelation—lead to the conclusion that a text can be both inspired and improvable. Texts are fluid; there is no perfect recension. The JST shows that a text cannot be considered perfect because it must always interact with an audience, and what an audience brings to the text changes over time. For example, there is a JST reading for Mark 2:14 that explains what it means that Levi was at the “receipt of custom,” a clarification that is likely helpful for modern readers of the KJV but would have been necessary neither for Mark’s earliest audiences nor for readers of modern English translations. So the ability of the text to communicate its intent is not strictly a product of a hypothetical state of perfection resident in the text itself but also of the audience’s level of knowledge. In other words, a verse that might have been perfectly functional, if not inerrant, when written is rendered in need of revision by the passage of time, which causes a lack of awareness of the practice mentioned in the text. Further, there is wide recognition that the JST contains a variety of material—restoration, commentary, harmonization, modernization, doctrinal correction—but the JST reader has no obvious way to distinguish between the types. This has an important effect on the audience—who must accept their inability to determine which type is which. This reader experience is itself an important weight against the swerve toward belief in inerrancy that a conservative religious tradition might be tempted to take.

The burdens that an inspired and imperfect scripture place on the interpreter are numerous and complex. The LDS exegete’s best defense is humility, care, and the avoidance of dogmatism. I’ve tried to honor this impulse in the BYUNTC by avoiding idiosyncratic interpretations and presenting a full spectrum of interpretive options to the reader. One unusual feature of BYUNTC Mark is the extensive use it makes of lists of interpretive options, as opposed to simply presenting the preferred hypothesis of the author.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these five impulses found in the JST of Mark—to amplify Mark's unique tendencies, to foreground women, to read critically, to modernize, and to revise—are significant not only in themselves but also because of the guidance they might provide to LDS hermeneutics. There is currently a divide in the LDS interpretive community between what might be called traditionalists and progressives. My hope is that this chasm could be bridged by a recognition that these reading impulses can be rooted not only in the modern reading practices of the secular academy but also in the founding prophet of the Restoration. The idea of using the work of Joseph Smith to bridge the divide between more traditional and more progressive LDS exegetes will, I hope, appeal to both groups.

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The Bible in Early Christianity: Audiences, Projects, and Agendas

Peter Martens

Contested terrain

ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING—though by no means uncontroversial—academic developments in the past hundred years has been the renaissance of interest in how the Bible was interpreted by early Christians. If we are to adequately characterize this renaissance, it is crucial to acknowledge that it has often been motivated by more than an antiquarian interest in reconstructing a dusty corner of late antique Christianity. On any view of the long history of scriptural interpretation, it is readily acknowledged that this discipline underwent a profound transformation in the modern era. Precisely when, how, and why this revolution took place is debated. But no one contests *that* it happened and that its two main protagonists—the premodern and modern iterations of this discipline—often stand in a disjunctive, even hostile, relationship to one another.

This paper was delivered as a lecture sponsored by the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts and the Ancient Near Eastern Studies program at Brigham Young University (March 27, 2015). I am grateful to Carl Griffin for organizing the event and for the hospitality extended to me during my stay. I delivered a lengthier version of this talk at the quadrennial international Origen conference held in Aarhus, Denmark (August 26–31, 2013). That version is being published in the conference proceedings: *Origeniana Undecima: Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought*, ed. Anders-Christian Jacobsen (Leuven: Peeters, 2016).

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In his Bampton lectures delivered at the University of Oxford in 1885, Frederic W. Farrar gave classic expression to the modern, withering critique of premodern biblical interpretation. Farrar presented a view of early Christian scriptural scholars that is still representative of how many biblical scholars today, over 125 years later, view these figures. “The task before us,” Farrar wrote,

is in some respects a melancholy one. We shall pass in swift review many centuries of exegesis, and shall be compelled to see that they were, in the main, centuries during which the interpretation of Scripture has been dominated by unproven theories, and overladen by untenable results. . . . Exegesis has often darkened the true meaning of Scripture, not evolved or elucidated it. This is no mere assertion. If we test its truth by the Darwinian principle of “the survival of the fittest,” we shall see that, as a matter of fact, the vast mass of what has passed for Scriptural interpretation is no longer deemed tenable, and has now been condemned and rejected by the wider knowledge and deeper insight of mankind.¹

Farrar continues, calling to mind recent developments in archaeology, history, and comparative religion, and concludes that these disciplines

have resulted in the indefinite limitation, if not the complete abandonment, of the principles which prevailed for many hundreds of years in the exegesis of Scripture, and in the consignment to oblivion—for every purpose except that of curiosity—of the special meanings assigned by these methods to book after book and verse after verse of the sacred writings.²

For Farrar, “the history of interpretation” was “to a large extent a history of errors,”³ and it was Origen—a figure I will discuss at greater length in

1. Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation: Eight Lectures Preached before the University of Oxford in the Year 1885 on the Foundation of the Late Rev. John Bampton* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 8–9.

2. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 9–10.

3. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, xxxv.

this essay—who helped establish these “errors” of exegesis for more than a thousand years.⁴ While very important exceptions to this dismissive attitude exist today, I suspect that Farrar’s sentiments would probably still ring true to many professional biblical scholars, for whom patristic biblical interpretation is at best a distraction and, at worst, an obstacle to sound, biblical exegesis.

A number of disciplinary, ecclesiastical, and institutional factors have contributed to the renewal of interest in patristic exegesis. But it is important to appreciate that this renaissance has transpired against the backdrop of a long and deep suspicion about the value of premodern exegesis in Christian circles. This becomes especially clear when we turn to the early historical studies in the field. They were authored by Christian intellectuals who were not only familiar with this suspicion, but whose studies were also marked by this suspicion—either reiterating its veracity or calling it into question. I offer two brief and contrasting examples as they pertain to Origen, the towering third-century scholar of the Bible and lightning rod for many subsequent debates about biblical exegesis.

In *History and Spirit*, Henri de Lubac, a Jesuit priest, threw into sharp relief the competing perspectives from which Origen’s exegesis had often been approached.⁵ On the one hand, most readers saw nothing of interest or importance in Origen. They rejected his approach to scripture as an “aberration” that did not even deserve “from the historian a glance of sympathetic curiosity, an effort to rediscover its soul.”⁶ The voice of Farrar is unmistakable. On the other hand, de Lubac warned, “It would be no less an error . . . to admire these ancient constructions so much that we wished to take up permanent residence in them.”⁷ Resisting unqualified rejection as well as naïve retrieval, de

4. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 190.

5. Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit: L’Intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1950). Translated by Anne E. Nash and Juvenal Merriell as *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007).

6. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 429.

7. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 429.

Lubac's project lay somewhere between these two extremes. It aimed for a disposition that was apparently quite rare in his day: an appreciative analysis that steered clear of the debilitating prejudice that saw from the start nothing of value in Origen, as well as the avoidance of an "excessive enthusiasm that would lead us to imitate their [i.e., the ancients'] methods."⁸ De Lubac ultimately concluded that Origen's exegetical project was of mixed value. Beneath its discardable husk lay an enduring kernel: "at the heart of their [the fathers'] exegesis dwells a sacred element that belongs to the treasure of the faith."⁹

R. P. C. Hanson, later Anglican bishop of Clogher, published *Allegory and Event* nine years after de Lubac's *History and Spirit*.¹⁰ Hanson's book raised the alarm about the increasingly sympathetic ways in which the French Jesuits were approaching Origen's biblical scholarship. Hanson overtly aligned himself with contemporary historical-critical biblical exegesis. On the opening page of his study he raised the question that would shape his entire inquiry: "Has the interpretation of the

8. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 491. A handful of projects today more or less align with, and extend, de Lubac's agenda to the actual practice of scriptural reading. There is a growing sentiment in some pockets of the English-speaking world that patristic (and medieval, reformation, and early modern) exegesis has become a crucial resource for understanding and gaining inspiration from the Bible. The aim of these projects is to utilize patristic interpretations of scripture to help today's readers determine what the Bible meant, or means. See especially Thomas C. Oden, ed., *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998-); and Robert L. Wilken, ed., *The Church's Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003-). Both projects gather patristic biblical interpretations on a particular biblical book—we might call these "neo-catenas"—with the view to supplementing modern critical scholarship on the Bible. Another notable series, the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, ed. R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009-), contains a number of volumes that mediate the patristic exegetical legacy through a wide spectrum of contemporary theologians and ethicists who seek to clarify the Christian doctrinal message of scripture; see R. R. Reno, series preface to *1 and 2 Peter*, by Douglas Harink (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 10–14.

9. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 491. For more on de Lubac's project, see Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

10. R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959).

Bible as it is practiced today anything seriously in common with the interpretation of the Bible as Origen, and indeed as the early Church generally, practiced it?”¹¹ As becomes increasingly clear to the reader of Hanson’s book, the answer to this question is, with few exceptions, “no.” Origen’s biblical exegesis was vastly inferior to contemporary biblical scholarship, whose “guiding principle” was “the question of what any given text meant when it was first written or uttered to the first audience for which it was intended.”¹²

It is helpful to have these two studies in mind. They are two of the most important books on Origen’s exegesis, and astonishingly both still remain in print, an indication of their significance for the continuing interest in Origen. These books also demonstrate how research into Origen from within theological departments has rarely been motivated by simple antiquarian interests. De Lubac and Hanson were genuinely interested in helping their readers understand Origen’s exegesis, but this did not preclude contemporary debates about biblical scholarship from seeping into the pages of their works. Even if we seldom encounter research on Origen—or on other early Christian figures today—that is characterized by such undisguised, normative inquiries (whether in the form of Hanson’s brazen call to reject or de Lubac’s plea to retrieve a vital essence), the topics that scholars have chosen, the ways in which they have handled them, and indeed, even the topics that have been ignored have often reflected the evolving debates within contemporary biblical scholarship, and increasingly, debates outside this discipline.

From topic to field

But before turning to some of these trends in the research, it might be useful to briefly sketch a narrative of the rise of interest in early Christian biblical interpretation, or “the reception history of the Bible.” A good point to begin this narrative is in the years following World War II,

11. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 7.

12. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 362, 368.

where interest in this topic experienced a pronounced revival. Among continental European Catholics a growing dissatisfaction arose with the strongly Thomistic and rationalistic orientation of their theological program, a program often devoid of a clear connection to scripture. New sources for thinking the faith were sought, and so these *ressourcement* theologians turned east. An important vehicle for this new orientation within Catholic theology was the series Sources Chrétiennes, founded in Lyon, France, by the Jesuits Jean Daniélou, Claude Mondésert, and Henri de Lubac. This series aimed to expand the canon of texts for doing Catholic theology.

Its first volume was saturated with significance: the aforementioned Jean Daniélou—one of the leading *ressourcement* theologians—published an edition of Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*.¹³ Here readers were presented with a patristic text, not a medieval one; a Greek text, not a Latin one; one made accessible to the reading public with a facing French translation, not simply an edition accessible only to the classically trained scholar; a text focused on the spiritual or mystical life, not on the subtle distinctions of fourth-century Trinitarian theology; and a text that integrated scriptural exegesis into its theological program, not one in which the Bible retreated into the background. In his *Life of Moses*, Gregory invited readers to enter the rich world of early Christian allegory and join Moses in the ascent of Mount Sinai, an allegory of the Christian's never-ceasing ascent to the eschatological face-to-face encounter with God.

Today Sources Chrétiennes remains an important vehicle for transmitting patristic biblical interpretation, but it has been joined by a number of other series that merit attention. Patristic commentaries and homilies on scripture are continually being edited within the major series of critical editions, such as the Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca or Oxford's Early Christian Texts, where my own edition of Adrian's *Introduction to the Divine Scriptures* will be published. Perhaps the most notable development in coming years will be the new editions

13. *Grégoire de Nyssa: Contemplation sur la Vie de Moïse*, ed. Jean Daniélou, Sources Chrétiennes 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1943).

and studies on Alexandrian and Antiochene biblical exegesis coming out of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.¹⁴

Much of this foundational textual work has been translated into an array of modern European languages.¹⁵ English speakers have been generally well served, and there is even an anthology of early Christian biblical interpretation that remains serviceable.¹⁶ I should note, however, that *many* really important early Christian treatises on the Bible, as well as homilies and commentaries on it, remained unedited, or if edited, have never been translated into English. Much textual work remains to be done.

As this textual work progressed, specialized articles and books naturally followed. A journal in Italy is devoted to the history of exegesis,¹⁷ and Brill publishes a monograph series called the Bible in Ancient Christianity.¹⁸ A very important research tool, *Biblia Patristica*, is currently developing from its original print format to a digital format. This reference work allows readers to identify the places in the writings of early Christian authors where they discussed a particular verse.¹⁹ And not a few important overviews of the field have been authored.²⁰ I regard

14. <http://www.bbaw.de/forschung/biblexegese/uebersicht>.

15. Begin with Adalbert Keller, *Translationes Patristicae Graecae et Latinae = Bibliographie der Übersetzungen altchristlicher Quellen* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1997). See also Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 39–44.

16. Karlfried Froehlich, trans. and ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

17. *Annali di Storia dell'Esgesi* (1984–).

18. <http://www.brill.com/publications/bible-ancient-christianity>.

19. <http://www.bibindex.mom.fr/>.

20. Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum Futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950); Robert M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1957); Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiéval: Les quatres sens de l'Écriture* (Paris: Aubier, 1959–64); Bertrand de Margerie, *Introduction à l'Histoire de l'exégèse* (Paris: Cerf, 1980); Manlio Simonetti, *Profilo storico dell'esgesi patristica* (Rome: Istituto patristico "Augustinianum," 1981), and *Lettera e/o allegoria: Un contributo alla storia dell'esgesi patristica* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1985); James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge:

Frances Young's *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* as the most important of these. The work is becoming dated but still remains the point of departure for any serious research in the field.

As we follow the life cycle of this emerging field of study we arrive, finally, at the reference works. Charles Kannengiesser's *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* receives the notable distinction of becoming the first reference work devoted exclusively to biblical interpretation in early Christianity.²¹ The *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation* is currently in development under the editorial supervision of Paul Blowers and myself.²²

Several indications show that work in the field is still accelerating today. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the establishment of the study of patristic exegesis as a scholarly discipline at the beginning of the twenty-first century is that this topic is surfacing beyond the traditional boundaries of early Christian studies. Arguably the most striking development has been the editorial decision at Walter de Gruyter to integrate the reception history of the Bible, patristic exegesis included, into its *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR)*.²³ In the encyclopedia's introduction, the editors remark that interest in the reception history of Bible has many roots so that "a now well-established branch of biblical studies, *the history of exegesis*, continues to contribute to the debate about the meanings of the biblical texts as they have been

Cambridge University Press, 1997); Henry Chadwick, *Antike Schriftauslegung: Pagane und christliche Allegorese. Activa und Passiva im antiken Umgang mit der Bibel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998); John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church: Exploring the Formation of Early Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

21. Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*.

22. See the layout of the volume at <https://slu.academia.edu/PeterMartens>.

23. <http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/ebr>. Note as well the new series *Lives of Great Religious Books* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011–), which includes contributions on individual biblical books, as well as on other religious writings. Its aim is to "examine the historical origins of texts from the great religious traditions, and trace how their reception, interpretation, and influence have changed—often radically—over time" (<http://press.princeton.edu/catalogs/series/lgrb.html>).

expounded in the histories of Judaism and Christianity.”²⁴ The willingness of this encyclopedia to consider not simply the current state of scholarship on the Bible, but also the Bible’s reception in the patristic period, reflects emerging scholarly agendas and will undoubtedly also set them. On this issue of reception history, the contrast between the *EBR*, which will be the major reference work on the Bible for coming decades, and its predecessor, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, is striking: the latter rarely attended to the topic, and its aversion to anything premodern is suggested by the absence of an entry on “allegory,” even though the apostle Paul used the word in his letter to the Galatians.

I hope to have conveyed through this very schematic orientation to research on early Christian biblical interpretation that what began as a narrow topic of academic interest around the middle of the twentieth century has gradually blossomed into a full-fledged, international field of study—perhaps even a discipline in its own right. It has its editions and translations, research tools, monograph series, a journal, and several reference works. From my viewpoint, this field of study is animated by three major stakeholders who approach it with often disparate motivations: (1) professional biblical scholars who, perhaps due to a growing exhaustion with, or simply the exhaustion of, traditional approaches to scripture, find in reception history new avenues that supplement how they have examined canonical texts; (2) historians of Christianity who increasingly recognize the importance of scripture and the scribal, interpretive, and institutional cultures that emerged around it for reconstructing the world of early Christians; and (3) scholars and preachers with normative theological programs who, not unlike the *ressourcement* theologians of the mid-twentieth century, wish to integrate scripture more obviously into their own projects. In patristic biblical exegesis they find such an ally.

24. Hans-Josef Klauck et al., eds., introduction to *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 1:xi.

The middle stakeholder group

I belong to the second of these stakeholders. I am a historian of early Christianity, and while interested in how the other two stakeholders view my work, my research remains firmly tied to the field called patristics, or early Christian studies. Most of my work has been on Origen, the famous third-century Christian. Origen was many things—an educator, priest, apologist, ecclesiastical diplomat, churchman, and heretic, among others—and subsequent generations, ours included, have struggled to offer a coherent portrait of this complex, late antique figure. Yet among friends and foes alike, few have lost sight of Origen, the biblical scholar. With only a touch of exaggeration, Adolf von Harnack quipped, “There has never been a theologian in the church who desired to be, and indeed was, so exclusively an interpreter of the Bible as Origen was.”²⁵ Hardly surprising, then, is this larger renaissance of interest in patristic exegesis, often focused specifically on Origen, that I have briefly sketched here. He was an extraordinarily prolific biblical scholar, whose exegetical writings exercised influence and stirred much controversy among subsequent Christians in both the Greek- and Latin-speaking worlds. It is my contention that if we attend to the major trends in the research on Origen, we will have a good sense as to the larger trajectories that run through the research on patristic scriptural exegesis as a whole.

While the literature on Origen’s biblical scholarship is notoriously large, it tends to follow well-worn paths. Two prominent trajectories merit detailed examination: the focus on Origen’s literary scholarship—by which I mean his philological procedures, including the quest for the literal and allegorical referents of scripture—and the growing interest in the social dynamics of Origen’s biblical scholarship. Let’s begin with Origen’s literary scholarship.

25. Adolf von Harnack, *Der Kirchengeschichtliche Ertrag der exegetischen Arbeiten des Origenes*, 2. Teil: *Die Beiden Testaments mit Ausschluss des Hexateuchs und des Richterbuchs*, Texte und Untersuchungen 42.4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1919), II.4 A3.

Origen the philologist

In the preface to his *History of Classical Scholarship*, Rudolph Pfeiffer announced his quest to identify a *philologia perennis*—that is, a literary scholarship that was “still enduring,” while omitting what was “obsolete and past for ever.”²⁶ Pfeiffer did not explicitly identify this chaff, though he tipped his hand when he referred later in his preface to the “Alexandrian scholar poets” as “our ancestors” and underscored that they did not, in fact, practice allegorical interpretation.²⁷ Allegorical exegesis played a small role in Pfeiffer’s narrative and he was not alone among scholars of his generation in relegating it to the margins. Allegory was not scholarship, or at least, a *philologia perennis*.

In Origenian scholarship, Bernhard Neuschäfer’s *Origenes als Philologe* is a striking parallel to Pfeiffer’s approach.²⁸ Inspired by the scholia on Dionysius of Thrax’s *Art of Philology*, Neuschäfer examines how the four main philological exercises of the typical late antique classroom all surface in Origen’s own work: textual criticism, reading a passage aloud, literary and historical analysis, and finally, aesthetic and moral evaluation. The all-important exercise of literary and historical analysis consisted of several independent inquiries: elucidation of a word’s meaning, grammatical and rhetorical analysis, metrical assessment and style criticism, and finally, examination of the historical realities discussed or alluded to in a scriptural passage. Neuschäfer’s book is one of the towering achievements in twentieth-century Origenian scholarship. It is not without precedent, but it remains the most comprehensive investigation of Origen’s literary scholarship to date.

Neuschäfer raises a question on the closing pages of his study that strongly echoes Pfeiffer’s earlier research: given the long-standing interest in Origen the allegorist, and now Neuschäfer’s own account of Origen the philologist, do we have here two irreconcilable portraits, or is it possible that these two halves can be woven together into a single,

26. Rudolph Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), vii.

27. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, x, 140, 167.

28. Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1987).

harmonious picture?²⁹ Neuschäfer leaves this question unanswered, though I suspect he would favor the latter scenario. Even so, the talk of two halves, and the deliberate exclusion of allegory from the discussion of Origen's philology, suggests that an enduring modern prejudice is still at work: even if we *can* link allegory to philology, allegory is *not* philology. On the whole, my impression is that over the course of the last half century, classicists and historians of literary criticism have increasingly resisted this tendency to divorce allegory from philology or literary analysis. Robert Lamberton, George Boys-Stones, and Peter Struck (to name only a few) have often been more inclined than their counterparts in church history to treat allegory as integral and not peripheral to late antique literary scholarship.³⁰

And this takes us to Origen the allegorist. Never, seemingly, has there been a period in the modern epoch when scholars have not been interested in—or perhaps we should say fixated on—Origen's allegory. Nor is this surprising, since it is precisely here where he stands at his farthest remove from modern biblical scholarship.³¹ As noted above,

29. Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe*, 292.

30. In response to this prejudice, which was not original to Pfeiffer, classicists and historians of literary criticism have issued a number of studies on ancient allegorical practices. Notably, Félix Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1956); Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1958); Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); George R. Boys-Stones, *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Ilaria Ramelli, "Cornutus in christlichem Umfeld: Märtyrer, Allegorist und Grammatiker," in *Cornutus: Die Griechischen Götter: Ein Überblick über Namen, Bilder und Deutungen*, ed. Heinz-Günther Nesselrath et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 207–34. On the continually evolving character of philology as a discipline, see Karla Pollmann, "Philologia Perennis: Ever-Green and Ever-Pruning," *Frons: Blad voor Leidse Classici* 30 (2010): 90–98.

31. Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung des Alten Testaments für den christlichen Glauben," in *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), 1:335.

it was precisely through this lens that R. P. C. Hanson evaluated Origen's exegetical project.³² For Hanson, Origen's biblical interpretation exemplified the "alchemy of allegory" and was deficient in comparison to contemporary biblical scholarship whose "guiding principle" is "the question of what any given text meant when it was first written or uttered to the first audience for which it was intended."³³ Unlike the great expositors of the past who "successfully put themselves into the minds of the biblical author whom they are interpreting," Origen "on countless occasions gives the opposite impression, that he is reading into the mind of the biblical author thoughts which are really his own."³⁴ "The critical subject," Hanson continues,

upon which Origen never accepted the biblical viewpoint was the significance of history. To the writers of the Bible history is *par excellence* the field of God's revelation of himself. The Jewish historians may not have achieved the accuracy of a modern historian, but they did believe that in the events of history God's will and purposes were made plain.³⁵

While Hanson is clear that Origen did not "reject or abandon history" as some scholars insist, he did not have a deep respect for it.³⁶ "History," Hanson summarizes, "is therefore an essential ingredient of revelation; it is an inseparable part of the manner in which God reveals himself. One might almost say that in the Incarnation God has in a sense taken history into himself. To this insight Origen is virtually blind."³⁷ Hanson's argument, then, is that there are two different views of history: history as "event" and history as "parable." "In history as event, in history as

32. This account of Hanson is indebted to my earlier essay, Peter Martens, "Origen against History: Reconsidering the Critique of Allegory," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 635–56.

33. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 362, 368.

34. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 363.

35. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 363.

36. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 364. Most of the chapter entitled "Historicity" investigates the passages where Origen denies and affirms historicity (259–77).

37. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 364.

the field of God's self-revelation *par excellence*, Origen is not in the least interested. He is only interested in history as parable," or symbol of eternal truths about God.³⁸ Herein lies the force of his title *Allegory and Event*: the *and* means something like "is opposed to" or "trivializes."³⁹

This book was intended as a rebuttal to the growing sympathies with Origen's biblical scholarship among the *ressourcement* French Jesuits, especially Henri de Lubac. De Lubac, as noted earlier, sought to rehabilitate the tarnished legacy of Origen, particularly the charge that he was a reckless allegorist who was mired in pagan exegesis.⁴⁰ The scholarship of de Lubac and Hanson was reflective of one of the most persistent historiographical distinctions of the modern era: they largely accepted the reigning demarcation of the Hellenistic/pagan from the salutary Hebrew/Christian. For Hanson, Origen missed the Hebraic view of history's significance because he was uncritically Hellenistic; for de Lubac, Origen's allegory, or "spiritual exegesis," was primarily indebted to the traditions of exegesis already seen within the New Testament, especially in Paul's writings, as well as being continuous with the Greek and Latin Catholic exegetical traditions that followed him and were, in some measure, also dependent upon him. But for de Lubac there was more than an external link between Origen and the New Testament authors. There was a "Catholic instinct"⁴¹ that drove Origen's project, which itself could not be disentangled from "a whole manner of thinking, a whole world view . . . [a] whole interpretation of Christianity."⁴² De Lubac's book was ultimately about the relationship between

38. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 276.

39. For a critique of Hanson's reading, see Martens, "Origen against History," 646–50.

40. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 9–10. "Yet one thing is certain: Origen's effort was inconceivable to a Hellenic mind. . . . For the moment, let us merely observe that, whatever the procedural similarities we might be able to enumerate, whatever the mutual participation we might even be able to observe in the same 'allegorizing' mentality, that effort alone is enough to place an abyss between Origen, thoroughly marked by Christianity, and those Greeks to whom he is at times thoughtlessly compared" (317).

41. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 295.

42. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 11.

the two testaments. When Origen allegorized the Old, he sought to discern Jesus Christ, the church, or indeed the New Testament in the figures, events, and institutions narrated in Israel's scriptures. The *et* in the title *Histoire et Esprit* did not mark conflict, the hostile rejection of the Old *histoire* in favor of the New *esprit*, but a complex, unique, and ultimately mysterious harmony. "The New Testament is hidden in the Old, the Old is made clear in the New."⁴³ This harmony ultimately expressed a christological thesis, with which de Lubac closed his study: "By bringing himself, he [Christ] brought renewal."⁴⁴

Today most of us are aware that the Hellenistic-Hebraic dichotomy is too simplistic and that Origen's exegetical project cannot be situated as neatly in one camp or the other as both Hanson and de Lubac thought. Yet despite the differing agendas of both authors, my impression is that there was a good deal less *debate* between them than first meets the eye. Both de Lubac and Hanson knew that Origen's view of scripture, and the way in which he read it, differed markedly from contemporary scholarly approaches to the Bible. But both remained strongly perspectival in their approach: one viewed this difference sympathetically, and the other critically. Neither author was particularly interested in discovering the full range of presuppositions that informed these disparate approaches to scripture, and so the robust evaluation of both Origen's approach *and* the modern approach to the Bible was decidedly underdeveloped. The reader has the distinct impression that these books belonged more to the world of campaigns than arguments.

Origen and the transformation of society

Probably the most striking shift in the scholarship in the last half century has been a new social contextualization of Origen's scriptural exegesis. In this trajectory—representative of the larger shift in patristics studies, especially in the North American scene—the driving questions have been reoriented; they are simply no longer how did Origen interpret

43. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 503, but see especially 503–7.

44. De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 507.

or view the Bible, but how did his exegetical project influence society?⁴⁵ Emblematic of this shift for the whole field of patristic exegesis is the title of Frances Young's landmark work: *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*.⁴⁶ What makes this development so interesting is that it has created unexpected bedfellows. On the one hand, scholars who work within an ecclesiastical and theological framework see this new focus as the exploration of Origen's larger pastoral, spiritual, or pedagogical vision. On the other hand, scholars who dialogue with contemporary literary and cultural studies have seen this inquiry furthering the larger theoretical concern for identifying the ways in which our cultures are, in fact, fluid and constructed, not simply static, given realities.

This new focus on the cultural impact of Origen's biblical scholarship surfaces strongly in Karen Jo Torjesen's *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*. She insists that we organize Origen's exegesis "around the figure of the hearer/reader."⁴⁷ Torjesen argues for a twofold pedagogy of the Logos: the original, historical teaching, which was located in the literal sense of scripture, and the contemporary pedagogy, which resided in the spiritual sense and was continually being directed toward new audiences. Origen's allegorical project, Torjesen contends, was to reenact the original pedagogical activity of the Logos for a contemporary audience: "Therefore Origen's exegesis moves from the saving doctrines of Christ once taught to the saints (the historical pedagogy of the Logos) to the same saving doctrines which transform his hearers today (the contemporary pedagogy)."⁴⁸ Origen

45. On this shift, see especially Elizabeth A. Clark, "From Patristics to Early Christian Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan A. Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7–41.

46. See especially Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 215, where what she means by "formation" becomes clear: "The Bible's principal function in the patristic period was the generation of a way of life, grounded in the truth about the way things are, as revealed by God's Word. Exegesis served this end."

47. Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 12.

48. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 13.

arranged these doctrines so that they corresponded to the needs of his audiences, thereby ensuring “a progression of stages in the Christian’s progress toward perfection.”⁴⁹ Simply put, biblical interpretation was “the mediation of Christ’s redemptive teaching activity to the hearer.”⁵⁰ Torjesen sheds genuinely new light on Origen’s exegetical project, and her work has been well received.

John David Dawson has contributed two books to this broader issue of how exegesis shaped society. In *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, he argues that Alexandrian allegory was an instrument put into the service not of salvation (as Torjesen had claimed), but of “cultural revision,” where “readers secure for themselves and their communities social and cultural identity, authority, and power.”⁵¹ The study examines Philo, Clement, and Valentinus. More recently, Dawson has published a book on Origen that still expresses his interest in the influence of exegesis on society and culture but that also takes a less cynical view of his subject matter. His *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* is written in the demanding idiom of literary and cultural theory and rarely dialogues with earlier Origenian scholarship.⁵² However, closer inspection indicates that this book is traditional not only in the question that it raises, but also in the answer that it provides. Dawson tackles an old problem in Christian theology, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and in particular, the familiar charge that Christian allegorical exegesis of Hebrew scripture undermines the literal meaning of the text and thus entails some form of supersessionism. Dawson’s chief interlocutors are Daniel Boyarin, Erich Auerbach, and Hans Frei, three prominent theorists of figural reading. Dawson criticizes all three for imposing a modernist conception of allegory on Origen, according to which

49. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 12.

50. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure*, 14.

51. John David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 2.

52. John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

he is thought to have reduced, replaced, or undermined the “Jewish meaning,” “historicity,” or the “literal sense” of the text. In fact, Dawson counters, Origen exemplifies—and serves as an exemplar for—a properly Christian symbolic reading of the Hebrew Bible that builds upon or transforms the literal Jewish sense and thus respects “the independent religious identity of Jews, and, more broadly, the diverse identities of all human beings.”⁵³ Such a symbolic reading deserves the name *figural* to distinguish it from the literal-historical denying *figurative* or *allegorical* exegesis.⁵⁴ To those well-versed in the modern reception of Origen, it is evident that Dawson’s proposal for how Origen linked the two testaments was in many ways already anticipated by de Lubac.⁵⁵

New approaches—integrative

In closing, I ask your indulgence as I map out some of my own work in the field. When I set out to write my book on Origen, my impression was that most of the research had been directed toward specific facets of Origen’s exegetical project but that the overall shape of this project had not been adequately sketched. It was also my impression that, despite the bewildering array of studies on Origen’s biblical scholarship, there was also a glaring omission in the literature: a failure to account for the sort of person doing scriptural exegesis. What had gone missing, in my view, was a biographical approach to Origen’s biblical interpretation. His writings teem with observations about the sorts of credentials required to be a good reader of scripture. And we know from the prologues to

53. Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 3–4.

54. Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 15.

55. Dawson, though, refers only once to de Lubac (at 125–26). Also note especially Trigg’s critique of Dawson’s reticence to engage earlier scholarship on Origen: Joseph W. Trigg, review of *Christian Figural Reading*, by John D. Dawson, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002): 524–26.

philosophical commentaries in late antiquity that outlining the reader's credentials was more than a Christian concern.⁵⁶

In my book *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*,⁵⁷ I adopt such a biographical approach by examining Origen's portrait of the scriptural interpreter. For Origen, ideal interpreters were far more than philologists steeped in the skills and teachings conveyed by Greco-Roman education. Their profile also included a commitment to Christianity from which they gathered a spectrum of loyalties, guidelines, dispositions, relationships, and doctrines that tangibly shaped how they practiced and thought about their biblical scholarship. Not unlike the emerging consensus among historians of late antique philosophy like Pierre Hadot, then, I argue that for Origen scriptural exegesis was a way of life⁵⁸—a particular sort of life. Origen contextualized interpreters—himself included—within the drama of salvation. They did not simply examine this drama as it unfolded on scripture's pages. In doing biblical interpretation well, they also participated in this drama by expressing various facets of their existing Christian commitment: for example, by following Paul's exegetical precedent, reading in conformity with the rule of faith, and exercising a wide range of reading virtues while examining scripture (to name only a few). Ideal interpreters *qua* interpreters embarked upon a way of salvation that ultimately culminated in the everlasting contemplation of God.

In my estimation, one of the great advantages of introducing a biographical approach to the study of patristic biblical exegesis, Origen included, is that it helps us see more than a particular facet of ancient scriptural scholarship. The interpreter was the animating center of the

56. Jaap Mansfeld, *Prolegomena: Questions to Be Settled before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 23–24, 161–73.

57. Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

58. See, for instance, Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, Belknap, 2004); Alfons Fürst, *Von Origenes und Hieronymus zu Augustinus: Studien zur antiken Theologiegeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 81–114, 125–62.

entire project of biblical interpretation. To offer a detailed biographical portrait of this person is to hold out the promise of disclosing the sweeping contours of the entire Origenian exegetical project, and, I think, of finding new ways to compare and contrast it with the exegetical projects of his later critics, like Theodore of Mopsuestia. This is precisely the area in which I hope to direct my attention in coming years—the exegetical projects, or perhaps better, exegetical cultures of Alexandria and Antioch. The complex relationship between these cultures cannot be collapsed into who allegorized and who read literally. These cultures were replete with assumptions, indeed convictions, about ideal readers, ideal “pagan” models for interpretation, and notions of textuality, of institutional contexts, of facets or stages of exegesis, and of metaphors for reading, all of which informed the emergence of two different, and sometimes competing, approaches to the authoritative text of Christians.

Conclusion

In the opening pages of Young’s *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, she remarks that her two aims are “to challenge accepted generalisations” in the standard accounts of patristic biblical exegesis and “to work with certain key texts and authors to provide living examples of the exegetical process, its principles, underlying assumptions and practice.”⁵⁹ These are still excellent guidelines for working in the field. But I would like to add one more. I often find myself returning to the realization that work on Origen’s biblical scholarship, and the biblical scholarship of other early Christian figures, is easily susceptible to unintentional anachronism. For many of us, our first exposure to biblical scholarship was not what we found in Origen but what we experienced in the classrooms where we were initiated into the guild of contemporary biblical scholarship. Words like *scripture*, *exegesis*, and *scholarship* flow easily off our tongues, their denotations

59. Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 4–5.

and connotations configured by the academic lexicon of the twenty-first century. Yet we use these same words to understand early Christian scriptural exegesis and to translate its writings. Indeed, some of these words are transliterations of the original Greek and Latin terms we study. But the registers of these ancient words rarely overlap tidily with their modern equivalents. This is a challenge in all historical work, but especially one that confronts us historians of biblical exegesis, for this discipline underwent an enduring revolution in the modern era. And we do not stand on Origen's side of that revolution, but on *this* side, where with the passing of time, the old ways become increasingly foreign. This is perhaps the greatest demand placed on the historian of biblical exegesis: to be vigilantly self-aware of the limitations of our language and to be correspondingly responsive to the strangeness of the ancient world that awaits us.

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Review Essay

Scripture as Literature: Michael Austin's *Job*

Jason A. Kerr

Review of Michael Austin. *Re-reading Job: Understanding the Ancient World's Greatest Poem*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014.

IN *RE-READING JOB*, MICHAEL AUSTIN argues by both precept and example that literary methods afford a fruitful way of studying scripture. Austin is not the first Latter-day Saint to advocate such methods; in recent years several books have taken literary approaches to the Book of Mormon, drawing inspiration from books published in the early 1980s by Robert Alter and Northrop Frye that launched literary study of the Bible as a serious academic field.¹ For all this flurry of activity, though, such ways of reading remain unfamiliar to many Latter-day Saints, perhaps due in part to wariness about treating familiar biblical

1. Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997); Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981); Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

figures as literary characters or favorite narratives as stories rather than historical accounts. Literary methods, however, enrich the practice of reading scripture by inviting readers to become aware of how they read, and this awareness sends readers into the depths of the text in ways that can produce devotional readings that attend closely to the complexities of human life. In this way, as Austin's book amply shows, literary study of scripture provides a powerful means of affirming the continued relevance of scripture, even amidst historical change.

Becoming aware of how one reads includes grappling with questions of historicity and historicism. In chapter 2 of *Re-reading Job*, Austin takes the stance that questions of historicity are more or less uninteresting: "As Latter-day Saints . . . we are free to seek our own inspiration in determining whether or not there was an actual man named Job who lived in a place called Uz. . . . I do not believe that the answer to this question matters" (p. 18). He then proceeds to build a case for reading Job as a fictional text because it begins with the Hebrew equivalent of "once upon a time," among myriad other details (including its problematic depiction of God). Fictional status does not, however, ipso facto undermine the book's connection with truth: "Acknowledged fictions can be assembled into narratives that convey profound—and true—insights to those who read them" (p. 19). We can find, for instance, that *Middlemarch* conveys truth without our being obliged to believe in the historical existence of Dorothea Brooke or Edward Casaubon. More to the point, Jesus's parables can teach truth without requiring belief in the historical existence of a Samaritan who actually helped a wounded traveler on the road to Jericho. Such an approach assumes a transcendental, transhistorical truth that can be instantiated in vehicles whose accuracy or otherwise according to the methods of twenty-first-century historiography is of little moment.

Accordingly, it might appear that history matters little to literary readers of scripture, but such need not be the case. Austin draws on scholarship that locates the origins of the Job frame tale (the prose sections in chapters 1, 2, and the end of 42) in Persian folklore, but his reading also relies on the insights of historical biblical criticism,

particularly the notion that Israelite religion was a multifarious business in which Deuteronomistic, Priestly, and Wisdom schools of thought (however loosely defined) offered postexilic Jews different ways of understanding their national situation, history, and present obligations. Rather than treat this historical information merely as context, Austin (as would most literary scholars trained in the past three decades) understands that literature, whether fictional or factual, engages dialogically with its contexts, informing as well as being informed by them. In chapter 7 Austin presents the book of Job as an extended argument against the Deuteronomistic school, according to which the Babylonian exile resulted from Judah's breaking the covenant and thereby bringing on the curses described in Deuteronomy 28:47–57. In Austin's reading (which may oversimplify Deuteronomist thought), both Job and his comforters believe in what Latter-day Saints call "the law of the harvest"—the friends insist that Job's suffering means he must have done something wrong, and Job accuses God of injustice for punishing an innocent man. The Job poet, in Austin's reading, invites readers to see that the world is more morally complex than the law of the harvest allows, telling "the story of a man who thinks he is living in the world of Proverbs but finds himself trapped in that of Ecclesiastes with no way to escape" (p. 143). Thus, the book of Job offers a critique of what Austin describes as its host culture's prevailing religious orthodoxy, inviting readers to reject pat answers and to learn, instead, to ask more probing questions about the nature of God, the underpinnings of moral thought and practice, and so on. In this way, historically aware literary readings can send those who use them into processes of moral reasoning that, done well, can produce people able to respond with thoughtful faith to a complex range of human experiences.

The above claims hinge more on historical awareness than specific literary practice, however, which has to do with careful attention to the consequences of texts being written in a particular way. An immediate complication arises in that most Latter-day Saints do not have the training to read biblical texts in their original languages but must instead engage through the mediation of translation—a difficulty

further amplified by the anglophone church's continued use of the four-hundred-year-old King James Version (KJV), which adds the challenge of navigating early modern English to the mix. Here, too, history comes into play, for the past century has seen considerable philological advances that put modern scholars in much better stead to make sense of the Hebrew text than were their Jacobean counterparts (and with regard to the New Testament we now have access to much better manuscripts than those available to the KJV translators). This is to say that even though literary readings are of course possible using the church's lightly annotated edition of the KJV, modern study bibles (especially ones with thorough notes) can make literary readings much easier.

One feature of Job in which literary and historical readings come together in enriching ways has to do with Satan, or rather *ha-satan*, "the satan." The definite article means that this word cannot be read as a proper name but instead refers to an office, "the adversary," or "the accuser." As Austin explains, "'The satan' is a member of God's royal court like 'the messenger' or 'the advisor,' known only by his function. . . . [He] combines the functions of a district attorney and a star witness for the prosecution. His job is to keep the Kingdom of God safe by rooting out discontentment and sedition wherever it might be" (p. 35). Close attention to the text—noticing that definite article—prompts historical inquiry that then leads readers to divest the satan in Job of the diabolical trappings associated with his capitalized theological counterpart and instead understand this figure as a character in a story. This realization prompts the question of whether God in Job should also be treated as a literary figure rather than as a literal portrait of the true Deity, which raises the further question of genre: if Job isn't a historical account of an encounter between the one true God that other scriptures call us to worship and the capital-S Satan they invite us to spurn, what is it? Questions of this kind, and the insights that may follow them, are available to nonreaders of Hebrew only through study Bible annotations or similar secondary materials.

The question of just what sort of text Job happens to be illustrates another advantage of approaching scripture from a literary perspective,

including the use of modern translations of the Bible. Scripture contains multiple genres, and being aware of genres and their conventions can make us more sensitive readers. The Bible obviously contains a range of genres: the tightly written prose narratives of Genesis, the historical accounts in Samuel and Kings, the law codes in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, a range of poetic forms in the Psalms, satire in Jonah, literary prophecy of various kinds, and so on. Richard Rust has extended this kind of generic analysis to the Book of Mormon, analyzing its use of sermons, letters, and other forms. Attention to genre could also inform readings of the Doctrine and Covenants, which contains personal addresses of the sort addressed to Oliver Cowdery in section 6, ecclesiological instructions (e.g., sections 20 and 107), letters (sections 121–23), conciliar declarations (section 134), and press releases (section 135), among others. In Job, the most important generic point (aside from observing that it is a fictional account rather than a historically “true” one) is the text’s shifting from prose to poetry at the beginning of chapter 3 and back to prose at 42:7. This is a shift that readers of the KJV, which uniformly renders the book in its lovely prose, will miss altogether.

The best way for people who don’t read Hebrew to attune themselves to literary features of biblical texts is therefore to engage with multiple translations. The KJV should remain part of the picture, not only because it is the Bible with which most anglophone Latter-day Saints are most familiar, but also because, as Ronan Head observes, its language undergirds modern LDS scripture.² Putting modern translations like the New Revised Standard Version or the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) Tanakh—especially when these are published in study bible format complete with annotations—into conversation with the KJV can attune non-Hebrew readers to nuances of the text, especially

2. Ronan James Head, “Unity and the King James Bible,” *Dialogue* 45/2 (2012): 45–58. On the history of Latter-day Saints and the King James Bible, see Philip L. Barlow, “Why the King James Version? From the Common to the Official Bible of Mormonism,” *Dialogue* 22/2 (1989): 19–43, expanded in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (1991; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

where the Hebrew is difficult to translate, as happens frequently in Job. These translations, needless to say, render Hebrew verse as English verse and thus make at least that generic shift easier to notice. Anyone interested in literary readings, though, should be sure to include Robert Alter's translations in their collection of bibles.³ Alter translates with the goal of making the English represent the literary features of the Hebrew as nearly as possible, explaining his thought process in copious notes. There is no real substitute for reading the Hebrew, but comparing multiple translations (especially when Alter's is among them) inculcates in readers an awareness of the mediation that translation performs while, somewhat paradoxically, also getting us as close to the original as possible without learning Hebrew.

Awareness of how translation affects scriptural meaning opens the door to a deeper awareness of how we habitually read in the first place. Sometimes the dislocation of encountering a new translation is all it takes to help us see that we perhaps hadn't quite thought through our interpretation of a particular passage. Austin's strongest case in point from Job is 19:25, which the KJV renders as "For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth." The LDS Old Testament Gospel Doctrine manual reads this passage as being transparently about Jesus Christ, indeed going so far as to use it for the title of the Job lesson.⁴ The JPS Tanakh, meanwhile, gives the passage as "But I know that my Vindicator lives; in the end He will testify on earth." Alter's translation comes closer to the KJV—"But I know my redeemer lives, / and in the end he will stand up on earth"—but his note adds crucial context:

This famous line, long the subject of Christological interpretation, in fact continues the imagery of a legal trial to which Job reverts so often. The redeemer is someone, usually a family member,

3. Michael Austin, personal communication to author, April 28, 2015. Although Austin quotes from the New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh, he prefers Alter's translation, which licensing fees prevented him from using in the book.

4. *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 157–61.

who will come forth and bear witness on his behalf, and the use of “stand up” in the second verset has precisely that courtroom connotation.⁵

Alter soft-pedals the point somewhat, half-countering the christological reading without quite explaining why it doesn't work. Austin builds on this context and philological investigation of the word translated “redeemer” (*goʿel*, a form of *gaʿal*) to drive the implications home:

There are many scenarios in which an Old Testament figure might plausibly talk about the prophesied Messiah as a *gaʿal*. But Job 19:25 is not one of them. . . . Job is not looking for someone to redeem him from his sinful human nature or from spiritual bondage. He wants someone to testify on his behalf to convince God that he did not do whatever God thinks he did—and therefore to restore, if only posthumously, both his reputation and his estate. (pp. 105–6)

That is, Job is looking for an avenger of blood (another possible translation of *goʿel*) to vindicate him against God. He isn't expressing faith in God but rather in someone who will correct the injustice he believes that God has done to him.

This interpretation calls habituated Christian ways of reading the passage sharply into question. One need not agree with Austin's reading for the desired effect to occur: instead of seeing the word *redeemer* and immediately assuming Jesus, we pause and think again. We consider the surrounding verses. Although the Gospel Doctrine manual includes the whole of chapter 19 in the assigned reading, the lesson plan refers only to verses 25–27, omitting 21, which clearly identifies God as the entity Job blames for his afflictions: “Pity me! Pity me! You are my friends; For the hand of God has struck me!” (NJPS).⁶ This is to say nothing of the litany of complaints directed at God in verses 8–13. Admittedly, a christological reading is still possible in light of this knowledge, but producing one

5. Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Norton, 2010), 83–84.

6. *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*, 159.

demands more thought and care than simply identifying the “redeemer” with Jesus. One possibility requires accounting for a malicious God whom Jesus will placate on our behalf. Alternatively, reading in light of God’s stern rebuke of Job in the theophany that concludes the poem, we could think about how Jesus engages in our lives when we completely misunderstand how God works—an approach that would require thinking about God in Job as a character we’re supposed to critique rather than as an accurate depiction of Deity. The superficial “redeemer = Jesus” reading has been uplifting Christians for fifteen hundred years and shouldn’t be dismissed too casually, and yet getting beyond the surface of this famous passage opens up opportunities for a grittier theological account of what part Jesus plays in human-divine relationships. Literary approaches to scripture value this kind of deep dive into the text and the difficult questions it raises when put to close scrutiny.

By inviting readers to slow down before reaching homiletic conclusions, literary approaches work in harmony with the long-standing Jewish (and related Christian) interpretive practice known as PaRDeS, an acronym for *Peshat* (literal reading), *Remez* (allegorical reading), *Derash* (homiletic reading), and *Sod* (mystical reading). This method distinguishes literal reading (*peshat*) from spiritual readings (the other three), with the idea that one ought to pursue *peshat* before moving on to the others—in part because *peshat* is the best way of learning that other kinds of reading are necessary.⁷ Such literal reading sounds easy, but as the example of Job 19:25 illustrates, it requires painstaking attention, often involving research with spurs shooting off in several directions. A literary approach adds to the possibilities *peshat* might explore by adding literary interpretations to the mix. As John Crawford points out, Austin’s book is more a reception history of Job than a close reading, drawing readers’ attention to a range of literary retellings of and responses to the book of Job.⁸ Rewritings—like Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* or Robert

7. For instance, Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed* is an extended exercise in showing that passages with problematic *peshat* readings require allegorical interpretation of various kinds.

8. John Crawford, “Job: A Useful Reading,” *Dialogue* 48/1 (2015): 153–56.

Frost's *A Masque of Reason*—attest particular ways of reading that can help readers see the scriptural text in new ways after encountering the literary adaptations. Such work can lay the foundation for homiletic interpretations that respond powerfully to the complexities of human life by attending closely to the complexities of the scriptural text.

Austin's book does *peshat* well at a macro level, if not so much at the micro level. He devotes four chapters (out of ten), comprising about 60 pages (out of 150) to reading Job, a book of 42 chapters that (including the introduction) occupies 66 rather larger pages in the *Jewish Study Bible*. These chapters aim to present the big picture of a prose frame tale, a Wisdom dialogue in verse, some odds and ends, and the concluding theophany, doing just enough close reading to give readers a reasonably detailed but still broad sense of how the book as a whole works. The Wisdom dialogue, at 24 chapters comprising well over half the book, receives 15 pages. This forest-rather-than-trees approach is useful for readers accustomed to thinking of Job as the frame tale with a christological verse dropped somewhere in the vast unknown of the middle chapters, and it provides a fair enough *peshat* reading of the book as a whole to serve as the launching pad for the applied readings of the final four chapters. Chapter 7 reads the book of Job as a critique of the law of the harvest, arguing that it privileges kindness to friends over defending religious orthodoxy, including the justice of God. Austin takes on the familiar reading of 19:25 in chapter 8, arguing that even though this verse does not testify of Christ, the book's universalism, its parallels with the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the Good Samaritan, and its acknowledgement of the need for reconciliation between humans and God make it the most profoundly Christian book in the Old Testament. Chapter 9 explores uses of Job to construct (or critique) theodicies in the wake of the Holocaust, including literary works that put God on trial, arguing that we shouldn't use the idea of God to dismiss other people's suffering. Finally, in chapter 10 Austin works to situate Job in the complex category of biblical Wisdom Literature before advancing a final argument that imaginative literature is not at all incompatible with divine revelation. These chapters present compelling

arguments, and chapters 9 and 10 especially show the kind of payoff that careful attention to the text can yield. Sometimes careful attention undercuts familiar ideas—for instance, that 19:25 refers to Jesus—but it can also replace those ideas with more robust ones: a message of God’s love for all his children, an ethic of care for the suffering.

Austin’s focus on the big picture serves as a helpful introduction to deeper study of Job, upon which readers will learn, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Job is even more complicated than Austin allows. He writes frequently that Job is a great poem, but he does not do quite enough analysis of how the poem works or what makes it great. The concluding theophany is indeed sublime poetry, but Austin limits himself to higher-order analysis, simply saying that the point of chapters 38 and 39 is to demonstrate God’s greatness. Austin notes that scholars have been underwhelmed with God’s response to Job’s questions; however, he suggests that God does respond to Job’s accusations of injustice. A closer look challenges this perspective by, for example, bringing out God’s sarcasm, which turns Job into the Deity’s rhetorical plaything. One instance of sarcasm appears in 38:19–21:

Where is the way that light dwells,
and darkness, where is its place,
that you might take it to its home
and understand the paths to its house?
You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great! (Alter)

Given that the frame tale makes God complicit in Job’s suffering, this concluding insistence on the length of his days is nothing short of cruel. First of all, the line’s sarcastic tone means that God is suggesting that Job’s life will not be so long after all, which can only call to mind the divinely permitted deaths of his children. God’s calling oblique attention to his own arbitrariness in allowing Job’s suffering hardly provides an effective defense against accusations of injustice.

In a further passage, thick with irony, God invites Job to prove his own strength by crushing proud people in an angry fit:

If you have an arm like God's,
 and with a voice like His you can thunder,
 put on pride and preeminence,
 and grandeur and glory don.
 Let loose your utmost wrath,
 see every proud man, bring him low.
 See every proud man, make him kneel,
 tramp on the wicked where they are.
 Bury them in the dust together,
 shut them up in the grave.
 And I on my part shall acclaim you,
 for your right hand triumphs for you. (40:9–14 Alter)

Perversely, God will acknowledge the righteousness of Job's cause only if Job does to others what God has done to him. That is, God offers to vindicate his own justice by implicating Job in similar behavior. How, after all, is the theophanic show of force, whose stated purpose is to correct one "that darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2 NRSV), anything other than a rather petulant crushing of human pride?

Austin acknowledges readings, notably Jung's, that find the theophany dissatisfying, but his attempted defense—at least God shows up!—underserves the Job poet's achievement in passages like these. By portraying a God who is just as all-powerful as he claims, but who uses that power to rub Job's face in the very suffering that he allowed the satan to inflict, the poem invites readers to scrutinize their deepest beliefs. Such scrutiny happens through both literary and theological reflection, intertwining the processes of figuring out what the text actually says and working through the theological implications of various possible meanings. Austin credits the Job poet with greater moral complexity than any of the characters in the poem individually possess, which means that the poem's moral insights can only be discovered through careful reading, accompanied by lots of questions. Literary approaches to scripture involve ongoing dialogue between making sense of texts and working out their applications. These applications need not be devotional, but they certainly can be, and given that devotional readings do and should

play a central part in Latter-day Saint communal life, literary methods recommend themselves as ways of producing readings adequate to the complexities and difficulties of our lives. Austin shows the potential that this approach has, and he invites readers to walk farther down the path to which his book opens the gate.

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Hugh Nibley and Early Christianity

Looking Down a Dark Well: An Editorial Introduction

Carl Griffin

TEN YEARS AGO MORMONS MOURNED THE LOSS of the most important Mormon scholar of his generation, Hugh Winder Nibley (1910–2005). *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* is observing this decennary with a special section on Nibley as a scholar of early Christianity. We are publishing here for the first time “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation,” the final chapter of a long, unpublished typescript preserved in the Nibley papers that he titled “The End of What?”

The intended purpose of “The End of What?” can only be surmised, but its broad topic is early Christianity and apostasy. It is Nibley’s longest single treatment of this subject¹ and probably dates to the early 1950s. Just from the excerpt reproduced in “Preservation” we clearly

1. With the qualification that it seems to be comprised of two or more iterative discussions of the same subject matter (successive drafts?), which is itself an inviting research prospect for students of Nibley.

see its relationship to later published works, particularly “The Passing of the Church,”² as Louis Midgley discusses.

While Nibley’s manuscript bears all the hallmarks of the draft that it is—lack of references, messy overtyping, spotty handwritten changes—it is still a remarkably compelling piece of writing, with great energy and cadence. Nibley’s published work can at times feel dense and opaque, even encoded. “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” shows a relative looseness and linearity—an enthusiastic gush of insight more than crafted, blunt-force argument. Or something more of a live performance than a studio production. And as Bert Fuller shows in his introduction to it, this preliminary work has real utility for both unpacking and augmenting our understanding of Nibley’s published work on early Christianity.

A generation ago, when Nibley wrote this, he was, very nearly, the only Mormon scholar engaged in the serious study of early and medieval Christianity. Today such Mormon historians number perhaps a score and are now beginning to reassess Nibley within the context of contemporary scholarship and modern Mormon inquiry. Certainly Nibley posed distinctively Mormon questions that still inform Mormon readings of Christian history.³ At the same time, as shown by Daniel Becerra and Taylor Petrey, each new generation must do as Nibley did and engage its own unique questions.

Nibley was necessarily in dialogue with the scholars of his day, and those even earlier—not with us who were to come. He worked within the basic context of fin-de-siècle ecclesiastical historiography. This historiographical divide between Nibley and us may pose the greatest challenge to contemporary appreciation for the original force and creativity

2. Hugh Nibley, “The Passing of the Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme,” *Church History* 30/2 (1961): 131–54; reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 168–208.

3. See especially Ariel Bybee Laughton, “Apostasy’s Ancestors: Anti-Arian and Anti-Mormon Discourse in the Struggle for Christianity,” in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, ed. Miranda Wilcox and John Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 218–41. Several essays in this important volume discuss both Nibley and the issues I just touch on here.

of his scholarship on early Christianity. Nibley showed high antipathy toward the church historians opposite him, and we might say, with good reason. Predominant still were creaky Protestant narratives of Roman Catholic corruption and decline, recently put into new academic trim by Protestant scholars like Adolf von Harnack, the leading pre-war historian of early Christianity. Catholic scholars of course responded sharply. Nibley articulated his own distinctively Mormon narrative that dismissed both sides alike, as well as those who had recently tried, too conveniently (he says), to claim nonpartisanship under the color of science. "Since the rules no longer favor us, we will abolish them! The modern scientific credo is thus no exception to the rule that an ulterior motive has marked the writing of church history from the very beginning."⁴ Nibley never claimed a scientific detachment for himself that he denied to others. And while he rebuked Protestant historians for not going far enough, his intellectual debt to them was undeniably great.

It takes nothing from Nibley, I think, to suggest he was our own Mormon Harnack, and not because he cites from Harnack frequently and approvingly (though critically). Within their respective communities, both scholars were at the vanguard of conversation about the relationship of Christian history to Christian truth. Both were gifted with second-to-none intellects. It has been rightly said of Harnack that his work showed "an erudition that would probably have been attributed to witchcraft in a more supernaturalistic age."⁵ Nibley's erudition was equally "obscene."⁶ One finds in both a similar historiographical method

4. Hugh Nibley, "The Way of the Church," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 213.

5. Jaroslav Pelikan, preface to *The Reality of Christianity: A Study of Adolph von Harnack as Historian and Theologian*, by G. Wayne Glick (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), xi.

6. Truman Madsen recounted this most famous Nibley anecdote: "He has memorized half the Greek poets, and when at a Biblical Society meeting Jesuit George MacRae heard him discourse without notes and then spontaneously quote thirty lines in the original, he put his hands over his face and said, 'It is obscene for a man to know that much.'" Truman G. Madsen, foreword to *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), xi.

and even a similar rhetorical style, Teutonic and bold.⁷ Karl Barth and others attacked Harnack for insisting on a continuity between history and revelation that, in their view, emptied Christian faith. Nibley used the same historical and rhetorical strategies, with a Restoration reframing, to empty competing Christian claims of authority. George Tyrrell complained, “The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a dark well.”⁸ Nibley saw at the bottom a different (Mormon) reflection, certainly, but how different was his well?

With its enmeshment in the sectarianism of another era, we recognize that “Preservation” is largely discontinuous with contemporary academic and Mormon historiography of early Christianity. Scholars today no longer see Christian history, even read theologically, as a dark well or any other such pessimistic construct. But more than just changing fashion, one might regard this as the proper fruit of such contrarian and brilliant scholarship as Nibley’s. Unlike more pedestrian fare, it generates new work that engages and supersedes it, driven by the provocative questions it raises. We continue to read Nibley because he continues to provoke us. Whatever the questions that result, may we emulate his thoroughness and fearlessness in engaging them!

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7. Compare, for example, Harnack’s *Monasticism* with “Preservation,” which cites it. See also the anthology of Martin Rumscheidt, ed., *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at Its Height* (London: Collins, 1988). I would compare Nibley only to his more narrative and polemical works. Harnack’s publication output was heroic—numbering 1,658 items, by one count, even five years before his death—including many textual editions, philological studies, histories, handbooks, etc., that are not comparable to Nibley.

8. George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 44.

Beginning of What? A Reflection on Hugh Nibley's Legacy and LDS Scholarship on Late Antique Christianity

Daniel Becerra

THE WORK OF HUGH NIBLEY (1910–2005) has set the contours of the discussions that characterize much of Latter-day Saint scholarship on ancient Christianity in the last several decades. In many ways, Nibley's "Preservation, Restoration, Reformation" is representative of his larger body of work on the early church, particularly as it pertains to Christianity after the first century CE. Nibley traces ancient Christian discourses regarding the need to revive, reform, and restore what was understood to be the purity of the apostolic church. His analysis reveals the impressive breadth of his knowledge of ancient languages and primary sources, lending an academic rigor to his work that was largely unseen in the "confessional histories" of his predecessors.¹ He jumps from East to West and back again, often giving voice to ancient authors not typically in conversation with one another. And true to form, Nibley

1. See Matthew Bowman, "James Talmage, B. H. Roberts, and Confessional History in a Secular Age," in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, ed. Miranda Wilcox and John Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 77–89. See also B. H. Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History: A Text Book* (Salt Lake City: Cannon and Sons, 1893); and James Talmage, *The Great Apostasy: Considered in the Light of Scriptural and Secular History* (Portland: Northwestern States Mission, 1909).

exhibits a determined defense of the tenets of the LDS faith as he understood them.

Some ten years after his death, LDS scholars of ancient Christianity have an opportunity to reflect both on the work of Hugh Nibley and how we will continue to honor his legacy. I offer one such suggestion here in his own words: “As long as you are going to be doing something, why not be doing something that hasn’t been done before.”² In his early correspondence with Presidents McDonald and Wilkinson of BYU, Nibley recognized the field of early church history to be an “unexplored wonderland,” full of “important and voluminous,” “vital,” and “vast and neglected” textual resources.³ In a 1952 letter he pleaded, “Our business is to get into this stuff and it is high time we were doing something in this direction.”⁴ In the spirit of Nibley’s trail-blazing habitus, I pose the question, what might it look like to expand the parameters of the discussions that characterize LDS scholarship on ancient Christianity, or put another way, how might LDS scholars resist scholarly trends that limit the purview of early Christian studies as it pertains to Mormonism?⁵

In the past, LDS scholarship on the early church, and particularly on postapostolic Christianity, has generally assumed an ecclesiological posture, focusing primarily on institutionalized power structures, ritual, and the development of doctrine.⁶ Two of Nibley’s significant

2. Hugh Nibley, interview by Louis Midgley, “Hugh Nibley: The Faithful Scholar,” in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 25–26.

3. Hugh Nibley to President Ernest L. Wilkinson, February 22, 1952, and June 15, 1953; Hugh Nibley to President Howard S. McDonald, April 28, 1946. Boyd Petersen Papers, MSS 7449, box 3, folder 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Perry Special Collections).

4. Nibley to Wilkinson, February 22, 1952.

5. Ariel Bybee Loughton poses the latter question in “Apostasy’s Ancestors: Antarian and Anti-Mormon Discourse in the Struggle for Christianity,” in *Standing Apart*, 225.

6. For several representative examples, see Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987); Hugh Nibley, “*Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966): 1–24; *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005); Noel Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in*

contributions to this method of inquiry were to provide an academic infrastructure to Mormonism's great apostasy narrative as well as to contribute to larger scholarly debates regarding the history and historiography of early Christianity.⁷ Within this analytical paradigm, however, the ancient church is often framed as a foil for Mormonism, the assumption being that there exists a profound discontinuity between late antique Christianity and the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁸ Consequently, one sees in this scholarly trend the implicit and pervasive supposition that the study of the ancient church has limited value apart from its potential to legitimize Mormonism as the true heir of the church of Christ and the apostles.⁹

One way to expand the scope of LDS scholarship on the early church would be to proceed from the assumption of a more fundamental continuity with the past.¹⁰ Terryl Givens has argued that Joseph Smith set a

Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005). Particular attention in these works is paid to priesthood organization, temple ordinances, and what is understood to be the corruption of doctrine and practice in the postapostolic church.

7. Laughton discusses this in "Apostasy's Ancestors," 220. For Nibley's engagement with non-LDS scholars on the subject of history and historiography, see Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Passing of the Church: Two Comments on a Strange Theme," *Church History* 30/4 (1961): 481–82; and R. M. Grant, "The Passing of the Church: Comments on Two Comments on a Strange Theme," *Church History* 30/4 (1961): 482–83. For an overview of the larger debate regarding objectivity and subjectivity among church historians, see Henry W. Bowden, *Church History in an Age of Uncertainty: Historiographical Patterns in the United States, 1906–1990* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991). For a recent treatment of the evolution of the study of the early church, see Elizabeth Clark, "From Patristics to Early Christian Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7–41; and Karen King, "Which Early Christianity?," in *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, 66–84.

8. Taylor Petrey, "Purity and Parallels: Constructing the Apostasy Narrative of Early Christianity," in *Standing Apart*, 174–82.

9. Laughton notes: "The question 'What in early Christianity may prove the LDS gospel to be true?' has hindered the development of a full and academically rigorous Mormon study of early Christianity." See "Apostasy's Ancestors," 224.

10. Terryl Givens, "We Have Only the Old Thing: Rethinking Mormon Restoration," in *Standing Apart*, 336. To his credit, Nibley understood Mormons, at least more

precedent for how contemporary Mormon scholars might engage with the ancients, in that Smith understood the process of restoration to consist of “salvaging, collecting, and assimilating” as well as “borrowings, reworkings, collaborations, incorporations, and modifications of what he found about him, with many false starts, second-guessings, and self-revisions.”¹¹ Givens continues, “Smith was explicit and unapologetic in assimilating the scattered truths and practices he found,” putting them all to “their proper use” within the context of Mormonism.¹² Where many saw otherness and difference, Smith often saw commensurability and potential. What then might informed, ethical engagement with and discerning appropriation of the wisdom of the past look like in the context of the LDS study of the late antique church?¹³

One complement to the ecclesiological current might be to adopt theoretical models of self-construction that view ancient Christianity as a mode of being, or program of self-cultivation, as opposed to merely an institution defined by its priesthood organization, rituals, and dogma.¹⁴

so than Roberts and Talmage, to “consistently find themselves in the company of the ancient saints.” See Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 139. However, what linked the modern LDS Church to the late antique church for Nibley were perceived similarities of the latter to a Mormonism understood almost exclusively in ecclesiological terms (e.g., rituals such as baptism for the dead and prayer circles). See note 13 below.

11. Givens, “We Have Only the Old Thing,” 338–39.

12. Givens, “We Have Only the Old Thing,” 339.

13. As Laughton notes, in recent decades Nibley has been criticized for his tendency “to read too far into sources, to make inferences not necessarily suggested by language or context, and to amalgamate information from numerous sources of dubious relation.” See “Apostasy’s Ancestors,” 223, as well as Kent P. Jackson, review of *Old Testament and Related Studies*, by Hugh Nibley, *BYU Studies* 28/4 (1988): 115–17; William J. Hamblin, “Time Vindicates Hugh Nibley,” *FARMS Review of Books* 2/1 (1990): 119–27; Douglas F. Salmon, “Parallelomania and the Study of Latter-day Saint Scripture: Confirmation, Coincidence, or the Collective Unconscious?,” *Dialogue* 33/2 (2000): 129, 131; Ronald V. Huggins, “Hugh Nibley’s Footnotes,” *Utah Lighthouse Messenger* 110 (May 2008): 9–21; Shirley S. Ricks, “A Sure Foundation,” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 253–91.

14. The theoretical framework proposed by Michel Foucault is probably the most influential for understanding ancient Christianity as a program of self-construction. See especially *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, vols. 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1985–86). Recently, Catherine

Mormonism at its heart is a *system of becoming* intended to facilitate the cultivation of Christlikeness in its adherents. The ascetic and hagiographic traditions of the late antique church, to name two examples, provide a virtually untapped resource for understanding the science and contours of self-construction, particularly as it pertains to moral formation. Perhaps more than any other Christian literary corpus at the time or since, these texts both explore what it means to negotiate the liminal space between human and divine nature, as well as to demarcate numerous technologies for cultivating a more Christlike subjectivity.¹⁵ Within this framework the ecclesiological elements of the early church might be understood as various mechanisms for the conversion of one's entire being to God.

Additionally, one sees in the growing field of Mormon theological studies sparse efforts to engage with the voices of the fathers and mothers of the ancient church in any sustained manner.¹⁶ Discussions of theological anthropology in the writings of Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius,

Chin has proposed alternate theoretical approaches that highlight the communal and collaborative nature of the (trans)formation process. See "Who Is the Ascetic Exegete? Angels, Enchantments, and Transformative Food in Origen's Homilies on Joshua," in *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 203–18; and "Cassian, Cognition, and the Common Life," in *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau*, ed. Blake Leyerle and Robin D. Young (South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 2013), 147–66.

15. In a 2001 address Elder David A. Bednar opined that the cultivation of Christlikeness is a topic that Mormons "do not study or teach frequently enough. I believe we do not understand it adequately." See "The Atonement and the Journey of Mortality" (devotional, Brigham Young University, October 23, 2001). See also Taylor Petrey, "Practicing Divinity" *Dialogue* 42/2 (2009): 179–82.

16. One exception would be Terryl Givens, who frequently engages with the fathers of the church in his work, although most often as a way of contextualizing Mormon theology as opposed to informing it. See *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Grant Underwood also periodically engages with the fathers in a similar fashion. See "Justification, Theosis, and Grace in Early Christian, Lutheran, and Mormon Discourse," *International Journal of Mormon Studies* (2009): 206–23. For a concise history of the practice of theology in the LDS tradition, see Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 6–22.

Gregory of Nyssa, and others allow scholars to overhear conversations regarding identity, unity, and diversity in the ancient church. How might such late antique notions as human creation in the “image and likeness of God,” for example, contribute to an understanding of ourselves and the principles that should govern our interactions as relational beings? Especially at a time when Mormonism has never been more culturally and politically diverse, such literature may function as a conversation partner as Mormons seek to negotiate the boundaries of personhood, or the “authentic self,” in the context of the latter-day body of Christ.¹⁷

At the heart of this ancient-modern dialectic would be the principle that theology is an “exploratory rather than explanatory discipline,”¹⁸ both acknowledging the theological terrain already tread and looking forward to additional insights that come from thinking *with*, in contrast to merely *about*, the ancients.¹⁹ The supposition of continuity with the past need not restrict productive engagement with the late antique church to instances of perceived parallels; rather, sympathetic understanding of difference can be equally profitable for approaching Mormonism with new eyes and new questions. Such an approach to ancient Christianity will demand of LDS scholars epistemic humility and methodological sensitivity to the historical situatedness of the texts engaged as well as to the cultural assumptions that inform modern conceptual frameworks. Continued historiographical reflection and pursuits of historical-critical acuity, such as can be seen in the recently published volume *Standing*

17. The rhetoric of “authenticity” is often deployed in modern LDS circles to elucidate the tension that can arise between one’s self-identification—typically with respect to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, “orthodoxy,” or political affiliation—and a particular understanding of Mormonism. For two representative examples, see “Kate Kelly: If Staying in LDS Church Doesn’t ‘Spark Joy,’ It’s OK to Leave,” published on July 17, 2015, at <http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/2738628-155/kate-kelly-if-staying-in-lds>; and “Being Authentic within Mormonism” episodes 249–50 on the Mormon Matters Podcast, published on September 23, 2014, at <http://mormonmatters.org/2014/09/23/249-250-being-authentic-within-mormonism/>.

18. Frances Young, *God’s Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2.

19. Michael D. K. Ing, “Future Prospects in the Comparison of Religion,” *Dialogue* 44/3 (2011): 112.

Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy, will in many instances widen the theological gap between Mormons and our ancient predecessors; however, at the same time, they will also serve to inform analytical approaches that preserve the integrity of discrete but potentially commensurable ways of life.²⁰

Joseph Smith taught that it is “the first and fundamental principle” of Mormonism to be free “to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another.”²¹ As LDS scholars continue to seek to demarcate some of the methodological contours of this endeavor, may we recognize the vast and neglected writings of the late antique church as a means of enriching and expanding theologically constructive projects in the present, and in so doing, continue the tradition of preserving, restoring, and reforming all that is good and profitable.

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20. Several works are helpful for understanding the theoretical considerations involved in the comparison and appropriation of discrete systems of life. See Elizabeth Cochran, “Bricolage and the Purity of Traditions: Engaging the Stoics for Contemporary Christian Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40 (2012): 720–29; Ing, “Future Prospects in the Comparison of Religion,” 107–14; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); David D. Peck, “Covenantal Pluralism in Mormonism and Islam: Alternatives to the Binary Logic of Islam,” in *Standing Apart*, 280–308; Petrey, “Purity and Parallels,” 183–88; Jonathan Smith, “In Comparison a Magic Dwells,” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19–35; C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); “The Art of Retrieval: Stoicism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40 (2012): 705–19; Jeffery Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Young, *God’s Presence*, 1–6.

21. *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 420.

Siding with Heretics: Evaluating Hugh Nibley Today

Taylor G. Petrey

HUGH NIBLEY'S TREATMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY helped transform Mormon scholarship by turning to the primary sources themselves. Even when the content of his argument and his depiction of early Christianity may not hold up, his approach remains instructive. "Preservation, Restoration, Reformation" is a chapter draft that was not published, so many of its shortcomings and errors may be attributed to its unfinished state. My comments focus specifically on this work. First, I point out some of these shortcomings but conclude with a discussion of what remains most vital in Nibley's approach for scholars working today.

Nibley's narrative of early Christianity may be characterized as follows: There was a pure, original church guided by prophetic and apostolic authority. However, by the second century Christians were turning away from the main church to charismatic teachers who were using spiritual gifts and prophecy and were preaching about the end times. By the fourth century, the universal church found itself in even more serious opposition with rival Christian groups claiming lineage and authority from the pure original. Nibley identifies a few specific features of the pure church: unity, charismatic spiritual gifts, apostolic lineage, and correct eschatology. The essay then traces his view of the early Christian struggle to achieve, or in some cases, deny and suppress

these features. Nibley's framework here is sophisticated but reflects a traditional Mormon apologetic approach that I call a discourse of purity and parallels.¹ Drawing on models from Protestants in the nineteenth century like Adolf von Harnack, this discourse constructs a version of a pure original church and then seeks to authorize the church of today by showing how it is like its ancient counterpart.

There are numerous overstatements in this draft. Sometimes the quotations offered do not support Nibley's interpretation.² Nibley also frequently attributes motives or psychological states to ancient Christian subjects that are broadly claimed but weakly demonstrated.³ There are also numerous translation errors and creative glosses to the quotations

1. Taylor G. Petrey, "Purity and Parallels: Constructing the Apostasy Narrative of Early Christianity," in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, ed. Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young (New York: Oxford, 2014), 174–95.

2. For the late-fourth-century thinkers Hilary, Cyril, Basil, and Gregory, the "seeds of apostasy" and "falling away" refer to the continued success of Arianism in their day, not an admission that orthodoxy itself is corrupt. There is nothing in the description of Nepos's teachings that indicate he was calling for "continued apostolic authority," and he did not say that if Christ and the apostles were here we could ask them. Rather, Eusebius's source was saying that if Nepos were still alive we could speak with *him* directly. Additionally, Eusebius explains that the teachings of Judas were a response to the persecution of Christians at the time, not that they "stirred up" persecution against them. Novatus's *Katharoi* (the Pure) took the title not because of a claim to some original purity or truth, but because they alone had not cooperated with the Roman authorities at the time of persecution. When Epiphanius compares the church to the ship built from more than one kind of timber, he is trying to explain why both marriage and virginity can be accepted by the church—a claim some schismatics rejected—not making a general statement rejecting claims to exclusive truth.

3. For example, "Part of [the Montanists'] old-church practice was an insistence on purity and a consequent embarrassment at having to admit they were defective in it"; or "[the church] did not have [spiritual gifts]. Therefore, since it claimed to be the true church, it could only insist that the true church should not have them." Other assertions Nibley offers are hyperbole at best, such as: "The main church in its glory had simply failed to deliver, and everybody knew it." Nibley frequently tries to portray his subjects as being aware that the entire early Christian church was in a state of general apostasy. For example, "it was not only the crackpots who remembered that the church should have been something very different from what it had become—deep down, everybody knew it." This is more than an overstatement, and it makes a claim that scholars simply cannot prove.

that cannot be found in the original languages. Further, though the precise date of this writing is unknown, the overall characterization of many early Christians comes from a prior era of scholarship. Many of his evaluations of the New Prophecy (or Montanism), Gnostics, and others have since been significantly revised in modern scholarship.

When making comparisons, Nibley draws many explicit parallels to Mormonism in ancient Christian texts, including the search for prophecy, spiritual gifts, a literal eschatology, and the office of apostle. Sometimes Nibley tries to draw implicit parallels to Mormonism, such as in his claim that Montanists chose a site “amid the mountains of the West” where they “perform holy ordinances.” Western Asia Minor was still the “East” in the Roman Empire, and the translation of “holy ordinances” is incredibly loose. Sometimes, the parallels Nibley makes here do not tell us anything about the content of either the ancient Christian or the Mormon claims, leaving any comparison to Mormonism superficial.

Even with the few hints Nibley gives, the notion of a “pure” old church is difficult to define in this essay. Nibley leaves it a bit ambiguous here in terms of specific features. His implied list of ancient traits of purity emphasizes neither priesthood, nor specific ordinances, nor a list of specific teachings. Further, no single ancient Christian individual or group is held up as an example possessing this pure ideal, but the picture is painted from an amalgam of different authors, locations, and time periods. Origen’s claim that the church has always been diverse seems more accurate than the evidence Nibley offers to the contrary.

Looking beyond the specific shortcomings of interpretation or translation in this chapter, how does Nibley’s overall approach hold up today? Like any scholarship from a previous era, the paradigms that informed how scholars approach their topic are continually changing and being refined. In the interim period between Nibley’s writings on early Christianity and today, a number of important shifts took place in the field. Social scientific studies, ideological criticism, religious studies, and new historiographical approaches all impacted how scholars researched and wrote about early Christianity. These new methods arose not simply as fashionable trends deviating from some previously

stable core of scholarship, but rather as an abandonment of the kinds of normative, apologetic questions that had informed an earlier generation of scholars. Newer generations not only felt constrained by the questions of purity and parallels the previous century had provided, but they also felt as if those questions had largely proved to be dead ends.

Today, scholars are less interested in establishing the normative claims of the “real church,” as if such a thing could be objectively agreed upon, and are more interested in evaluating the rhetoric early Christians use about why their views were authoritative. Several developments contributed to a shift “from patristics to early Christian studies,” as Elizabeth Clark has put it, signaling the transition from a primarily theological framework to a more expansive toolkit that included social history, anthropology, women’s history, and attention to new topics such as the body, sexuality, race and ethnicity, empire, and material culture, to name a few.⁴ Scholars have replaced the question of orthodoxy itself with a sociological framework that is interested in examining how early Christians constructed their identity as orthodox, over and against constructed heresy. This approach pays attention to discourses and rhetorics of orthodoxy not as descriptions of the actual world but as practices and acts that form identity, shape differences, and define and police group boundaries.⁵

Nibley’s essay models some of these more contemporary concerns about orthodoxy and heresy, diversity in early Christianity, and the importance of what nonnormative Christianity may teach us about the ancient world, even when his approach to these topics does not anticipate current paradigms. Yet somehow his willingness to side occasionally with the ancient heretics reflected his own critical stance toward evaluating religious claims alongside his fierce commitment to discipleship.

4. Elizabeth A. Clark, “From Patristics to Early Christian Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (New York: Oxford, 2008), 7–41.

5. Karen L. King, “Which Early Christianity?” in *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, 66–84.

What Nibley models for Mormon scholars today is a bold attempt to put Mormonism into conversation not only with ancient Christian sources but also with the best scholarship of the day. His legacy is not only in breaking new ground and setting the agenda for at least a generation of Mormon scholars of the ancient world, but in tackling tough issues and being willing to chart new territory.

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Situating Nibley on Early Christianity: A Bibliographical Note

Louis Midgley

“PRESERVATION, RESTORATION, REFORMATION” was the title Nibley gave to a section or chapter, published here in part, of an undated, and unpublished, very rough manuscript entitled “The End of What?” and written early in his academic career.¹ By drawing upon my earlier effort to assemble, preserve, and annotate Hugh Nibley’s vast array of published and unpublished essays and books,² I will describe and strive to situate this essay within the larger context of his intellectual concerns. “Preservation” could have been part of a lecture course on the history of Christian faith, or it could have been the notes for a book on the abrupt

1. The 517-page manuscript entitled “The End of What?” actually ends on page 446. The remainder of the manuscript (pp. 447–517) is an untitled verse-by-verse commentary on the Gospel of Matthew that was somehow attached to the larger work but that bears no thematic connection to it.

2. See Louis Midgley, “Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:xv–lxxxvii. Shirley S. Ricks, with very minor assistance from me, and necessarily without my sometimes lengthy annotations, has continued to update and refine this bibliography. See “Bibliography of Hugh Winder Nibley’s Works, Secondary Works about Him, and Reviews of His Works,” available at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1071>.

end of the primitive church. This rough manuscript does not seem to have been, as I will demonstrate, his first effort to grapple with the topic.

Unlike previous Latter-day Saint efforts to deal with the notion that something radical and terminal, though not total, began to go wrong with the primitive church even as the apostles attempted to obey the commandment to take the gospel to all the world, which ended the original church soon after the death of the apostles, Nibley insisted on taking a fresh look at what he would eventually call the “way of the church.” The results of his inquiries were often dismissive of the received opinions. His conclusion was that the apostles, whom he saw not as leaders of local communities of saints but as stewards of the entire community of saints, were soon replaced by powerful and quarreling bishops. Nibley saw the apostles as traveling authorities who provided general supervision to the church; they were, he argued, open to divine special revelations for the entire community of saints. With the death of the apostles, there had been a cessation of crucial charismatic gifts, including the end of revelation. The Light had suddenly been turned off.

Nibley’s academic training in classics and ancient history, coupled with his remarkable mastery of the relevant ancient and modern languages, as well as his disposition to examine closely the relevant sources, led to an intense study of the New Testament, the church fathers, and hence to compare and contrast what he found with the competing opinions of later churchmen and historians, both ancient and modern, in an effort to recover as well as possible what had actually happened. He sought to figure what those who were involved directly in the events experienced and expected, as well as the accounts provided by those who were then faced with explaining the radical changes from the way of the original primitive church.

“The End of What?” thus provides a window into Nibley’s effort to set out an original, well-grounded account of what Latter-day Saints see as apostasy. He argues that the church came to an abrupt end, even though teachings and practices remained in ever-increasingly altered forms. He sought to demonstrate that there was an original primitive church, which was guided by divine special revelations and led

by apostolic authority. Then something went wrong. Hence the title “The End of What?” “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” is thus an intriguing sample of a much larger endeavor in which he was engaged early in his career and that seems to have been, from time to time, a concern to the end of his scholarly life.³

The first indication that seems to have been preserved of Nibley’s interest in apostasy is a twenty-three page mimeographed class hand-out, which I date to about 1952, entitled “Questions on Authority and Passages for Discussion (The Atonement).” This is a compendium of passages from the New Testament, the church fathers, and also historians of Christian antiquity relevant to the question of apostasy. The issues raised in this handout were later addressed in detail by Nibley in courses, lectures, and in a series of publications.⁴

In addition to “The End of What?” Nibley fashioned still another much more polished manuscript related to understanding what happened to the primitive church, which was later discovered by John W. Welch in 1977. From this meticulously typed manuscript, in 1954 he read lectures to, one can safely guess, bemused and perhaps yawning students. The title of the course was “Apostles and Bishops in the Early Church” and was eventually published under a similar title.⁵ Both of these large

3. Nibley’s endeavors were, of course, apologetic—that is, a setting out of historical accounts supporting, enriching, and defending the faith of Latter-day Saints. This is not a flaw in his scholarship. In a real sense everyone is obliged to defend their opinions. Hence every intellectual endeavor is necessarily a defense of some position by those who advance their opinion. Every author, as well as everyone with an interpretation or explanation, whether they recognize the fact or not, is thus an apologist. So the question is always how well one sets out and defends one’s position. These previously published essays have been made available in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (CWHN)*, which consists of nineteen volumes.

4. Nibley collected quotations on topics related to changing scholarly and sectarian understandings of the scriptures, the history of Christianity and so forth, and circulated them in various forms. See, for example, a twelve-page collection entitled *New Discoveries concerning the Bible and Church History* (Provo, UT: BYU Extension Publications, 1963).

5. See Hugh Nibley, *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity*, ed. John F. Hall and John W. Welch, CWHN 15 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005). Hall and Welch provide an excellent editor’s preface (pp. vii–xi) and also an editor’s

manuscripts seem to have been part of Nibley's abiding interest in the question of apostasy in the early church, or, more directly, what led to and resulted from the sudden end of the primitive church of Jesus Christ.

Nibley dealt with these and similar issues in a series of thirty-one essays entitled *Time Vindicates the Prophets* that he read over KSL from March 7 through October 17, 1954. These were immediately published in separate leaflets by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and then published in the book entitled *The World and the Prophets*.⁶ An indication of the contents of this collection is illustrated by the first essay, entitled "How Will It Be When None More Saith, 'I Saw'?"⁷

Nibley also set out his understanding of the end of the church in a series that appeared in the *Improvement Era* between January and December 1955, entitled "The Way of the Church."⁸ This series, which consisted of three parts, was abandoned without explanation. Although for a time he turned to writing about other matters for his Latter-day Saint audience, he had not lost interest in the question of what had happened to the church with the death of the apostles, which he argued came to an end with the end of genuine divine special revelations, resulting in, among other things, a closed canon of scripture, ecumenical councils, and a host of other radical changes. In 1961, the arguments he had set out in "The Way of the Church" were refined and assembled in an essay entitled "The Passing of the Church: Forty Variations on an

postscript (pp. 239–45), which supplement my thoughts here. Unfortunately this publication is out of print, and only the table of contents is currently available on the Maxwell Institute webpage.

6. *The World and the Prophets* was originally published by Deseret Book in 1954 and republished in an enlarged edition, also by Deseret Book, in 1962. It was published as volume 3 of the CWHN in 1987—Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

7. Hugh Nibley, "How Will It Be When None More Saith, 'I Saw'?" in *The World and the Prophets*, CWHN 3:1–8.

8. See Hugh Nibley, "The Way of the Church," *Improvement Era*, January–December 1955, reprinted in Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 209–322.

Unpopular Theme.”⁹ This remarkable essay was directed to a non-LDS audience.

“The Passing of the Church” immediately drew some presumably hoped-for critical attention. The arguments for the fading of the church led to a protest by Hans J. Hillerbrand, who insisted, among other things, that if Nibley’s arguments were accepted, it would preclude teaching what is traditionally known as “church history.”¹⁰ If there was a genuine “passing of the church,” as Nibley argued, even though various elements of Christian faith and devotion still remain, it would be impossible to teach church history. Instead, one could only study the history of what happened after its passing. Hillerbrand seems to have feared that historians would end up having to teach the history of controversies and apostasies, which is what general histories of Christianity actually end up doing.

The editors of *Church History* called upon the distinguished Robert M. Grant¹¹ to respond to the incensed Hillerbrand.¹² Grant argued that historians would have to deal with Nibley’s arguments and evidence, and an appeal to a Protestant understanding of what constitutes the church would be futile. Only a Catholic understanding of the church

9. See Hugh Nibley, “The Passing of the Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme,” *Church History* 30/2 (1961): 131–54. This essay was subsequently reprinted, with two other closely related essays concerning the early church, as “The Passing of the Primitive Church (Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme),” in *When the Lights Went Out* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 1–32 (reprinted by FARMS in 2001); as “The Passing of the Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme,” in *BYU Studies* 16/1 (1975): 139–64; and as “The Passing of the Primitive Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4:168–208.

10. See Hans J. Hillerbrand, “The Passing of the Church: Two Comments on a Strange Theme,” *Church History* 30/3 (1961): 481–82. (Nibley did not respond to Hillerbrand, but others did.)

11. See Robert M. Grant, “The Passing of the Church: Comments on Two Comments on a Strange Theme,” *Church History* 30/3 (1961): 482–83, for this reply to Hillerbrand.

12. For an insightful response to this issue, see William A. Clebsch, “History and Salvation: An Essay in Distinctions,” in *The Study of Religion in Colleges and Universities*, ed. Paul Ramsey and John F. Wilson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 40–72, at 67.

can make sense of whether it faded away or not. And Nibley's being a Latter-day Saint is not a reason for rejecting his arguments and ignoring his evidences. According to Grant, if what continues was not the original church, it makes no sense to turn to the magisterial Reformers for their understanding of what constitutes the church. The issue must be dealt with by engaging Nibley's arguments. If the church did not persist, then one can only tell the story of various competing factions, or competing interpretations of the Bible, or theological squabbles, or the history of religion. Grant rejected attempts to avoid the issues raised by Nibley by reducing, among other things, church history to the "history of interpretation," shifting to "history of Christian religion."¹³

Responding to this issue, William Clebsch argued that more than merely writing about versions of Christianities is at stake. If one were to grant that the church faded away, then "Christian faith itself will not long outlive its major premise: God's real presence in human history—past, present, and future." "Indeed, the church historian must assume the survival of his object of investigation." But the assumption of continuity cannot be settled because the "hard data indicate as much discontinuity as continuity in the church."¹⁴

The tendency has been, as Nibley expected, for scholars to avoid the crucial issue of the survival of the church by turning instead to writing about history of "religion," an ambiguous and amorphous term, and more recently to secular religious studies. The publication of "Preservation, Restoration, Reformation" thus raises again the issues Nibley sought to address: how ought the Saints and others understand apostasy both in the original covenant community of saints and hence also in the present?

13. See Clebsch, "History and Salvation."

14. Clebsch, "History and Salvation," 70.

Appendix: Chronological Bibliography of Hugh Nibley's Works on Early Christianity

"Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times." A series of articles in the *Improvement Era*.

"Part 1." *IE*, December 1948, 786–88, 836–38.

"Part 2." *IE*, January 1949, 24–26, 60.

"Part 3." *IE*, February 1949, 90–91, 109–10, 112.

"Part 4." *IE*, March 1949, 146–48, 180–83.

"The Dilemma: Part 5—Conclusion." *IE*, April 1949, 212–14.

"The Unsolved Loyalty Problem: Our Western Heritage." *Western Political Quarterly* 6/4 (1953): 631–57.

Time Vindicates the Prophets. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1954. 30 pamphlets, weekly radio addresses from 7 March to 17 October.

The World and the Prophets. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954. 250 pp.

1. "How Will It Be When None More Saith 'I Saw'?"
2. "A Prophet's Reward"
3. "Prophets and Preachers"
4. "Prophets and Scholars"
5. "Prophets and Philosophers"
6. "Prophets and Creeds"
7. "The Prophets and the Search for God"
8. "Prophets and Gnostics"
9. "The Schools and the Prophets"
10. "St. Augustine and the Great Transition"
11. "A Substitute for Revelation"
12. "Prophets and Mystics"
13. "Rhetoric and Revelation"
14. "Prophets and Reformers"
15. "The Prophets and the Open Mind"
16. "Prophets and Miracles"
17. "Prophets and Ritual"

18. "Easter and the Prophets"
19. "Two Ways to Remember the Dead"
20. "Prophets and Martyrs"
21. "The Ancient Law of Liberty"
22. "Prophets and Crisis"
23. "The Prophets and the Scriptures"
24. "The Book of Mormon as a Witness"
25. "Prophecy and Tradition"
26. "The Prophets and the Plan of Life"
27. "A Prophetic Event"
28. "Prophecy and Office"
29. "What Makes a True Church"
30. "Prophets and Glad Tidings"

"The Way of the Church—1"

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 32. “The Return of the Prophets?”
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Mormonism and Early Christianity. CWHN 4. Edited by Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987. xiii + 446 pp.

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“The Early Christian Prayer Circle”

“Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times”

“The Passing of the Primitive Church”

“The Way of the Church”

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“Christian Envy of the Temple”

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“The Office of Bishop in the Church in Rome”

Louis Midgley, now an emeritus professor, taught the history of political philosophy at Brigham Young University.

Preservation, Restoration, Reformation

Hugh Nibley

with an introduction by Bert Fuller

Introduction

EARLY IN HIS ACADEMIC CAREER Hugh Nibley composed a 446-page manuscript that he entitled “The End of What?”¹ As in related work, such as his KSL radio series *Time Vindicates the Prophets*,² Nibley marshaled an onslaught of quotations, allusions, and intertexts, primarily from ancient sources, to argue that the original Christian church went out of existence as the gift of prophecy faded. Given that Nibley never substantially revised the manuscript, it should not surprise readers that “The End of What?” often follows a meandering path. And yet, to read Nibley’s commentaries, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge once said of the great tragic actor Edmund Kean, is like reading church history by flashes of lightning.

1. Currently unpublished, with the exception of what follows. The manuscript is preserved as typescript in Hugh Nibley, Hugh Nibley Papers, MSS 2721, box 177, folder 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. You can view or download the original transcript of this excerpt at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodical/sba-v7-2015>.

2. Published later as Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, CWHN 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

Near the end of the manuscript, lightning continues to flash in a section labeled “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation.”³ Nibley begins with the classic criticisms of Celsus, surveys early patristic anxieties about the loss of prophecy—referencing Eusebius, Epiphanius, Justin Martyr, and Philastrius among others—and moves to Jerome’s solemn realization that the prophetless church, subject as any other institution to internal betrayals and external assaults by barbarians, has lost its privileged position—“no longer the body of the elect that its name implies; it is now the universal catch-all.” Throughout “Preservation,” Nibley frequently invokes his sources in idiosyncratic ways, creating some tendentious connections and at times proffering tenuous translations. But this style has two clear benefits. First, the unpolished nature of the piece gives readers a glimpse into Nibley’s workshop. Notorious for endless revisions, Nibley doubtless would have reworked “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” beyond recognition if he had prepared it for publication, hiding away what are now its more obvious seams. And these seams can be instructive for analyzing the tighter rhetoric that Nibley employs elsewhere. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the essay is a bricolage from which Nibley drew to fortify his work on church history that did see publication. Because Nibley’s published work on the early church could sometimes baffle readers,⁴ there is a good deal to be gained from studying Nibley’s unpublished pieces in light of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (nineteen volumes), especially when the two come into close textual contact with each other.

For example, in “The Passing of the Primitive Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme,” Nibley, citing Kirsopp Lake, famously remarked that Robert Browning’s “Death in the Desert” is “the best background reading for understanding the state of mind of the church at

3. This section comprises manuscript pages 381–409. Here it has been edited for length, and “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” reproduces pages 381–99.

4. See Hans J. Hillerbrand, “The Passing of the Church: Two Comments on a Strange Theme,” *Church History* 30/4 (1961): 481–82; R. M. Grant, “The Passing of the Church: Comments on Two Comments on a Strange Theme,” *Church History* 30/4 (1961): 482–83; and the preceding article by Louis Midgley.

the passing of the apostles—all is lost.”⁵ Given the range of ancient texts within Nibley’s reach, why would a nineteenth-century English poem be the best background reading for understanding first-century history? In “The Passing of the Primitive Church,” this comment concludes number eighteen of the forty themes and describes first-generation Christians as having a bleak outlook for the future church. If we look at a similar passage in “Preservation” (see p. 89 below), we find the same reference to Browning but within a different context. Here the primary interlocutor is Celsus, whose lost book survives only through Origen’s quotations. Though Nibley the apologist would likely have been inclined to systematically refute Celsus’s dismissal of Christianity as Origen had, Nibley instead takes this opportunity to lend credence to Celsus’s concern: divided into countless sects, second-century Christians must not belong to the original unified church; each sect claims apostolic lineage, but none of them can satisfy truth seekers since there is no clear sign of authenticity anywhere (that is, no living prophets). In fine, Nibley agrees with the pagan argument; Origen of course does not.

This point, in relation to Browning, is significant for at least three reasons. First, although Nibley must rely mostly on patristic texts such as Origen’s for his argument, he reads them with suspicion when they argue for the legitimacy of what some call proto-orthodox Christianity. Since Nibley’s thesis is that the truthfulness of the apostolic church had passed, he perforce recognizes the need to perform resistant readings against the dominant record. Truth in the matter does not come solely from trusted *auctores* but from potentially any source, pagan or Victorian. A second point, related to the first, is the fact that Nibley respects the reality of lost records. *The True Word* by Celsus is lost, preserved only in part by an antagonistic respondent, but its fragmented claims are important to Nibley’s argument. To make better use of Celsus, Nibley needs not only to see through Origen’s appropriations but also to re-create, however incompletely, something of the ethos and milieu of *The True Word* through an act of the imagination. A convincing imaginative act

5. See Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 176.

is what good poets can provide, and Nibley found Browning envisioning the mood suitably. A third point, in reconsidering this passage for “The Passing of the Primitive Church,” Nibley removed not only the explicit digs at Origen but those against Irenaeus and Justin Martyr as well. The tighter paragraph in “Passing” does less finger pointing, focusing rather on elegiac sentiments from early church members. This move is an improvement, a detail worthy of attention because it represents perhaps a more charitable engagement with the source material. But without the Browning reference, there would be no obvious reason to read these two passages together, and the shift in register would be lost.

Another contact point between “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” and the Collected Works comes near the end, when Nibley cites F. M. Powicke: “‘The church is always running after the saints,’ says Powicke, ‘so she can control them’” (see pp. 102–3 below). Powicke makes three appearances in *The World and the Prophets* (see chapters 22, 23, and 31), and each reference is to a single essay, “The Christian Life [in the Middle Ages]” (1951). One reference uses the same quotation as here in “Preservation,” though corrected (“‘The Church is constantly hastening after the saints, . . .’ says Powicke, ‘so it may . . . control them’”). When we compare Nibley’s use of the same quote, how he drafted it into “Preservation” apparently from memory, it becomes clear that “The End of What?” is a staging ground and should be read as such. To expect its arguments to have the completeness of some of the essays in the Collected Works might be like expecting a half-finished building to keep one warm through winter. But the secrets of monuments often come from excavating their foundations—like the newly publicized Easter Island discoveries⁶—and careful consideration of unpublished work like “Preservation” can further illuminate what Nibley was after in his more polished pieces.

In the following transcript, very few editorial changes have been made to the words Nibley himself wrote. Abbreviations have been expanded, punctuation and capitalization have been standardized, and

6. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2149846/Hidden-treat-The-Easter-Island-heads-BODIES.html>.

obvious errors or obscurities emended. Substantive editorial additions and notes are placed in square brackets. Nibley provides almost no sources for his citations. Source citations, where possible, have been supplied by the editors, but are partial and at times tentative. Except in the case of common works, references to early Christian authors are keyed to *Patrologia Latina* and *Patrologia Graeca*, since these are the editions Nibley himself used; in fact, the volumes of the *Patrologiae* in the Harold B. Lee Library contain much Niblean marginalia. While the mutilation of library materials should never be encouraged, oftentimes the presence of Nibley's notes made the identification of sources somewhat easier. What's more, since almost everything Nibley wrote deserves attention, working with marginalia further reinforced the argument of this introduction: lasting insights into Nibley's thought frequently come when one reads both the published and unpublished work as being in a symbiotic relationship.

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IN HIS FAMOUS WORK, *The Truth about the Christians*, one of the charges Celsus brings against the Christians is that, whereas “in the beginning, when the Christians were few in number they all thought alike; but when they became numerous and spread out everywhere they divided into sects, each of which claimed the depository of the pure old original form of Christianity passed down from the beginning, while all the others were upstarts and innovators.”¹ This is a very serious charge to have been brought against the church before the year 200. It is well enough known that this was to be the fate of the church in later years, but is this, delivered possibly in the second century, just a smear? Origen has the last word—Celsus is dead and gone, and Origen is speaking to a Christian world waiting eagerly to hear his rebuttal. It is a surprising one—he says, in the first place, that though of course the church was small at the *very* beginning, it immediately became very large, with people following Jesus in vast numbers because of his powerful preaching. So Celsus is wrong on his first point—the church was *never* small.² He is also wrong on his second point, according to Origen, for the church was *never of one mind!*³ Opinions differed from the *first*, as can be seen from the disagreements among the apostles themselves. And what is wrong with that? Origen would like to know—do not philosophers and medics disagree, and is it not by disagreement that they come to that discussion and investigation that gets to the bottom of things? No serious and vital institution is without such disagreements, he says, and since there are among the Christians many trained in Greek philosophy, “it is *necessary* for them to group themselves into sects. . . and to name themselves after the leaders who they believe interpret the truth best. . . . Why therefore should we not excuse even *heresies* found among the Christians?”⁴

This sort of answer was the best that could be given in light of the facts as Origen knew them—it is *not* an answer to delight the church of a later day. The important thing, of course, is not Origen’s explanation

1. Origen, *Cels.* 3.10 (PG 11:932).

2. Origen, *Cels.* 3.10 (PG 11:932).

3. Origen, *Cels.* 3.11 (PG 11:932–33).

4. Origen, *Cels.* 3.12–13 (PG 11:933–36).

for conditions, but his admission that they existed. From the very first, Origen admits, there had been sects, and each of these naturally thought it had the pure old doctrine. Groups claiming that they *preserve* the faith in its purity are not to be distinguished from those claiming a call to *restore* or *revive* it and those coming forward to reform it.

Preservation, revival, and reformation are the constant preoccupations of churchmen throughout the world from the first century on. That is extremely significant. One might expect some crackpot along about the fifth century to suspect that the true faith had disappeared—but that all the leaders of the church should have had to wrestle with this problem from the first demands the close and respectful consideration which it has never received. First to notice is the eager, pathetic concern of the people of the church, lay and clergy, for the survival or preservation of the old apostolic church. We have seen that the fathers of the fourth century looked back on the Christianity of the good old days, of which—Basil, John and Gregory tell us—not a shred remains. We have seen how concerned the leaders of the church and the general public were after the Council of Nicaea. But that kind of concern had already become traditional in the church: the failing of the spiritual gifts had long had a disquieting effect. “The general opinion of Christians in those days,” says John Kaye speaking of the time of Tertullian, “founded as they conceived on apostolic authority, was that the spirit of prophecy would remain in the Church, until the second coming of Christ. They felt, therefore, a predisposition to lend an attentive ear to one who assumed the character of a prophet.”⁵

This strong predisposition to accept Gnosticism, Montanism, Manichaeism, etc., clearly shows how hungry the people of the church were for something which the church was no longer giving them. The shallow imposition of Montanus was greeted by cries of tearful joy not only by the rank and file but by the man who knew more about the primitive church than perhaps any other man alive—Tertullian himself, who

5. John Kaye, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries, Illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian*, 2nd ed. (London: Griffith Farran Browne, 1845), 7.

became an ardent convert and worker in the Montanist cause.⁶ A century later Eusebius was deeply moved by a sense of yearning, a lingering hope that “there might be something to it,” when he contemplated Montanism.⁷ Tertullian’s activities as “a fanatical protagonist of the new movement” were a “recognition of spiritual prophetism in opposition to the newly formed officialdom of the church.”⁸ But neither the Montanists nor Tertullian thought for a moment of their church as a “new movement.” For them it was simply the old church preserved. We have seen that the Gnostics (of which Montanism is only another expression) insisted that they had the *gnosis*, which the main church had lost. The Marcosians, among the Gnostics, had tried to make it appear that they *still* had the gift of prophecy, and took drugs and practiced special exercises to get themselves “inspired.” Simon made magical imitations of the apostles’ miracles. Valentinius faked revelation. It was all phony, yet everyone rushed over to the Gnostics. Just so with Montanism—it was a fake, and in time Tertullian, being an honest seeker, found out that it was a fake—but that same honesty would not let him remain in the big church either. It was to be the same story with the Manichaeans. They filled with the shreds and tatters of Oriental mysticism a vacuum which the main church could not fill at all, and so the great Augustine, born and raised a Christian, for the nine most enthusiastic years of his life, was their ardent disciple, as Tertullian had been of the Montanists. And for the same reason: because they offered something which both men felt deeply that the *true* church *should* have, but which the main church certainly did *not* have.

All along in the early days we find upstart sects claiming to be “apostolic.” Had not Celsus said (and Origen did not deny it) that every sect in his day claimed to be the pure original church while all others were upstarts? All the fuss about Papias and Polycarp is significant.

6. See Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6–10.

7. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.27; 5.3, 14, 18.

8. In *The Cambridge Ancient History, XII. The Imperial Crisis and Recovery, A.D. 193–337*, ed. S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock, M. P. Charlesworth, and N. H. Baynes (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 537.

Irenaeus, in proving that *he* represented the old apostolic church, put forth as an argument—his main one—that *once* as a young child he had actually *seen* Polycarp. He was thus a living link with the apostles, for Polycarp had seen John.⁹ Well might Kirsopp Lake say that the best commentary on the times is Browning's "Death in the Desert."¹⁰ Papias, says Eusebius, "while he does not claim ever to have seen or heard an apostle," took careful notes from all "the elders" who were eyewitnesses, not being overjoyed like everybody else at every wild report that went the rounds; he would "ask for specific reports on what Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any other of the disciples had said or done."¹¹ A strange precaution if apostolic authority were to survive undiminished. Stranger still that the apostles themselves, as Eusebius notes with wonder, took no interest in the vital work of recording their thoughts and revelations—nay, seemed to have an actual antipathy towards doing what would of all things help the church most if the church were to carry on through the centuries. Papias frankly states that he prefers the living voice to what is in the books.¹² "It would be worthwhile," Eusebius reflects, "to have such a collection of ancient sayings and miracles as that which Papias made."¹³ Among such things, once taught by the elders but in Eusebius's time completely dropped, was the teaching of the millennium.¹⁴ Why had the church not kept Papias's priceless book? In the middle of the second century, Justin commented at length upon the great variety and number of Christian sects, almost all of whom he considers to be good and bona fide Christians. Trypho notes, however, that there are also among the Christians "men who confess Jesus and are called Christians, but who I learn eat food offered to idols, and claim that there is no harm in that." Justin's reply is

9. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.

10. Kirsopp Lake, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 62.

11. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.2–4.

12. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4.

13. [This is an incorrect or misattributed quotation; Eusebius says clearly that Papias's work was extant (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1).]

14. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.11–13.

that there are indeed “many who confess Jesus the crucified yet follow not his teachings, but rather those that come from the spirits of error, but *we* are the disciples of the *true* and *pure* teaching of Jesus Christ, being more firm and faithful in the hope announced by him.”¹⁵ This is exactly what Celsus said—that there were many sects, and each claimed to be the *pure* church and accused the others of being impure.

The Montanists claimed that they were salvaging the primitive church—the powerful testimony of Tertullian gives them a pretty good case. In their wickedness they also claimed, wrote Urbanus, “that every bit and all of the church under the whole heaven was teaching blasphemy.” On the other hand, “they call us catholics slayers of the prophets because we do not receive their idiotic prophecies.”¹⁶ This is Celsus’s accusation again: each sect takes comfort in the biblical prediction that there would be false prophets—that takes care of the opposition, *they* are the predicted false prophets for sure, *we* are the pure old church. The thing that most strongly appealed to Tertullian and others was the Montanist claim that somewhere in the world at least *prophecy* still survived. For to them prophecy was the hallmark of God’s presence among men. It was a great hunger for prophecy, says Eusebius, which caused the Cataphrygian heresy to spread like wildfire, and after the main church won a smashing victory over it, Montanus came along to carry on the tradition, “babbling and speaking foreign things, prophesying in opposition to the tradition and succession of church practice from above. . . . Then *everybody*, as if glorying in the possession of the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy, forgetful of their contradicting the Lord, began to ‘prophesy.’”¹⁷ But prophecy was not everything: the Montanists also placed great store by their claim to possess the apostolic office. “Among us,” writes Jerome, “bishops hold the place of the apostles: but *they* put the bishop in third place. Their highest office is that of patriarch in Pepuza; the second rank they call *genonas*, and the bishops come third.”¹⁸ Part of their old-church

15. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 35.

16. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.9, 11.

17. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.7–8.

18. Jerome, *Ep.* 41.1.

practice was an insistence on purity and a consequent embarrassment at having to admit they were defective in it, says Jerome, “whereas we when we do penitence are very easily promised forgiveness.”¹⁹

It is interesting that the Montanists chose not the old Jerusalem but a place amid the mountains of the West in which to await the second coming. Plainly this refers to a genuine Old Christian tradition, for despite all the charges of inconsistency and absurdity thrown at the Montanists, no one ever thinks to criticize or see anything wrong with the idea that they should choose a desolate spot in the hills of western Asia Minor. “And they say that the Jerusalem shall come down from above to that spot. For which reason they repair thither to perform their mysteries in that place, where they claim they perform holy ordinances.”²⁰ They said that they were the prophets which God had promised to send to the people before the second coming and that they had all the gifts and powers of the primitive church. There was nothing wrong with the claims. Everyone felt there should be such a church—but making the claim and proving it were two different things. “It is plain,” writes Epiphanius, “that they do not have the real charismatic gifts, for they go out of their way to argue, persisting in the spirit of error and wild imaginings.”²¹ If their gifts were genuine, he asks, “why have none since Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla had them? Maximilla said, ‘After me there will be no prophecy, but all shall be completed.’ Yet the end did *not* come after her time, which was many years ago. That proves her a false prophetess.”²² Throughout the East conferences were held everywhere to discuss Montanism. That such a feeble performance could have so impressed the Christian world is an eloquent commentary on the poor diet the Big Church was giving it.

The tradition, beginning with the Gnostics and passing down to the Cataphrygians and Montanists, *never ceased* from the Christian world; in *every century* it rankles. “There are many,” says Philastrius in

19. Jerome, *Ep.* 41.1.

20. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.14.1–2.

21. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.1.5, 7.

22. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.2.1–7.

the late fourth century, “who daily assert that there are prophets, and who preach that there should be prophecy, not knowing that ‘The Law and the Prophets’ were up to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13), and that the end of the law and the prophets was completed in the presence of Christ, and thereby consummated.”²³ These people, knowing full well that the apostles were prophets, could not see how the successor to an apostle could be anything but a prophet, unless such a succession was only to certain apostolic functions and not to all of them. Methodius mocks the pretensions of Justin of Naples as “a man no nearer to the apostles than the rest of us either in time or in virtue.”²⁴ Proximity to the apostles had become a norm of truth—a riskier one could not be imagined, since the very churches to which the apostles wrote their letters stood on very shaky ground. Mani was absolutely crazy, Eusebius believes, for “he said he was the Paraclete and like Christ anointed himself twelve apostles.”²⁵ Crazy he may have been, yet he appealed to the best in Augustine, who during the happiest years of his life was a devoted and ardent disciple, believing he had found in Mani true Christianity; yet when he left the Manichaeans, he says, the bottom of his world fell out and he spent the ensuing years in black despair. His attitude to the catholic church, even after he joined it, was one of caution, reserve, and to quote Troeltsch, “abysmal pessimism.”²⁶ Socrates describes the Novatians as trying to be primitive Christians.²⁷ Pacianus makes fun of them for avoiding the name *Novatians* and blushing when it was applied to them: they would be primitive Christians and nothing else. “Why do you scold us for using rhetoric and quoting Virgil?”²⁸ he asks his Novatian friend: the answer would be that the primitive Christians would have done the same.

23. Philastrius, *Haer.* 78 (PL 12:1189).

24. Methodius, *Res.* 4.6 (PG 18:313).

25. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.31.1.

26. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Augustin, die Christliche Antike und das Mittelalter* (Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1915).

27. See Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 4.28.

28. See Pacian, *Ep.* 2.4 (PL 13:1059–60).

When they weren't actually claiming to be direct descendants of the first church, men and groups would still continue to claim a degree of inspiration which aimed at *restoring* that church. At the end of the second century, "once again arose, loud and penetrating, the cry to establish life on the ground of the expectation of the Lord's speedy return. There were congregations which, led by their bishops, withdrew to the desert; there were congregations which sold all their possessions in order to be able to meet the coming Christ."²⁹ But if these were departing from the main church, it was the church more than they, according to Harnack, which really departed from the old Christian traditions: "The church herself . . . entered the world-state by the open door in order to establish herself permanently, to preach Christianity in its streets. . . . In the middle of the third century we find the church furnished with all the forces that a state and its culture could offer her, entering on all the relations of life, and *ready for any concession which did not concern her creed*."³⁰ The last qualification is one which every church historian must make in order to save anything at all of the real church, but it is a qualification in word only, without any support in fact. An examination of the doings and decisions of the councils through the centuries will show clearly enough that one cannot separate creed from practice and that once the church begins to compromise there is no limit. A church which was willing to make *any* concessions to the world is not the same as a church that would make *none*. It was a church that wanted to eat its cake and have it, too.

But as Harnack notes, the main church was by no means the *only* church; it was *never* universal, because there were *always* Christian groups that challenged its claims. Athanasius reports the crazy Phrygians as insisting that the full truth was first revealed to them, and "that the faith of the Christians actually began with them."³¹ This is simply the claim that *they* are the pure old church. In that case, says Athanasius,

29. Adolf Harnack, *Monasticism: Its Ideals and History*, trans. E. E. Kellett and F. H. Marseille (London: Williams and Norgate, 1901), 27.

30. Harnack, *Monasticism*, 28–29.

31. Athanasius, *Syn.* 4 (PG 26:688).

what of the fathers and the blessed martyrs and those who descend in their faith from them? There is an ominous note in Basil's announcement that the corruption that is spreading like wildfire through the whole church only began in the East: "The gospel began with us, and so did also the seeds of apostasy, spreading from here throughout the entire *oecumene*."³²

This awareness of general and universal corruption in the church could only inspire the enthusiasm of the sects to salvage the True Gospel from the wreckage. The main church, in its glory, had simply failed to deliver, and everybody knew it. After Montanus, says Bardy, after the passing of the Gnostic, "for a long time yet, after the first disillusionment, there could still be found Christians, even bishops, only too eager to let themselves be fooled by new promises: every announcement of the end of the world provoked a crisis which the calmer spirits could cure only by dint of great effort."³³ This was not an isolated phenomenon, limited to a few crackpots and extremists—it was and ever remained a major threat to the church. Eusebius tells us, for example, of a bishop Nepos in Egypt, who tried to revive the old doctrine of the millennium using Revelation as a text. The bishop of Alexandria opposed Nepos bitterly, though he greatly admired his pure character and his great gift for writing hymns. (Another annoying fact: it was not the worst, but the best and most gifted men who most often expressed discontent with the main church.) The trouble with Nepos, says Eusebius, was that he was too literal-minded and naïve. If Christ and the apostles were still here, says Eusebius, we could ask them about these things. In their absence, however, the best we can do is to put an allegorical interpretation on the scripture and make it fit our needs. Nepos was therefore taking unfair advantage when he wrote his book *Refutation of the Allegorizers*, calling for continued apostolic authority.³⁴

32. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 243.3 (PG 32:908).

33. Gustave Bardy, *La conversion au christianisme durant les premiers siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1949), 311.

34. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.24.1–5.

Again, in the time of Origen and Clement of Alexandria, one Judas “went off the track with the crazy idea that the *parousia* of the Antichrist was then at the doors.” Of course Daniel was his guide, and his book caused an immediate sensation, “stirring up terribly the forces of persecution that were against us at that time and throwing the masses into complete confusion.”³⁵ The rude and simple, literal-minded people who followed Novatus called themselves the Katharoi—those who had kept themselves pure and regarded all others as being out of the church—for *they* were the true Christian church. Novatus regarded himself, says Eusebius, “as the fixer of dogma, the defender (shield-bearer) of ecclesiastical knowledge.”³⁶ The title of *hyperaspistes* shows that Novatus thought of his function as primarily a preservative one. A Novatian tract, held up to ridicule by Pacianus, says that ever since the Decian persecution the line of descent from Christ had been interrupted, and the outrageous thing is that *he* felt called to put things right again: “Novatians to the rescue! Justice will be liberated! By the authority of Novatian, whatever is wrong will be said right!”³⁷ “The Lord has sent *me*,” Maximilla announced to the world, “for this work of preaching, and, whether I will or not, to learn the gnosis of God as one set apart, a mouthpiece, an interpretress—forced to be such whether I will or no.”³⁸ This, says Epiphanius in a feeble rebuttal, proves she was a false prophetess, for Christ came of his own free will! Apparently preachers must always be self-chosen on that pattern. Epiphanius speaks of other sects calling themselves apostolic; their sacraments and mysteries, he says significantly, are very different from ours. Then he says an interesting thing: “The church is like a ship, made not of one board but put together from many different ones. Yet each one of those heresies thinks it is the only timber in the ship, and so misses the whole idea of what the church is like.”³⁹ Again we find Origen’s insistence not on uniformity, but on

35. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.7.

36. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43.8.

37. See Pacian, *Ep.* 3.1 (PL 13:1064).

38. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.13.1.

39. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 61.3.4–5.

variety in the church—only crackpots and extremists believe the church should be a one-piece vessel.

While the councils continued to wrangle, and revivalists and sectarians sought to get the church back on the old track—their track—another interesting development was taking place within the church. The journal that Lady Sylvia (now known for the first time by her right name of Aetheria [Egeria]) kept during her pilgrimage in the Holy Land about the year 380 is one of the most remarkable documents in existence.⁴⁰ What the good woman is seeking is tangible contact with the holy ones of old—and that is what she finds, infallibly and delightfully, wherever she goes. All the locations mentioned in the Old and New Testaments are awaiting her inspection at their proper and official places. The bush that had burned for Moses was still thriving and covered with blossoms. One might enter and pray in the cave in which Jesus was born, in which he was raised, in which he taught his disciples, in which he was transfigured (!), in which he ate the last supper, in which he was buried, met with his disciples after the resurrection, and finally the *cave* in which the Lord ascended to heaven. It was a great time for cave cults. Grottos have always played a major role in popular religion around the Mediterranean, and Christianity gladly complied. In every page of Sylvia's travels we meet with the deep yearning for some *tangible* connection with the Bible to offset the allegorical pap that was disgusting the revivalists but which was the only reality the church had to offer. The quest of the Middle Ages was on.

In fourteenth-century Ghent, “after each Mass was a sermon, lasting an hour and a half: the monks and the priests tried to show the great similitude between them and the people of Israel . . . who have been kept in bondage by the Earl of Flanders.”⁴¹ In the East, in Egypt and Syria, every popular uprising for liberation from the hated Western rule and culture was in the name of restoring the true old church as, from the fourth century on, “old national Oriental traditions revived”

40. Egeria, *Itinerarium*.

41. Jean Froissart, *Chroniques: Tome dixieme, 1380–1382*, ed. Gaston Raynaud (Paris: Renouard, 1897), 221.

and opposition to Hellenic culture intensified. The general corruption of the church, in fact, seems to have been taken as an axiom through the Middle Ages. In vain the main church sneered and mocked at little separatist groups—“You think that you are the only people on earth who receive the exhortations of the Holy Ghost, but *we* can show you that the Holy Ghost speaks to that church which is universal, for does not the Psalm say ‘Let *all the earth* sing a song to God?’ But you alone of all the inhabitants of the earth pride yourselves on being different from all the rest and claim that you alone have the right to receive that order.” It was in vain, because for all the silly sophistical arguments to show that the true church *must* be the biggest church, the fact remained that as long as even the littlest Christian community existed to challenge her claims, the Catholic Church could *not* claim to be universal. Even more obvious was that God’s people in the days of Israel, as in those of the apostles, *did* pride themselves on being a small and peculiar—*not* large and universal—people. Against the logical and rhetorical appeals of the schoolmen the revivalists could set the whole scripture.

That the claims of the heretics who made the loss of the true church and the true authority their theme were not wild vaporings was clearly seen in the attitude that the leaders of the main church itself took whenever things really went bad. As long as things went their way, Basil and Chrysostom, Jerome, Hilary, Eusebius, etc., could be very magnificent, indulging in a full-hearted and typically Mediterranean gloating over all opponents of the church. But when sudden reverses of fortune abolished security in a night, they all reverted to the Old Eschatology and took to conning Revelation and Daniel, and suddenly remembered that they were members of a faithful and persecuted little band that looked not to the Things of this World. In short, it was not only the crackpots who remembered that the church should have been something very different from what it had become—deep down, everybody knew it.

Nothing is more natural than that men in times of grave calamity should come to view all the things of this world—its hopes and promises and rewards—as a snare and a delusion. The well-known “pessimistic literature” of the Egyptians is of great age and “seems to have sprung

up under the influence of the catastrophes which overwhelmed Egypt at the close of the Sixth Dynasty.⁴² The great name in this category of composition, one who might well be called the father of pessimistic literature, is Nefer-Rohu [Neferty], who while he declares that the world has reverted to barbarism, prophesies that a King will come who will drive out the Asiatics, defend Egypt by a wall, and bring to the land a rule of righteousness in which evil will vanish.⁴³ It was the persecutions of the second and third centuries, according to Caspari, that led the church forever after to conceive of the Antichrist as primarily a political figure;⁴⁴ after the fourth century the medieval “Endchrist” was developed, the Antichrist who would follow the fall of the Roman Empire. Accordingly, when things went wrong the churchmen would always remember the Antichrist and were ever ready to tag the label on anyone who displeased them much.

Persecution, says Voelker, was followed by a reawakening of the old *enthusiasmus*, which was the quaint and old-fashioned quality of the primitive church of which the second generation had, according to historians, so wisely rid itself.⁴⁵ The church that Tertullian left because it displayed the forms while it denied the power of godliness only took that unfortunate stand because it had to—it denied the gifts not on grounds of theory but of fact. It *did* not have them, therefore, since it claimed to be the true church, it could only insist that the true church *should* not have them. But nothing is more comical than to see the rush and scurry of the churchmen of the age to claim for their church

42. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 24b.

43. See “The Prophecy of Neferti,” in Alan H. Gardiner, “New Literary Works from Ancient Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 1 (1914): 100–106; Adolf Erman, *Ancient Egyptian Poetry and Prose*, trans. Aylward M. Blackman (London: Methuen, 1927), 110–15.

44. C. P. Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Altertums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters* (Christiana: Malling, 1890), 429–72.

45. Walther Voelker, “Von welchen Tendenzen liess sich Eusebius bei Abfassung seiner ‘Kirchengeschichte’ leiten?” *Vigiliae Christianae* 4 (1950): 157–80, at 172.

anything at all that might be interpreted as a miracle. When a Roman army in Germany was saved from dying of thirst by a providential shower of rain, everybody hastened to give his own church credit for the “miracle.” Dio Cassius credits it to the prayers of the Egyptian magician Arnuphius who was with the army; on the Antonine column it is attributed to Jupiter Pluvius; and since there were Christians in the army, Tertullian attributes the rain to *their* prayers.⁴⁶ The pathetic “miracles” in Augustine are of the same order. The way these coincidences are exploited by the fathers clearly indicates that—however loudly they may have protested that only fools and fanatics insist on the survival of the spiritual gifts—the church knows perfectly well that those gifts belong to it by right and should always be there. The recent phenomenal rains and the lights in the sky, says Tertullian, “are signs of the imminent wrath of God; we must preach and announce and beseech while yet the time remains to us.”⁴⁷ Eusebius was absolutely convinced from his studies that the gift of prophecy *must* remain in the church until the second coming of Christ, and his great charge against the Montanists is not that they claimed that gift—he was rather impressed by that—but that if they ever had it they had lost it.

The great troubles that accompanied the Arian controversy naturally drove many to think as old Christians in the days of trial and persecution. “*This*,” says Athanasius, “is the *greatest persecution* the church has ever known. They are attacking our ancient traditions!”⁴⁸ He quite forgets that what the real saints were persecuted for was not their traditions but their innovations. Viewing the state of the church, Hilary can only declare—this is it!

Christ is to be expected, because the Antichrist is here. The pastors lament, because the hirelings have fled . . . the thieves have entered in, and the ravaging lion is abroad. The angel of Satan had transformed himself into an angel of light. Such a persecution it is as

46. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 72.9; Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.6.

47. Tertullian, *Scap.* 3.2–3.

48. [Perhaps a paraphrase; cf. Athanasius, *Decr.* 1–2.]

has never been since the beginning of the world. God will cut the time short; let us endure to the end. Let us suffer with Christ that we may reign with him. I have long foreseen this terrible time.⁴⁹

This is the language not of the Victorious World Church, but of the suffering Old Church of brief duration and no worldly expectations. It is notable that what these men call the *greatest* persecutions are not persecutions by the pagan monster on the imperial throne—not a bit of it. The *real* persecution is what Christians are doing to Christians. Lactantius's preoccupation with the predictions of Revelation is meticulous and exact: no modern-day revivalist ever took the Apocalypse of John more literally than the Christians of his time.⁵⁰

Another interesting tendency is to glorify the church in times of prosperity but to turn to the otherworld in times of disaster with an almost cynical disregard for *ecclesia*. In the day of her power the church is rankly worshipped—the church is the great miracle that proves the existence of God; the church is the revelation of Christ on earth; one need look no farther for his coming; the church is the kingdom of heaven; one need expect no higher glory than that apparent in her ritual, etc., etc. But a few heavy jolts to lay bare the basic instability of society and the forces of nature, and the most devout will suddenly look right through the church, their eyes focused on something far beyond. St. Basil, who feels the full impact of social disaster in his day, almost never mentions the church at all; for him it is no miraculous, self-existent, independent, mystical, eternal, supernatural entity at all. “Men are not theologians today,” he says, “but technologists. The wisdom of this world has first call on the church, pushing aside the claims of the cross. . . . The wolves are in power. The old people mourn the passing of what was; the young grow up in pitiful ignorance.”⁵¹ Because of her sins the whole church is going into bondage.

49. Hilary, *In Constantium* 1 (PL 10:577).

50. Lactantius, *Inst.* 7.15–26.

51. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 90.2 (PG 32:473).

“I believe the mystery of iniquity is already at work,” writes Cyril of Jerusalem. “I am frightened by the wars of the nations, by the schisms of the churches, by brother-love turning to brother-hate. May it not happen that these things are to be fulfilled *in our day*?”⁵² Of course he who has seen the church in her glory asks, “Will God allow it? Will he allow one to come with *all power* and lying wonders?”⁵³ Alas, is the answer, he *will* allow it “as a means of enabling the saints to win eternal glory on the other side.”⁵⁴ He too, in the face of disaster, forgets the glorious future of the church and speaks the language of the other-side Christians of the early days. “The Antichrist will come when the appointed times of the Roman Empire are fulfilled and the end of the rest of the world is near.”⁵⁵ When will that be? “The apostasy *is now, this is the end*.”⁵⁶ Another contemporary of Nicaea, Gregory of Nazianzus, is always comparing himself to Jeremiah, the church being the Jews on the eve of their destruction. Gregory the Theologian, who was writing on the state of the church at the same time, foresees immediate end and reports present dissolution of everything: “Our order is dissolved,” he says. “We have not done well to sit in exalted places. The officials, teachers of what is good to the congregation, are themselves under-nourished; our soul-doctors are themselves ailing, walking corpses teeming with every conceivable disease; our guides themselves do not know the way.”⁵⁷ The church is being shaken to its foundations by the devil.

The men of the fourth century, who with great exultation foresaw church and empire moving inexorably forward side by side to the conquest of the world, had no choice when the empire was beaten time and again by the barbarians but to see in those disasters the sure presages of the End. When the empire fell, “nothing remained for Ambrose (as for

52. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.18; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

53. Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.9; 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

54. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.17.

55. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.12.

56. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.9.

57. [“Gregory the Theologian” is another title for Gregory of Nazianzus. The intended referent here is probably the other famous Gregory of this period, Gregory of Nyssa, but the source of this citation cannot be identified.]

Jerome) but to lament the suffering of the world and the imminent End of Days.”⁵⁸ After Ambrose got control of the emperor it was in pagan rather than in Christian circles, Straub observes, that people spoke of the coming destruction of the *imperium*.⁵⁹ Prudentius boldly put forth the coming victory of the Christian emperor over the barbarians as sure proof of the divinity of the Christian religion.⁶⁰

It was therefore the Christians more than the pagans who had to undergo a violent readjustment of their thinking with the fall of the empire. Though the pattern was readily at hand—all they had to do was read the scriptures to discover intact the old eschatology which the schoolmen had brushed aside as “old wives’ tales.” But Church and World were wedded again when Augustine made the kingdom of heaven absolutely identical with the church. Henceforward one could not at will ignore the earthly failings of the church, for, being on earth, the kingdom cannot claim that it is here temporarily, by mistake, in a hostile environment—now it is fully right and proper that the kingdom endure upon earth, fully set up, in its power and glory, and [without the eschatological] otherworld nonsense. “Inextricable confusion” was a result. “Western Monasticism,” says Harnack, “in contrast to the Eastern, maintained the Apocalyptic element of Chiliasm, which, it is true, *lay dormant* for long periods, but *at critical moments constantly emerged*.”⁶¹ But while monasticism was an example of such an emergence, Harnack believed, it lost the apocalyptic element in proportion as it “allowed itself to be used by the Church.”⁶²

The church becomes the steady enemy of the old eschatology, with which it constantly has to deal. In every century the church has had to deal with the saints—those who went back to the thought patterns of the early church—by suppressing them. “The church is always running

58. Johannes Straub, “Christliche Geschichtesapologetik in der Krisis des römischen Reiches,” *Historia* 1 (1950): 57.

59. Straub, “Christliche Geschichtesapologetik,” 57–58.

60. See Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*.

61. Harnack, *Monasticism*, 69, emphasis added.

62. Harnack, *Monasticism*, 80.

after the saints,” says Powicke, so she can control them.⁶³ Indeed, for Harnack this is the *leitmotiv* of the church history through the Middle Ages and down to the present time. Constantly people, led by the scriptures, have reverted to the old promises and concepts to which the World Church has, necessarily, a violent antipathy. Chrysostom in evil times remembers that the Lord had said “that the time had come when the door of this my bounty would be closed.”⁶⁴ Like the other fathers, he cannot admit that it has already come, but like them he is convinced that it is *very near*. His comfort is that the victory of the church is also near, but that cannot come until the end of the world. Yet this was the same John Chrysostom who time and again had gloried in the almost instantaneous victory of the apostles over all evil in the world—a complete, smashing, universal victory for the right. He reports a great earthquake in his city of Antioch and tells how it made the people very pious—the rank and file too became primitive Christians (for a few weeks) when things went wrong. There were hymns in the marketplaces and the churches were packed.⁶⁵ With his incurable fourth-century devotion to appearances, Chrysostom immediately declared that the heavenly order had been restored. After the earthquake he himself stops speaking for a while like a fourth-century rhetorician, glorying in the power and splendor of the church, and instead takes the tone of an apostolic father: “If we keep the faith unshaken by our good works, *then* we may have with us an unshaken foundation for the church.”⁶⁶ He worries no more about poor attendance at church, “for it is not a multitude of bodies we want to see in the church, but a multitude of hearkeners.” And what is this world? “A foul nest stuck together of scraps and mud. The greatest houses are no better than swallows’ nests: comes the winter and they promptly collapse. . . . Well, I say this is the winter now. God is going to

63. See F. M. Powicke, “The Christian Life,” in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. Charles Crump (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 39.

64. (Ps.) John Chrysostom, *In s. Bassum* 3 (PG 50:723).

65. See John Chrysostom, *De terrae motu* (PG 50:713–15); cf. *De Lazaro concio* 7.1 (PG 48:1027–28); *Hom. Acts* 7.2, 41.2 (PG 60:66, 201).

66. (Ps.) John Chrysostom, *In s. Bassum* 3 (PG 50:724); cf. *De Lazaro concio* 7.2 (PG 48:1030).

purge the world with great destructions.”⁶⁷ Christ “said that when the gospel had been preached to all nations then the end would come,” says Chrysostom, “and since the gospel *has* been preached to almost all the *oecumene* nothing remains but that the *end* is at the door. Let us fear and tremble, beloved, for the end is very near. . . . Yet we go on being trivial, vicious, and silly.”⁶⁸ “Let us build upon the rock, for the storms are coming. . . . There is great danger for those who lead the church . . . the Christian spirit must be ardent.”⁶⁹ It was the evil of the time that induced John to say these things.

Left to themselves, the fathers of the fourth century instantly gravitate into the orbit of the schools and look forward to long careers of success for themselves and prosperity for the church. It is real trouble that forces Chrysostom to say:

We go on electing unqualified men . . . so that in our day it has reached the point where, unless God very quickly snatches us from the danger and saves us and his church all will be lost. . . . Pray tell me, where do you think all these riots come from that now fill the churches? . . . All this corruption comes from the head: if the head is sick, of course the whole body will suffer. . . . Some are actually filling the churches with murder, leading whole cities to riot and revolt, all because they are fighting to be elected bishops.

Jerome is even more eloquent for the West than Chrysostom is for the East. When the hope of the empire was blasted in 378, the fathers suddenly turned to eschatology, returning to old Christian concepts, ancient *topoi*, that “the earth was unstable and the empire would surely fall.” Rome has fallen, cries Jerome, Greece has fallen. “The Orient seems to be immune from these evils, but its turn is coming next: the wolves of the north are even now attacking the eastern cities.”⁷⁰ To express his grief the saint then quotes Virgil (!) to the effect that a hundred tongues

67. John Chrysostom, *Comm. Col.* 2.4 (PG 62:314).

68. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Heb.* 21.3 (PG 63:152).

69. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Heb.* 32.2; 34.1, 3 (PG 63:222, 233, 236).

70. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.16.

could not tell his woes. And why has this happened? “Because of *our* sins the barbarians are strong. Because of *our* crimes the Roman army is beaten!”⁷¹ Civil war, in fact, is killing more than the enemy, he says. As the ancient Israelites went into bondage to Nebuchadnezzar, “so we miserable ones have so displeased God that by the rage of the barbarians his own rage is felt against us. . . . O the shame of it! The Roman army, conqueror and ruler of the world, is being chased by timid barbarians! . . . While we are dying and being overthrown every day we go right on thinking that we are indestructible.”⁷² So deeply had the lovely lesson of the indestructible heavenly order been ingrained in the thinking of the fourth century. It was impossible to believe that Roman Christian civilization was anything but God’s own world order. “Who will ever believe it?” cries Jerome, “Rome fighting on her own home territory (*in gremio suo*, “on her home base”) not for glory but for survival! Not even fighting, in fact, but rather trying to buy off her life with gold and goods. The cause for all this is that we are fighting like a lot of half-barbarians among ourselves.”⁷³ A review of Roman history follows.

As for the church, our house upon this earth as well as our home in heaven, if we are lazy and slow to good works, it will be brought low. And the whole structure which was designed to elevate to the peak of heaven shall collapse to earth, bringing ruin to its inhabitants. When our hands weaken the storms overcome us, and this is as true of the church as it is of private individuals: that through neglect of the leaders the whole structure collapses, and where there is no incentive to crime there is always found a pretense to virtue.⁷⁴

In view of the great and unexpected calamities, Jerome not only reverts to old church eschatology but actually discards the daring faith and confidence of the fourth century: that though individuals might go astray

71. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.17.

72. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.17, 19.

73. Jerome, *Ep.* 123.17.

74. [Nibley gives a slightly different translation of this in *The World and the Prophets*, CWHN 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 195. The citation given there appears incorrect; the correct source is unknown.]

the church never could, that though the pretenders might swarm, in the end the true church would always prevail. Now under terrible blows of misfortune, Jerome is forced to admit that if individuals can lose the light and go to ruin, so can the church. “The stake is not broken and useless and destroyed—it would be impiety to say that: but the stake is taken away from the place of the believer, that is, the church—because of daily increasing impiety.”⁷⁵ The church is indeed indestructible, but that does not mean that it must always remain in the same place. Where the people are not righteous it is taken away. “This means,” says Jerome commenting on Luke 18:8, “that Christ *deserts* (literally “undoes,” “dis-establishes”) his church because of daily increasing unrighteousness.”⁷⁶ And where is this unrighteousness? Jerome agrees with his Eastern counterpart, John Chrysostom: it begins always at the top: “For it is the custom of the leaders of the churches to oppress the common people in their pride.” “The pride of the important ones, the iniquity of those in charge, often drive people from the church, driving away from the Lord those who he himself hath saved. . . . That is why there is a famine in the lands, a famine to hear the word of God.”

But how could the church expect to be free of wickedness and still be a world church? Jerome realizes the difficulty of the problem. “It needs must be that in the net of the whole church should be both good and bad. For if all were pure, what would be left over to the judgment of God?” This weak and silly argument was the common answer to the charges of *necessary* evil in a world church. A little thought shows its shallowness. Chrysostom uses it in a shocking way. Does the greatness, power, and wisdom of a judge depend on the number and the depravity of the criminals brought before him? “If all were pure” within the church would God’s judicial functions actually be in jeopardy? If it is necessary to preserve a goodly batch of evildoers against the judgment, must such be preserved

75. Jerome, *Comm. Isaiah* 7.22 (PL 24:275).

76. [This appears to be an interpretive restatement of Jerome’s comment on Luke 18:8 in *Comm. Isaiah* 7.22, just cited, and is not found in the text. In working from his notes, Nibley may have mistaken a gloss of his own on it for a further citation from Jerome. Cf. Nibley, *World and the Prophets*, 195.]

within the church? Jerome falls back on the classic argument: “The wheat and the tares must grow up together.”⁷⁷ Here he boldly corrects the Lord’s priceless interpretation of this parable—the only fully interpreted parable in the scripture: “The field is the world,” Jesus had said.⁷⁸ “I do *not* affirm that the field is the world,” says Jerome, “but I understand by the field the congregation of the Christian population.” (As if in this case Christ had left any room for this or any other interpretation.) Having put the Lord to rights, Jerome is free to continue:

Just as you find mixed wheat and tares in fields, even so in the terrestrial churches (at least he concedes that much to the Bible) you will find some wheat and some weeds. This should teach us, when sinners turn up from time to time in our congregations, not to be scandalized, nor to say: “Behold, a sinner in the holy community! If that is allowed, what is wrong with my sinning?” As long as we are in this present world, that is in the field and in the net, both good and bad are contained in it. But when Christ comes, *then* there will be a separation and 1 Corinthians 4 will be fulfilled.

But if sin is to be expected in the church, why does God persecute the church for the sinners that are in her? Why is she to be punished for that which by her very nature she cannot possibly avoid? “An angry God gives the church over to persecutions,” says Jerome, “because of vice and sinning, that she may come forth from the fuller’s fire of the world as pure as gold and silver.” Strange reasoning indeed! God insists on including all the dross and defilement of the world in his church for the sake of making it universal, and then he becomes angry and by violent means removes—to the exact amount that he once mixed it in—all the dross and defilement! The church is no longer the body of the *elect* that its name implies: it is now the universal catch-all. In the ancient times only the sheep ever heard the Master’s voice; only the gold and silver were allowed into the church, kept pure and undefiled by passing through the fires of persecution and being taken *out* of the world. The totally opposite

77. See Matthew 13:30.

78. Matthew 13:38.

doctrine of a universal world church is opposed to this and required generations of cunning lawyers and rhetoricians to make a case for it.

Having admitted that God would purge the church, Jerome is ready to treat the dangerous ground of *restoration*—ground that the fathers, without the pressure of real and violent setbacks that needed explaining, preferred to avoid. “Hence the Lord, promising again peace and mercy, says he shall return *again* to build up the church (*eam aedificaturum*, “to reestablish it”) . . . which things, foretold thus by all the prophets, refer to the celestial Jerusalem, which having been destroyed by ruin, is to be built up by virtue. Which things we more properly interpret as referring to the *church*.”⁷⁹ The church is *now* in the place of *fallen Israel*—not an enviable position, but a significant admission. Can the men whose wickedness brought about its fall qualify to reestablish the church on a heavenly foundation? Can the generations of wickedness that broke the covenant and forgot the law reestablish the law and the covenant of their own authority? The *heavenly* Jerusalem can be established from only one direction. There is no doubt that Jerome had come to this as a result of experiences almost too terrible for him to believe. With the fall of Rome, which he admits with horror and incredulity is just that and nothing else, he closely associates the fall of the church: the two formed a single society, and that society was destroyed because of its wickedness.

This desolation which we have described befalling the city of Rome we know also to have come upon every city in the world! For other regions have been desolated by calamity, others wiped out by the sword, others tortured by famine, others swallowed up by the earthquakes. *Let us therefore with all our heart and mind despise this world as a thing marked for extinction.*

What a comedown from the confidence and glory of half a century earlier!

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79. Jerome, *Comm. Zach.* 1.1 (PL 25:1426).