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Forum: Lived Mormonism

Editors' Introduction

MORMONISM PROVIDES A COMPELLING PARADOX for scholars: it is both powerfully institutional and richly local and participatory. Although contemporary Mormon studies by most accounts remains dominated by attention to aspects of the institutional (biographies of religious elites, intellectual history, and church history), there is also a long-standing if minority tradition of interest in the religion as it is experienced and lived *in situ*. As Robert Orsi has observed, lived religion, while not ignoring the institutional and historical, regards its subject more particularly “as a form of cultural work,” directing attention “to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds.”¹ The study of lived religion is aggressively interdisciplinary, drawing on social history, sociology, ethnography, folklore, material culture, and other methodological tools. The scholars in this volume’s forum assess “lived Mormonism,” both in terms of how disparate angles of inquiry might abet understanding of Mormonism and how Mormonism might enliven scholarly discussion of world Christianity, globalization, and secularization.

1. Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), xix.

Pedagogical Impulses and Incommensurables: Lived Mormonism in Hong Kong

Stacilee Ford

Globalization is a brutal phenomenon. It brings us mass displacement, wars, terrorism, unchecked financial capitalism, inequality, xenophobia, and climate change. But if globalization is capable of holding out any fundamental promise to us, any temptation to go along with its havoc, then surely that promise ought to be this: we will be more free to invent ourselves. In that country, this city, in Lahore, in New York, in London, that factory, this office, in those clothes, that occupation, in wherever it is we long for, we will be liberated to be what we choose to be.¹

WRITER MOHSIN HAMID'S TAKE ON GLOBALIZATION feels relevant to Mormonism in Hong Kong, where I live as a participant-observer in a cosmopolitan community of Latter-day Saints deftly (and often quite creatively) incorporating principles and practices into their lives. As a cultural historian who is interested in chronicling how individuals are changed by their cross-cultural encounters, I think, write, and teach about the intersection of gender, national identity, class, ethnicity, and historical time. I analyze stories of cross-cultural encounter through

1. Mohsin Hamid, *Discontent and Its Civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York, and London* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), xi–xii.

the lens of transnational feminism, narrative inquiry, and diaspora/Sinophone studies. Since 1993 I have observed, firsthand, the ways in which “rising China” (and much of Asia) engages or ignores “America” (read the United States) in its material and virtual forms.

Today, as a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong is also marked by its British colonial past and the ongoing presence of American neocolonialism. Dueling notions of national exceptionalism are evident in the public sphere. The question of what constitutes the “foreign” in the context of Mormonism in Asia often follows similar tributaries. The processes of globalization and self-invention that Hamid notes above are evident in LDS congregations in Asia.

Shu-mei Shih’s caution against neocolonial attitudes in transnational feminist practice in Asia is a helpful way to view what is happening in the microcosm of Mormonism I know best. Shih calls attention to “productive incommensurables” in relationships where individual differences inform institutional practices and balances (or imbalances) of power. She argues that once we acknowledge that certain differences will never be completely reconciled we can move toward acceptance of these “incommensurables” in ways that energize a community by acknowledging the “restless dialectic between the translatable and the untranslatable.”² My research, teaching, and service as a district Relief Society president in the

2. Shu-mei Shih, “Is Feminism Translatable? Spivak, Taiwan, A-Wu,” in *Comparatizing Taiwan*, ed. Shu-mei Shih and Ping-hui Liao (London: Routledge, 2015), 172–73. Shih was speaking of a dialogue she witnessed between a famous postcolonial critic and women in Taiwan. She writes: “Even with the best of intentions and a keen spirit of solidarity, we may still be complicit with the neocolonial production and circulation of knowledge, if we are not attentive to the unavoidable, and I’d like to think, productive incommensurability in transnational encounters. Translation does not presume translatability; neither is solidarity sufficient ground for commensurability. It is the restless dialectic between the translatable and the untranslatable, the commensurable and the incommensurable, that compels both the possibility of communication and the self-critical awareness of one’s own knowledge formation.”

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Hong Kong China District are in a “restless dialectic” of their own. To use Anne Taves’s term, my “multiplex subjectivity” informs my worldview.³

As Mormonism “goes global,” I see the ways in which its members and leaders wrestle with incommensurables; whether the process is productive or not depends on many factors, not the least of which is members’ and leaders’ ability to be more nimble in dealing with—rather than simply paying lip service to—difference. At the macro level, many Hong Kongers encounter Mormonism through the missionaries they see out and about in public. While LDS leaders and public affairs officials in Hong Kong worry about negative views of the church that circulate online, and there have been conscious attempts to address discordant translations between Chinese and English words and concepts, most of my university students know very little about Mormonism.

In class we discuss Mormon history as an important case study in US history and one of many Christian traditions. We also think about Mormonism outside North America as an example of transnational American studies and the ways in which culture and traditions travel across borders. Students repeatedly conjecture that the confidence they see many Americans and Americanized Hong Kong residents exude (which they sometimes read as arrogance, although there is a certain grudging admiration as well) is related to links between faith and citizenship in US civil society. I have written about this elsewhere as a historical phenomenon associated with US culture—including but not limited to evangelization among women—called a “pedagogical impulse.” The phenomenon is evident in various Americanized LDS congregations in Hong Kong. (As an LDS sister from Japan asked me after we finished our Primary teaching one Sunday, “Why is it that American women are always trying to teach me something?”)⁴

3. See Taves’s quote and Fluhman’s critique of a lack of methodology in Mormon studies in J. Spencer Fluhman, “Friendship: An Editor’s Introduction,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 4–5.

4. This anecdote and a more detailed discussion of links between American exceptionalism and women’s narratives of self are found in Stacilee Ford, *Troubling American Women: Narratives of Gender and Nation in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong

Men as well as women can express pedagogical impulses, but what the above comment illustrates is that Mormon notions of chosenness can piggyback on larger narratives of American exceptionalism in an environment where Americanization in multiple forms has expanded rapidly from the Cold War period through recent globalization and neoliberalism. Assumptions made about how things should be done, and about how new converts or reactivated members should dress, talk, teach, and testify, often conform to conservative middle-class American norms. Caucasian members still, generally, dominate the conversation in Gospel Doctrine class or Relief Society and priesthood meetings. In some cases, white privilege is upheld in congregations where whites are in the minority, partly because of an ethos of harmony—born of Hong Kong’s turbulent past that encourages its highly mobile population to be pragmatic and restrained—but also because of a deep-rooted legacy of colonial privilege that segmented Hong Kong society for much of its history.

Some leaders understand the depth and diversity of culturally ingrained patterns of behavior (and the ingrained cultures hail from many places), but there is little consensus about how to deal with such incommensurable differences other than to promote another type of harmony—that of unity in belief—that may actually postpone a day of reckoning with neocolonialism in institutional structures and individual hearts and minds. Few members consider the ways in which Mormonism piggybacks on an expanding American presence in Asia, but there are links. Religion becomes entwined in the flow of people, resources, and ideology transiting the Pacific, and more work is needed to better understand how Latter-day Saint communities have been shaped by Hong Kong’s unique identity as an in-between but increasingly Americanized space.

For many Latter-day Saints, particularly recent converts, a strategic borrowing of “bits of America” via consumerism, identity documents, or attitudes is accentuated by exposure to LDS norms and cultural

University Press, 2011). I wrote the book with students and Latter-day Saints in Hong Kong in mind but did not explicitly discuss Mormon notions of exceptionalism.

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codes. This may or may not translate into acceptance of American values or mores. However, the encounter with Americanism via Mormonism occurs regularly in various congregations, including special units such as a Mandarin Chinese-speaking branch, where subethnic identity (PRC, Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and American Chinese) and larger geopolitical shifts—as well as gender, class, and generation—may have an impact on how members see and interact with each other.

For as American as Mormonism may be perceived to be, LDS leaders at the local and area level are keen to foment locally grounded sensibilities. Hong Kong and PRC government policies are upheld with caution and care, something that frustrates members who wish the church would join other religious groups in agitating for civil rights and social justice reforms. And there are, of course, incommensurable differences in families as well as in congregations when it comes to just how “American” children, as well as the church, should be.

For example, in many local Cantonese-speaking congregations (wards), young women who are considered to be too Americanized struggle to negotiate between familial expectations and their own desires for self-individuation. It is women in this group—as well as many young, single, professional women in the Mandarin and English-speaking family branches—who are quite cognizant of recent discussions about women and the priesthood, and gender in LDS culture more generally. This discourse dovetails with discussions of single women in their mid-thirties as “leftover” in Hong Kong and PRC society. Today, like their North American sisters, more and more LDS women navigate within and between patriarchal structures of all sorts cognizant that their expectations for combining motherhood and satisfying careers are less novel than in previous generations, but they are still met with a certain amount of familial and institutional resistance.⁵ In their efforts to harmonize with local government policies and promote traditional family values, LDS Church leaders will have to assess how the ongoing use of the term *patriarchy* and the doubling down on the rhetoric of the traditional family will place

5. See Grace Ka Ki Kwok, “Mormon Women Identities: The Experiences of Hong Kong Chinese Mormon Women” (master’s thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2012).

them at odds with members keen to overcome gender discrimination or sexual abuse as well as sexist mindsets at church.

Demographically speaking, the majority of Latter-day Saints (like the approximately 95 percent of the general population) who live in Hong Kong are Cantonese speaking and ethnically Chinese. But the small cohort of individuals who are members of the Hong Kong China District are, as I have noted elsewhere, an interesting community where local Hong Kongers share the space with “foreigners” who have come for opportunities of various sorts—mostly economic—as Hong Kong remains a key node for commerce, migration, and relative freedom of expression and movement in the region.⁶ In these units there are members who served missions in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or in other Chinese-speaking communities and who have returned to capitalize on hard-earned language skills in a place they feel tied to in various ways. Many within this population belong to or have married into the Chinese/Asian diaspora that has, for generations, been moving between nations, congregations, and social contexts, appropriating aspects of home and host national cultures as well as Wasatch Front and more localized (or even subethnic) expressions of Mormonism. They are making inroads in leadership positions and have blended leadership styles that make them particularly well equipped to mediate between various stakeholders in the church community in Hong Kong and beyond.

However, the majority of the Hong Kong China District is a unique population that challenges existing structures yet exuberantly embraces Mormonism as a way of finding meaning in a society that depends upon but exploits them. These are the women (and a few men and children) from the Philippine Islands (more than 1,000 out of about 1,800 members), and a smaller group from Indonesia and Nepal, who are employed as domestic or hospitality workers. This fact makes the Hong Kong China District arguably the most gender-imbalanced entity of its type in the LDS Church. Lived Mormonism in the “sister branches” is very different from more “typical” congregations that include the

6. Stacilee Ford, “Crossing the Planes: Gathering, Grafting, and Second Sight in the Hong Kong China International District,” *Dialogue* 47/3 (Fall 2014): 23–52.

branches with large populations of more economically privileged foreign expatriates and their families. The domestic worker branches are structured so that the Sabbath is a lively and rewarding but lengthy day of worship and fellowship. Sundays include a regular three-hour block of meetings, home and visiting teaching, Relief Society activities, and family home evening.

There are structural issues to reckon with in order to keep things running smoothly and provide domestic workers with opportunities to learn and grow spiritually. Branch and district leaders seek to uphold official guidelines while adapting to particular circumstances. Women are called and set apart as executive secretaries/administrative assistants (names are often blended and/or used interchangeably), branch mission coordinators (with responsibilities similar to those of branch mission leaders), Sunday School superintendents or coordinators (with assistants rather than counselors and responsibilities similar to those of a Sunday School president/presidency), and assistant membership clerks. They attend branch council meetings and constitute the bulk of the branch council.

While the mostly male leadership in the sister branches seeks to adapt to the needs of the members (including the opening of the Hong Kong Temple on Sundays once a quarter), there are incommensurables that have yet to be productively reconciled. Hong Kong is a very socioeconomically as well as culturally segmented society, and that segmentation often follows Latter-day Saints to church. District events are held on public holidays when many expatriate families desire to gather on their own. The very existence of these special units can, at times, exacerbate the gulf between members from different backgrounds, and some members worry that colonial mindsets may deepen rather than recede over time.

For the most part, LDS domestic workers seem quite unfazed by such talk; rather, they establish informal networks and microcommunities within larger congregations. Even as they do so they remain deferential to structural limits while allowing for nontraditional behavior. They borrow bits of America—particularly in their embrace of American

slang, popular culture, snack food, fashion, and websites celebrating aspects of Mormon culture—but their home cultures are their touchstones. They draw upon the church to recharge on Sundays, to express creativity through activities, and to suit their own individual needs. It is interesting to watch the leaders (many of whom are senior missionary couples) adapt their initial expectations to members' rhythms and visions of "girl power Mormonism."

One must be careful not to overstate the power wielded by members of sister branches. As a subaltern and expendable pool of laborers, domestic workers are, generally speaking, frequently infantilized or seen as sexual objects in Hong Kong society. Their low wages, limited rights, curfews and housing restrictions, and exploitative contract status further marginalize them, as does the vital but poorly compensated work of care they do. Many are deeply in debt, malnourished or in poor health, or struggling to provide for extended family members with difficulties of their own. While the church provides a refuge, a community, and an expression for creative outlets, the circumstances of their lives are vastly different from other Latter-day Saints in Hong Kong.

Despite attempts to combat neocolonial attitudes and sexism, and the efforts of members from many places who "cross over" ethnic and economic borders, segregation is still evident and incommensurables seem difficult to manage. LDS families who employ domestic workers try to level the social asymmetry by treating them with care and respect, but even at church it is not uncommon to see expressions of deference in conversation or self-segregation in seating arrangements or in social settings. Yet individual agency is evident as domestic workers come to various conclusions about what business/shopping they do on the Sabbath, how they calculate tithing given the fact that paychecks are often committed to pay debts or support needy family members before being cashed, and how those with children of their own uphold traditional models of LDS motherhood when they are raising other people's children *and* trying to long-distance parent their own. Efforts to teach practical lessons about self-reliance have empowered many women, and leaders have, for the most part, taken a more flexible stance towards

gender-role conventions than they do elsewhere (including in other branches in the district and in other wards in Hong Kong).

Most important for Mormon studies scholars, and religious studies more generally, is that the Hong Kong China District is a rich case study of a faith community in a global age. There is, thanks in part to the structure of an all-male cohort of priesthood leaders overseeing a large and underserved female population, a conservative ethos overriding less orthodox behaviors. But beneath the surface there are other factors in play. Many of the men in positions of power patiently and respectfully serve women domestic workers in ways that transgress conventional gender norms. Men cook, serve, and participate in traditionally “female” spaces including Relief Society meetings and activities. They and their spouses often become advocates for greater structural flexibility and more cognizant of the ways in which the church needs to shed certain US-centric mindsets.

In Hong Kong, then, there are unique opportunities for members to envision a global Latter-day Sainthood that takes account of the complexities of gender, national, cultural, economic, and political identities and dynamics while forming and nurturing a community where “all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33) despite the incommensurables of mortality.

Stacilee Ford (BA, Brigham Young University; EdM, Harvard University; EdD, Columbia University; PhD, Hong Kong University) has lived in Hong Kong since 1993. She is an Honorary Associate Professor in the Department of History and in the American Studies Program at the University of Hong Kong. Her scholarship focuses on the intersection of gender, national identity, and culture. She is the author of two books: *Troubling American Women: Narratives of Gender and Nation in Hong Kong* (2011) and *Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting’s “An Autumn’s Tale”* (2008). She is currently working on a study of men and leadership in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Greater China/Diaspora/Sinophone communities.

Testimony in the Muscles, in the Body: Proxy Performance at the Mesa Easter Pageant

Megan Sanborn Jones

The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead. . . . Those saints, who neglect it in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation.

—Prophet Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL MOMENTS of the Mesa Easter Pageant comes each night during a reenactment of the crucifixion. The primary actor playing Jesus, after being condemned by Pontius Pilate, is given a crown of thorns and a red robe. The Romans mock him in exaggerated pantomime while a crowd jeers in the background. The actor is then tied between the columns stage right and whipped, with prerecorded strop noises coordinated with the action of the soldier who scourges Jesus. A neat costume trick has Christ's robe shredding during the scourging, revealing a back covered with makeup stripes. The lights shift ominously to red to emphasize the evil of the violence.

The sound of nails being hammered into wood segues the narrative to Calvary, where a different actor portraying the crucified Christ and two others portraying the two thieves are suspended on crosses and raised up in the center of the proscenium stage. The sound and lightning effects make clear the terror of the moment for the audience,

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starting with faint noise coming from behind the crosses and building out into the audience until the chairs rumble with the bass notes of the thunder. The scene ends in a terrible silence and blackout.

Each night that I saw this performance during the week I spent at the Mesa Pageant in March 2013, I was keenly aware of the reverence this moment was accorded by audience members. While the rest of the pageant was accompanied by the sounds of chatting, crying babies, and the muffled laughter of teenagers, even the most aggressively uninterested spectators paid attention to the crucifixion. The staging was certainly spectacular enough to merit the focus, but it was not so much more compelling than that of a number of other scenes. I believe that the audiences behaved reverently in this moment because they were responding to the scene as both compelling theatre and sacred moment. Indeed, the power of Mormon pageantry is this blurring of lines between the performance of the past and lived and practiced beliefs of the present.

Because I am a theatre scholar and practitioner, my work is focused on what it means to *perform* Mormonism in the twenty-first century. Basing my areas of inquiry on the field of performance studies allows me to examine not just theatre—like pageants, road shows, or *The Book of Mormon* musical on Broadway—but anything that is enacted or behaved. Performance studies considers a range of performances on a scale from efficacy/ritual to entertainment/performing arts.¹ On the one end are performances that are meant to make something happen, like a religious ritual or a public ceremony. On the other end are performances for the pleasure of the observing audience, like plays on stage or sporting events.

However, performance studies makes it clear that rarely is a performance one or the other, as all performances are intended to achieve an aim and to please audiences. The overlapping purposes of performance are especially notable in religious performances, where belief and behavior are sometimes almost inseparable. Religious performers do

1. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 80.

things because they believe they matter; religious things matter because believers do them. In the field of religion and theatre, performance studies has opened up a host of inquiries, including the examinations of evangelical missionary efforts,² the Creation Museum,³ Bible stories on the Broadway stage,⁴ religious drama in Egypt,⁵ and the public performance of religion.⁶

Mormonism has a long history of both ritual and performing arts. At the dedication of the Salt Lake Theatre in 1862, Brigham Young stated that “the stage can be made to aid the pulpit in impressing upon the minds of a community an enlightened sense of a virtuous life, also a proper horror of the enormity of sin and a just dread of its consequences.”⁷ Since then, the LDS Church has produced a wide range of theatrical performances, celebrations, and spectacles with an eye towards uplifting the audience. Additionally, performance is embedded in every aspect of Mormon practice: from the formal rituals practiced in temples to the elaborate handcart trek reenactments performed by Mormon youth to the identity construction evidenced by the “I’m a Mormon” campaign. Mormon performance is a vibrant cultural expression of the lived Mormon experience.

Lately, I have become fascinated by the six official Mormon pageants both as spectacular works of American religious theatre and as evidence of the deeply intertwined relationship between the living and

2. John Fletcher, *Preaching to Convert: Evangelical Outreach and Performance Activism in a Secular Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

3. Jill Stevenson, *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

4. Henry Bial, *Playing God: The Bible on the Broadway Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

5. Marvin Carlson, “The Religious Drama of Egypt’s Ali Ahmed Bakathir,” in *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith*, ed. Lance Gharavi (New York: Routledge, 2012).

6. Joshua Edelman, Claire Chambers, and Simon du Toit, eds., *Performing Religion in Public* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

7. Brigham Young, “Propriety of Theatrical Amusements—Instructions Relative to Conducting Them,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:243.

dead in Mormon experience.⁸ In this essay I focus on the Mesa Arizona Easter Pageant to argue that those who participate in pageants each year are not just acting in roles in the theatrical sense.⁹ Instead, they are acting in behalf of those that they represent in a proxy performance that borrows as much from LDS theology as it does from realistic acting conventions. Understanding the experiences of Mormons who participate in pageants reveals the power of performance in worship and belief.

For Mormons, the past is an integral part of daily practice from scripture study that brings to life the ancient stories to blogging as a means of record keeping. The past can be visited at sacred sites preserved by the church and dedicated for spiritual experiences. It is commemorated in annual ceremonies that mark the LDS calendar. The past is also performed. The ritual performance of the past is most evident in the work done in the temple, where faithful members participate in a series of covenant-making ordinances like baptism, endowment ceremonies, and sealings for their ancestors.

In a general conference talk, Elder Dallin H. Oaks discussed the embodied practice of temple work: “Our temples are living, working testimonies to our faith in the reality of the resurrection. They provide the sacred settings where living proxies can perform all of the necessary ordinances of mortal life in behalf of those who live in the world of the spirits.”¹⁰ Oaks’s emphasis on “living, working testimonies” reminds his listeners how belief requires action and testimonies are dependent on practice. Indeed, the verb used in Mormon doctrinal language to describe the action of ordinances is *perform*. It is no wonder, then, that

8. Each year, the LDS Church produces four pageants across the United States—the Hill Cumorah Pageant in Palmyra, New York; the Manti Pageant in Manti, Utah; the Nauvoo Pageant (featuring the British Pageant) in Nauvoo, Illinois; and the Mesa Easter Pageant in Mesa, Arizona. Additionally, there are two biennial pageants—the Castle Valley Pageant in Castle Dale, Utah, and the Martin Harris Pageant in Clarkston, Utah.

9. This essay is a preview of work from my forthcoming book entitled *Walking with the Dead: Resurrecting the Past in Mormon Pageant Performance*.

10. Dallin H. Oaks, “Resurrection,” LDS.org, 2000, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2000/04/resurrection?lang=eng&query=proxy>.

participants in Mormon pageants feel a resonance between the work they do to embody a character of the past onstage and the work they do to redeem the dead in temples.

A man who played a Roman soldier in the Mesa Pageant remarked that the spirits of the people being enacted in the pageant “are up on stage with us. This year . . . one of the themes has been that every single person in the pageant represents someone that was alive at the time. I’m one-fourth Italian, so I don’t know what some of my ancestors were doing at the time, [but] some of them may have been involved in some of these events.”¹¹ This comment reveals the ease with which cast members are able to slip into a proxy role, even connecting their characters to possible ancestors in terms of genealogical lines. It also suggests how pageant organizers make this emphasis clear in the way they describe the pageant experience.

One feature of all of the Mormon pageants is how pageant performance is a spiritual experience rather than an opportunity to perform in a play. The spiritual function of pageant performance is coded in the way that cast members are anonymous; there are no programs or curtain calls that give credit to the performers for their skill in creating a role. Instead, cast members are set apart to religious callings for the duration of the pageant. Depending on the pageant, these callings might be as “special representatives,” as “pageant missionaries,” or simply as “missionaries.”¹² In addition to learning the staging of the pageant, casts are also trained by missionaries on effective teaching techniques and participate in daily scripture study, faith-building activities, and service projects. Each night before pageants are performed, cast members

11. Ron Middlebrook in discussion with the author, March 23, 2013.

12. The pageant program is housed in the missionary department of the LDS Church, but the relationship between local authorities and central oversight varies between each pageant. As a result, each pageant has a different process by which cast members are cast, called, and set apart. The processes also vary from year to year as pageant presidencies—the ecclesiastic leaders of the pageant experience—coordinate with the pageant artistic directors and local mission presidencies to find the best means to help pageant participants and audience members feel the Spirit and come closer to Christ.

attend a devotional together. It serves as a time for the director of the pageant to give practical notes on the production, but the emphasis is clearly on the spiritual preparation for the night ahead.

In one devotional I attended at the Mesa Easter Pageant, a speaker made clear the relationship between past and present when he suggested that the performers needed to focus on bringing the real people of Christ's time to life again on the stage. He asked the performers to consider that they were not left alone to simply invent these characters, but that "maybe [the real people] are looking down upon us and seeing how we are delivering what they did when they walked this earth with Christ. . . . Maybe, just maybe, they are watching us and praying for us."¹³ This belief in the literal dead who watch over the work of lived devotion is emphasized as well in temple discourse. As Elder Quentin L. Cook admonished, "Don't underestimate the influence of the deceased in assisting your efforts and the joy of ultimately meeting those you serve."¹⁴

The lived experience of proxy performance is made even more clear in Mesa as the pageant is performed on temple grounds. When I asked the director of the pageant if it could be performed anywhere else, she replied, "I don't think I would want it anywhere else. I think that [the temple] lends to the spirituality of the cast; I think it lends to the reverence, to the inspiration. I might see things on those grounds that I wouldn't see other places, or feel things. It's a sacred place for a sacred show, a pageant."¹⁵ It is clear that space brings meaning to production. In her essay on the production of space in Mormon cultural memory, Lindsay Adamson Livingston argues that certain Mormon space "functions as performative: it is supposed to *do* something. It ought to elicit feelings, create connections, and inspire revelations."¹⁶ Temple grounds

13. Author's field notes, devotional, March 22, 2013, Mesa, Arizona.

14. Quentin L. Cook, "Roots and Branches," LDS.org, 2014, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2014/04/roots-and-branches?lang=eng&query=perform>.

15. Jenee Wright in discussion with the author, March 21, 2013, Mesa, Arizona.

16. Lindsay Adamson Livingston, "'This Is the Place': Performance and the Production of Space in Mormon Cultural Memory," in *Enacting History*, ed. Scott Magalson and Rhona Justice-Malloy (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 26.

perform the proxy work for the dead as the living pageant participants re-create the past on stage.

I don't want to suggest that those participating in pageant performances think they are actually doing proxy work in the same way that they would perform ordinance work in a temple. But it was surprising to me how often, across all pageants, the link between temple work and pageant participation was made. Pageant administrators and participants clearly see pageants as sacred experiences.¹⁷ When participants in pageants reenact the past, they are bringing back to life characters who they believe have already been literally brought back to life through resurrection or who may one day be so revived. They connect in very real ways to the presence of the past in the form of spirits from the other side who have agency and can intervene in human life. They feel responsible to those who came before, for their faithful lives and their sacrifices.

The mother of a family who has participated in the Mesa Pageant for years explained the impact that playing characters who knew Jesus has on the testimonies of the pageant performers:

They were testifying in their time; we're testifying in our time through their story. . . . We've had family discussions where we thought, "Okay, so Jesus actually kicked everyone out of the temple. What would that feel like? Can you imagine? Can you feel that physical force of somebody knocking over tables and throwing money and a whip passing by? Wow." Just to be able to reenact in a small way really helps you kind of get the testimony into your muscles, into your body.¹⁸

17. In fact, one of the biggest stumbling blocks I encountered as a researcher to pageants was the honest desire to keep private the sacred nature of pageants. As one woman explained, "I would be totally willing to talk with you about the pageant, of course, as long as your book is positive and uplifting about the pageants. I would in no way ever want to be a part of something that shed a bad light on something so sacred to me." Anonymous Facebook message to the author, September 25, 2013.

18. Noreen Allen in Allen family interview with the author, March 21, 2013, Mesa, Arizona.

Proxy performance in Mormon pageants is a unique and powerful way Mormons can connect the past, the present, and the future through their lived experiences that take testimony from the heart and into the body.

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The Materiality of Lived Mormonism

Josh E. Probert

IN 1998 THE EDITORS OF THE *Utah Historical Quarterly* devoted the fall issue of the journal to “The Tangible Past.” Architectural historian and guest editor of the volume Thomas Carter observed the following in his introductory essay: “Despite the increased interest in material culture around the country this type of research has not made significant inroads into Utah or for that matter the West in general.”¹ Since Carter’s observation seventeen years ago, material culture has made significant inroads into Utah history and Mormon studies altogether. And today, with the ascendancy of interdisciplinarity, more and more scholars of Mormonism are including material culture in their research.

While this new literature has enriched our understandings of the Mormon past and some of it is very good, much of it views objects reductionistically as static symbols having singular meanings. And sometimes material culture is a trendy garnish on top of the “real” story. Discussions of symbolism, in particular, are often exercises in speculative semiotics that interpret religious symbols outside their historic fields of cultural production. In this brief essay, I will touch on a few ways in which scholars might think more rigorously about representation. I will also locate material culture within frameworks that go beyond it.

1. Thomas Carter, “Studies in Material Culture,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 56/4 (Fall 1998): 308.

Lived religion and material culture

Material culture is simply culture-made material. It collapses the dyad of materialism and idealism. Objects are the result of the dialectically interpenetrating negotiations that humans make, both individually and collectively, with their material environments. The study of culture-made material, then, is the study of these negotiations and the ways that people strategically engage the resources of the physical world toward their desired ends. For the scholar of Mormon studies, these negotiations encompass myriad topics, including insularity versus integration, communalism versus individualism, and Protestant versus Catholic affinities.

Lived religion—the day-to-day religious experience of nonelites—saturates the material remains of the Mormon past. The scriptural injunction to build Zion was a heavenly mandate to fashion an earthly utopia out of the physical resources available to the Mormon faithful (D&C 39:13; 101:74). Latter-day Saints constructed buildings, spun thread, harvested fields, and otherwise manipulated their physical environment in their millenarian project to establish Zion. They materialized their faith. Therefore, objects as quotidian as plows, butter churns, and adobe brick molds evidence the day-to-day experience of Mormonism as much as scriptures, sermons, and sacrament meetings do.²

2. Although many publications have touched on the topic of the materiality of building Zion, the following are especially significant: Thomas Carter, *Building Zion: The Material World of Mormon Settlement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant, *Every Needful Thing: The Everyday Lives of Utah's Pioneers* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1999). On the role of material culture and religion, see the following: Colleen McDannell, "Interpreting Things: Material Culture Studies and American Religion," *Religion* 21 (1991): 371–87; John E. Cort, "Art, Religion, and Material Culture: Some Reflections on Method," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64/3 (Autumn 1996): 613–32; Sally M. Promey and Shira Brisman, "Sensory Cultures: Material and Visual Religion Reconsidered," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America*, ed. Philip Goff (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 177–205; and David Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Anything “lived” transpires in an embodied, material world, and humans leave material evidences of their lived experiences. The evidences of the past that historians traditionally use are material objects such as diaries, letters, newspapers, and government records. These objects contain symbols in the form of glyphs, ligatures, digits, and punctuation marks that scholars “translate” into their language. Non-language-based objects also contain historical information, although such information is rarely encoded as specifically and purposefully as writing. Objects range along a spectrum from purely functional to purely aesthetic and vary in the amount of cultural information they bear.

Like other religions, Mormonism is a solution to a particular set of cultural problems. These problems range from something as simple as needing a tool to scrape the mortar between bricks to something as complex as needing clothing that adequately performs class, taste, and ethnicity. Mormons involved in the dynamic, perpetual process of addressing these problems do so by drawing upon and deploying their interrelated mental and material resources.³ In doing so, Mormons include objects in their construction of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*—a cultural consciousness through which people perceive their world.⁴ Because of this, the artifacts that Mormons leave behind speak to the cultural norms that Latter-day Saints inherited, inhabited, and modified. In this way, historical artifacts can be thought of as fossilized ideologies. They evidence the common sense of the past. And their

3. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). The classic treatise on objects as solutions to cultural problems is George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962). See also William L. Rathje, “In Praise of Archaeology: Le Projet du Garbage,” in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 1999), 316–24.

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Mathieu Hilgers, “Habitus, Freedom, and Reflexivity,” *Theory and Psychology* 19/6 (December 2009): 728–55.

horizons in time and space denote the beginnings and endings of their correlative ideologies.⁵

Cultural orthodoxy

The cultural politics of Mormonism produce their own types of cultural orthodoxies. By “cultural orthodoxies” I mean the dominant cultural norms that are not inherent to Mormon scripture and doctrine but provide the material and behavioral vocabularies through which believers create and enact their religious identities. These orthodoxies often double as tacit benchmarks of doctrinal conformity. They include modes of dress, grooming, and social decorum. They also include culturally sanctioned aesthetics in architecture, literature, music, and the visual arts.⁶

Material culture does much of the work in creating, reinforcing, and resisting these cultural orthodoxies. This is because objects are social actors that, along with human actors, cocreate normativity.⁷ They do more than symbolize some belief system outside of themselves, although they do this too. Objects exude a type of nonsentient agency within a web of human-object relationships to create cultural worlds.⁸ As Bruno Latour writes, “In addition to ‘determining’ and serving as a ‘backdrop for human action,’ things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid,

5. The appearance and disappearance of objects-as-solutions in time and space can be thought of as what Raymond Williams called “structures of feeling.” Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with “New Left Review”* (London: New Left Books, 1979), 156–72; and Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 64–88.

6. Bourdieu, *Theory of Practice*.

7. Arjun Appadurai, “Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Lives of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63.

8. Andrew M. Jones and Nicole Boivin, “The Malice of Inanimate Objects: Material Agency,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 333–51.

and so on.”⁹ Each of these actions is readily apparent in the everyday lives of religious people. In terms of Mormon visual culture, for example, illustrations of scriptural narratives, events from church history, portraits of church leaders, photographs of temples, and embroidered quotes all do cultural work. They prompt, suggest, influence, render possible, and so on.

Depictions of God are among the most powerful type of Mormon material culture. Paintings, prints, and cinematic depictions of God the Father and Jesus Christ are complete inventions.¹⁰ Yet they establish and reinforce shared visual conventions of what the Father and Son look like. Because Mormon images of Jesus rarely, if ever, depict a first-century Jew, they evidence modern concerns far removed from those of ancient Christianity. This popular iconography reveals anxieties over gender roles, racial hegemonies, insider/outsider boundaries, Protestant/Catholic affinities, and highbrow/lowbrow forms of art. This devotional imagery also does theological work. It preaches.

Cultural orthodoxy is bound up in discourses of taste. Religious material culture helps create standards of orthodox, communal taste—a type of cultural capital tied up in discourses of class that permeates all aspects of lived Mormonism.¹¹ Objects are positioned rhetoric, and Latter-day Saints enlist them to create and reify their relationship to other church members and to non-Mormons. Mormons employ objects as placeholders of class and status within families, wards, and stakes. Clothing, automobiles, and domestic furnishings act as social lubricants within Mormon microcultures. They elicit the felt reality of who does

9. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63–86.

10. On Mormon images of Jesus, see Noel A. Carmack, “Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture, 1900–1999,” *BYU Studies* 39/3 (2000): 18–76.

11. On the intersection of taste and class, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).

and who does not belong in certain Mormon worlds, particularly the worlds outside Sunday meetings.¹²

The material culture of scripture

Books of scripture are themselves tactile objects that possess cultural information. The binding, paper, colors, formatting, and typesetting all shape reader reception. From the Book of Mormon's first leather binding at the Grandin Press to the faux leather, gold-stamped editions the church distributes by the millions today, the church has strategically packaged the Book of Mormon for religious consumption. Large heirloom editions have acted as props in the social performance of devotional piety similar to Victorian parlor Bibles. Glimmering gold bindings with ancient characters inscribed upon them have silently advocated the book's facticity as an ancient record to the reader holding it.¹³ George Reynolds's *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (1888) was the first illustrated edition of the Book of Mormon; and since then, multiple editions have contained imagery that shaped the reception of the people, places, and events described in the text.¹⁴ These and the images that have followed act as theological intercalations. They both illustrate and innovate.

12. For a discussion of objects as rhetoric, see Katherine C. Grier, "Material Culture as Rhetoric: 'Animal Artifacts' as a Case Study," in *Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, ed. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 65–104.

13. For an overview of Book of Mormon editions, see Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011).

14. George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1888). See also Noel A. Carmack, "'A Picturesque and Dramatic History': George Reynolds's *Story of the Book of Mormon*," *BYU Studies* 47/2 (2008): 115–41.

The body

The human body is a material vehicle of cultural production and the primary material object through which people experience lived religion.¹⁵ Although bodies arrive on the historical stage through biological reproduction, they soon become a kind of material culture because, like objects, self-reflecting people map meaning onto their bodies and those of others. Mormon bodies perform Mormonness. The body is the primary mechanism through which one lives religion, after all. It exerts its power upon the psychological self, and that self simultaneously exerts its power upon the body. Relatedly, lived religion is seen, felt, tasted, and smelled. And objects are integral to the facilitation of these sensory experiences. Because of this, material culturists are beginning to incorporate sensory experience into their narratives of religious pasts.¹⁶

The social lives of objects

Objects live social lives. Because of this, their uses and meanings change over time. This is most clearly evident in the way people retire objects from their role as usable market commodities and consecrate them as facilitators of nostalgia, heritage, and identity. Believers inject these objects with *numina*. The objects' new role as agents of memory lies in their connection to people, events, and places in the past with which cultural consecrators wish to identify. These emotional and spiritual meanings often eclipse the objects' original uses and meanings. These relics—whether recognized churchwide or only within a specific

15. David Morgan, "Religion and Embodiment in the Study of Material Culture," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, March 2015, <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-32>.

16. See, for example, David Walker, "Transporting Mormonism: Railroads and Religious Sensation in the American West," in *Sensational Religion*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

family—create new pasts that can powerfully structure the lived experience of the present.¹⁷

Religious objects possess semiotic valence, and some possess more than others. This symbolic value is not to be downplayed. But objects do more than symbolize or represent a priori ideas. They actively participate in the social construction of reality. In fact, they destabilize the autonomy of social actors by participating in that process themselves. Objects cocreate the cultural worlds in which phenomena such as prayer, revelation, and priesthood become possible. The boundaries between Mormon and non-Mormon worlds are porous and at times nonexistent, making it necessary to properly contextualize objects both inside and outside Mormon discourse in order to fully understand them. Otherwise, Mormon exceptionalism becomes the default lens of analysis—a lens that provides a skewed and incomplete understanding of the roles and meanings of historical objects.

The following three examples illustrate some of the many possible ways that scholars might think about Mormon material culture. The first two consider the way objects act as media. The third considers the role objects play in creating sacred space. The recently published history and images of the brown seer stone used by Joseph Smith raise questions about the power of earthly objects to generate heavenly revelation.¹⁸ According to contemporary accounts, the stone was not wholly passive in the translation process. It acted on Smith. Its alluring shape and color compelled him to remove it from the ground. And without it, Martin Harris relates, Smith could not translate. The seer stone, the

17. Rachel P. Maines and James J. Glynn, “Numinous Objects,” *Public Historian* 15/1 (Winter 1993): 8–25. An example of this process in Mormon history is in Jennifer Reeder, “Eliza R. Snow and the Prophet’s Gold Watch: Time Keeper as Relic,” *Journal of Mormon History* 31/1 (Spring 2005): 119–41.

18. Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Part 1: Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 1–Alma 35*, facsimile edition, part 1 of vol. 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), xix–xxii; and Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen, and Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Joseph the Seer,” *Ensign*, October 2015, 49–55.

nearby golden plates, and the paper and ink used by the scribes formed a constellation of objects that intersected with Smith's revelatory prowess to cocreate the text of the Book of Mormon. The stone was a rock, an object removed from all human behavior in the ground that, once brought into human contact, acted as a mediator.¹⁹

Relatedly, almost all Latter-day Saints worldwide today experience lived Mormonism through some form of digital media. Computer screens, television screens, and handheld devices mediate between message makers and members. In addition to official church content, nonofficial social media groups, blogs, and chat rooms have proliferated in the past ten years. And on a smaller scale, members experience church membership through phone calls, text messages, websites, and social media. In short, Mormonism has become more mediated than ever. Scholars might look to material culture in media studies to better understand the way digital technologies are changing the lived experience of Mormonism.²⁰ Are these objects facilitating the construction of a new, virtual city of Zion? What is the role these devices play in adapting today's sound-bite culture to Mormon devotion? And how is the messenger also the message?

As mentioned earlier, aesthetic objects are among the many material arbiters of religious experience. While LDS meetinghouses are purposely designed to be unadorned and utilitarian—at least those in recent history—the construction and furnishing of temples is meant to be just the opposite. Temples are highly aestheticized. They are filled with

19. John Durham Peters has recently argued that all objects act as media, including those from the natural world. "Media theory," he writes, "is about environments and infrastructures as much as about messages and content." John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 4.

20. See, for example, Heidi Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religious Practice Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80/1 (2012): 64–93; Lorne Dawson and Douglas Cowan, *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital* (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010).

custom-made furniture, stained glass windows, floral arrangements, and original paintings. These furnishings shape the felt experience of temple ritual. The built environment of temples constructs the feeling of eternal progression by equating the presence of God with ideologies of Western taste.

Yet taste is a moving target. The interior decor of a temple may elicit a sense of the sacred for one generation but have trouble doing so for the next. Because of this, the redecoration of temples remains a perpetual process. A celestial room, for example, is a snapshot in time of the negotiations between producers and consumers regarding taste concomitant with spiritual experience. Seeing the architecture and interior decor of a temple as only a backdrop for temple rituals overlooks the power that built environments exert. And because the creation of sacred space is culturally contingent, scholars must be careful not to essentialize objects in the same way they are careful not to essentialize people.

In conclusion, everyday objects like cell phones and temple interiors are especially valuable evidences of lived religion. Because people take their built environments largely for granted, they rarely record the details of things like the materials, methods, and ideologies of building a fence around a cow pasture or the warp-and-weft construction of a piece of damask fabric used in a mourning dress. Yet objects as simple as fencing and fabric were integral to the lived experience of the Mormon past just as merit badges and tithing envelopes are today. The study of these material documents augments and complements existing narratives while also offering up its own. As Thomas Carter reminds us from seventeen years ago, “Although their message is not explicit, such documents—however mute they first appear—nevertheless have an important story to tell.”²¹

21. Carter, “Studies in Material Culture,” 307.

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Lived Leadership

Kate Holbrook

SEASONED HISTORIANS AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCHOLARS know we must regularly reexamine our theses for accuracy and accountability to change over time. The lived religion approach can also help to keep us honest, because as we begin to imagine coherent trends and grand narratives, it forces us to take into account the messiness of actual experience. Two techniques employed by scholars of lived religion—attention to meaning and attention to practice—can enlarge our understanding of the leadership structure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The term *hierarchy* is both underexamined and frequently employed to describe the church's leadership structure. Wielding that term, people can make broad and useless generalizations, such as “both the Mormon and the Catholic churches are hierarchical.” Such expressions leave the impression that hierarchy is somehow monolithic and easy to comprehend. But the bishops, priests, and deacons of Catholicism are not the bishops, priests, and deacons of Mormonism. A terse description of Latter-day Saint government as “hierarchical” disguises the truth of that government as members experience it. Applying lived religion's emphasis on meaning and practice to personal accounts of encounters with leadership promotes a richer understanding of the religious ways in which Latter-day Saints experience leadership and the ways in which those interactions do and do not relate to a tiered leadership structure. Lay members of the church take turns acting in leadership positions.

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Both leading and being led summon members to religious practices such as forgiveness, repentance, and selflessness, and approaches to leadership often subvert the top-down systems that the term *hierarchy* implies.

There is an irony here that I should make explicit, particularly because that irony is intentional. The lived religion methodology grew out of the popular history approach, which focused on regular people.¹ I am writing here about using lived religion to better understand hierarchy, a term that usually connotes the elite. However, the lived religion approach shows us that the leadership structure of an institution impacts all members, whether they hold a leadership position or are affected by the decisions of those who do.

Moreover, the typically dichotomous categories of leader and laity are relatively fluid in the LDS Church. While the church has developed a structure of carefully defined and organized leadership since early in its history, theoretically all members are regular people, differentiated only through (mostly) temporary leadership assignments. This dynamic should inform our lived understanding of church leadership. Even more than in the recursive theological formation described among the Puritans by David Hall,² a process of mutual lay-leader influence happens in the LDS context, where church members' experience includes both time at the pulpit and time in the pew.³

Latter-day Saints love to recount over the pulpit how a former bishop or high councilor happily accepted a calling to serve in the children's nursery upon his release from the more prominent position. Such stories are meant to teach that members should not value one church

1. David Hall states in his introduction to the method's seminal work that participants in the *Lived Religion in America* book set out to study regular people. David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii–xiii.

2. David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989).

3. These pulpits and pews are found in the Relief Society, Young Women, Sunday School, priesthood, and Primary meeting spaces, as well as in the chapel.

position over another.⁴ But they also demonstrate the fluid subjectivity of laity leadership among church members. Because many members have the opportunity to hold some kind of leadership role at some point in their lives, they each bring that experience of leading to their experience of being led, and vice versa. Therefore, the categories of leadership and laity overlap, and people's identification with one category or the other changes over time. This dynamic forces former leaders to grapple with their own leadership experience and whether they will support their current leaders when doing so may conflict with their own opinions. Leadership experience can also cause former leaders to empathize because they have firsthand knowledge of what it is like to be in the current leader's shoes. Thus, in navigating their respective positions within the church's hierarchy, individuals make a choice with religious ramifications. Will they persist past potential conflicts to empathize with and support a current leader, or will they focus on a difference of opinion that can subtly or extensively alienate them from other church members? Latter-day Saints promise to support their current leaders, and the wages of not doing so can, for some, outweigh the discomfort of setting aside their own opinions.

Furthermore, for Latter-day Saints, leadership is a religious practice, informed by oft-cited scriptures that include an injunction to selflessness and leading through love. "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile" (D&C 121:41–42). Scripture is only relevant to a lived religion analysis if members reference and think about it; these scriptures meet those qualifications.⁵ They make leading

4. However, church members often continue to refer to a man as "Bishop" or (stake) "President" long after he is released as bishop or president.

5. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42 has been quoted at least 84 times in general conferences, with both the verses used either together or separately a total of 135 times. Stephen W. Liddle and Richard C. Galbraith, *LDS Scripture Citation Index*, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://scriptures.byu.edu/#::c12e79>.

into a religious practice of sublimating the self in service of others. They also reinforce familiar New Testament teachings such as “The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (John 13:16).

When leadership does not follow this model, members sometimes feel betrayed. One Primary president prayed to discover whom to invite to be a new teacher and made a recommendation to leaders accordingly. Two weeks later, she sat in sacrament meeting and heard, to her surprise, a different person announced instead. The Primary president thought that if her choice was not approved, a member of the bishopric would return to her for another suggestion. She felt she shared stewardship for the appointment. The mismatch in expectations bid them both to religious practice (repentance, forgiveness) and to find religious meaning in that practice.⁶

Latter-day Saint approaches to leadership through councils further challenge overly simplistic notions about hierarchy. Church government happens through councils, in which Latter-day Saints who hold various leadership positions work together to make decisions and plan action. As Doctrine and Covenants 107:27, 30–31 instructs, those councils seek consensus.⁷ Apostle M. Russell Ballard explained that when the Quorum of Twelve Apostles entertains a topic on which they cannot reach consensus, they set it aside for a time. “Decisions that lack unanimity are always held over for further thought, prayer, and discussion. . . . We seek consensus in all that we do.”⁸ Ardeth Kapp, a longtime women’s leader at both general and local levels, similarly described seeking consensus through the practice of prayer when she worked on a church correlation committee. The committee and the Young Women general

6. Personal communication, May 26, 2015.

7. For example, M. Russell Ballard, who has written and spoken extensively on councils, said, “May God bless you, brothers and sisters, to find inspired consensus and unity as you counsel together in your service one to another. Only in so doing can the Church and our families begin to approach their full potential for doing good among the children of God on earth.” “Strength in Counsel,” *Ensign*, November 1993, 76–78.

8. “LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley Dies at Age 97,” *Deseret News*, January 28, 2008.

presidency disagreed about the state of a project. J. Thomas Fyans, an assistant to the Presiding Bishopric, met with the group and for twenty minutes encouraged them to seek inspiration.⁹ The group prayed after he spoke and reported feeling God's Spirit with them in the meeting. "You just could feel that we were united, one in purpose, one in intent," she recalled. Fyans told them that if any of them felt that spirit dim at any point during the meeting, they were to speak up and share that feeling so that everyone could stop and say another prayer together.¹⁰ Kapp's record shows how a process of decision making became for participants a religious communion with God's Spirit and with one another.

Councils seeking consensus practice prayer. Latter-day Saints also find religious meaning in the council system, as it bids them to listen when they want to speak and to speak when they would rather keep silent. At a 2011 worldwide leadership training, Relief Society general president Julie B. Beck acknowledged it can be hard for leaders to put themselves aside and ask for everyone else's opinion first, before expressing their own. She said if a president makes a decision before listening to and considering the advice of her counselors, she loses something valuable.¹¹ Just because the council system can subvert hierarchy does not mean that it does, however. Some female church members report that when they do speak up, they feel their opinions are discounted in favor of male perspectives.¹² Or sometimes they are consulted only after the fact. Chieko Okazaki recalled that the Relief Society general presidency, of which she was a member, would like to

9. J. Thomas Fyans (1918–2008) was managing director of the Internal Communications Division at the time. He became a General Authority in April 1974. "J. Thomas Fyans," *Deseret News*, May 20, 2008. "Elder J. Thomas Fyans, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve," *Ensign*, May 1974.

10. Ardeth Kapp, interview by Gordon Irving, 1978, Church History Library, 56–57.

11. "Working with the Ward Council," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, February 2011, <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/archive/worldwide-leadership-training/2011/02>.

12. Neylan McBaine, *Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 93–95.

have been advised during the drafting of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” a statement of the church’s doctrine that is regarded as semicanonical.¹³ On the other hand, some bishops worry that many of the women on their councils are too quiet.¹⁴ Richard G. Scott, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said, “I have observed—particularly in international areas, although it often occurs domestically—that sisters do not participate openly in ward council meetings. This is most unfortunate, because they have perspectives and experiences that are of immense value.”¹⁵ In such cases, he instructed male leaders to ask women council members by name for their input until they began to speak up on their own. In their study of women’s participation in non-religious meetings, Christopher Karpowitz and Tali Mendelberg found that women in the United States are more likely to speak up in groups when women are, by a large margin, the majority in a room.¹⁶ This dynamic may put many church councils at a disadvantage since women in ward councils are generally outnumbered by men. But Karpowitz and Mendelberg also found that women are more likely to speak up when the group atmosphere is noncompetitive and tasked to reach consensus, or unanimous rule—norms the church promotes.¹⁷ Thus the nature of church councils can inhibit women’s participation when gender ratios put women in the minority, but it can also foster women’s voices when leaders take seriously the commission to listen to every council member and to achieve consensus.

The techniques of studying lived religion—looking to first-hand reports for source material and attending to practice and to

13. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” can be accessed at <https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation?lang=eng>. Gregory A. Prince, ““There Is Always a Struggle”: An Interview with Chieko N. Okazaki,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45/1 (Spring 2012): 136.

14. McBaine, *Women at Church*, 107–10.

15. Richard G. Scott, “Sisters in Councils,” <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-leadership-training/2011/02/sisters-in-councils?lang=eng>.

16. Christopher F. Karpowitz and Tali Mendelberg, *The Silent Sex: Gender, Deliberation, and Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 51–52.

17. Karpowitz and Mendelberg, *The Silent Sex*, 62–65, 90, 342.

meaning—can move us from a facile conception of church leadership as hierarchy to a broader interpretation that provides a more complete understanding of the religious experience inherent to leading and being led. This approach expands a conception of church leadership as dictums passed down from on high to a more fluid and shifting picture of leaders and laity who inhabit both categories at different times and who sometimes choose to experience leadership (leading or being led) as a religious practice fraught with religious meaning. Because this is lived religion, it is messy. Real-life occurrences run the gamut from the sanctifying spiritual communion Ardeh Kapp experienced (a communion achieved at the cost of compromise) to the Primary president who felt her decision-making authority was usurped. The second experience was less satisfying and acquired religious meaning when the actor chose to forgive and moved closer to God because she forgave, not because her leader rose to the occasion in a noble way. Filling in the gap between casual use of the term *hierarchy* and members' actual experience of the leadership structure results in a more complete and also a more compelling analysis that recognizes the religious meaning and practice that participants bring to the church's leadership structure.

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“Provident Living”: Ethnography, Material Culture, and the Performance of Mormonism in Everyday Life

Danille Elise Christensen

I AM A FOLKLORIST, trained at Indiana University in the ethnographic and comparative study of verbal art, material culture, and customary behavior. Folklorists explore the vernacular practices and cultural forms that establish, maintain, and transform collectivities; that is, we're curious about the patterned things people make, say, and do in everyday life to communicate who they are, what they value, and where they belong. In the 1960s, folklorists began to shift away from cataloging narrative variants and tracing the origins of antiquities and toward the observation of what is termed “folklore in use.” Scholars with backgrounds in rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and anthropology championed more precise attention to the social, temporal, geographic, ideological, and aesthetic contexts relevant to any particular instantiation of “lore.” We hold that expressive culture—distinctively shaped play, talk, worship, and labor—is socially constitutive, rather than merely decorative or utilitarian. In other words, as a folklorist, if you study religion, you study *lived* religion.

I am also a Mormon—granddaughter of nineteenth-century stalwarts who migrated at great personal cost to Utah's Wasatch Front—and this fact has some bearing on my chosen discipline. Mormons “get” the

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social and symbolic importance of expressive practice.¹ In fact, a number of my folklore colleagues come from strong religious backgrounds, whether or not they continue to practice all prescribed forms of religiosity in their personal lives.² This convergence is hardly surprising, since religious boundaries are marked by high-context rituals and reinforced through individual and family practice: performative displays of adherence and devotion are key rhetorical tools of religion.³

Still, I've resisted turning an academic eye on Mormon culture. In part, my reluctance stems from the fact that the folkloristic study of Mormonism—which has centered on cultural exceptionalism in the Intermountain West—has not been the study of people I recognize from my own life as a practicing Latter-day Saint.⁴ As a child growing up in the Midwest, I felt little kinship with those we called “Utah Mormons”—my

1. Tom Mould and Eric Eliason have noted that folklore study has received unusually strong institutional support in Utah's public and private educational institutions, especially by scholars with some personal connection to the LDS Church. See their essay “The State of Mormon Folklore Studies,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 29–51.

2. I remember laughing with fellow IU folklore graduate students about how many Jewish, Catholic, Mormon, and Muslim-identified students were gathered around a seminar table one day.

3. On (everyday) ritual performance among Mormons, see, for instance, Jennifer Huss Basquiat, “Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Vodou, and the LDS Faith in Haiti,” *Dialogue* 37/4 (2004): 1–34; Rachel W. Loser et al., “Perceived Benefits of Religious Rituals in the Latter-day Saint Home,” *Review of Religious Research* 50/3 (2009): 345–62; and Loren D. Marks and David C. Dollahite, “‘Don't Forget Home': The Importance of Sacred Ritual in Families,” in *Understanding Religious Ritual: Theoretical Approaches and Innovations*, ed. John P. Hoffman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 186–203. Personal familiarity with lived religion means that scholars bring a certain amount of cultural baggage to the field site: cultural insiders have an immediate interpretive advantage but may be unable to tease out contextual threads or connect them to broader histories and practices; outsiders may be able to identify a “big picture” but be too quick to interpret what they see in terms of their own personal experience elsewhere.

4. Nearly all the articles collected in Eric Eliason and Tom Mould's recent *Latter-day Lore* are written by academically trained folklorists, anthropologists, or cultural geographers who themselves live and teach in the West, primarily in Utah (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013); see also Jill Terry Rudy, “Mormon Folklore Studies,” in *Folklore in Utah: A History and Guide to Resources*, ed. David Stanley (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004), 142–52.

siblings and I gently mocked the speech cadences that young missionaries picked up during their training in Provo, rolled our eyes at hymns that included phrases like “firm as the mountains around us,” wondered at the elaborate prom proposals cooked up by relatives out West. Later, I came to love the environmental diversity of the region and appreciate local idiosyncrasies, learned in my late twenties to prune fruit trees at my in-laws’ orchards near American Fork Canyon. But Utah—indeed, the whole contiguous Mormon Corridor—has always felt foreign to me. Not just the dry cool of summer nights and the absurdity of dusty corrals abutting outsized French Provincial or Italianate homes, but also the sense of assumption and assuredness that comes with cultural dominance. As something of an anomaly in my central Ohio high school, I chose to concentrate more on finding common ground than on emphasizing difference. And in more recent years I have also felt keenly my own intersectionality as a (divorced, childless) woman, a Midwesterner, a university professor, a person whose politics are left of center: being LDS is an important part of my identity, but not the only one. Even though my dissertation centered on the rhetorical framings made possible by the scrapbook as a material and social form—and thus included some fieldwork in Utah Valley, a mecca for the modern scrapbook industry—the majority of my graduate work was not Mormon-centric.

Latter-day Saints keep cropping up in my work, though. Sometimes it’s because an LDS example can illustrate the benefits of deeply engaged fieldwork. Evaluated against more charismatic performance styles, for instance, Mormon testimony meetings (especially in the United States) may come off as dull, impotent, boring—or even as the enactment of disempowerment.⁵ Yet expressive forms similar in style, structure, or even name may stem from divergent belief systems or be mobilized to different ends; thus similar forms may *mean* differently depending

5. See Elaine J. Lawless, “‘I Know If I Don’t Bear My Testimony I’ll Lose It’: Why Mormon Women Bother to Speak at All,” *Kentucky Folklore Record* 30/3–4 (1984): 79–96.

on context of use.⁶ Though not always artistically arresting, simple or unrehearsed speech has been valued historically among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—especially those with New England roots—as a marker both of humility and of authentic spiritual experience; comparative work on genre and language ideologies (including norms of interpretation and “ground rules for performing”) can thus shed light on the political efficacy of even “plain” language.⁷ Just as biologists cannot assume that all things called “daisies” or “red-fish” are morphologically identical, so too students of culture should be on the lookout for emic distinctions in interpretation and use, especially when investigating everyday practices that *seem* familiar enough in terms of their own etic categories.

As I’ve worked to understand the ways and reasons that people shape words, actions, and things in the course of daily life, I’ve also been drawn to moments when apparently commonplace activities within LDS practice and discourse—sharing personal narratives, making scrapbooks, praising the homegrown and the handcrafted—bubble up in American popular culture more generally. If I have engaged with Mormon studies, then, it has been to consider “Mormonism [as a way to] comprehend things non-Mormon.”⁸ In what follows, I ask

6. Roger D. Abrahams, “Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore* 81/320 (1968): 143–58; and Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 13.

7. Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 60; and Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1977, 1984), 28–30. For more on LDS language ideologies and the performance of testimony, see Danille Elise Christensen, “I Bear Witness . . . : Truth, the Person, and the Word in Latter-day Saint Discursive Practice,” unpublished manuscript, 2004; compare Tom Mould, *Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011).

8. J. Spencer Fluhman, “Friendship: An Editor’s Introduction,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 6.

how students of Mormon folklore might productively build on existing historical and folkloristic data from the Intermountain West in order to connect practices among Latter-day Saints to broader social, political, and cultural discussions.⁹ I encourage increased attention to those practices that seem transparently religious but are in fact more complicated mixes of cultures, places, choices, and histories. At the same time, I hope for more research investigating the nuances of LDS theology that give vernacular practice a Mormon twist, especially with regard to beliefs concerning materiality and materialism.

Beyond ritual: work and worship

Though ritual is perhaps the most obvious aspect of religion in action, I hope that attention to lived religion within Mormonisms encompasses more than ritual—or even materialization of ideology via iconology.¹⁰ What's interesting to me about Mormon expressive practice is that much of the ideological, metaphysical, or “religious” work gets done in ways that might seem simply practical, their sacred meanings not

9. For instance, folklorists can draw on their field's strong tradition of comparative study in order to discover how official or regional Mormon principles, concepts, and activities are selected as meaningful or discarded as peripheral in new or different contexts. Comparative thoughts about Pioneer Day celebrations outside Utah point in this direction; see Eric A. Eliason, “Beyond Deseret: An Introduction to Mormon Folklore in an International Context,” *Latter-day Lore*, 405–14. Examples of studies that contribute to broader discourses within the field of cultural geography include Samuel A. Smith, “The Cities of Zion? Mormon and Non-Mormon Town Plans in the U.S. Mountain West, 1847–1930,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 50 (October 2015): 1–13; and P. Starrs, “Meetinghouses in the Mormon Mind: Ideology, Architecture, and Turbulent Streams of an Expanding Church,” *Geographical Review* 99/3 (2009): 323–55.

10. Folklorists have produced a rich body of work about Mormon symbols inscribed on everyday items, including quilts, woven rugs and throws, furniture, buildings, signage, and tombstones. For overviews see Susan Oman and Richard Oman, “Mormon Iconography,” in *Utah Folk Art: A Catalog of Material Culture*, ed. Hal Cannon (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 110–25; Eliason and Mould, *Latter-day Lore*; and Mould and Eliason, “State of Mormon Folklore Studies.”

transparent to insiders or outsiders because they are so deeply embedded in workaday life.

Following Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's thoughts on what she referred to as "the significance of trivia," and acknowledging a disciplinary predilection to seek out the apparently outmoded or inconsequential, I believe that folklorists can add to Mormon studies by offering thoughts on the aesthetics and values that shape routine behaviors among Latter-day Saints, including housework, kinwork (e.g., family reunions and other forms of network management), care work, agricultural work, and other kinds of manual labor.¹¹ Such a focus could begin to tease out how much of LDS talk about the value of (unpaid) labor is distinctively Mormon in terms of doctrinal underpinnings and how much of rhetoric and practice reflects the adoption or adaptation of other discourses.¹²

The need for this kind of research hit home in late July 2013 as journalist Emily Matchar sat warily across the table from comedian-pundit Stephen Colbert while he quizzed her before a live studio audience. The show was *The Colbert Report*, the book in question *Homeward Bound*. Matchar described her work as an exploration of "the new domesticity"

11. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "The Significance of Trivia," *Journal of Mormon History* 19/1 (1993): 52–66. Useful sources on these topics include Judith Levin, "Why Folklorists Should Study Housework," in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, ed. Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 285–96; and Michael Owen Jones, *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1993). Helpful historical contextualizations of gendered domestic labor include Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Micaela di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12/3 (1987): 440–53; Emily K. Abel, *Hearts of Wisdom: American Women Caring for Kin, 1850–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Madonna Harrington Meyer, ed., *Care Work: Gender, Labor, and the Welfare State* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Amy Mattson Lauters, *More Than a Farmer's Wife: Voices of American Farm Women, 1910–1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

12. For example, James Burkhart Gilbert, *Work without Salvation: America's Intellectuals and Industrial Alienation, 1880–1910* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship: The Economic Order of the Shakers* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1974).

a broad social trend in which women and men were “re-embracing lost domestic arts and practices”—knitting, canning, home poultry production, and other DIY (do-it-yourself) efforts. Her book explains this movement as a response to a variety of contemporary ills, including exploitive workplaces, stressed pocketbooks, fears about food safety and environmental collapse, and the disconnect between mass production and aesthetic pleasure. But when Colbert asks about the politics of these practices (“is this a hippy-dippy, like crunchy-granola commune, love-baby [thing]?”), Matchar responds by sketching a contrast. Certainly there are the “typical lefty liberal *Portlandia* caricatures who are pickling everything,” she says; but some participants are “very conservative—you have, you know, very religious, you know, Mormon housewives, in Provo, Utah, who are selling scarves on Etsy, so it really crosses a lot of these lines.”¹³

As I read Matchar’s book, I realized that this example, thrown out in the course of an on-air conversation, was not randomly chosen: Mormons generally occupy a singular space on the “extreme right” when they’re mentioned in the volume, a convenient way to illustrate various divides. Her chapter “Strange Bedfellows,” for instance, clusters connotations about belief, gender, aesthetics, and class when it references the apparently odd circumstance of “Mormon stay-at-home-mom bloggers sharing recipes with atheist hipster foodies.” Positioning Mormonism as a conservative monolith, Matchar slips easily among dogma, culture, place, and history. “Mormons and New Domesticity go together like (homemade) bread and butter,” she observes. In “cultures where mothers are expected to stay at home no matter what” (and assuming that such women are “already knitting and making soap”), she concludes that online sales through sites like Etsy must be both natural and nonthreatening. Briefly explaining why DIY production might appeal to Mormons, she notes that motherhood is a calling and that “baking bread and sewing curtains was a simple matter of necessity” for western forebears, then suggests that a “major

13. *The Colbert Report*, July 31, 2013, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/ngxjwr/the-colbert-report-emily-matchar>; and Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

culture of gardening, home canning, and from-scratch cooking” has been fostered by LDS Church recommendations regarding emergency food storage. (In fact, meals produced by American Latter-day Saints from stored emergency food—unless they use wheat—are likely to include quite a lot of freeze-dried or otherwise processed foodstuffs, such as commercially canned soup.)¹⁴

Like Matchar, I am fascinated by the broad range of political positions that people hold within the world of DIY, and, indeed, with regard to the handmade and the handcrafted in particular. But she errs in painting Mormon women with a broad stroke and in not teasing out what relationship religion actually has to lived experience. For instance, a broader emphasis on entrepreneurship within the state of Utah stems from a historical, rather than strictly doctrinal, emphasis on home production; efforts to keep Territorial- and Depression-era Utah economically self-sufficient surely contribute to the fact that today’s Utah is also the land of multilevel marketing, cottage industry, and alternative economies. Furthermore, Mormon women have been leveraging income from home for a long time: in 1936, a year before the church-sponsored Mormon Handicraft consignment shop opened, author Sylvia R. Grant wrote to the *Relief Society Magazine* about “work done by women who live within a two mile radius of my door.” She remarked on the satisfactions of generating a cash income, noting that “there are dozens of different ways to earn money for either necessities or extras and it is considered smart to be able to do so.” The projects of her Utah neighbors included producing cakes, chicken pies and rolls, canapés, Thanksgiving dinners, and pressure-canned vegetables (using children to distribute these goods locally); starting in-home tea rooms or gift shops; crafting artificial flowers for department stores; knitting dresses; hemstitching; advertising by telephone for coal, facials, or magazine subscriptions;

14. One short vignette of an LDS blogger in *Homeward Bound* is a bit more nuanced; “Amy” is described both as a “hipster” concerned with the aesthetics and social impact of food and craft and as a “faithful Mormon stay-at-home mom”—however, Matchar uses words like *but* and *remarkably* to register surprise at such a convergence. Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 213–14, 222–24.

addressing envelopes; “kodak finishing” in basement darkrooms; refinishing or remaking furniture; beginning “nursery school” or tutoring programs; and finally, if all else failed, convalescent or child care.¹⁵

Historical documents, and the historians who locate and explicate them, have thus contributed much to our understandings of what people wore, ate, sang, made, and wrote in Utah’s past, and indeed how those everyday practices helped to forge “community and commitment” among new Mormon settlers in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ But ethnographic inquiry—long-term observation, qualitative engagement with participants—can help to make subtle patterns and theological influences clearer by attending to the ways people talk about these practices in the present *and* by reading the structure and style of behaviors themselves as a way to identify insights that go beyond verbalized discourse. How have shifts in official pronouncements about wage work for women, for instance, corresponded to the actual production and exchange practices of Latter-day Saints?¹⁷ What does “stay-at-home mom” mean in the context of powerful community volunteering and successful entrepreneurship? How might an emphasis on artistic production mask the economic salience of the homemade and the handcrafted? In addition, I welcome more ethnographic work that focuses on the actual modes and rhythms of labor—paid and unpaid—among Latter-day Saints around the world, studies that illuminate work and worship in relation to gender, class, national origin, and other factors.

15. Sylvia R. Grant, “Pin Money or Better,” *Relief Society Magazine* 23/9 (September 1936): 572–73. Women’s co-ops had existed in Utah since the nineteenth century; see Carol L. Clark, “Mormon Handicraft,” *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:936–37.

16. See, for example, Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant, eds., *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah’s Mormon Pioneers* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1999).

17. Vella Neil Evans, “Mormon Women and the Right to Wage Work,” *Dialogue* 23/4 (1990): 45–61.

Provident living: material displays

Then, too, I hope for increased examination of the faith's orientation toward the material world more generally. In an 1854 essay based on coverage in the *Edinburgh Review*, one commentator in a Maine newspaper noted (with disgust) the “materialism” of Mormonism, a problem that he saw as going beyond even the heresy of a corporeal God.¹⁸ Indeed, founder Joseph Smith taught that “all spirit is [refined] matter,” a formulation that challenges traditional Western divisions and that has been repeated more recently by LDS apostle Dieter Uchtdorf, who in October 2011 characterized “the temporal and the spiritual” as inseparable sides of a coin.¹⁹ How and when has the idea that matter *matters* influenced daily life choices among adherents to Smith's teachings? Why, for instance, has a supposed reverence for God's creations—an ethic “prevalent virtually in every corner of Latter-day Saint revelations and scriptures”—not translated into more active environmental stewardship discourse and practice, even within institutions like Young Women Camp, websites devoted to “provident living,” and the long-standing tradition of family gardening?²⁰

In a related vein, how and when does a materialist perspective shift into materialism in the contemporary sense and into conspicuous consumption and display? I suspect that proselytizing efforts and caricaturization in the popular press during the nineteenth century fomented a

18. The writer contended that Mormon emphasis on “political or business harangues,” “marches and waltzes,” the corporeality and “indefinite development” of God, and the expansion of Mormon families (in number and space) left no room for “prayer, self-examination, or repentance,” no “aspirations after communion with God, spirituality of mind, or purification of the affections.” See Edward L. Elwell, ed., “Tenets of Mormonism,” in *Portland [ME] Transcript*, 3 June 1854.

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:7; 2 Nephi 9:39; and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord's Way,” *Ensign*, November 2011.

20. George B. Handley, “The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief,” *BYU Studies* 40/2 (2001): 205. Curiously, until recently the LDS Church had not taken a strong official position on environmental sustainability. See “Environmental Stewardship and Conservation,” <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/environmental-stewardship-conservation> (accessed November 7, 2013).

persistent double consciousness (“how am I being perceived?”) that has lasted beyond the Americanization period of the LDS Church’s history.²¹ For instance, in 1946 the sense of being observed with (potentially hostile) curiosity spurred *Salt Lake Tribune* garden editor Hazel Moyle to advocate widespread (and semiotically loaded) flower gardening. A year before the Pioneer Centennial, she noted that because “the lime-light of the world” would be upon Utah during the celebratory Covered Wagon Days in 1947, Utahns should spiff up “shabby or unadorned” homes and yards with hollyhocks, daisies, phlox, and iris, giving special attention to flowers that would bloom midsummer, during the height of the touristic gaze. Such efforts would stand as proof of industry and conciliation: they would serenely “prove that we have truly made the desert blossom as the rose” and offer a “friendly message of peace and beauty” to “the stranger within our gates.”²² Surely the elaborate gardens at Temple Square, the demonstrations of self-sufficiency at Welfare Square, the outpouring of volunteer labor during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, and the growth of visually impressive gated communities reflect some of these same motivations, concerns, and aesthetics. I also wonder at the prevalence of plastic surgery, cosmetic enhancement, and diet supplements along the Mormon Corridor compared to other regions of the world in which Mormon identity is not necessarily expected to be on display.²³

21. See Lawrence Foster’s thoughts on the late but thorough adoption of Victorian domestic ideals among Mormons at the end of the nineteenth century (“From Frontier Activism to Neo-Victorian Domesticity: Mormon Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Mormon History* 6 [January 1, 1979]: 3–21) and Ethan R. Yorgason’s examination of the Americanization of the Mormon West between 1880 and 1920 (*Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003]).

22. Hazel D. Moyle, “Garden Making for Centennial Days,” *Relief Society Magazine*, August 1946, 517–21.

23. Marjorie Cortez, “Is Salt Lake Vainest City? Maybe We’re Just Insecure,” *DeseretNews.com*, December 18, 2007. Another recent article suggested that cosmetic surgery among Mormon women may also be a response to uneven sex ratios in local populations; Jon Birger, “What Two Religions Tell Us about the Modern Dating Crisis,” *Time*, August 24, 2015.

Finally, in the context of Joseph Smith's stance that "all spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure" (D&C 131:7), what does *secularization* mean? Secular and sacred could be considered in terms of the same fractal relationship that linguist Susan Gal has applied to notions of public/private—as a relative rather than absolute dichotomy.²⁴ How are distinctions among sacred and secular calibrated in LDS discourse, and how does this compare to the actual marking of sacred and secular space in practice? One might think, for instance, of the ways homes, meetinghouses, boweries, chapels, and temples are designed and treated differently (or not) and why, in terms of form, decoration, maintenance, and use.

Looking outward: Mormon practice as illustrative

Though my own work has necessarily engaged existing scholarship that's grounded in LDS population centers, my primary interest continues to be the ways that Latter-day Saint religious discourse and action articulate with broader cultural ideas or approaches to the world. For instance, though my current book project—a cultural history of home canning in the United States—grew out of my own family's experience, it is not a book about Mormon canning; instead, I explore the ways that ideas about deception, science, manual labor, scarcity, nation, beauty, gender, and change are filtered through the rhetoric surrounding this one lived practice shared by many communities, past and present.²⁵

LDS topics and examples add more than local color or variety to the manuscript, however. They stimulate new questions about, for instance, the relationship of canning to socioeconomic class in the twentieth century. Cookbooks, magazines, records of fairs and bazaars, and even marketing research that was conducted in the late 1910s demonstrate how fancy cooked preserves have been linked to social status throughout the United States: homemade jams and (especially) jellies were

24. Susan Gal, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13/1 (2002): 77–95.

25. Danille Elise Christensen, *Freedom from Want: Home Canning in the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming).

markers of skill, artistry, and hospitality, even as urban populations and the rising middle class took readily to commercially canned staples at the turn of the nineteenth century. Home canning in quantity, however, became associated with rural spaces and material necessity, a perception that persists to this day.²⁶ But the diaries of Isabella “Belle” Wilson Hales (1889–1963)—written in central urban Utah between 1941 and 1962—and the letters of Lillie Liston Baker (1884–1960)—penned from southern rural Utah in the 1950s—document instances in which high-volume canning is positively linked to high social status, in part because of the regional and religious contexts in which Hales and Baker lived. Hales was a leader of numerous women’s organizations in Provo, Utah, and the wife of Brigham Young University dean Wayne B. Hales; she canned extensively, keeping an especially thorough record of her home production in the 1940s.²⁷ Baker, a mother to seven and manager of several hired hands, hosted nearly every sacred and secular visitor that came to Boulder, Utah, at mid-century, where her husband Claude was a leading figure in the LDS Church and, among other duties, distributed grazing permits, hauled the mail from Escalante by mule, and established irrigation and road projects. Literally until the end of Lillie Baker’s life, food production and preservation organized both her attention and her social life; her letters are filled with references to growing, putting up, and distributing garden produce.²⁸

It’s fascinating to tease out the many cultural strands that are foregrounded as these women and those around them talk about strategies

26. Danille Elise Christensen, “Simply Necessity? Agency and Aesthetics in Southern Home Canning,” *Southern Cultures* 21/1 (2015): 15–42.

27. MSS 11, Women’s Manuscript Collections, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. In his own published documents, Wayne Hales highlights the food preservation prowess of both Belle and his second wife, Vivian Parkinson, a domestic science teacher whom he married in 1965 after Belle’s death from cancer; Parkinson was known even in advanced age to forage for chokecherries in order to make jelly. Wayne B. Hales, *My Life Story*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

28. MSS 1682, The Claude Vincent and Lillie Liston Baker Collection, 20th Century Western and Mormon Americana, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

for home provisioning. I am left to wonder: what role does scripture and doctrine play in this everyday talk about self-reliance and home production, and in what sense is LDS home food production simply a sustained engagement with a broader American agrarianism or a capitalist ethic founded on the husbanding of excess resources?

Going forward: community, change, and the relevance of folklore studies

As they draw on the range of theories and methods that have emerged from dynamic disciplinary engagements with philology, literary studies, anthropology, and art history—e.g., comparative textual analysis, ethnographic attention to contexts, rhetorical attention to form—folklorists have much to contribute to the field of Mormon studies, and to the study of lived religion more generally. Indeed, folklore studies is an area in which scholars and laypeople across political continuums can find their own common ground. The study of vernacular culture appeals to models of community advanced by both the political left and the political right: people of divergent political persuasions can often agree that small groups are the ideal social *form*, and face-to-face interaction the ideal *means*, for achieving positive social goals.

More conservative assessments tend to ground authentic community in relationships based on birth and place, where *small* means “homogeneous” and society is modeled after a biological family responsible for socializing its children, transmitting consistent social norms, and minimizing difference. This model of community as family (or neighborhood) values face-to-face contact that allows for “commutative justice”: one-on-one equity effected through the regulation of contractual obligations. Close contact allows for teaching, evaluation of just deserts, and reinforcement of desired behaviors by means of everyday cultural forms. For example, James Wind writes that churches and synagogues are able to “fill and then tap into deep imaginative reservoirs”

(which inspire future social engagement) by means of “practices, habits, attitudes, [and] rituals.”²⁹

Calls for community from further left see smallness less as a method for social regulation than as a means for cultural enrichment. Relationships in this version of community cross boundaries of physical proximity—they may be based on ethnicity, occupation, or religion, for example—and smallness is considered a way of consolidating influence in the context of a pluralistic society. Here the focus is on intensifying a group’s sense of difference—with the ultimate aim of encouraging understanding and interdependence, but not necessarily uniformity. This model is key in the applied work of folklorists who attempt to promote “populist approaches to social difference and an anti-elitist concern with the lives and the well-being of ordinary individuals”;³⁰ it is also a model germane to the LDS Church as a diasporic, proselytizing, and globalizing lay institution. Face-to-face contact in these circumstances can be envisioned as a way to foster “imaginative justice”—the ability to espouse the interests of the Other as one works to understand the circumstances and envision the claims of that other.³¹ Susan Yohn notes that nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries often began their work with the intention of assimilating “‘foreign’ or ‘exceptional’ populations” but concluded it as “vocal advocates” of those with whom they worked and lived.³²

29. James P. Wind, “Congregations and Leaders: Realities about America’s Primary Voluntary Religious Communities,” in *The Ethics of Giving and Receiving: Am I My Foolish Brother’s Keeper?*, ed. William F. May and A. Lewis Soens Jr. (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2000), 125–26. In the same volume, see also Charles E. Curran, “The Nature of Philanthropy: A Response to Kass,” 38; Leon R. Kass, “Am I My Foolish Brother’s Keeper? Justice, Compassion, and the Mission of Philanthropy”; and Kass, “A Response to Curran, Lovin, and Sverdlik.”

30. Jessica M. Payne, “The Politicization of Culture in Applied Folklore,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 35/3 (1998): 252.

31. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D. B. Robertson (New York: Meridian Books, 1967).

32. Susan M. Yohn, “What Time, Money, and a ‘Calling’ Produced: A Comment on Women, Volunteering, and the Process of Social Reform,” in May and Soens Jr., *Ethics of Giving and Receiving*, 142, 146.

Both models of community have their critics; what is important here is that they suggest why folklorists have successfully wooed supporters from all points on the political spectrum—and perhaps why the study (and celebration) of vernacular expressive culture has been so popular among Mormons as well. Folklorists' public initiatives often promote unity in diversity; they combine a more conservative model of community as cohesive and mutually understandable with a more radical view of communities as multiple and potentially linked sites of social power. Mormons on the left can embrace folklore as populist, pluralist, and applied; those on the political right appreciate the recognition of local needs, interests, expertise, and particular histories.

As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to negotiate the efficacy of centralized management structures and to recognize the diversity of its members both within and without the United States—and to honor the complexity of individual members' identities, as in the "I'm a Mormon" campaign—folklorists and other scholars of living cultures can do much to (1) highlight the consequences and contradictions of everyday religious practice and community boundary marking; (2) work to address essentialisms in the discourse of insiders and outsiders; and (3) demonstrate how Mormon lives, in all their varieties, aid in thoughtful examination of the broader issues of the day.

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Essays

Joseph Smith's First Vision: New Methods for the Analysis of Experience-Related Texts

Ann Taves and Steven C. Harper

Editors' note: The following exchange between Ann Taves and Steven C. Harper took place at the 2014 American Academy of Religion conference in San Diego, California. It was years in the making. At the 2013 Mormon History Association conference in Layton, Utah, Harper commented on Taves's paper, "Joseph Smith and the Materialization of the Golden Plates." That fascinating panel interaction spurred a productive subsequent personal correspondence related to their shared interest in religious experience and Joseph Smith's first vision. They eventually opted for a formal dialogue script to recount what they had learned in their scholarly exchange. We reproduce the complete dialogue here, with minor editing to suit a print format and accompanying appendixes related to primary source material, both as a case of best practices in lively, respectful, and muscular scholarly engagement and also as an example of the fruitful tension produced by marked differences in methodological approaches and assumptions in the academic study of Mormonism.

Harper: Looking back in 1832, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, recounted that his first audible prayer, uttered over a decade earlier

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in the woods near his parents' home in western New York State, resulted in a vision of one or two heavenly beings. Latter-day Saints, who canonized his 1839 account of this event in 1880, refer to the event as the first vision and regard it as the founding story of Mormonism.

Smith remembered this event often, narrated it more frequently than once thought, and recorded versions of it at least four times. The historical record also includes several secondary accounts written by contemporaries who heard Smith relate the event. The primary and secondary evidence, paradoxically, are both little known and much contested, in large part because both insiders and outsiders to the tradition tend to read the event through the lens of the canonized 1839 version.

Taves: Our presentation today is going to take the form of a dialogue. We will begin by introducing some terms and our sources, then launch into two discussions—the first a discussion of our assumptions and the way we view Smith's framing of his accounts, and the second a discussion structured around a chart that analyzes the different versions in relation to each other.

The method allows us to consider each version in relation to whatever Smith experienced as a youth (the past), its historical context (its historical present), and the other versions (the relationship between the accounts). We think this disciplined method allows historians who stand inside or outside the tradition to clearly identify points of agreement and difference and provides historians and sociologists with additional tools for analyzing the emergence of new social movements.

Terminology and sources

Harper: We will analyze five of the first vision experience accounts—three primary accounts from Joseph Smith and two secondary accounts from people who heard him tell about his experience in the 1830s. We know there are other (later) accounts, but we limited our analysis to those that occurred in the 1830s.

Taves: To help orient the reader to both the sources and the different kinds of analysis we will be doing, we will begin by introducing some terminology that we use throughout the discussion.¹

1. We are treating an experience as a kind of event, and we will be assuming that each time an experience is recounted we have a new event. Each account of the first vision is, thus, an “experience event.” We are going to be working with five experience events, key passages of which appear in appendix 1.
2. Each experience event has a new event context and a new reason for recounting the event. The context may involve an oral recounting or a textual recounting. In either case, the account of the event is embedded in a larger frame. Drawing on sociological research on the role of framing in the emergence of social movements, we refer to this as a “reframing event.”² Although a reframing event may be a simple recounting of the experience event in another time or place, it often involves linking a series of events into a larger narrative (e.g., a story, an autobiography, or an origin account). All the extant accounts of the first vision frame it as one event in a series. The frame situates the first vision event in a narrative and implicitly or explicitly

1. The terminology and methods we are using here were developed for and are elaborated in Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Unusual Experiences and the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (forthcoming from Princeton University Press).

2. It might be more accurate to call it a reframing event rather than a framing event since a frame in frame analysis is analogous to an appraisal and thus is constitutive of the event. On frame analysis, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974); for discussion of frame analysis in relation to the emergence of social movements, see David A. Snow, “Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (New York: Blackwell, 2007); and Hank Johnston, “Comparative Frame Analysis,” in *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*, ed. Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

offers a reason for recounting it. Of the five accounts, three are records of Smith orally recounting the event either to Latter-day Saints (1833a, 1835c) or to a visiting prophet (1835js), and two were recounted in histories of the new church (1832js, 1839js).

3. Sometimes a group appropriates an event—often a reframed event—as constitutive of its identity as a group. We refer to this as an “identity event.” The canonization of the 1839 version of the first vision was an identity event.³
4. Finally, we can analyze experience event narratives by breaking them down into sub-events, which allows us to make more refined comparisons.

Harper: Our initial plan was to focus primarily at the event and sub-event levels, but as we got into our dialogue, we realized that to understand each other’s point of view we needed to start by discussing the assumptions we were bringing to our analysis, which then turned into a discussion of how the experience events were framed. So we will begin with a discussion of our assumptions and our analysis and interpretation of the framing of the sources, then turn to what we can learn from comparing the sub-events that make up the event narratives. In both sections, we will go back and forth, discussing both our analysis of the sources and our interpretation of what we see, highlighting points of agreement and disagreement. Finally, we sum up what we have learned.

Discussion 1: Assumptions and framing

Taves: How did Joseph Smith frame his experience?

3. In terms of identity, I am drawing on work on social identity in social psychology. See Tom Postmes and Nyla R. Branscombe, eds., *Rediscovering Social Identity: Key Readings* (New York: Psychology Press, 2010); and in relation to the emergence of new social formations, see S. Alexander Haslam et al., “The Collective Origins of Valued Originality: A Social Identity Approach to Creativity,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 17/4 (2013): 384–401.

Harper: When Joseph Smith told his story, his first vision was prologue to everything else, the seminal event of his prophetic career, the first revelatory event that framed all subsequent ones. He always led with it, whether in his 1832 or 1839 autobiographies or in his 1835 story about the circumstances that produced the Book of Mormon. His story began there.

Taves: I agree that the first vision is the first significant event in Smith's recounting of events leading to the formation of the church. But I don't think you can say he presents the first vision in 1832 as "the seminal event of his prophetic career," since this account does not depict him as a prophet.

Harper: To what extent can the framing of the event provide evidence for the accuracy or "originality" of memories?

Taves: In looking at these sources, I have been assuming from the outset that the 1832 version (and the 1830 allusion in what is now D&C 20:5) are as close to the original experience as we can get, assuming there was an original experience. This is the interpretation advanced by Dan Vogel and shared by Richard Bushman.⁴ Bushman's views of Smith's memory are more nuanced than Vogel's, but they share the view that of all Smith's first vision accounts, the 1832 document most accurately describes what he experienced as a teen. I am not assuming that there was an original experience, but will argue (further on) that there most

4. See Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2004), xv; and Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 35–41. In a 2009 interview, Bushman said, speaking of Joseph Smith, "He initially thought, I believe, of the First Vision as a personal experience. It was his encounter with God that would reassure him of the favor of Heavenly Father. And only later did he come to see it as his call as a Prophet. The call of a prophet is a form of religious experience in Moses and Isaiah and all sorts of prophets. And gradually Joseph saw that this was the founding moment of his life as the restorer of the Gospel. But it took time for it to emerge in its full significance." Richard L. Bushman, interview by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, 2009, transcript in possession of Steven C. Harper.

likely was one and that its basic shape is reflected in the elements (the sub-events) that remain stable between accounts. My analysis, however, does not depend on that being the case.

Harper: I began with a different set of assumptions based, in part, on memory studies. Unlike Fawn Brodie, who viewed the first vision as the “elaboration of some half-remembered dream,” but like Vogel and Bushman, I assume that Joseph Smith had an experience in the woods of Western New York about 1820 that he understood as a vision of God.⁵

But I go my own way in asserting that there is no way to prove, nor reason to assume, that Smith’s memories decrease in accuracy or increase in distortion in proportion to their historical distance from the experience itself.

Joseph Smith’s narrative accounts of his first vision represent a convoluted mix of ways in which he consciously experienced the vision as it occurred and also as he reexperienced and interpreted it over time. So a close reading of the historical record can reveal insights into Smith’s subjective experience of the original event as well as his ongoing experiences of it as manifest in subsequent memories (experience events), revealing some of the ways he integrated his past and ever-changing present in a continuous effort to make sense of both (framing events).⁶

5. In her 1945 biography of Joseph Smith, Fawn Brodie characterized his 1839 narrative as the “elaboration of some half-remembered dream stimulated by the early revival excitement and reinforced by the rich folklore of visions circulating in his neighborhood.” Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 24–25.

6. Smith’s accounts are evidence of what Richard Bushman called “the rearrangement of memory,” or of what might be quite accurately called, simply, *remembering*. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 69. See Daniel L. Schacter and Elaine Scarry, eds., *Memory, Brain, and Belief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 19. In terms of memory studies, “the idea that there is a one-to-one correspondence between a bit of information stored away somewhere in our brain and the conscious experience of a memory that results from activating this bit of information is so intuitively compelling that it seems almost nonsensical to question it.” But memory scholars have questioned it and discovered that a memory is less a stored artifact than a present production. Daniel Schacter, a leading psychologist of memory, wrote that “just as visual

Rather than assuming that any one of Smith's accounts describes his original experience better than any other, I posit a pair of premises, one of which belongs to you. First, "variability does not have to be viewed as revealing mere methodological problems of how to establish the facticity of any person's account. It can become a resource for revealing the relationship between what people remember and the ideological dilemmas of their past and present."⁷ And as you wrote in *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, analyzing "the composition of multiple narratives of an experience from different points of view is an excellent way to examine how interpretations of an experience develop over time."⁸

I don't think any amount of close reading can verify that one of Smith's accounts is more authentic or accurate than the others. There is no conclusive evidence either generally or in this case that earlier experience accounts are more accurate than later accounts. Memory studies show that, generally speaking, autobiographical memories like these are not accurate *or* distorted. They are both.⁹ They are not objective *or* subjective. They are both.¹⁰ Historians hope and assume that earlier accounts are more accurate. What is our evidence? Memory studies

perception of the three-dimensional world depends on combining information from the two eyes, perception in time—remembering—depends on combining information from the present and the past." Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 28, 71. "Merely to remember something is meaningless," wrote scholar Roger Shattuck, "unless the remembered image is combined with a moment in the present affording a view of the same object or objects." Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 46–47.

7. David Middleton and Derek Edwards, eds., *Collective Remembering* (London: Sage, 1990), 3.

8. Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 71.

9. C. R. Barclay, for instance, observed that people he studied "retained the general meaning of their experiences, even though they were wrong about many particulars." "Schematization of Autobiographical Memory," in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. D. C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 97.

10. Edmund Blair Bolles, *Remembering and Forgetting: An Inquiry into the Nature of Memory* (New York: Walker, 1988), 58, 64–65.

make the notion of accuracy tenuous. What does one mean by *accurate*, and how can it be proved rather than simply assumed?

I don't mean to imply that there is no history in memory. Most memories are based on past experience, but such experience leaves traces or fragments in the brain that lie dormant *until something in the present causes the creation of a memory*. A memory is a combination of past remnants and present cues or reasons for "re-membering." Remembering involves *piecing together a past that makes sense in the present*.

Taves: Your response has made me aware that my assumption was an assumption. I think your argument about memory is very interesting. I want to highlight two phrases—"something in the present causes the creation of a memory" and "remembering involves piecing together a past that makes sense in the present." I think both these things can be true and still leave grounds for arguing that some versions describe an original experience better than others. To get at that, we have to consider what specifically might have triggered the creation of a memory in the present.

Harper: I agree that some memories may describe an experience better than others, just not with taking for granted that earlier memories necessarily do so. There are plenty of potential cues for Smith's 1832 history, which was almost certainly composed sometime between July and November. In June he wrote from Indiana to his wife in Ohio that he had been reflecting emotionally on his past. In July his main associate, Sidney Rigdon, claimed that God had taken authority from Smith and given it to him. In November Smith received a revelation (D&C 85) that commanded him to keep a careful history and elaborated a theology for doing so. The text of that revelation is written on the pages that immediately follow his 1832 history.

Taves: I think the introduction to the 1832 text supports this. There Joseph Smith explicitly sets out to write "a History" of his life and "an

account of his marvilous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Christ . . . and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ,” which is followed by a list of things the Lord did to establish the church. This list begins with “the testamony from on high,” which presumably refers to the first vision, but the emphasis in the list—which seems to function as an outline for the projected history—is on issues of authority in relation to the new church.

Harper: I think Joseph Smith often if not always told the vision as a claim to authority, but to me there is still a problem with the 1832 account. Memory studies suggest that his 1832 thought should, under normal circumstances, cue and shape his memory, but there is dissonance between the simple soteriology of Smith's 1832 autobiography and his 1832 soteriology. A landmark revelation Smith received just a few months before composing his 1832 history envisions a premortal world and a postmortal hierarchy of heavens inhabited by mortals saved in several possible degrees of glory. Then shortly after he composed the 1832 autobiography, he claimed revelations that require a ritual endowment of divine power administered by a set of priesthoods. This is the stuff Brooks Holifield had in mind when he credited Smith with revealing “realms of doctrine unimagined in traditional Christian theology.”¹¹ Why would 1832 memories be so far from 1832 revelations? Why wouldn't Smith account for the first vision in 1832 in ways that were consistent with what he had just heard from heaven?

Taves: I have several responses. First, with respect to more expansive theological views, as the JSP notes indicate, Christ's speech in the 1832 account is actually “saturated with allusions and phraseology from both the Bible and Joseph Smith's revelatory texts.”¹² In addition, when Joseph

11. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 335.

12. According to the JSP notes on the 1832 version, “Christ's declaration is saturated with scriptural allusions and phraseology from both the Bible and JS's revelatory texts. See, for example, Leviticus 26:3; Vision, 16 Feb. 1832, in *Doctrine and Covenants*

Smith summarized what he had learned from the scriptures (that God is unchanging and no respecter of persons and that he created humans in his likeness), its expansive tone reminds me of the “revelation to Moses” (June 1830). So there is clearly some cross-fertilization between his memories of the original event and his revelatory texts.

Second, I don’t think you can interpret the first vision accounts apart from the texts in which they are embedded, that is, in relation to what is relevant to the task at hand. If you consider the 1832 text as a whole, I think it is much more congruent with his 1832 soteriology than you suggest. If we return to the list of things he says he will cover in his 1832 account of the rise of the church, we can perhaps read a prophetic calling back into the vaguely worded “testamony from on high,” but the explicit emphasis is on priesthood authority and the keys of the kingdom (apostolic authority) and not (at that point) on prophetic authority, which is never explicitly mentioned. The Lord, as you point out, provides further revelation on priesthood authority in D&C 84 and 88, which are dated immediately after this.

Third, in the letter he wrote to his wife shortly before he started writing his history, which you mention, he said that he had been visiting a secluded “grove” outside town where he was “calling to mind all the past moments of his life” and in doing so “giving vent to feelings of his heart.” These feelings have to do with sorrow over having given “the adversary” too much power over him, but he indicates that God “has forgiven [his] Sins.” Praying for the forgiveness of his sins in a secluded grove is entirely in keeping with his 1832 account and suggests that the review of his life perhaps in preparation for writing his history cued his memories of that earlier experience.

So, to sum up, I will be arguing that the 1832 version is closer than the other versions to what Joseph Smith likely experienced in his teens, that the memory of the event was evoked in the context of reviewing

91:4, 1835 ed. [D&C 76:41]; Revelation, ca. 7 Mar. 1831, in Book of Commandments 48:9–10 [D&C 45:8]; Revelation, 22 and 23 Sept. 1832, in Doctrine and Covenants 4:7, 1835 ed. [D&C 84:49]; Psalm 14:3; Isaiah 29:13; Deuteronomy 29:27; and Matthew 24:30.”

his life in preparation for writing his history, and that he placed it at the start of his history of the church because it highlighted the problem—the apostasy of all the extant churches—that his new church solved and only later recast his experience to reflect his sense of having been called as a prophet.

Harper: I find that argument plausible. But there is still a case to be made for Smith's dissatisfaction with his 1832 history and the fact that its simple saved or damned soteriology is inconsistent with his February 1832 vision of tiered heavens that blurs lines between the salvations of the just and unjust. He evidently didn't finish or share this account. I don't think he felt like it did what he set out to do—accurately capture what he called his “marvilous experience,” including an adequate sense of his authority.

Discussion 2: Events and sub-events

Taves: Let's turn to our method for analyzing the texts themselves. It is designed to provide a disciplined descriptive analysis of sub-events (what happened) within an event narrative and explanations (why it happened) from the point of view of the historical subject(s). This descriptive analysis can then provide a basis for explanatory accounts of what happened and why (meta-explanation) from the point of view of the historian. The method of analysis is a simplified version of the method developed by social cognitive psychologist Bertram Malle in 2004 to analyze the everyday explanations that people offer for behavior in the context of social interactions. In *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, I demonstrated how a simplified version of Malle's method could be used to analyze individual historical accounts of events.¹³ We are extending this method to demonstrate how it can be used to compare multiple accounts of an event.

13. Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 100–111.

Appendix 1 includes key passages from all five narratives of the first vision. The entire chart represents the experience event. It is broken down into sub-events based on Malle's distinctions between unintended and intended events, here translated into the more user-friendly language of "what happened" and "what he did," followed by Smith's cause or reason explanations, that is, his embedded appraisals, when present. The chart thus allows us to analyze the elements that were included in each account, as well as changes between accounts in the description of what happened (what was experienced) and in the embedded explanations (or appraisals) of what was experienced. In focusing on the sub-events, we are clipping out phrases from the texts that speak to the questions of "what happened" and "what he did," so large chunks of straight discursive material are not well represented in the chart.

What stands out when we compare the content of the accounts in the chart? Why?

Harper: The chart reveals variation but especially continuity in the accounts—Joseph Smith's distress and anxiety about religion aggravated by competitive pluralism, his turning to the Bible leading to prayer in the woods, and the resulting theophany that relieved his distress. The evidence in the chart makes me confident that about 1820 Joseph Smith was an evangelical seeker whose experience in the woods, as he reported it, offended at least one Methodist minister for reasons I'll speculate about later.

Taves: I agree with your list of items that appear in each of the accounts. It is this stable core that makes me think there likely was an original experience that took this basic shape, although I have to say his experience sure does sound a lot like the one described to Emma just a few months earlier. But I am not so confident that his account "offended at least one Methodist minister," since the 1832 account simply says "I could find none that would believe the hevny vision" and the 1835 account doesn't mention this at all. Granted, he said he "pondered these things in [his] heart," but I will argue that what he couldn't get anyone

to believe was that all the churches had apostatized and that this was what he continued to ponder in his heart.

Harper: So it sounds like we agree on a basic experience and are starting to wrestle with the differences in the accounts of it and the weight we should give to them.

Exegesis

Taves: Yes, I think that's right. So let me introduce a difference that stands out for me: the shift in how he relates to the Bible and how he learned all the churches are wrong. In the 1832 account he learns that all the churches are wrong through his exegesis (see the lightly shaded portions of appendix 1), whereas in 1835 and 1839 he asks the Lord and the Lord tells him (see the darkly shaded portions of appendix 1). Moreover, in the later version he explains that he asked the Lord directly because, as of 1839, he is aware that exegesis isn't a reliable method, stating explicitly: "the teachers of religion . . . understood . . . Scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible"!

I think that he likely concluded in his early teens that all the churches were wrong based on his exegesis of scripture. I think this likely took place in a revival context in which his sense of his own sinfulness was awakened and he was expected to seek forgiveness within one of the extant "sects" and thus had to choose between them. In light of concluding they were all wrong, he appealed directly to the Lord for forgiveness.

I think he started using the "ask and receive" method of praying (James 1:5) later, most likely in conjunction with his early revelations (1827–28). In time, I think he also became more aware of the many different conclusions that could be drawn from the exegesis of scripture. Finally, in his later accounts of the first vision, he wants to heighten the sense of his prophetic authority. The shift from exegesis to the "ask and receive" method speaks to all these issues. By *substituting* the "ask and receive" prayer

method, he is no longer figuring out by himself that all the churches are wrong. Instead, he inquires and the Lord (or a personage) tells him. This shift in turn gives him a privileged status as the one to whom this information has been revealed, which ups his status, if not yet to full-fledged prophet in the text per se, to something that can easily be read as a prophetic calling.

Harper: Your insight is compelling—that in 1832 Smith remembered praying for forgiveness in light of his own scriptural exegesis that all the churches were wrong and later remembered that his inability to discern for himself was resolved by a revelation that all churches were wrong.

But I'm not yet convinced that there was a fundamental shift in Smith's epistemology between 1820 and 1832, or between 1832 and 1839. No doubt he had developed the "ask and receive" method by 1831, but evidence that he was using it by then is not evidence that he wasn't using it before. His early revelation texts are not evidence of a shift in his thinking, only the beginning of documentation of his thinking. The 1832 account can be read to support that he always followed the method spelled out in his early revelation texts, which is a combination of scriptural work followed by revelation—he searches the scriptures, he thinks about it, he prays to God. It is plausible to see a consistent epistemology in Smith's early revelation texts and in his first vision accounts.

Taves: I think that what the chart shows is that the difference is not mere nuance. *He took out the part about searching the scriptures and replaced it with the "ask and you will be told" method.* He didn't combine them. This is a crucial point, I think, because it undercuts a conflation strategy. It's hard to argue that he is using both methods at the same time when he replaces one with the other.

Harper: Almost thou persuadest me. As we continue, I'll develop a rationale for clinging to my "almost."

Theology

Taves: There is another interesting difference I see between the accounts. If you look at the first darkly shaded portion in appendix 1, you will see there are passages in Smith's 1835 and 1839 accounts and in the Curtis account that refer to Smith struggling with some sort of negative power or presence. There is no mention of struggle in the 1832 account, but it is a prominent part of Joseph Smith's vision of Moses's visions (and Moses's calling as a prophet).¹⁴ There are, in other words, interesting parallels between Smith's accounts of the visions of Moses, who "saw God face to face & . . . talked with him," and Joseph Smith's 1835 and 1839 accounts of his first vision (e.g., losing his strength, being tempted by Satan, and then explicitly called by God).¹⁵ This suggests to me that in his 1835 and 1839 accounts Joseph Smith conflates what he remembers of his experience with his visions of Moses experience. I think the surviving accounts suggest that this was a gradual process that occurred as he recounted his story in various contexts (i.e., giving talks and speaking to Robert Matthews, aka the Prophet Matthias). Conflating the two

14. I think we can trace a shift in the kind of authority he is claiming over time. Initially, he claims the authority of a seer, which according to the Book of Mormon, is greater than that of a prophet. As of 1830, he starts to play down seer authority (it is repeatedly excised from the headings of his early visions), then shifts to priesthood and apostolic authority early in the 1830s, and, over the course of that decade, builds a case for prophetic authority as primary. The struggle with "dark powers" theme is inserted into his first vision accounts as a way to make them more like Moses's calling. But I think he knows this feeling from his 1823 efforts to recover the plates from the hill in the wake of his Moroni vision. All Smith's accounts of this experience, which appears and is reinterpreted in the 1832, 1835, and 1839 accounts, include this element of struggle, but it is progressively elaborated over time from what I take to be a struggle with doubt (1832) to a struggle with Satan (1839). Thus, as I argue in *Revelatory Events*, I think that the nub of the "struggle with dark powers" is revealed when, in response to his inability to recover the plates, he fears that his vision of the plates was "only" a dream but then rejects this thought. In other words, I think the struggle with dark powers is a metaphoric way to express the struggle with doubt, that is, the competing interpretation of reality offered by "Satan" or other demonic powers.

15. There are also interesting parallels between the visions of Moses (and Joseph Smith's revisions of Genesis) with its expansive cosmology and frequent references to "the Only Begotten" and Joseph and Sidney's vision of February 16, 1832 (D&C 76).

experiences makes his experience more like that of a prophet and less like that of an evangelical.

Harper: I think there may be a connection—I'm not ready to call it conflation—between Smith's experience and his vision of Moses. Smith mentioned several times that his tongue was tied as he attempted to pray, that he was opposed by some power. These accounts are similar to the Moses vision and yet distinctive, suggesting a motif that Smith followed with his own memories.

Taves: Maybe *conflation* isn't the right word. I agree there are differences. I just think it is significant that shortly after the founding of the church in 1830, he received a revelation that elaborates on Moses's direct encounter with God and that some similar features wind up in his later recollections of his first vision. Moses is the first of the prophets. This suggests to me that Smith is starting to think more—or you could say the Lord is trying to get him to think more!—about how prophets are called and his memories of his first vision gradually come to sound more like Moses's.

Harper: That's an interesting idea, but if he's starting to think about prophetic callings in 1830, why don't we see it in 1832? Your point feeds right into my sense that he is suppressing things in his 1832 account; indeed, he seems to have suppressed the whole 1832 account.

Overall, I think the theology of the 1832 account is strangely dated. It's Book of Mormon theology, not reflective of Smith's later revelations. It's at least two years old if not ten, and in those two years Smith moved far away from evangelical Christianity toward a radically tiered soteriology mediated by priesthoods and rituals (or ordinances, as his revelation texts call them). Christ's speech in the 1832 account may, as you say, resonate with the Moses revelations, but as you just pointed out, his later accounts resonate with it more. Moreover, the 1832 account doesn't resonate with revelations received about the same time as its

composition. His 1832 history is strangely foreign to his thought at the time of its composition in summer–fall 1832.

Taves: I don't think that the 1832 document as a whole or the first vision portion in particular is "strangely foreign" to Joseph Smith's thought at the time of composition. I think the history he planned to write in 1832 reflected a soteriology mediated by priesthoods and rituals/ordinances, but that he never got to them in this version of the history. He didn't develop priesthood or ordinances in the context of his first vision experience because they were revealed later, but he began the document with a list of what he called his "marvilous experience," the first of which was his first vision, the second "the ministering of Angels," the third "reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of Aangels," and the fourth "power and ordinance from on high to preach the Gospel."¹⁶

Moreover, we agree that some contemporary content is included in his first vision account, well documented by the notes in the Joseph Smith Papers and seen in the resonances with the visions of Moses. I think of this as a sort of unconscious seepage between what the Lord had revealed to him in revelations and what he recalled Christ saying to him in his first vision. In the early 1830s, in response to Rigdon's challenge and direct revelations from the Lord, Smith was grounding his authority primarily in priesthood and ordinances. His vision of Moses was a prelude to his re-"translation" of the Bible, starting with the book of Genesis. So I would argue that while he was receiving these ideas about prophets in this period, they were not "cued" in relation to his history or his first vision until he started to think of his authority in explicitly prophetic terms. So I don't think Smith was suppressing anything in his 1832 account; I think he just didn't finish the history he'd started, so he didn't publicize it. The fact that he started recounting the first vision orally soon after composing the 1832 document is further evidence against suppression.

16. Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-circa-summer-1832>.

Harper: Or evidence that he didn't like the way he told it in his 1832 history, so he suppressed it and started to tell it differently in response. Why didn't he finish it? He claimed revelations that gave a theology for keeping his history. He started it but then didn't finish it, and there's no evidence that he shared it with Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer, who were relying on him to provide source material for the period only he knew. I think he must not have liked it for some reason.

Rejection

Harper: Let me draw your attention to what I regard as the most emotional passage in any of Smith's accounts, the section of the 1839 account in which Smith tells of reporting his experience to a Methodist minister and being rejected and then reflects passionately. Notice how he first remembers facts—a few days after the experience he meets the minister, reports the experience, and the minister rejects it because visions and revelations ceased with the apostles. Then notice how remembering that set of facts in 1839 launches him into a frustrated rant about a lifetime of persecution. (See appendix 2, in which the frequent references to persecution are highlighted for quick reference). This section is not specific. It's not about events or experiences as much as it is about feeling persecuted from infancy. The first part is factual memory. There probably was an objective meeting between Joseph Smith and a Methodist minister. The second part is interpretive memory—Smith's subjective experience of what that meeting meant in 1839, cued by lots of frustrating experience in the meantime, including the Missouri governor's order that Mormons must leave the state and Smith's having just come from a winter jailed in a cold, stinking, underground jail cell in Liberty, Missouri, where he awaited trial on a charge of treason for preaching that his church would fulfill the book of Daniel's prophecy about a kingdom that would subdue all others. It's this passage that makes me think that Smith's accounts can best be understood as differing ways he responded to rejection.

Looking through that lens leads me to believe that in 1832 he told his story to seek acceptance and validation, downplaying offensive theological content in his experience as much as possible. This explains the dissonance between the 1832 account and the 1832 theology. It also explains why the 1832 history doesn't echo the 1830 Moses revelation as much as later accounts do, since in 1832 Smith wasn't trying to remember himself as a prophet, just as another convert seeking acceptance; but he couldn't do it in the face of actually being, in his own mind and the minds of his followers, a full-fledged prophet/revelator. That explains why he neither finished nor shared his 1832 history and why he started over later, pointing us to the 1839 account as an alternative.

Literary scholars Neal Lambert and Richard Cracroft theorized an explanation that could account for the conflict I see. Granted, it is frustratingly unknowable, but the idea is that Joseph Smith's original report to the minister was more like his 1839 account than his 1832 account, and therefore objectionable.¹⁷

Taves: I agree that we need to account for this passage, but I don't think your explanation is the most plausible. I think it is much more likely that his "rant," as you call it, was a response to evangelical clergy's vehement rejection of his claims *in the 1830s*, which is when they became widely known. I don't think the Cracroft and Lambert theory holds either. Their argument is based on their claim that the 1832 account is a typical evangelical conversion account. But they don't even discuss Joseph Smith's 1832 exegetical claim that all the churches are wrong, which wasn't typical of evangelical conversion accounts and, in my view, provides a highly plausible (and sufficient) reason for why he could find no one who believed him.

Harper: That's certainly plausible. My psychological interpretation does not depend on whether Cracroft and Lambert are right. I cite their essay

17. Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 33–42.

because they offered an option that is consistent with my interpretation, an explanation for why Smith was rejected.

Our readings are clearly influenced by what we think about the nature of Smith's memories. I think the 1839 diatribe contains a fascinating mix of factual and interpretive memory, and as such it tells us a great deal about what he objectively experienced shortly after the experience in the woods and subjectively experienced at the time and over time as he internalized, interpreted, and reacted to that rejection. I think we have to take the psychology of this memory seriously. That specific rejection was painful for Joseph Smith, and his memories of his experience deal with that pain in one way or another.

Taves: I think this is at most a frustrated rant about a decade—not a lifetime—of persecution. In fact, I would turn this whole issue around and argue that the ramping up of the rejection theme is something that stands out when we compare the versions. In the 1832 version all that he says is “that none would believe the heavenly vision.” I suspect that what people had trouble with was his claim that all the churches were wrong, not his claim to have experienced forgiveness. In the 1839 version, he says the minister said “there was no such thing as visions *or revelations* in these days, that all such things had ceased with the apostles” (emphasis added). The insertion of “or revelations” here strikes me as highly significant. It seems to speak directly to the post-Book of Mormon claim to have produced new revelation. This is totally anachronistic in relation to 1820 but highly plausible post-1830.

Summary and conclusion of discussion

So, to sum up—and I'll make this my concluding statement—I do not think that Joseph Smith *shrank* his 1832 account in response to rejection, but rather that he *expanded* his accounts in the context of recounting the first vision during the 1830s in the wake of publishing the Book of Mormon (a new revelation) and establishing a restored church in 1830. Here I think the Curtis account offers us a big retrieval

clue when he says that Joseph Smith was recounting the story of the first vision and the recovery of the golden plates in order to explain to believers “the reason why he preached the doctrine he did.” He preached the doctrines he did—a new revelation—because all the churches had fallen away. If the churches hadn’t all apostatized, why bother with a new revelation? His 1832 version speaks to this issue, but the exegetical justification started to seem weak, so he replaced it with the “ask and receive” method so that the Lord revealed the apostasy directly. The Lord’s revelation of this to him, along with new elements that reflect his vision of the vision of Moses (the first prophet), shifts him from an evangelical seeking forgiveness in 1832, which he likely was in 1820, to a prophet being called in 1839.

Harper: You’re assuming a progression from simple to more sophisticated experience and explanation. Isn’t it possible that his original experience and his original, unrecorded explanation were somewhere in the middle, something like his 1835 account? The way he remembered that account (spontaneous associative retrieval) is fundamentally different from the 1832 or 1839 accounts (strategic retrieval). In 1835 Smith remembered spontaneously in conversation and associated his vision with the events that resulted in the Book of Mormon. In 1832 and 1839 he sat down purposefully to compose autobiography.

If we can grant the possibility that memories are dynamic and don’t necessarily always progress from less to more, then it’s not a stretch to suppose that psychological reasons factored into his strategic retrieval when he purposefully composed autobiography. That act led him to tell the story differently—not just with ever-increasing expansion (which accounts from the 1840s argue against), but differently every time. So here is my theory premise by premise: Joseph Smith’s 1839 interpretive memory—his rant against Protestant persecution—reveals his psychological need to respond to rejection by the minister. Given that need, his 1832 account is best explained as an attempt, perhaps subconscious, to appease the minister who rejected him, speaking for the larger culture. That explanation accounts for Smith’s 1832 emphasis on

biblical exegesis over new revelation *and* explains why he didn't finish or share the account of his "marvilous experience." In other words, his experience wasn't as marvelous when he remembered it to appease the minister in 1832 as it was when he remembered it later.

Our exchange has raised my consciousness of how my familiarity with the 1839 account may be opening my eyes to some things and blinding me to others. For example, in the light of the 1839 account, I have read Smith's 1832 critique of competitive pluralism as mild, no more condemning than similar critiques by a variety of seekers or primitivists, but you're telling me that churched folks might be a wee bit offended to learn "that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament." What could clearly have been grounds for rejecting Smith's experience sounds so mild to me because of the comparatively combative 1839 denunciation of creeds and all versions of Christianity, if not all Christians. I realize now that's a poor gauge for how Smith's Christian neighbors, especially an invested clergyman, would have responded to the announcement that they were apostate. Even so, I still think the 1832 account can be read as a softened version of the original experience.

We agree that in his accounts Smith becomes more prophetic over time, but I am explaining that in terms of what I regard as his reasons for recounting: (1) in 1832 a psychological need to reconcile with evangelicalism, which was impossible because of the theological content of Smith's original experience, resulting in a written account that he didn't accept himself; (2) in 1835 a need to be more prophetic than Robert Matthias; (3) in 1839 the need to be head of a growing church, heir to the great commission to take the good news to everyone, resulting in a defiant psychological response to evangelicalism instead of 1832's frustrated attempt at reconciliation. And if I'm right that Smith didn't like his 1832 account, its weak presentation of him as a prophet may be one reason why.

Reflections on method and process

Taves and Harper: Our exchange illuminates a variety of methodological issues:

1. The chart was easy to construct. We had no trouble teasing apart subjects' accounts of events and explanations (or more narrowly, experiences and appraisals) and reaching consensus on these descriptive analyses. The only real point of discussion in that regard was whether or not to include in the chart (see appendix 1) more of Smith's rant against the minister.
2. We discovered how important it was to surface each other's assumptions, in our case assumptions about memory and our ability to reconstruct how a subject most likely viewed or would have recounted an event close to the time it occurred. Until we did this, we had difficulty following each other's arguments. We still have differences with respect to the historical value of memory, which we will hold off on discussing for the sake of space. The key thing to note methodologically is that we were able to narrow and nuance those differences significantly by attending to the framing of narratives and specifically to the contextual factors that we thought might have cued, and thus shaped, what was recalled. And we are both convinced that studying various accounts of the same experience is an "excellent way to examine how interpretations of an experience develop over time."¹⁸
3. Once we had our assumptions on the table, having the chart as a point of reference allowed us to identify similarities and differences between the accounts. Although our initial reading of similarities and differences differed at times, we didn't have much difficulty reaching an agreement based on the evidence in the chart. Referring to the chart allowed us to

18. Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 71.

separate our analysis of similarities and differences between the accounts from our explanations of the similarities and differences.

4. A relatively clear distinction between the evidence in the chart and our interpretations of the evidence allowed us to focus on articulating the reasons for our interpretations. This was an exciting part of the back-and-forth between us.
5. Finally, it is probably obvious to everyone that our back-and-forth on the issue of memory and history has implications that are not simply academic. Steve's explanatory reconstruction leaves room for an initial experience much more in keeping with the way the LDS tradition has viewed the first vision. Ann's explanatory reconstruction is much more minimalist and positions the canonized account in a developmental trajectory. While some might be tempted to view one explanation as more theological and the other as more historical, we would argue that both Steve's sense that the initial event was robust and Ann's sense that it was more minimal reflect faith-based predilections, whether LDS or naturalistic. Moreover, as historians, we both want our interpretations of the evidence to be judged on the basis of agreed-upon historical methods rather than on our faith-based predilections, recognizing that the way scholars judge this evidence will shape their reconstructions of Mormonism's emergence as a new religious movement.

Appendix 1: Descriptive Analysis— Joseph Smith Jr., First Vision Accounts

light gray = material only in 1832js dark gray = material only in later versions

Unintended experience event (what happened)

- 1832js "my mind become exceedingly distressed"
1835js "being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion . . . perplexed in mind"
1835c Curtis: "he feeling an anxiety to be religious his mind somewhat troubled"
1839js Felt "desire" and implicit distress

Cause explanation (why it happened)

- 1832js "I become convicted of my sins" in the context of "contentions and divi[si]ons"
1835js "looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong"
1835c Curtis: "a revival of some of the sec[t]s was going on some of his fathers family joined in"
1839js "I felt some desire to be united with [the Methodists]," but it was impossible to decide "who was right and who was wrong" ["desire" + inability to decide = implicit distress]. Context note: "In the midst of this war of words, and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, what is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? and if any one of them be right which is it? And how shall I know it?"

Intended behavior event (what he did)

- 1832js "by searching the scriptures I found that mankind . . . had "apostatized from the true . . . faith and there was no . . . denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ"

Reason explanation (why he did it)

- 1832js Implicitly to find a denomination where his sins could be forgiven

Unintended experience event (what happened)

- 1835js "under a realising sense that [the Lord] had said (if the bible be true) ask and you shall receive knock and it shall be opened seek and you shall find and again, if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbradeth not"
1835c Curtis: "this scripture came to his mind which sayes if a man lack wisdom let him ask of god who giveth liberally and upbradeth not"
1839js "While I was laboring under . . . [these] difficulties I was reading [James 1:5]. . . . It seemed to enter with great force into . . . my heart." No cause given.

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Intended behavior event (what he did)

1839js "reflected on it again and again"

Reason explanation (why he did it)

1839js "the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passage of Scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible"

Intended behavior event (what he did)

1839js "I at last came to the determination to ask of God"

Reason explanation (why he did it)

1839js "I must either remain in darkness and confusion or else I must do as James directs, that is, Ask of God."

Intended behavior event (what he did)

1832js "I cried unto the Lord for mercy"

1835js "I retired to the silent grove and bowd down before the Lord, . . . and with a fixed determination to obtain it [information], I called upon the Lord for the first time"

1835c Curtis: "believeing it he went with a determinati[on] to obtain to enquire of the lord himself"

1839js "I retired to the woods . . . kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God"

Reason explanation (why he did it)

1832js "for there was none else to whom I could go and obtain mercy"

1835js "to obtain it [information]"

1835c Curtis: he believed it ["ask and you shall receive"]

1839js Reasons for praying same as above; reasons for kneeling in the woods not given

Unintended experience event (what happened)

1835js "my toung seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, I strove again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking"

1835c Curtis: "after some struggle"

1839js "siezed upon by some power which entirely overcame me . . . [the power bound] my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me and it seemed . . . as if I were doomed to sudden destruction . . . I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction"

Cause explanation (why it happened)

- 1835js He could not find an ordinary explanation (he "saw no person or thing").
- 1839js The feeling of being seized by a power was attributed to "this enemy." The cause was not imaginary. He was threatened "not [by] an imaginary ruin but [by] the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had a marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being"

Unintended experience event (what happened)

- 1832js "While in the attitude of [prayer] . . . a pillar of light [brighter than the sun at noon] come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled"
- 1835js "I kneeled again my mouth was opened and my toung liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down up me, and filled me with joy unspeakable"*
- 1839js "Just at this moment of great alarm I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head above the brightness of the sun, which descended . . . upon me. . . . I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound."

Cause explanation (why it happened)

- 1832js Image of pillar of fire/light associated with "shekinah" in OT; being "filled" attributed to the "spirit of god"
- 1835js No cause given for the "pillar of fire"; implicitly understood as response to prayer
- 1839js No cause given for the light; implicitly understood as response to "great alarm"

Unintended experience event (what happened)

- 1832js "the Lord opened the heavens . . . I saw the Lord . . . he spake unto me saying . . . thy sins are forgiven thee" [the Lord's speech continues in apocalyptic vein and ends with a promise that he will "come quickly"]
- 1833a Andrus: "angel came and that [glory?] and trees seemed to be consumed in blaze and he was there entrusted with this information that darkness covered the earth that the great mass of Christian world universally wrong their creeds all upon uncertain foundation now as young as you are I call upon you from this obscurity go forth and build up my kingdom on the earth"
- 1835js "a personage appeared in the midst, of this pillar of flame which was spread all around, and yet nothing consumed, another personage soon appeared like unto the first, he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee, he testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God; and I saw many angels in this vision"
- 1835c Curtis: "the Lord manifested to him that the different sects were [w]rong also that the Lord had a great work for him to do."

Unintended experience event (what happened) continued

1839js "I saw two personages . . . standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me . . . and said (pointing to the other) 'This is my beloved Son, Hear him! . . . No sooner . . . did I get possession of myself so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong) and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors were all corrupt, that 'they draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me, They . . . [have] a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.'"^{*}

Unintended experience event (what happened)

1832js "my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me"

1835js No indication of what happened next.

1839js "When I came to myself again I found myself lying on my back looking up into Heaven."

Intended behavior event (what he did)

1832js "[I] could find none that would believe the hevnlly vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart"

1839js "Some few days after I had this vision I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist Preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement and conversing with him on the subject of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behaviour, he treated my communication not only lightly but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil, that there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days, that all such things had ceased with the apostles and that there never would be any more of them."

* This quotation could be broken down further but is left intact since the themes align with other material in this section of the chart.

Sources

1832js Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City, Church Historian's Press, 2008), 3–16 (hereafter cited as *JSP*, H1).

1833a Milo Andrus, 17 July 1853. Papers of George D. Watt, MS 4534, box 2, disk 1, May 1853–July 1853, images 231–56. Transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth, 3 October 2012; corrected October 2013.

1835c Joseph Curtis, "Joseph Curtis reminiscence and diary, 1839 October–1881 March," MS 1654, pages 5–6, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

1835js Joseph Smith, History, 1834–1836, 9 November 1835, *JSP*, H1:115–19.

1839js Joseph Smith, History, circa June 1839–circa 1841, *JSP*, H1:205–35.

Appendix 2: Sources for Five First Vision Accounts

1832js *Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832*

This is Joseph Smith's first known effort to record his history. It is in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith.

Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City, Church Historian's Press, 2008), 3–16 (hereafter *JSP*, H1). Digital version at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-circa-summer-1832?p=1>.

1833a *Milo Andrus, 17 July 1853*

Andrus's recounting of hearing Smith's account of his vision twenty years earlier was recorded in shorthand. A transcription records:

I was a boy first 19 years of age* when I heard the testimony of that man Joseph Smith that angel came and that [glory?] and trees seemed to be consumed in blaze and he was there entrusted with this information that darkness covered the earth that the great mass of Christian world universally wrong their creeds all upon uncertain foundation now as young as you are I call upon you from this obscurity go forth and build up my kingdom on the earth.

Papers of George D. Watt, MS 4534, box 2, disk 1, May 1853–July 1853, images 231–56.
Transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth, 3 October 2012; corrected October 2013.

1835c *Joseph Curtis, 1839*

Curtis remembered Smith's circa 1835 teachings and recorded them in an 1839 autobiography.

In the spring of 1835 [October 1834] Joseph smith in Company with his father & mother & some others came to Michigan & paid us a visit—in a meeting stated the reason why he preached the doctrine he did I will state a few things according to my memory—as a revival of some of the sec[t]s was going on some of his fathers family joined in with the revival himself being quite young he feeling anxiety to be religious his mind

* Milo Andrus was born March 6, 1814.

somewhat troubled this scripture came to his mind which says if a man lack wisdom let him ask of god who giveth liberally and upbradeth not believing it he went with a determinati[on] to obtain to enquire of the lord himself after some struggle the Lord manifested to him that the different sects were [w]rong also that the Lord had a great work for him to do—it worried his mind—he told his father—his father told him to do as the Lord manifested—had other manifestations [rest of line blank] saw an angel with a view of the hill cumorah & the plates of gold had certain instructions got the plates & by the assistance of the Urim & Thumim translated them by the gift & power of God [rest of line blank] also stated he done nothing except he more than he was commanded to do & for this his name was cast out as evil for this he was persecuted [rest of line blank]

Joseph Curtis, “Joseph Curtis reminiscence and diary, 1839 October–1881 March,” MS 1654, pp. 5–6, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Digital version at https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE1215485.

1835js *“Sketch Book for the use of Joseph Smith, jr.,” p. 23, entry for 9 November 1835* In his dialogue with a visitor named Robert Matthews (aka the Prophet Matthias), Smith related the “circumstances connected with the coming forth of the book of Mormon,” beginning with his first vision. This narrative is in the handwriting of Warren Parrish.

Joseph Smith, History, 1834–1836, 9 November 1835, JSP, H1:115–19. Digital version at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-1835-1836?p=24>.

1839js *Joseph Smith, History, circa June 1839–1841, volume A-1 pages 2–4.* This is the best-known account of Smith’s experience. It was copied by scribes into a large bound volume, published serially beginning in 1842, published in the Pearl of Great Price in 1851, and canonized in 1880.

Some few days after I had this vision I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist Preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement and conversing with him on the subject of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I

had had. I was greatly surprised at his behaviour, he treated my communication not only lightly but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil, that there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days, that all such things had ceased with the apostles and that there never would be any more of them.

I soon found however that my telling the story had excited a great deal of **prejudice against me** among professors of religion and was the cause of **great persecution** which continued to increase and though I was an obscure boy only between fourteen and fifteen years of age and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, Yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me and create a **hot persecution**, and this was common among all the sects: **all united to persecute me. It has often caused me serious reflection both then and since**, how very strange it was that an obscure boy of a little over fourteen years of age and one too who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintainance by his daily labor should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day so as to create in them a spirit of the **bitterest persecution** and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and was often cause of great sorrow to myself. However it was nevertheless a fact, that I had had a Vision. **I have thought since that I felt much like** as Paul did when he made his defence before King Agrippa and related the account of the Vision he had when he saw a light and heard a voice, but still there were but few who beleived him, some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad, and he was ridiculed and reviled, But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision he knew he had, and all the **persecution** under Heaven could not make it otherwise, and though they should **persecute** him unto death Yet he knew and would know to his latest breath that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me, I had actualy seen a light and in the midst of that light I saw two personages, and they did in reality speak unto me, or one of them did, And though **I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision**, Yet it was true and while **they were**

persecuting me reviling me and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, why persecute for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, “and who am I that I can withstand God” Or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen, for I had seen a vision, I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dare I do it, at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God and come under condemnation.

Joseph Smith, History, circa June 1839–circa 1841, *JSP*, H1:205–35. Digital version at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2?p=2>.

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Toward a Greener Faith: A Review of Recent Mormon Environmental Scholarship

George B. Handley

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW foundational essays by Hugh Nibley, it was not until the late nineties when formal theological treatment of the environmental ethics in Mormon belief emerged. However, since that time we have seen a steady and significant proliferation of such treatment even though LDS ecotheology unfortunately remains an understudied and underappreciated contribution to Mormon studies. When we consider that Joseph Smith provided three additional accounts of the creation and that the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants provide instruction about the principles of environmental stewardship that is unprecedented in Christianity, it is surprising that these doctrines haven't been given more attention. Moreover, given the significance of the environmental crisis before us, I am convinced that Mormon doctrines of the creation are among the most important and valuable insights the tradition has to offer. This essay assesses the major contributions during this recent upsurge of scholarship and provides suggestions for future directions.

Although my focus here is on ecotheological scholarship, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of environmental historians who have explored the historical environmental practices of Mormons. While historians have at times criticized Mormons for their environmental practices (most notably Donald Worster in his important

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study of dams and irrigation, *Rivers of Empire* in 1992, and Marc Reisner in *Cadillac Desert* in 1993), their work has often been largely ignorant of, if not unsympathetic to, the beliefs and unique history of Mormons.¹ We find important correctives to this in essays by Thomas Alexander and Richard Jackson² and in the recent book *On Zion's Mount* by Jared Farmer, a book that is required reading for understanding how Mormon environmental attitudes were shaped in the context of life along the Wasatch Front.³ There is still much work to be done in this area, particularly to help us understand how religion affects environmental behavior generally, how it interacts with political ideology, and how Mormon environmental attitudes and behavior shaped in the context of the Intermountain West have been transformed in an increasingly global church.⁴ It is a challenge, for example, to understand how Mormonism can help inspire the environmental views of a Hugh Nibley or a Terry Tempest Williams as well as those of a Glenn Beck or a Cliven Bundy.

1. Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

2. Thomas Alexander, "Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847–1930," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (Autumn 1994): 340–64; and Richard Jackson, "Righteousness and Environmental Change: The Mormons and the Environment," in *Essays on the American West, 1973–1974*, ed. Thomas G. Alexander (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 21–42.

3. Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

4. One sociological study done in 2006 compares Mormon attitudes about the environment, as reflected in a sample drawn from citizens of Logan, Utah, with the General Social Survey and found that their attitudes tended to reflect greater concern for the environment than that found nationally, but with one difference: "While LDS respondents appear environmentally concerned, they also appear to believe that environmentally benign economic growth is feasible" (Lori M. Hunter and Michael B. Toney, "Religion and Attitudes toward the Environment: A Comparison of Mormons and the General U.S. Population," *Social Science Journal* 42/1 [2005]: 6). In general, they seemed less willing to adopt the measures others with similar concerns about the environment were willing to adopt, measures such as higher taxes, more sacrifices, joining an environmental organization, or signing a petition.

Nibley, of course, was prolific in his career and addressed many topics in his scholarship, but one of his favorites was the requirements for building Zion—the Mormon concept of a unified, harmonious community. In *Approaching Zion* and in his collection *On the Timely and Timeless*, he wrote trenchant criticisms of the ethos of capitalism, particularly its profound misunderstanding of nature as a divine gift and a sign of grace toward God’s children.⁵ Whereas capitalism wants to emphasize the virtue of the independence of the self-made man, Nibley wants to ask, “Independent of what? Of God? Of our fellowman? Of nature? So we actually reject the gifts of God. As *gifts* we despise them.”⁶ In his essay “Subduing the Earth,” he offered what is arguably Mormonism’s most important and clearly articulated environmental ethic when he corrected misunderstandings about the meaning of human stewardship following the fall of Adam and Eve. He explained: “Man’s dominion is a call to service not a license to exterminate.”⁷ A similarly trenchant essay, “Stewardship of the Air,” was written in the context of the struggle for air quality during the time of the operation of Geneva Steel but has proved prescient in the context of our current struggle in Utah with inversion.⁸ A much-cited essay of his on Brigham Young’s views of environmental stewardship is, in my view, less rigorous in its analysis and less useful, since we have little or no context and no analysis of the ecological implications of Young’s views.⁹ One suspicion that arose as a consequence of Nibley’s Brigham Young essay was that the church’s

5. For a more thorough exploration of Nibley’s environmental views, see Terry B. Ball, “Nibley and the Environment,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/2 (2011): 16–29.

6. Hugh W. Nibley, “Deny Not the Gifts of God,” in *Approaching Zion*, ed. Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 136.

7. Hugh W. Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 96.

8. Hugh W. Nibley, “Stewardship of the Air,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 55–75.

9. Hugh W. Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” in *To the Glory of God: Mormon Essays on Great Issues—Environment, Commitment, Love, Peace, Youth, Man*,

nineteenth-century leaders and the doctrines they preached demonstrated a more pronounced environmental ethos than that apparent in the church today, a persistent suspicion that nevertheless remains underresearched, unproven, and at the very least unexplained. But the overall legacy of Nibley's environmental essays was to stimulate a concern among scholars that the environmental ethics of Mormon belief deserved more attention, maybe even some rescue.

One of the most ambitious efforts in this regard was an underappreciated book of essays published in 1999 called *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community*.¹⁰ *New Genesis* covers interesting terrain, including essays by Mormon authors, activists, scientists, environmental professionals, scholars, and artists. It also includes three essays by LDS Church leaders (General Authorities): Vaughn J. Featherstone, Hugh W. Pinnock, and Steven E. Snow. It is an impressive collection (if somewhat uneven in its scholarly rigor) that provides personal and intimate portraits of various members' perceptions of the responsibilities that people bear to their environment. It stands as a powerful testimonial of the inspiration many Latter-day Saints feel about environmental stewardship based on personal experience, doctrinal understanding, and, in some cases, professional training. One of its most trenchant essays, by James B. Mayfield, is entitled "Poverty, Population, and Environmental Ruin," which to this day remains the only essay to address the pressing concerns about growing population levels from the perspective of LDS doctrines of stewardship. Mayfield's essay is an important counterpoint to the false assumption that environmental stewardship requires extreme

ed. Truman G. Madsen and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 3–29.

10. Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, eds., *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1999). One publication that almost entirely escaped the public's notice was a self-published book by Aaron Kelson, a graduate of Utah State University, entitled *The Holy Place: Why Caring for the Earth and Being Kind to Animals Matters* (Spotsylvania, VA: White Pine Publishing, 1999). Although light on analysis and without much reference to relevant scholarship, it covers major doctrines ably and with a touch of personal conviction.

population control measures and is otherwise antithetical to family and children. Mayfield places the suffering of families facing extreme poverty and environmental degradation front and center and argues that rather than imposing draconian measures to control population levels, we need to curb greed and strengthen women's position in society. He writes:

Free agency is only possible when people have choices, and choices require opportunities, awareness, resources, and abilities in conscious decision-making. Teaching children skills, values and proper attitudes is largely the responsibility of the women. Thus the best hope for solutions lies in strengthening the role and position of women in society, not through forced family planning and easily available systems of abortion, but by helping both men and women develop their levels of literacy and productivity where they do have choices that are meaningful and fulfilling. (pp. 61–62)

Because evidence suggests that as women gain more independence and educational opportunities, family sizes tend to decrease, he concludes: "I believe God wants people to make good choices, to use wisdom in determining the number of children they will have, and that in the long run, as systems of education and literacy are implemented throughout the world, the problem of overpopulation will take care of itself" (p. 62). Among many other worthwhile essays, I find "Water-masters" by Dennis Smith to be an especially beautiful and insightful tribute to the stewardship Smith learned growing up at the foot of Lone Peak, and Michael Dunn's gripping tale of an encounter with a grizzly in the Tetons provides an inspiring account of the spiritual meaning of wildness. It is a collection of admirable diversity and engaging reading, one that has yet to be replicated.

The book's force lies mainly in its many personal witnesses. Although the essays are often anchored by scriptural anecdotes, the book's aim is not to present a systematic and scholarly treatment of the relevant theology. Indeed, even the work of Nibley seemed to lack rigorous connection to the broader conversations about environmental ethics and ecotheology in other traditions and systematic analysis of

relevant doctrines. Upon my arrival at BYU in 1998, I began researching the environmental doctrines of the LDS tradition but also the literature of ecotheology. My aim was to understand Mormonism in light of how other Christian traditions were trying to inspire an improved relationship to the natural environment. I was struck by the almost uncanny similarity between these ideas advanced by Christian ecotheologists and the doctrines of the Latter-day Saints. My essay “The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief” was the result of this research.¹¹ I identified four major doctrinal questions with important environmental implications, namely, the doctrine of the soul, the doctrine of the spiritual and physical creations, the human role within the creation, and the law of consecration. As the first attempt at a formal ecotheological treatment of LDS doctrines of environmental stewardship, it seems to have continued to be relevant despite the advance of time and despite the fact that many other doctrinal areas have been and still need to be explored. I confess that, at the time, I somewhat naively hoped that I had provided a more or less comprehensive survey of relevant doctrines, a view belied by the prolific scholarship that has continued since that time. At least my main purpose was to provide a rebuttal to the suspicion that environmental stewardship was somehow a fringe idea or that the sometimes vehement anti-environmentalism of the Intermountain West was representative of an official church view, ideas expressed in Richard Foltz’s essay “Mormon Values and the Utah Environment,” published in *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* in 2000. Foltz had suggested that it is not clear whether an environmental ethic “is with or against the current of formal teaching” or if caring for the creation is merely a fringe idea, an example of other potentially heretical “private theologies.”¹² Thomas Alexander and I coauthored a rather strident response to Foltz that was published in the same journal, but I have since felt that despite his false equation of local politics in Utah with official church doctrine, perhaps Foltz’s overstatements were

11. Published in *BYU Studies* 40/2 (Summer 2001): 187–211.

12. Richard C. Foltz, “Mormon Values and the Utah Environment,” *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 4 (Spring 2000): 4, 14.

understandable given the dearth of any formal teachings on the subject from official church venues.¹³ While I do not equate environmental attitudes in Utah as stemming from overt or even covert church positions, I believe that lack of institutional emphasis on stewardship has allowed a culture of anti-environmentalism to continue unchallenged in many Mormon communities throughout the Intermountain West. Following on the heels of my publication, the important journal *Environmental Ethics* also published an excellent analysis of LDS doctrines, coauthored by Philip Cafaro, a professor of philosophy at Colorado State, and his LDS graduate student at the time, Matthew Gowans, now a visiting professor of religious studies at DePaul University.¹⁴

Seeking to fill in the gaps of what church leaders have said about environmental stewardship over the years, Richard Stratton, a former graduate student in forestry at Utah State University, self-published a collection of statements from General Authorities entitled *Kindness to Animals and Caring for the Earth: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Latter-day Saint Church Leaders* in 2004.¹⁵ Restricting himself mainly to members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency of the LDS Church, Stratton provides robust evidence of concern for proper treatment of all living things among every generation of church leaders. The book's weakness is that it is only a reference book of quotes and doesn't provide analysis or context, but it certainly should have put to rest any doubts about the existence or consistency of such teachings. Sadly, Deseret Book refused to publish it, so it never enjoyed wide circulation, thus allowing apathy about stewardship to continue.

13. George Handley and Thomas Alexander, "Response to Richard Foltz's Article 'Mormon Values and the Utah Environment,'" *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 5/2 (2001): 223–27.

14. Matthew Gowans and Philip Cafaro, "A Latter-day Saint Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 375–94.

15. Richard D. Stratton, ed., *Kindness to Animals and Caring for the Earth: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Latter-day Saint Church Leaders* (Portland, OR: Inkwater Press, 2004).

At this same time in the early 2000s, students at BYU became increasingly interested in environmental questions and in Mormon answers to those questions in particular. It was clear that a strictly scientific approach to the environment was not enough. In 2002 I created an environmental humanities course that covered religion, poetry, painting, philosophy, and literature. Biologist Steve Peck and I also later experimented with a team-taught course entitled Religion and the Environment, and in 2003, in collaboration with Terry Ball in Religious Education, we also planned and held a symposium on LDS perspectives on the environment. The symposium was very successful, with hundreds of attendees and participants from around the country and internationally. In 2006 BYU's Religious Studies Center published the selected proceedings in a coedited collection entitled *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment*. The book enjoyed a short run in print, unfortunately without broad distribution, but is now available online.¹⁶ The highlight of the conference and, in my judgment, of the published proceedings was the keynote address by Paul Cox, "Paley's Stone, Creationism, and Conservation." It broke ground by exploring the implications of the Mormon teaching of creation out of unorganized matter as opposed to the traditional Christian dogma of a creation ex nihilo. He shows the compatibility of Mormon theology and contemporary science and the consequent reasons why we are held more accountable in such a creation. The essay is at once a brilliant examination of theology and a personal witness by one of Mormonism's most accomplished environmental scientists. Speaking to fellow Latter-day Saints, he concludes: "I hope that you may experience the same whisperings of the Spirit that I have felt as you ponder this artistic masterpiece, this beautiful earth, that the Lord personally created. That great gift—a testimony of the Savior and His atoning mission—can come only through the ministrations of the Holy Ghost. As we

16. George B. Handley, Terry B. Ball, and Steven L. Peck, eds., *Stewardship and the Creation: LDS Perspectives on the Environment* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2006); online at https://rsc.byu.edu/%5Bfield_status-raw%5D/stewardship-and-creation-lds-perspectives-environment.

reverence the Savior, let us treat His masterpiece with reverence and humility.” The collection also included a valuable examination of business ethics by Don Adolphson, entitled “Environmental Stewardship and Economic Prosperity,” a topic that he taught in the MBA program at BYU for many years but that still needs more attention. Craig Galli provides a very well researched and important analysis of city planning in his essay “Stewardship, Sustainability, and Cities.” He brings forward many of the ideas of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young to test their viability in the context of contemporary environmental problems. Galli quotes Brigham Young: “The work of building up Zion is in every sense a practical work; it is not a mere theory. A theoretical religion amounts to very little real good or advantage to any person.” Galli then concludes that for this reason “the design and attributes of our neighborhoods, communities, and cities impact future generations and have spiritual, if not eternal, consequences.” Galli’s essay is especially valuable because city planning is proving to be increasingly vital to determining the kind of environmental health we will pass on to future generations. Steven Peck’s essay, “An Ecologist’s View of Latter-day Saint Culture and the Environment,” provides a careful and helpful discussion of the differences between commonly held views about the environment among Mormons and what science and theology teach, helping to dispel many misunderstandings about environmental problems that have influenced the way Mormons behave and vote. The collection also includes helpful case studies of environmental attitudes and behavior as inspired by LDS belief and as they pertain to certain regions of the Intermountain West and Mormon community life and to specific issues, including endangered species and watersheds.

One perspective that the collection neglected was that of the social sciences. Gary Bryner was a political science professor at BYU at the time and was someone who had long been engaged in thinking and teaching about these concerns. Inspired by the emerging scholarship on Mormonism and the environment and despite undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer, he authored a brilliant essay entitled “Theology and Ecology: Religious Belief and Environmental Stewardship.” It was

published in *BYU Studies* in 2010, just after he succumbed to his illness. The essay provides an indispensable overview of the interface between religious organizations and public policy related to environmental problems and thus offers a useful framework for Latter-day Saints to consider in their contemplation of their own obligations as stewards. He provides a more comprehensive look at the history of religious environmental activism than what previous scholars have offered and also acknowledges specific obstacles to LDS involvement. He encourages fellow members by concluding that “[our doctrinal] obligations [to be stewards] require that we plunge into the world of politics and work with others who may disagree with us on many issues in order to find common ground and workable solutions to the problems we face together.”¹⁷

Also in the wake of the symposium and its related publication, I decided to write an environmental memoir. *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo River*, also published in 2010, was an attempt to put to the test my own theological understanding in the context of the watershed where I live and my own family and ancestral history. I mention it in this review because, although a work of creative nonfiction and partially an environmental history of the Provo River, it teases out many of the possible implications of LDS teachings about the creation in a suburban, twenty-first-century context. Although much nature writing, especially in Utah and throughout the West in general, is often a reaction to the context of Mormon culture and history, including most famously the work of Terry Tempest Williams, my aim was to provide a perspective from within the practice of Mormonism to test the viability of LDS belief and practice for a more sustainable sense of place.

Its viability was at least acknowledged positively by two review essays published in a 2011 special issue of *Dialogue* devoted to environmental stewardship, edited by Steven Peck.¹⁸ The issue also provides six

17. Gary Bryner, “Theology and Ecology: Religious Belief and Environmental Stewardship,” *BYU Studies* 49/3 (Summer 2010): 41.

18. Rob Fergus, “Scry Me a River,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44/2 (2011): 190–95; and Adam S. Miller, “Recompense,” *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 134–42.

substantive and well-researched articles that rigorously apply LDS doctrines of stewardship and the creation to environmental questions. For example, in his essay “Enoch’s Vision and Gaia: An LDS Perspective on Environmental Stewardship,” Craig Galli provides a compelling exploration of Gaia theory and how it might be consonant with LDS accounts of creation.¹⁹ Bryan Wallis, in his essay “Flexibility in the Ecology of Ideas: Revelatory Religion and the Environment,” explores the basis for a kind of epistemological flexibility in Mormon creation theology that should allow Mormons the freedom to adapt understandings to new information gleaned from study and science. He finds that basis compellingly in the conception of ongoing revelation, since it posits a kind of contingent and earth-bound context in which revelations take place.²⁰ Jason Brown’s essay, “Whither Mormon Environmental Theology?,” provides an especially trenchant critique of what he sees as two strands of Mormon environmental thinking—thinking that falls into the stewardship tradition and thinking that falls into the category of what he calls the vitalist tradition.²¹ The former, he argues, stresses anthropocentric management of natural systems while the latter challenges us with a more biocentric context in which to understand ourselves. This seeming ambiguity within LDS doctrines of creation highlighted by Brown may very well account for the tensions in LDS attitudes toward the environment. It is certainly relevant to many similar tensions within the history of environmentalism more generally. Brown argues that to the degree that Mormons limit themselves to an anthropocentric stewardship, they may still be guilty of what he criticizes as stewardship’s “instrumental valuation of the earth and its creatures by giving human subjects mastery over material objects” (p. 75). Positing the intriguing possibility that there was an ecological apostasy in addition to the spiritual one, Brown suggests that Joseph Smith’s doctrines of vitalism

Miller’s essay pushes the theological implications of *Home Waters* by exploring the meaning of genealogy, the body, and grace.

19. *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 36–56.

20. *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 57–66.

21. *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 67–86.

can be seen as a restoration of ancient understandings of all life that can provide adequate alternatives to the instrumental attitudes of crass capitalism or even of a utilitarian environmentalism. In his essay “‘The Blood of Every Beast’: Mormonism and the Question of the Animal,” Bart Welling provides what remains the only essay to explore environmental ethics within the Book of Mormon itself, addressing the intriguing question of wilderness, wild beasts, and the implications of red meat in Book of Mormon theology.²² My own essay, “Faith and the Ethics of Climate Change,” examines for the first time LDS theology in light of the Anthropocene, the age of climate change. The essay is less an attempt to prove climate change to LDS skeptics than it is an attempt to understand how the complexity and unpredictability of climate change—often the very reasons for so much denial—are opportunities well met by LDS creation theology, particularly the account of Moses’s vision of the creation in the Pearl of Great Price.²³ Finally, Patricia Karamesines offers a fascinating exploration of Mormon doctrine as it relates to the practice of nature writing, offering reasons for Mormons to make more contributions to this popular genre.²⁴ This special issue of *Dialogue* remains a singular achievement of environmentally focused scholarship on Mormonism.

In 2012 a special issue of *Sunstone*, also edited by Steven Peck, provided a less significant cluster of three essays on Mormon environmentalism. I say this because the essays are more personal and are not as engaged in the scholarship built up by previous contributors. However, one essay, by Rachel Whipple, raises what is a pressing topic still awaiting adequate research.²⁵ That is, how might LDS faithful find ways to engage in more sustainable practices and more effectively teach an ethics that is intimately connected to the ethos and spiritual health

22. *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 87–117.

23. *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 6–35.

24. *Dialogue* 44/2 (2011): 119–33.

25. Rachel Whipple, “Practicing Stewardship in a Consumer Culture,” *Sunstone* 167 (2012); online at <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/practicing-stewardship-in-a-consumer-culture/>.

of families and homemaking, especially within the context of capitalism? Much work remains to be done to connect the Mormon ethic of self-reliance and provident living to the task of living more sustainably and with a gentler impact on the earth. Indeed, it would seem that if a strong Mormon environmental ethos is to emerge, it will come from a more holistic understanding of the relationship between the domestic space and the global environment. Unfortunately, self-reliance and stewardship have recently been understood to have merely monetary meanings and could benefit from an expanded recognition of our interdependencies with and responsibilities for the health of ecosystems, of earth's energy sources, and of communities across the globe and into the future.

Teaching and research on the environment at BYU, meanwhile, have continued to develop and grow in interdisciplinary reach. In the fall of 2012, BYU held a second symposium on stewardship, this time called "Conservation, Restoration, and Sustainability: A Call to Stewardship." It was cosponsored by the College of Humanities, the Kennedy Center for International Studies, and the College of Life Sciences and underwritten by a donation to BYU from The Nature Conservancy, money that helped to formally organize a consortium of cross-disciplinary faculty called the Environmental Ethics Initiative (EEI). Although no proceedings of the symposium were published, it was again well attended and included an array of prominent non-LDS scholars, as it sought to bridge the conversation happening within LDS culture with the broader field of environmental studies. Keynote speakers included restoration ecologist Margaret Palmer, climate change thinker Jonathan Foley, and environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott. This same support for EEI most recently led to a semester-long weekly climate change lecture series during the winter semester of 2015. It was cosponsored by the David M. Kennedy Center and featured lectures by internationally renowned experts as well as several of BYU's own faculty involved in

climate-related research, including two standout lectures by William Christensen and Summer Rupper.²⁶

What is perhaps the most significant and culminating development of this history is the result of a symposium entitled “Religion, Faith, and the Environment,” held at the University of Utah Law School in March of 2013.²⁷ Elder Marcus M. Nash acted as an official representative of the LDS Church at the symposium and, in his speech “Righteous Dominion and Compassion for the Earth,” offered what is certainly the most definitive statement regarding earth stewardship by the church that we have to date. The speech was met with great enthusiasm and was the impetus for the creation of two websites later produced by the church on the topic “Conservation and Stewardship,” first on the Mormon Newsroom website and then, more importantly, on LDS.org, where it is now part of the Gospel Topics library.²⁸ Elder Nash’s speech is featured on the websites, along with links to articles about the church’s sustainability practices, scriptures and teachings of the prophets, tips for conservation, and some of the abovementioned research, including links to the aforementioned volume *Stewardship and the Creation* and to my essay “The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief.”

While statements about stewardship have been made by most if not all church leaders at one time or another, until Elder Nash’s speech no one had ever devoted an entire talk exclusively to the topic. What stands out, in my judgment, about the talk is the way it directly connects the Mormon plan of salvation with environmental stewardship. As noted, some scholars have sought to identify ways in which Mormon theology

26. Keynote and other lectures from the conference are available online at <http://kennedy.byu.edu/lectures/>.

27. The entirety of the symposium is available online at <http://www.law.utah.edu/event/12233/>.

28. See <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/environmental-stewardship-conservation> and <https://www.lds.org/topics/environmental-stewardship-and-conservation>. A short and well-produced video, included on these links, summarizes briefly the ethos of Mormon environmental stewardship. These websites were unfortunately overshadowed by the production at the same time of several webpages by the church on such topics as race and the priesthood and the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

is more friendly to a biocentric view, which in many ways it is, but his talk instead emphasizes the anthropocentrism of Mormon theology and then embeds an environmental ethic directly into our broader and exceptional human responsibilities toward one another. Better stewardship does not require, in other words, a radical rethinking of ethics but rather a more holistic and expanded understanding of God's gifts. The earth was created for humankind and is intended to be used for human ends, and while this might imply that Mormonism is essentially uninterested in the inherent value and long-term well-being of the planet, Elder Nash makes it unambiguously clear that all human uses of natural resources must have in mind both long-term sustainability and the needs of the poor front and center. His talk is, in other words, a call to much greater modesty in consumption, deeper reverence for all of life, and a more conscientious and compassionate approach to distributing natural resources more equitably. He sums up his argument by saying that "as stewards over the earth and all life thereon, we are to gratefully make use of that which the Lord has provided, avoid wasting life and resources, and use the bounty of the earth to care for the poor." I believe that the talk serves as a vital reference point for all future discussions and will likely provide, along with the additional information provided on the websites, incentives for church administrators and members to develop more effective and focused efforts in homes and in wards to respond to environmental problems with moral urgency and practical efficiency. The websites also make clear as never before that the church has a long history of commitment to good stewardship practices in their design of buildings, ranches, and in other areas.

If it seems paradoxical that Mormons believe in a spiritual creation that makes living souls of all living things while also believing in a decidedly human purpose to the whole of creation, it is. This is a tension that is perhaps yet to be more fully explored and understood, since it is clear that Mormonism, despite having an unmistakable ethic of stewardship placed directly on human shoulders, has not produced a very even record of environmentally friendly attitudes, policies, and practices. Indeed, one of the most common perceptions of Mormonism

prior to the development of this scholarship was that Mormonism was at best ecologically indifferent and at worst ecologically hostile.²⁹ The emphasis on the environmental principles of Mormonism continues to be either largely ignored or met with surprise. Many of the faithful are either largely unaware of the church's websites or suspicious that they were created under political pressure. And much of the ideas contained in them have yet to see the full light of day in general conference, in the *Ensign* magazine, or in any of the church lesson manuals.

There are many areas of research awaiting the voices of new scholars. We have yet to see a thorough examination of the ecotheology of the Book of Mormon, much less an attempt to connect it to what is written in the Doctrine and Covenants and to the significant ecotheological scholarship that already exists on the Bible. Mormon thinkers of a theological bent could also explore ways to widen the definition of "provident living" to include stewardship of the earth; a more exhaustive exploration of the Word of Wisdom in light of what is known about the environmental impacts of our eating could be undertaken;³⁰ and, especially because of LDS contributions to business, more careful attention to the environmental ethics of business practices is also warranted.³¹ As the church makes progress in the greening of its architecture, further research is needed on how to help the users of buildings—whether at home, at church, or at work—maximize the efficiencies and minimize

29. In his survey of faith-based environmental initiatives, Max Oelschlaeger mistakenly concludes that the LDS Church is "the only denomination that has formally stated its opposition to ecology as part of the church's mission" (*Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994], 204).

30. Jane Birch is the only scholar to have addressed the Word of Wisdom in this way. See her book *Discovering the Word of Wisdom: Surprising Insights from a Whole Food, Plant-Based Perspective* (Provo, UT: Fresh Awakenings, 2013). Although her primary purpose is to develop a more healthy diet based on the recommendations of the Word of Wisdom, she does address some of the environmental benefits of such a diet.

31. It would be valuable not only to revisit Nibley's words of caution about greed and the drive for accumulation, but also to consider the environmental impacts of extractive economies that externalize costs to the detriment of future generations and the poor.

the environmental impacts of the built environments they inhabit. Although the question of animals is proving increasingly important in humanistic studies, more research is required to understand the fullest implications of the place of animals in the Mormon plan of salvation and the concomitant ethical obligations humans bear towards all animals. Since there was a time when humane treatment of animals was important enough for the early twentieth-century church to create a program, Humane Day, to teach Primary children ethical treatment and care of animals, one wonders how that ethic might be reenacted in the current age of industrial meat production, not to mention the mistreatment of animals involved in the production of all kinds of consumer goods. Finally, and on a related note, more work needs to be done to understand the relationship between family economics and consumption patterns to climate change and how Mormons can develop the kind of collective ethics needed to respond adequately. It will also be important to consider how climate change affects the poor disproportionately and how this might require a shift or redefinition of the kind of humanitarian work the church does.

The particular visions of stewardship held by Brigham Young, Joseph Smith, or any other leader of the LDS Church still await scholarly attention in light of contemporary ecological understandings. Furthermore, what neither Nibley nor the scholars who have followed him have ever suggested are any reasons explicitly stated or implied by church leaders as to why LDS faithful might be justified in neglecting stewardship of the earth. This is perhaps a major oversight, since many Mormons justify anti-environmental attitudes, however incorrectly or vaguely, by recourse to doctrine and teachings of the church. In other words, scholars might do well to not assume that the absence of a strong environmental ethos is merely a function of benign neglect. Environmentalism, rightly or wrongly, was often identified as a threat to LDS values, and scholarship should explore such reasoning.³²

32. For example, a little-known book entitled *Environmentalism and the Gospel* (Analytica, 1995), by Gale Lyle Pooley, seeks to make an argument against contemporary environmental wisdom and activism on the basis of the Mormon author's

More work is needed to understand the interface between political ideology and theology in Mormon culture. It didn't used to be the case that Republicans in the United States were anti-environmental (and it certainly isn't always the case), but today partisan affiliation explains, more directly than religion, one's environmental attitudes. For that reason, more research is needed to understand the political formation of Mormons, particularly in the Intermountain West, and how that might differ from formations elsewhere in the country and in the world. To which doctrines are Mormons drawn to substantiate their views, and what, if anything, might influence a Mormon to change her mind about such a matter as the environment? And although I have suggested that environmental history is beyond the purview of this study, it still remains to be answered why, given the exceptional and explicitly stated doctrines of stewardship in Mormonism, Latter-day Saints are not more known as a people for their environmental stewardship. What, in other words, accounts for the fact that the research on the doctrines of stewardship over the last several years came so late, and why do the pertinent teachings remain relatively neglected by most members of the church?

I should stress that most of this research is really a means to an end. As Orthodox ecotheologian Metropolitan John of Pergamon has written, humanity needs "not an ethic, but an ethos; not a program, but an attitude; not a legislation, but a culture."³³ Elder Nash's talk makes it clear that Latter-day Saints don't have to displace or reformulate their fundamental understandings of their purposes on this earth. Any compartmentalization of, say, human economy from the natural economy, or of human ethics apart from ethics toward all life, would be an impoverishment of LDS theology as well as of the earth itself. As many of the thinkers and writers reviewed above suggest, what is required is a kind

understanding of the gospel. The problem with the book, however, is that it provides a straw man of environmental extremism, drawn up by his own strong ideological understanding of the environmental movement as the representation of all environmentalisms, as well as an equally narrow and selective reading of LDS doctrines of stewardship.

33. John D. Zizioulas, "Preserving God's Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology," *King's College London Theological Review* 12/1 (Spring 1989), 1-5; 12/2 (Autumn 1989), 41-45; and 13/1 (Spring 1990), 1-5.

of living and imagining and acting that is deeply attuned to the sanctity of human life and of all living things—in the past, in the present, and into the future.

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Review Essays

Wrestling with Language: Exploring the Impact of Mormon Metaphysics on Theological Pedagogy

Michelle Chaplin Sanchez

Review of Terryl L. Givens. *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought—Cosmos, God, and Humanity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS* IS ONE OF THE MORE FAMILIAR of his dialogues, presenting several of the philosopher's most famous ideas. On the one hand, the *Phaedrus* would seem to contain ample evidence for the Platonic tendency to value the spiritual over the material, souls over bodies, and the eternal over the mortal. On the other hand, the context of the dialogue embeds such claims alongside an extended and complex discussion on rhetoric, persuasion, and whether writing is suited to teach: to induce a student along the path of recollection. In his wonderful and capacious contextualization of Mormon theology, *Wrestling the Angel*, Terryl Givens references the *Phaedrus* (among other sources) to provide a philosophical contrast to Mormonism's high valuation of embodiment, citing Plato's "wholesale condemnation of the bodily dimension of the self" (p. 201). Such a reading is hardly unique to Givens, but as

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a reader of Plato, I have often sided with those who argue against these kinds of interpretations (common as they are) on the grounds that the dialogue's overarching interest in the problematics of communication will ask a reader to look beyond what is stated and more closely to *how* it is stated. Attention to Socratic irony—or *how* Socrates teaches—will render claims differently than they might otherwise seem at face value. And on my reading, the rhetorical strategies in a dialogue like the *Phaedrus* present a more complicated view of the body.

As I paused to consider yet again if I agreed with the familiar negative assessment of Plato's view of embodiment, however, I began to realize that in the context of Givens's ambitious project—that of compiling and nuancing an account of Mormon theology—such interpretive questions point to a larger and much more interesting issue. Specifically, such comparative questions remind scholars of theology to consider how and to what extent fundamentally different metaphysical beliefs will affect the way words are used, arguments are offered, and teaching is undertaken. For even though I might quibble with the claim that Plato in fact should be read to offer a “wholesale condemnation of the bodily dimension of the self,” Givens shows beyond doubt that the Platonic tradition begins from radically different cosmological premises than Mormonism, and these differences will impact how an understanding of “the truth” must be communicated and enacted.

As a theologian who works primarily in the period of the Protestant Reformation, I routinely emphasize the importance of reading theology for more than propositional claims, and instead approaching theological texts as crafted forms of discourse designed to persuade a reader to think and live differently. This often involves the use of rhetorical strategies involving claims that may come to be understood very differently when one assumes a different perspective on the path of instruction. After working through *Wrestling the Angel*, however, I began to wonder how and to what extent this particular understanding of theology as a pedagogical discourse can be generalized, and to what extent it might rely on a fundamentally Platonic—or Augustinian—cosmology. In this review essay, I will attempt to think alongside Givens, who has done an

invaluable service both to scholars of theology and to scholars of Mormonism in producing this stunning comparative effort. I hope that my thoughts will begin to show the kind of engagement that Givens's work has made possible across these traditions and disciplines, and perhaps point to some avenues for future work at the intersection of Mormon and wider Christian theology.

First, let me say a bit more about what Givens offers in *Wrestling the Angel*. As a reader with expertise in theology but only a cursory prior knowledge of Mormonism, I found it a distinct pleasure to work through Givens's work and to witness the Mormon theological tradition emerge from those pages with the kind of complexity and integrity that it rightly deserves, addressed at least in part to a wider academic audience that has often treated Mormonism unfairly or ignored it altogether. Throughout this thoroughly comparative enterprise, the book successfully constructs a clear and exceedingly useful account of what it is that Mormons actually believe, and it does a fine job gesturing to what is at stake in these beliefs. The reader comes to understand not only that Mormons hold to a great many distinct and wonderfully bold metaphysical and soteriological commitments; she is also invited to appreciate the deep vitality and coherence of these teachings as well as the logic through which various teachings and practices have been negotiated and amended over time.

The book itself, which comprises the first of an eventual two-volume treatment of "the foundations of Mormon thought and practice," works methodically through Mormon beliefs from the greatest in scope to the smallest. Beginning with the cosmos and moving quickly to the Mormon doctrine of God, Givens opens his study by emphasizing the fundamental cleft between Mormon metaphysics and the basic view of the cosmos that has dominated the Christian West. Many currents of Christianity have been committed to an understanding of God as a trinitarian spirit who is transcendent, eternal, impassable, omniscient, omnipotent, and good; who created the time and space of our cosmos, along with human beings, out of nothing. For Mormons, according to Givens, the universe itself is both material and eternal; it is composed of a single substance

that organizes variously into intelligences, bodies, and the subtle matter of spirit. Within the universe, God is a superlatively realized intelligence who is subject to the laws and conditions of the universe (pp. 65, 99). As such, God is fundamentally the *organizer* of all things, rather than the creator of all things. The divine intelligence organizes itself in various ways—in a body, as ether, or as the highly refined matter of spirit (pp. 95, 125–27); as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (pp. 72–74); and alternatively as both Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother (pp. 106–11). God freely chooses the fullest relation to both the universe and its laws and to other intelligences (pp. 74, 88, 97, 103), and it is through this relationship that human beings may ultimately ascend to a fully embodied deification. Salvation is therefore the decision on the part of human beings to freely embrace the call of divine organization according to eternal laws and to live according to these practices—to fully realize the knowledge of God and the cosmos, and thus to become fully realized material intelligences in relationship to and alongside of God (pp. 312–13).

To ground his claims concerning Mormon beliefs, Givens relies heavily on teachings, publications, lectures, and letters from key founders and subsequent figures. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley Pratt, and Orson Pratt are cited early and often, though their views and teachings are often accompanied by those of a wider array of past and present LDS voices. To shed additional light on what is at stake in these beliefs, Givens cites a truly rich array of non-Mormon theological teachings to highlight both the continuities and novelties that Mormon theology presents. He tends to locate positive resonances in some forms of ancient Greek philosophy, pre-Augustinian Christian theology, and some early modern European philosophies, as well as in the full range of nineteenth-century American thought: Transcendentalists, Pragmatists, Unitarians, Universalists, and Romantics. Contrasting examples are routinely drawn from varieties of Platonism, Augustinianism, and especially Calvinism and its later Puritan varieties in America.

As Givens's account progresses from the cosmos through the Godhead to views of human life and salvation, Mormonism's distinctive theological character stands out in its unparalleled willingness to engage

with aplomb radically divergent possibilities for the nature and meaning of reality. These possibilities are embraced, first and foremost, in response to a revealed project of restoration. As a scholar of the Protestant Reformation, I found Givens's discussion of the Mormon restoration in contrast to other projects of religious reform (chapter 3) to be utterly fascinating in itself, certainly deserving of further interdisciplinary engagement. Additionally, Givens texturizes the unique qualities of Mormonism in ongoing relation to the mores of its own time and American context, highlighting the positive relationship Mormonism has historically assumed with respect to scientific inquiry and innovation (pp. 14–15), its wholesale embrace of the values of freedom and human choice (pp. 194–98), and its intrinsic commitment to the paradigms of law, organization, and hard work (e.g., pp. 155–61, 266–74, 299–300, 309). These last qualities—which might be summarized as commitments to materialism, voluntarism, and proceduralism—make for a fascinating comparison to the legacy of Calvinism and Reformed theology, which I will more fully address later in this essay.

Returning to my overarching interest in theological method—or how traditions give themselves to be *written*—there is no doubt that Givens faces a tricky task, though one not unfamiliar to scholars of many traditions known to distrust or disavow the legacy of theology. He acknowledges this early: “[Modern-day] Mormons have considered the very enterprise of theology to be largely a secular enterprise, a sign of true religion’s failure, and not an activity worth pursuing with any energy” (p. 6). He points out, however, that the early founders of Mormonism accorded a more positive role to theological teaching. According to Givens, “Theology is, as the etymology suggests, reasoned discourse about God, and one of Joseph Smith’s earliest projects was to organize a School of the Prophets and deliver there a series of ‘lectures on theology’” (p. 6). Invoking this etymology, Givens is able to tactfully recover a conception of theology as a more general form of discourse that is, in fact, never absent from any attempt to speak about divine things. To convey a belief, or the experience of a revelation, requires that one *reason* before another using perhaps all of the senses conveyed in

the Greek word *logos*, which can also be translated as “speech,” “word,” or “argument.”

Givens does not discuss the other possible, and quite common, rendering of the Greek genitive that combines *theos* and *logos* into “speech of God”: namely, the suggestion that *theology* is also meant to connote “God’s own speech.” The latent possibility that theology must also function as a transcendent or uniquely *divine* form of speech has perennially placed the problem of *analogy* at the center of debates over Christian speech. Analogy refers both to the similarity and the difference that obtains between two things that stand in some form of relation but are fundamentally different from each other. For many Christian theologians, this analogical difference is rooted in the belief that there is a vast ontological difference between God and God’s creation. As such, the majority of Christian approaches to theological writing have always had difficulty stabilizing any attempts to contain or define the single, proper form of theological speech and have often resorted to a wide range of literary and interpretive devices. One might think quickly of the *via negativa* or the use of both cataphasis and apophasis (saying and unsaying) when speaking of God in an author like Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fifth century) or of the doctrine of divine accommodation as an interpretive principle in an author like John Calvin (sixteenth century).

Yet one does find Givens gesturing to the problem of transcendent language in one subtle but significant way—namely, his chosen title, “Wrestling the Angel.” This vivid image points to what his argument does not fully explore. Givens provides only one sentence (the book’s very first sentence) to explain his title: “‘Wrestling the Angel’ seems an apt image for any mortal attempt to capture in finite time and human language the essential propositions about the nature of God, his universe, and his creations” (p. ix). The suggestion that the borders of any comprehensive contextualization of Mormon theology are in fact circumscribed by a human being wrestling an agent of transcendence frames this book as a whole and hangs atop the left side of every page. This elicits the following question: in what way, and to what extent, does

this destabilizing feature of theological language impact our reading of the uniquely Mormon beliefs that Givens outlines with such care? Or, conversely, how do Mormon commitments concerning the nature of the universe and God render the problem of divine speech *differently*?

To unpack what I mean, let me return briefly to Plato's *Phaedrus*, which Givens uses to underscore Plato's low view of embodiment—a reading that may seem fair enough, given Socrates's claim that the highest and truest Being is “without color, without form, intangible, visible to reason alone . . . fed on intellect and pure knowledge”¹ and that a human being must rise above mere bodily activities in order to contemplate it. However, the dialogue itself is suffused with a debate over how words are properly used to guide a person to the path of the contemplation of the truth, and this debate often involves the recognition that within the unwieldy enterprise of teaching the truth, all boundaries are porous. Philosophy, for example, requires a love-induced madness that is both dangerous but also necessary to draw one beyond oneself; rational argument requires reliance on the use of myths that do not themselves conform to the rules of rational argument; and speaking the truth is not a straightforward endeavor, but one that requires the use of rhetoric for the purpose of persuasion. In both its content and its form, the *Phaedrus* relies on a variety of complex literary and rhetorical devices that not only situate its propositional claims but display the larger argument that philosophy can never attain its goal through the uncomplicated use of reason or language, but always requires things like madness, love, and myth to induce a student to the true contemplation of the gods.

As a result, several of the more blunt claims of the dialogue are undone in the course of the speeches and events that it recounts. This includes, I think, Socrates's statements concerning the body. Many of Socrates's negative claims about the mortal body analogically *rely* on a positive use of the material features of the mortal body in order to ground the activity of recollection itself. Socrates's own body, his bodily

1. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246c.

actions, and his continued reliance on bodily metaphors and especially the embodied experience of desire are crucial to founding and figuring every argument he offers concerning the soul. Bodily desire, in other words, is the experience that anchors the possibility for the soul to adequately navigate what it means to desire the truth. It may be that the truth is immaterial, but it is not a truth that is unconcerned with a positive use and experience of the body. In this way, a text that rhetorically denies the goodness of the body might be read as performing a critical interruption of conventional attitudes for the purposes of radically heightening one's view of the *true importance* of the body.

This brief foray into the *Phaedrus* exemplifies a larger point: teachings that involve engaging ontological difference—or things anchored beyond the bounds of ordinary human representation—will often use propositional claims strategically to achieve precisely the opposite effect of what a reader or student might have expected. Ascertaining the face value of a theological assertion is thus always a task of critical importance, but so is ascertaining the full rhetorical effect of theological assertions in the context of more complex pedagogical aims. Givens does a masterful job of presenting a multidimensional account of Mormon theological assertions. Yet the question still lingers: how do these beliefs give themselves to be taught or communicated to others? How are they designed to shape a certain kind of religious life in relation to that which words cannot capture?

To explore this question more deeply in connection with *Wrestling the Angel*, let me return to the three features of Mormon theology that I named at the outset: materialism, voluntarism, and proceduralism. Givens provides a fascinating discussion of these three particularly in “The Fall” (chapter 18), “Embodiment” (chapter 19), and “Salvation” (chapter 20). In these chapters he also offers a rich exploration of the relationship between Mormon beliefs and their ethical and social implications. All three of these features also make for an especially fascinating contrast with Calvinism, not only because Calvinism is often presented by Givens as Mormonism's *bête noire*, but also because of the general scholarly consensus that Calvinism itself has done much to

shape Western, modern proclivities toward materialism, voluntarism, and proceduralism.

Givens opens these chapters by quoting Brooks Holifield: “A substantial part of the history of theology in early America was an extended debate, stretching over more than two centuries, about the meaning and truth of Calvinism” (p. 176), in particular citing resistance to Calvinist teachings on original sin, predestination, and the transcendent sovereignty of God over creation, judgment, and salvation. In some of his most explicit historicizing, Givens situates early Mormonism in relation to a broader wave of American intellectual movements that similarly repudiated Calvinism: “Mormon conceptions of human nature unencumbered by original sin or inherited depravity comport perfectly with the nineteenth-century zenith of liberal humanism, with its celebration of human potential, sense of boundlessness, and Romantic optimism” (p. 191). He argues, however, that Mormons differ from their Unitarian, Transcendentalist, Romantic, and Humanist counterparts in one crucial way—namely, *their unique metaphysical commitments* (pp. 191, 196). In other words, Mormonism’s cosmology provides premises that undergird a thoroughly holistic and consistent alternative to Calvinism. “Given God’s purported materiality,” Givens writes, “Mormonism endows an unequivocal value on the physical and bodily” (p. 199). Accordingly, God’s freedom of choice also entails that all intelligences both have and must make use of freedom of choice. The logic here is not one of analogy, but rather one of univocity.

This all leads to a fascinating possibility: that Mormon cosmology might in fact render Mormon theological language unique with respect to other Western theological traditions that rely on the fundamental distance between signification and the thing signified. If God is part and parcel of the universe to which human beings also belong, and if human beings are similarly preexistent and can be expected to attain a deified status, then perhaps the difficulties of analogy cannot be expected to haunt Mormon theological claims. Perhaps they function in an altogether different rhetorical sense—a possibility that, while intriguing, will also complicate any comparative project that relies on contrasting

theological claims. To get at what might be at stake in the possibility that Mormon linguistic assertions actually function differently, let me look at some examples drawn from my own field and its debates over the socio-political impact of Reformation theologies.

The case for arguing that Reformation theologies laid crucial intellectual groundwork for a uniquely modern, Western form of human subjectivity (for better and worse) has been made by a wide variety of authors including Max Weber, Marcel Gauchet, Charles Taylor, Michael Gillespie, Philip Gorski, Brad Gregory, and Roland Boer. In spite of their many disagreements, one will find a general consensus among these authors that Reformation teachings on divine transcendence, sovereignty, original sin, divine grace, predestination, and Christian freedom actually achieved a number of highly counterintuitive effects. And, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*, these effects can be traced to the ability of language to shape persons not by simply telling them the truth, but by causing them to approach ordinary things differently and thus orient their worlds and activities differently. As a result, arguments on these arcane matters of theology have often functioned to achieve the opposite of what they seem to say.

For example, the prospect of divine predestination, rather than paralyzing human agency, might in fact motivate a person to act *more* boldly as a purported agent of God's providential will; think, perhaps, of the logic of Manifest Destiny. The teaching that the divine will is not bound by any law, rather than sanctioning human anarchy, might in fact lead to new and unprecedented interest in forming a disciplinary society around law; after all, if religious subjects are no longer required to conform to one fixed rubric for church and society, the horizon for crafting an improved society becomes infinite. The assertion of a vast ontological distance between God and the world, rather than causing passivity, might in fact motivate unprecedented interest in ascertaining exactly how nature works on its own, thus eliciting new efforts to take mastery over nature without fear of transgressing some internal divine order. And finally, utter reliance on divine grace for salvation and good works, rather than undermining moral improvement, might in fact lead

to greater confidence in taking on radical or revolutionary change—in other words, the courage to act boldly in the name of what is perceived to be a just cause.

Givens repeatedly expresses puzzlement—both his own and the puzzlement of his documentary sources—over how the teachings of Calvinism could ever have made any sense (e.g., pp. 176–83, 222–24). How can God be creator, wrathful judge, and merciful savior all at once? How can total depravity do anything but undermine healthy human relations or attempts at moral improvement? These are sensible questions, if one reads univocally. But for me, as one who spends considerable time making sense of these claims and tracing their often-counterintuitive impact on the social landscape of the modern West, it seems beyond controversy that these propositional claims did—and were perhaps designed to—actually motivate materialistic, voluntaristic, and procedurally oriented human activity in oblique but discernible ways. But what does this imply about the more straightforward Mormon valuations of materialism, voluntarism, and proceduralism? If Calvinist claims of determinism are designed to foment a more radical form of human activity—or if the Socratic disparagement of the body is designed to draw increased scrutiny to the activities and desires of the body precisely because these are centrally important—are Mormon claims similarly counterintuitive?

After reading Givens's work, I do not think so. On my reading, Givens successfully shows that Mormon theological teachings tend to achieve what they aim to achieve in terms of their ethical and social force, without the need for complicated rhetorical artifices or oblique interpretations. But if this is the case, it is important to ask why, and furthermore *what* this has to do with the distinct way Mormons approach language itself. Ultimately, this will require assessing how Mormon cosmological and theological foundations actually impact the use and function of language. The radical difference in metaphysics that Givens emphasizes may complicate but also enrich our notions of what precisely is meant by "*Mormon* theology." And in the end, perhaps the place to begin unwinding this question is not in cosmology

but soteriology. If the logic of grace—the logic of the “gift”—has been crucial to the Western imaginary for understanding the operation of communication, knowledge, and salvation between the transcendent and the immanent—for Plato, but *especially* since Augustine—then a Mormon salvation that does not rely on the logic of the gift would point to huge implications. A gift, after all, reifies the notion that God’s own reason is not explicable according to the logic of a human economy, but always comes from an unexpected and radically nonreciprocal source. But while salvation is made possible by the gift of Christ’s atonement, Givens points out that the condition of being saved is not fundamentally a gift: “Eternal life, the kind and quality of life that God lives, is a natural and inevitable consequence of compliance with eternal principles” (p. 232). It may be that such principles, as a rhetorical form, are nothing more than univocal.

And yet Mormonism remains circumscribed by the account of a revelation—of wrestling with an angel. This carries implications too—implications that later scholars will have to pursue. I expect that delving further into the nuances of a Mormon theology of language will prove a fascinating project and may shed additional light on the conditions through which Mormon beliefs functioned to persuade, have shifted over time, and may continue to reveal unique and intriguing patterns of living. Givens’s study has performed an enormous service in allowing scholars of theology and Mormonism alike to continue to hone these kinds of questions.

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Accounting for Whiteness in Mormon Religion

Sylvester A. Johnson

Review of W. Paul Reeve. *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Introduction

THE CRITICAL STUDY OF RACIAL WHITENESS, which is often observed to have begun with the scholarship of W. E. B. Du Bois, has developed in important ways during recent years. Since the 1990s, particularly, scholars have emphasized the dynamic nature of white racial identity. Some present-day populations routinely designated as white, for instance, would have been targets of racism in earlier periods such as the nineteenth century. In addition, the United States government has inconsistently located particular populations (such as Hispanics) within or beyond the boundaries of racial whiteness over time. Among important studies that have stressed this aspect are those by Noel Ignatiev, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and David Roediger.¹

1. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

Whereas earlier studies tended to reflect minimal concern, if any, for the role of religion in racialization, scholars have more recently begun attending to the linkage between religion and whiteness. Of major importance here are Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus*, Edward Blum's *Reforging the White Republic*, Tracy Fessenden's *Culture and Redemption*, Shawn Kelley's *Racializing Jesus*, J. Kameron Carter's *Race: A Theological Account*, Kelly J. Baker's *Gospel According to the Klan*, and Eric Goldstein's *Price of Whiteness*.²

In this context, W. Paul Reeve of the University of Utah, a historian of Mormonism, has written an insightful and potentially game-changing study of race and religion. In *Religion of a Different Color* (a riff on the title of Jacobson's study), Reeve accounts for the marginalization of Mormons during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His central argument is that Euro-American Mormons³ were racialized on the basis of their religion. This racialization, Reeve claims, made Mormons "racially suspect" and rendered them, in the perspective of a white Protestant majority, as coconspirators with indigenous peoples, as biologically distinct from white Protestants, and as complicit in fomenting racial mixture with blacks and resistance to the regime of racial separatism. Reeve further asserts that Mormons firmly secured whiteness—they became fully white—only during the

2. Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); and Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

3. Throughout this essay, I employ the term *Euro-American Mormons* to designate the population Reeve terms "white Mormons." As I discuss below, referring to these Mormons as racially white becomes problematic given Reeve's claim that Mormons did not achieve whiteness until the twentieth century.

twentieth century, following an arduous struggle for acceptance by a white Protestant majority (pp. 2–4). As a result, he explains, contemporary Euro-American Mormons are soundly ensconced within whiteness and have invested fully in this racial subjectivity.

Nature of the work

In support of this argument, Reeve marshals myriad forms of archival evidence. He draws on political cartoons (the book is richly illustrated with these), literature, government documents, newspapers, travel narratives, magazines, and diaries to capture the history of relations among Mormons, American Indians, blacks, white Protestants, and the US government. The structure of the book, in fact, is largely guided by a focused examination of Mormon relations with several non-white populations. Two chapters are devoted to assessing the history of relations between Euro-American Mormons and Native Americans. Four chapters are devoted to anti-blackness in Mormon religion. Reeve also allots a chapter to examining Euro-American Mormon relations with Asian immigrants. A final chapter examines race and Mormon religion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the two chapters on Mormon-Indian relations, Reeve explains the role of Mormon scripture in shaping a racial imaginary of American Indians. Mormon missions targeted native peoples to redeem them, and Mormons collaborated with the US government to seize the lands belonging to indigenous nations. What emerges is a decidedly complicated portrait of racial conflict. Euro-American Mormons succeeded in winning many indigenous converts. But the very presence of Native American Mormons among Euro-American members of the church was easy evidence for white Protestants to assert Mormons were agents of race mixing and savagery. More importantly, as the US military continued to wage endless war against native nations to seize their lands, government officials and the populist media of the Anglo-American empire accused Euro-American Mormons of colluding with indigenous militias to rout the invading troops of the white nation-state. In

this sense, Euro-American Mormons were charged with undermining national security.

In his four chapters on Mormons and blacks, Reeve develops a compelling and complex rendering of the racial hierarchy that Euro-American Mormons imposed in the Utah territory that eventually became a state. In the first of these (chapter 4), he explains Euro-American Mormon opposition to so-called racial amalgamation and focuses on the ban against ordaining blacks to the LDS priesthood. Central here are the stories of William McCrary, a black Mormon who was eventually expelled from the church after claiming to be a prophet, and William Appleby, the Euro-American Mormon who challenged Brigham Young to remedy the presence of black priests and interracial marriage involving black Mormons.

Chapter 5 focuses on Brigham Young, the Mormon leader who became governor of the Utah Territory. Reeve discusses Brigham Young's pivotal role in establishing white supremacy by instituting a priesthood ban against blacks in 1852 and legalizing slavery through a "servitude" bill that governed enslaved blacks and white servants. Even more impactful was Young's leadership of a political movement to legalize black slavery in the Utah Territory. Reeve explains how Young rationalized racial purity through a doctrine of racial priesthood and gentile pollution. According to traditional readings of Mormon scripture, blacks were uniquely set apart because they were the cursed descendants of Cain (a villainous character of scriptural myth) and were marked for their impurity by their dark skin. Reeve explains further that Young, drawing on biblical narrative, preached that the biblical Deity had punished Gentiles for racial mixture—intermarriage with other nations. But the saints of the LDS Church were racially pure and needed to maintain their purity from the cursed seed of Cain. By this account, a racial system of government, broadly conceived, was essential to secure Mormon salvation. Mormon redemption thus became dependent on policing racial boundaries and enforcing black inferiority.

Even more striking is the fact that Utah's race laws stipulated that only "free white males" could vote. So it seems clear enough from Reeve's

historical study that racial whiteness was an active, legally inscribed force that Euro-American Mormons deployed to govern populations in the territory. In this significant way, these Mormons were racially white. In this same chapter, Reeve examines the strife that ensued when Orson Pratt publicly acknowledged Mormon polygamy and defended it as free exercise of religion. From there on, a full onslaught of scrutiny and condemnation emerged that frequently defined Mormon polygamy as white slavery.

In chapter 6 Reeve displays the consequences of black Mormon men marrying Euro-American women of the church. This was a rare occurrence, but the very fact that it happened evoked both praise from anti-racists such as the Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and, more frequently, devastating condemnation from the nation's racist majority, who exploited the occurrence as evidence that Mormons were breaching the standards of white racial purity. Reeve demonstrates that even the Republican Party took up the issue to undermine Brigham Young's political aspirations, despite the fact that Young promoted anti-black racism unapologetically.

In the next chapter, Reeve tethers his discussion to the Euro-American Mormon Scipio Kenner, who was falsely accused of having black ancestry, and two black Mormons, Elijah Abel and Jane James, who demanded but were denied equal treatment by church leaders. Reeve explains Kenner's success in defending his whiteness from being marred by false accusations of black ancestry. At the same time, he explains how church leaders continually forced Abel and James into a humiliating, inferior status to enforce ecclesiastical boundaries of whiteness. Once again, racial whiteness becomes evident among Mormons.

In chapter 8, Reeve examines how Mormons were compared to or associated with populations of Chinese immigrants, Muslims, and Asians broadly. He tells how in 1880 Protestant minister Thomas Talmage welcomed Chinese immigrants while insisting Mormons were intolerable owing to their religious practices—particularly polygamy. He also recounts how Euro-American Mormons themselves sometimes responded to being associated with Asians by celebrating Asian

civilization as superior to that of the West. More frequently, however, Mormons resented being associated with non-white races and repeatedly sought to enforce the distinctions of race through social policy, church teachings, and public propaganda.

In his concluding chapter, Reeve summarizes the twentieth-century shifts through which Euro-American Mormons not only gained mainstream acceptance but at times were even idealized as hardworking, monogamous, self-sufficient exemplars of stereotypical American whiteness. He notes as “ironic” the LDS Church’s strident condemnation of interracial marriage and defense of the US system of legal apartheid at the height of the civil rights movement. By the twenty-first century, during Mitt Romney’s bid for the US presidency, Mormons had become so iconic of whiteness that one pundit suggested Romney was too white for the expediency of the Republican Party. The explicit interracial aesthetics of the church’s “I’m a Mormon” publicity campaign, furthermore, becomes in Reeve’s elucidation a startling parallel to the interracialism that evoked brutal anti-Mormon invective during the 1800s.

Throughout the book, polygamy and the violence of racism and US expansionism are continually at the fore. Reeve thoroughly underscores how polygamy became a pliable, omnipresent target of derision and persecution that enabled racializing tactics against Mormons. It was the eventual basis for military reprisal and disenfranchisement of Mormons under federal government power. Reeve renders the complexity of this history, furthermore, by attending to how Mormons conscientiously participated in the political project of US empire, particularly by helping the Anglo-American state to dispossess Native Americans of their lands and to undermine indigenous sovereignty. Although they remained devoted to religious self-determination at every point, Euro-American Mormons sought to emblazon their common racial status and cause with non-Mormon whites.

Racialized Mormons: white, less white, or non-white?

The book is not without points of frustration. Most notably, despite his central claim that Mormons secured their whiteness only during the twentieth century, Reeve continually refers to Euro-American Mormons of the nineteenth century as “white Mormons,” at times perhaps to distinguish them from Mormons who were racially black, Native, or Asian. He does this, however, while constantly proffering evidence that Mormons were racialized as racially distinct from white Protestants. Moreover, he expresses at the outset that Euro-American Mormons were racialized to be “less white than white” (p. 4), a mystifying claim that he never fully clarifies. Precisely what would it mean, after all, to be less white than white in racial terms? When one considers, moreover, that Reeve constantly describes nineteenth-century Mormons as “white Mormons,” one is led to wonder how to understand his claim that Mormons achieved whiteness only after a long process of being denied that status.

At the heart of this problem, ironically, is the meticulous, evidentiary execution of Reeve’s study, which convincingly demonstrates that Euro-American Mormons were racialized by white Protestants and the US government while simultaneously showing that these same Mormons established a racially stratified society in the Utah Territory (and subsequent state) based on racial whiteness. As mentioned above, Reeve explicates the myriad practices whereby Euro-American Mormons ensured that racial whiteness was a socially realized status that generated liberties and freedoms that were institutionally denied to blacks, American Indians, and Asians through legal, religious, and, more broadly, cultural practices. As further evidence of this complexity, Reeve examines accusations that Euro-American Mormons were guilty of race mixing, specifically as it relates to interracial sex and marriage. A small number of black Mormon men did marry Euro-American Mormon women. He mentions that AME minister Henry McNeal Turner celebrated Mormon support for interracial marriage while condemning their polygamy. Reeve also explicates how racial mixture among Euro-American Mormons and blacks was condemned and was used

to demean Mormons. Members of the Republican Party even staged accusations of interracial sex and marriage against Brigham Young. By Reeve's own account, this mirrored accusations of race mixing against white non-Mormon abolitionists. While this is not necessarily racialization, but rather a means of policing whiteness, it indicates that white Protestants viewed Mormons as racially white; otherwise there would have been no point in accusing them of violating race purity.

Moreover, despite his claim that early Mormons were universal in their racial outlook, he also shows that their use of the Book of Mormon scripturalized race as both a semiotic system for conceiving social identities and an imperative for political and social order that relegated American Indians to an inferior status of alienated descendants of ancient Israelites and blacks as racially distinct and cursed with dark skin and an evil nature. From the very start, the LDS Church embraced a racial calculus that would remain integral to its theology. More importantly, the Utah Territory was like the rest of the United States insofar as it was a white settler polity, a racial polity. It was established through the violent destruction of American Indian sovereignty and the hegemony of white racial domination. Beyond this, Reeve goes to great lengths to show how the nation's white Protestant majority made a political football of Euro-American Mormon women in polygamous marriages, calling it "white slavery." According to anti-Mormon discourse, Mormon polygamy reduced these women to abject slavery, a condition that the racist majority deemed suitable for only blacks. But of course this invective achieved coherence only because white Protestants viewed these Mormons as racially white. Otherwise there could be no white slavery.

So how should readers assess Reeve's claim that Mormons were racialized in a manner that deprived them of whiteness? Does this mean Euro-American Mormons truly ceased to be white following a bifurcating racialization that split them away from white Protestants? In many ways, this is similar to the problem examined in Edward Blum's *Reforging the White Republic*, an insightful study of religion and racial whiteness during the years following the US Civil War. White northerners, Blum observes, commonly asserted that white southerners were

racially distinct and inferior. The massive violence of the war and the military occupation of the South created a formidable political cleavage that sundered in two what had previously been a single white republican political community united in its racial constitution over and against blacks, American Indians, and Asians. But Blum does not claim that white southerners ceased to be white. He does argue, however, that a veritable racial distinction emerged and divided white northerners and southerners.⁴

Reeve's study can also be compared to how Matthew Frye Jacobson approached the matter in his book *Whiteness of a Different Color*. The fact that some Euro-Americans (white Jews, for instance) were targeted as racial outsiders in the United States, Jacobson claims, does not mean they were not white. He attempts to show, rather, that not all whiteness is created equal. He charts a shifting tapestry of white racial formation in the United States. This ranged from a unified white racial population in the 1790s to myriad white races under Anglo-Saxon hegemony from the 1840s to the 1920s (roughly) and a unitary Caucasian race divided by only ethnicity around the 1940s. But this seems to contravene the very import of racial whiteness as central to conceiving the body politic in a racial state. Even following the period of what Jacobson describes as racial bipolarization—when the black-white racial binary was reasserted to trivialize the distinctions among various European races following the Second World War—not all whites were on exactly equal footing. White Jews particularly, he argues, were white, but they were not *simply* white. Their Jewishness has continued to function to set them apart from other whites.⁵ Among the many evidences of this pattern is the work of Lothrop Stoddard, the Harvard-trained historian who argued that the world's populations consisted of five "primary races" (white, yellow, brown, black, and red), each of which might in turn comprise multiple sets of subordinate races. In the political terms of his own day, the self-avowed white supremacist recognized the fact that

4. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 26–28.

5. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 7–8, 277–79.

multiple populations of whites have been governed as racially distinct peoples along a hierarchy, yet all remained racially white.⁶

Both Blum and Jacobson thus proffer a hierarchical multiplicity of white races, whereas Reeve conceptualizes a racial population that is fully white (white Protestants) and racialized others who are necessarily less white or non-white. Reeve recognizes, of course, that “white Mormons” were racialized and subjected to extermination campaigns, forced removal, and derision as fundamentally, racially distinct from white Protestants. And yet he also recognizes that these same Mormons asserted racial hegemony over Asians, American Indians, and blacks on the basis of asserting white racial rule. Finally, he wants to maintain that Mormons did not achieve whiteness (as a comfortably ensconced status) until the twentieth century.

So how should racial whiteness be interpreted? Can multiple races of whites exist simultaneously? Or can there be only one “truly” white race at a time? In order to assess which theoretical approach is the more exacting, a more precise account of race is required so that the constitution of whiteness can be assessed apart from racialization per se. This brings us to the aspect of Reeve’s study that will inspire the most debate: his definition of race.

Explaining race

Reeve clearly charts his understanding of what race entails in the introduction to his study. He explains that during the nineteenth century, “race operated as a hierarchical system designed to create order and superiority out of the perceived disorder of the confluence of peoples in America. Race could be variously marked by language, national origin, religion, laws and government, marital relationships, and a variety of cultural characteristics” (pp. 3–4). He also observes that the term *race*, as employed during the 1800s, “sometimes referred to nationality more

6. Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 3–12.

than skin color” (p. 4). He continues: “In defining a group identity for Mormons, outsiders frequently conflated believers with other marginal groups to imagine them as more red, black, yellow, or less white than white. Race, then, was a socially invented category and not a biological reality. It was employed by the white Protestant majority to situate Mormons at various distances away from the top of a racial hierarchy and thereby justify discriminatory policies against them” (p. 4).

Because Reeve recognizes that racial terminology was dynamic and inconsistent, his argument and analysis concerning race are not based strictly or exclusively on attempts to locate uses of the term *race* in the period under question, although he includes explicit racial grammars in his discussion. Instead, Reeve aims for a more complex approach, elucidating the numerous and repeated instances of white Protestants expelling Euro-American Mormons from towns, ordering their extermination, publicly deriding them as a threat to the nation’s political interest, and continually associating them with American Indians, blacks, and Asians in order to underscore claims that Mormons were not to be embraced as legitimate peoples of the United States. Of equal importance is his attention to anti-Mormon state practices at multiple levels, particularly that of the sovereign nation-state.

Reeve’s study, by design, will upend or formidably challenge the way many scholars think of race. Because religion is not a phenotype, and because Reeves is arguing that Mormon religion was racialized, his book will without doubt meet with some initial skepticism from readers who think race is strictly somatic. The compelling case that Reeve makes, however, should subdue any reticence among those willing to assess his argument on the basis of evidence and a more complex account of race.

The colonial matrix of race

Reeve’s explication of race, despite his meticulous analysis, is nevertheless divorced from any explicit engagement with colonialism. As we shall see, this produces a lack of theoretical precision in his definition

of race. This is an analytical pattern that has characterized the way most scholars approach the study of race. There are hints of colonialism in Reeve's study, particularly when he describes how Euro-American Mormons were positioned with respect to the US empire and its aggressive, militarized expansion into the sovereign lands of indigenous nations and of the Mexican Republic. Thus it is patent that Reeve has colonialism on the radar for a narrative account of anti-Mormon racism. It is, nevertheless, equally evident that Reeve's account of race renders no direct connection between colonialism and racial formation.

It is essential to recognize that race is constituted through the governing practices of colonialism. Although she does not theorize race herself, the historian Penny M. Von Eschen, most notably, has lucidly observed that colonialism has continually been the crucible for racism, and she has elegantly detailed the political history whereby state and nonstate actors of the twentieth century explicitly manufactured a counternarrative of race to elide the role of colonialism in generating racism, thereby undermining anticolonial activism. In consequence, race was repackaged as a psychological condition or even as a disease-like epidemic.⁷

As the political theorist Barnor Hesse has persuasively demonstrated, moreover, the elision of colonialism as the matrix of race extends beyond state practices of repressing anticolonial activism during the Cold War era. The problem was also exacerbated by scholars of the early twentieth century who desired to critique the racism of the German state under Nazi rule while affirming or shielding from criticism European colonization of non-white peoples throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Although rightly lauded for condemning racism on empirical and ethical grounds, scholars such as Franz Boaz, Ashley Montagu, and Margaret Mead focused not on colonial administrations of race governance but on intellectual, academic, and scientific practices such as craniometry, phrenology, and especially anthropological studies aiming to demonstrate fundamental racial differences. In

7. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

these terms, racism was rendered largely as a problem of thinking—a cerebral, intellectual fiction—as opposed to the material, governing practices of European colonialism.⁸

Despite the lucid scholarship of theorists such as W. E. B Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Aníbal Quijano, Edward Said, and Sylvia Wynter, which has richly demonstrated that colonialism creates racialization, most of the contemporary scholarship on race remains fundamentally disengaged from a clear apprehension of how colonialism functions as the structural, generative matrix for race. The elision of colonialism's role in racialization, thus, is not a simple oversight. It is a historical development rooted in ambivalent modes of anti-racist scholarship *as well as* overt political, state projects devoted to preserving Western colonial control over non-white peoples in an age when white supremacism had ceased to be politically correct.⁹

So how does colonialism make race? Colonialism is a specific form of political power constituted when a given state governs populations in a manner that differentiates their respective relationship with the political community (body politic) of the governing state. Under this system of governing, some populations are people of that state, while others are relegated to the status of aliens, foreign to the body politic. This is especially true of the nation-state (versus the monarchical state, for instance). As a caveat, it is important to observe that colonialism is achieved through a power differential, not a spatial one. Colonized

8. Barnor Hesse, "Im/plausible Deniability: Racism's Conceptual Double Bind," *Social Identities* 10/1 (January 1, 2004): 9–29; Franz Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); and Margaret Mead, "The Methodology of Racial Testing: Its Significance for Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 31/5 (March 1926): 657–67.

9. William E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson, 1975); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3/3 (2003): 257–337; Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del Poder, Cultura y Conocimiento en América Latina," *Dispositio* 24/51 (January 1999): 137–48; and Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1961).

populations might reside in proximity to the metropolitan center of the imperial state. As the British historian Bernard Porter has emphasized, the saltwater fallacy—the notion that real colonialism exists only when a colony is governed from far away across a sea or ocean—has functioned to enable imperial governments such as the United States to deny their actual status as such.¹⁰ Because the governing practices of colonialism are fundamentally rooted in creating differential statuses—varying degrees of rights and privileges—based on the political standing of human populations, the colonial exercise of social power has continually provided the architecture for racializing populations.

Not every instance of colonialism, however, automatically equates to race governance. Political tactics of colonial rule have become racial governance only at the point that imperial states are structured as *racial states*. In this political domain, the differential mechanisms of colonial governance that structure a hierarchy of privileges, freedom, and unfreedoms are applied to render populations as perpetually alien to the nation's political community, regardless of the passage of time or the homogenization of cultures. So despite the fact that a given population might exist within an empire-state for generations—even centuries—the material, ideological, and governing mechanisms of that state continually deny the experience of a pristine relationship between the body politic and those populations deemed alien. Settler colonialism produces the most extreme form of this problem. Not incidentally, white settler polities—the United States writ large and the Utah Territory, more specifically—are not merely linked to the racialization Reeve describes. They actually constitute the political architecture of race.

Multiple white races

Through the governing practices of controlling some populations as alien to a state's political community, colonialism constitutes race. This

10. Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 79.

is politics, not phenotype. And it is why the Euro-American Mormons in Reeve's study became racialized as political enemies of a white republic despite having "white" skin and other stereotypically Anglo-Saxon physical features. At the point when Mormons were treated as a threat to the political community of the United States (the racial nation), they were racially split apart from the dominant white race (whom Jacobson terms "Anglo-Saxons"). The means of this racial fission has been lucidly analyzed by Michel Foucault in his theoretical study of the racial state. Perhaps as an unwitting consequence of his entrenched Eurocentrism, Foucault began his account of the racial state with a nonracialized population of Europeans (no blacks, American Indians, or Asians figure in Foucault's assessment). Given this starting point, he attempted to explain how race emerged as a Western state practice. This was achieved by conceiving of the political community of European states not through the political body of a monarch but, rather, through the political body of a mass population—a nation. This was, in other words, the rise of popular sovereignty, corresponding to what he also theorized as the birth of the population. The emergence of Western republican democracy required the creation of a different political body—a collective one as opposed to a solitary, monarchical figure. The nation-state thus became both legible and dominant in contrast to the monarchical state.¹¹

Most importantly, Foucault explained that it was through politics that a nonracialized political population was transformed into a *battle-ground of races*. For instance, whereas political histories that recounted the mighty deeds of the state had formerly fixated on the monarch, official court (i.e., royal) histories became increasingly concerned with the character and spirit of the population of a given state. Not every inhabitant of a given state, however, was perceived to be in possession of the putative national character. Political divisions and disputes among myriad nonracial groups were rendered as a fundamental struggle for control of the society waged by two or more political populations. Those

11. Michel Foucault et al., "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (Macmillan, 2003); and David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

who gained the upper hand fiercely devoted themselves to defending their society from others *inhabiting the same society*. Inverting the axiom of war as politics by other means, made famous by Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz, Foucault claimed that politics is war by other means. More specifically, race is war waged through politics (governing) to defend a given society from being controlled by intimate enemies, from those *living in* the state yet governed as ultimate *adversaries of* the state. Foucault termed this dynamic an instance of “internal colonialism,” standing in contrast to the colonial projects that Europeans pursued outside of Europe.¹²

By attending to the scholarship explicating the colonial account of race, we can resolve the earlier question of what to make of Reeve’s claim that “white Mormons” were racialized and “less than white,” despite being recognized by white Protestants as “white slaves,” establishing a white racial territory, and otherwise asserting the possession of racial whiteness. Like many other Euro-Americans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Euro-American Mormons did not stop being white after being racialized as enemies of the racial nation-state, nor did they become “less white” (an imprecise if not meaningless designation). They were, however, forced into being governed as a racial threat to the nation’s body politic—this was colonial governance, and it further explains why the United States would go to war against Mormons *as* Mormons. As part of this process, they were deemed racially inferior while remaining racially white. Just as Irish colonial subjects were governed as racially inferior and as political enemies by the British Empire—or, closer to home, just as white northerners (in Blum’s study) were racially divided from white southerners or Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants (in Jacobson’s study) were racially divided from America’s Anglo-Saxons—so also were Mormons engaged by the US government and by Anglo-Saxon (including white Protestant) nationalists who, by Reeve’s own account, continued to recognize these racially distinct Mormons as nonetheless white. This accounts for how it was possible for

12. Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*.”

racialized Mormons to have been victims of state practices of racism while simultaneously establishing a (fully) white settler polity (the Utah Territory) to produce (fully) white racial domination over American Indians, blacks, and Asians.

With this vibrant study of Mormon religion and race, Reeve has recalibrated the high-water mark of denominational history. He demonstrates the complex formation and reformation of racial whiteness. His book persuasively evidences the importance that studying religion (and not merely labor or immigration history) bears for understanding race and settler history in North America. Reeve exposes the layered constitution of racial whiteness as a historical formation. He also issues a solid demonstration of how Mormons, as white victims of racism, were nonetheless integral to and complicit in structuring the governing practices of white racial rule throughout a long arc of struggle for status within the body politic of the United States.

Religion of a Different Color should stand as an exceptional and transformative study of race and American religion. It is a rich and unique contribution to scholarship on Mormon religion that is equally a well-crafted study of race. It should certainly serve to inspire intellectually generative debate and further research on the constitution of racial whiteness for many years to come.

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“A Kind of Painful Progress”: Contesting and Collaborating on the Mormon Image in America

Cristine Hutchison-Jones

Review of J. B. Haws. *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS AT A CONFERENCE with a number of fellow Mormon studies scholars. I presented a paper on the Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon*, which by most reviewers' accounts was both a vulgar takedown of and a loving tribute to modern American Mormonism by the often sweet but always crude creators of *South Park*, Trey Parker and Matt Stone. I, like most Americans, only knew the work through reviewers' summaries and analyses when it racked up nine Tony Awards in 2011. But, as I argued in the paper, when I finally *saw* the show, it became clear to me that the musical's intent was not simply to skewer the Latter-day Saints. Rather, the show carefully constructed its Mormon characters as the epitome of a certain kind of consumer-oriented, pathologically optimistic American exceptionalism. The sharpest criticism in the play was reserved, to my mind, not for Latter-day Saints' peculiar beliefs and practices—though those unique aspects of Mormonism received enough jabs—but rather for an American mindset that glories in the “paradise” of Orlando's artificial realities and only understands Africa through the lens of Disney's *The Lion King*. I was

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proud of my analysis—and in most ways I still stand by it—but during the course of a vigorous discussion that followed the conclusion of my paper, a Latter-day Saint scholar and friend looked at me and said, “Sure, they’re using Mormons to represent a certain kind of American-ness, but *work out your anxieties on someone else’s body!*”

I am not a Latter-day Saint. And despite many years of examining non-Mormon images of the Latter-day Saints, and the sensitivity that my research has led me to develop toward unfair representations of the LDS Church and community and the misperceptions those images engender, it simply did not occur to me how it would *feel*, as a Mormon, to be the critical lens, the easy target, the butt of the joke once again. My analysis wasn’t inaccurate, but it lacked an awareness of Mormon responses to the images in question.

This tension between non-Mormon representations of and reactions to the Latter-day Saints—however well-meaning—and LDS responses to them is the driving narrative in J. B. Haws’s valuable exploration of the Mormon image in the United States from the national political career of George Romney in the mid-1960s to that of his son Mitt Romney in the 2008 and 2012 presidential election seasons. Haws, an assistant professor of church history at BYU, reviews print and television news media, polling data collected from the 1960s to 2012, materials released by the LDS Church’s communications department in its various permutations since 1960, and interviews with scholars, journalists, and others who have engaged in the study of the Mormon image or who were involved in the major events that Haws describes. Using these materials, he charts the vacillations in America’s visions of Mormonism and Mormons—and the LDS Church’s responses to and efforts to shape those visions.

While Haws offers just one slice of the complex web of public imaginings that have made up the Mormon image in the last fifty years, this is nevertheless an important contribution to Mormon historical studies. In fact, Haws steps into a significant void in Mormon studies scholarship more broadly. While there are a number of notable works on the Mormon image in the United States in the nineteenth century—perhaps

most importantly Terryl Givens's *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (1997; revised edition 2013) and J. Spencer Fluhman's "A Peculiar People": *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (2012)—there is a dearth of scholarship about the Mormon image specifically, and Mormonism more generally, that inquires beyond the First World War. This is an important area that cries out for examination and analysis, and Haws delivers an important foray into this relatively new scholarly territory.

While Haws's time period is largely uncharted, he does not enter his examination of the Mormon image without guides. Scholars Givens, Fluhman, and Kathleen Flake set the stage for any inquiry into non-Mormon understandings of Mormonism in twentieth-century America. In particular, Fluhman argued in "Peculiar People" that the LDS community concluded the nineteenth century by eliminating its most peculiar practices, gaining statehood for Utah, and finally being popularly recognized as a religion—albeit a false one—in the American mind. To Fluhman, this status as a false religion divested of the most unique of its historical practices marked the religion's successful Americanization. In *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (2003), Flake argued that the near expulsion from the Senate of LDS apostle Reed Smoot in the first decade of the twentieth century was a key moment in the history of LDS/non-LDS relations, asserting that congressional and national acceptance of Smoot's fitness to serve in the nation's highest legislative body marked the turning point in non-Mormons' acceptance of Latter-day Saints as Americans.

But despite the fact that the Mormons' "Americanization" is firmly settled in the historiography, non-Mormon America's relationship with its most successful homegrown religion has remained fractious, to say the least. And yet, despite the ongoing relevance of discussions of the Mormon image in the United States, not to mention the Saints' explosive growth in America and abroad in the last one hundred years, there is little scholarly engagement with the LDS Church and its members beyond the earliest decades of the twentieth century. Broad general

histories of the Saints, such as Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton's classic *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (1979) and Matthew Bowman's *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (2012), have provided basic overviews of the Saints' expansion and, to a lesser extent, their changing practices during these years, but they do not deliver in-depth analysis. Sociologist Armand Mauss's *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (1994) is an invaluable resource—in part because it is so singular among major scholarly works in giving voice to the Mormon side of the LDS struggle for accommodation in the twentieth century—that examines the changes that Mormonism has alternately embraced and rejected as it struggled with assimilation in the twentieth century. It is a sign of how neglected the Mormon image in the twentieth century is that by far the most oft-cited work on the subject remains Jan Shipps's seminal work "From Satyr to Saint: American Perceptions of the Mormons, 1860–1960," an essay first delivered as a conference paper in the 1970s that measures the improvement in the Mormon image in the first half of the twentieth century through close examination of magazine articles. But Shipps herself noted, in her follow-up essay "Surveying the Mormon Image since 1960" (2000), that the positive trends she charted did not uniformly hold after 1960 and that much work remains to be done in unpacking the changing Mormon image in the age of new media. While Haws's *Mormon Image in the American Mind* is neither comprehensive nor deeply analytical, it nevertheless delivers a significant overview of the shifting Mormon image in the last fifty years.

The book is organized chronologically, with chapters built around major topical trends in representations of the Saints. It begins in the early 1960s as George Romney's political star was on the rise. The popular Mormon governor of Michigan, Romney was considered a contender for the 1968 Republican presidential nomination, and Haws does some of his best work in the book unpacking polling data and the media's treatment of Romney and his religion. It is perhaps surprising, for those who better remember Mitt Romney's more recent campaigns, that religion was *not* a major issue for his father. In fact, the

elder Romney's religion was regarded by the media as something of an asset. As Haws notes, this perspective was fueled in large part by the ecumenicalism of the mid-twentieth century that encouraged Americans to focus on religious dialogue instead of differences. What sunk Romney's campaign, Haws convincingly argues, was not his religion, but rather the candidate's controversial remarks about the Vietnam War. In short, politics, not religion, dominated discussion of the elder Romney's candidacy. But while Mormonism may have been insignificant for Romney's run for the White House, his run was not insignificant for Mormonism (p. 13).

The years after Romney's campaign—the late 1960s and the 1970s—were marked by increased scrutiny of the church's social policies. Whereas the Mormon image in the 1950s and 60s had been marked by a sort of “benign wholesomeness” characterized by family values and patriotism (p. 14), as the 60s progressed the country tacked hard left—and the Mormons did not follow. Despite Romney's reputation as a supporter of civil rights, his candidacy focused the national spotlight on the LDS Church's exclusion of men of black African descent from an otherwise universal male priesthood. In the face of protests nationwide that focused on church-owned BYU's sporting events, the church adopted a new public relations strategy. Rather than simply dismissing the criticisms, it took a proactive approach to offset those criticisms by advancing civil rights—or, just as importantly, the visibility of civil rights—within the LDS community. The church's efforts at damage control were so effective that when the priesthood ban was eliminated by revelation in 1978, non-Mormon America had already largely moved on. After a brief, intense flurry of publicity for the change, Mormonism and race fell from the national radar.

The Mormon community almost immediately faced another national challenge, this time fueled by the church's opposition to the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. While the LDS community remained largely silent during the early years of the campaign for the amendment, as the ERA neared final ratification, church leaders became concerned that the amendment would weaken the

traditional family and encouraged members to work against it. Individual Saints mobilized swiftly, effectively, and in seeming droves, and the ERA's steady march toward ratification was halted in its tracks. To non-Mormons, members' swift action on a political issue in response to a call from their church's hierarchy raised fears of church involvement in politics (p. 97), a breach of the wall between church and state. When highly visible Mormon feminist Sonia Johnson was excommunicated in 1979 for her outspoken opposition to the church's position on the ERA, it played in the national media as a confirmation of those fears.

Just as the Mormon image was suffering from negative responses to its stance on social issues—for decades an area of strength for the Saints in the minds of many Americans—the cultural backlash against the progressive turn of American political and social values in the 1960s and 1970s brought conservative Christian political activism to the forefront of national discussion. And although the Saints and evangelical Christians seemed natural allies on social concerns such as feminism, abortion, and other so-called family values issues, evangelical Christians were not interested in being allied with the Saints—whose growth, particularly in the American South, was viewed as a direct threat to the evangelical community. In what Haws demonstrates was an exercise in boundary policing, the loose coalition of conservative Christians from varying denominations that made up the Religious Right turned on the Mormons (p. 109). The anti-Mormon rhetoric exemplified by the “documentary” film *The God Makers* (1982) demonstrated the group's determination to prove its own Christian bona fides by proving that the Mormons were not authentically Christian. While *The God Makers* was a grassroots phenomenon limited primarily to the evangelical Christian community, the Religious Right's use of similar rhetoric primed the national stage for a resurgence of fear about Mormonism as a false religion defined by secrecy and violence and controlled by a hierarchy bent on absolute authority over its members (p. 126). The media frenzy over forger and murderer Mark Hofmann—who was himself LDS and who had spent years manufacturing fake early Mormon documents in an effort to undermine the church—both fed on and reinforced these

perceptions. The media's use of these images continued into the 1990s, most notably in its coverage of the punishment of the September Six, a group of Mormon intellectuals whose work challenged official church teachings, and the success of Deborah Laake's salacious best-selling memoir about her experiences as a young Mormon woman. Although the church maintained an active campaign throughout this period to promote a positive image of Mormonism, it could not overcome the groundswell of popular suspicion driven by this combination of critical rhetoric and sensational events that seemed to prove popular fears.

Despite the overwhelmingly negative press of the 1980s and early 90s, Haws argues that the final years of the twentieth century seemed to be a return to harmony between Mormon and non-Mormon Americans, as new church president Gordon B. Hinckley—a longtime veteran of the church's public relations program—led Mormons in a new era of bridge building. Hinckley forged a new path for LDS outreach that included greater openness to the media and a proactive approach to public relations that sought not only to present the realities of Mormonism to the non-LDS public *before* rather than *in response to* public relations crises, but also simply to educate non-Mormons about their LDS neighbors rather than trying to prepare non-Mormon audiences for LDS missionizing. These years were characterized by media coverage of Hinckley himself, widely regarded as one of the most respected men in the country; by human interest coverage of the pioneer trek reenactment celebrating Utah's 1997 sesquicentennial; and by the overwhelmingly positive international coverage of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. In relation to all of these topics, the church maintained its new bridge building and public education stances, even going so far as to declare that there would be no missionizing on the streets of Salt Lake during the Olympic Games. And the non-Mormon public was receptive to this new approach. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, against all expectations raised by the troubled and troubling representations of Mormons in the 1980s, non-Mormon Americans generally found the Latter-day Saints “more interesting than threatening” (p. 194).

It was onto this stage, Haws writes, that Mitt Romney entered for his first campaign for the presidency in the 2008 election season. While observers—and Mitt Romney himself—may have reasonably expected treatment mirroring his father’s in the 1960s, in fact Romney’s first turn in the national political spotlight exposed “a latent, smoldering suspicion” about Mormons in American culture (p. 207). For Haws, this suspicion was given clear expression in filmmaker Helen Whitney’s 2007 documentary *The Mormons*, produced for PBS. The film was “a snapshot of American opinion of Mormons and Mormonism” (p. 218), and many Saints were disappointed to find that non-Mormon Americans were still disproportionately interested not in who the Mormons are in the present, but rather in the scandals of the LDS past like polygamy and the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre. The ongoing suspicion was evident in the political rhetoric surrounding Romney’s campaign as well, with other Republican candidates vying to prove themselves as *the* Christian candidate using sometimes subtle and other times blatant jabs at Romney’s religion. And yet, just a short four years after Romney’s unsuccessful 2008 attempt to earn his party’s nomination for the presidency, everything changed. Why? Because, Haws argues, enough evangelicals were ready, in part based on years of dialogue between Mormon and evangelical scholars and theologians, to make peace with their theological differences with Mormonism in order to ally themselves with a candidate whose religious community so clearly aligned with them on social and political issues. In fact, by the time of the Republican National Convention in 2012, the party of the Religious Right was willing to celebrate Romney’s religion as something that proved his social conservatism and humanized his somewhat remote personal image. The opposition to Romney’s Mormonism in the 2012 election cycle came more from liberal opponents than from conservatives, and according to Haws, that opposition was muted for reasons that remain unclear. In the end, for another Romney, defeat apparently was not (in 2012, at least) the result of his religion.

Haws ends by discussing the state of the Mormon image after 2012. He makes no predictions about whether Romney’s defeat signaled the end of the current “Mormon Moment” (going so far as to title his final

chapter with a quote from an LDS official, “I Don’t Think This Is Really a Mormon Moment”). He rightly notes, however, that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, while negative images of the Saints persist (alongside the two-dimensional Ozzie and Harriet-like images of family values and patriotism that characterized earlier positive depictions), we have seemingly begun to move into a new era of the Mormon public image. These new representations are crafted by a dialogue between the Saints and their non-Mormon neighbors, rather than being the product of one-sided reactions against each other. The early fruits of this conversation are promising as we begin to see more fully realized portraits of Mormons as complex people inhabiting a multifaceted and by no means homogenous community. According to Haws, dialogue is the watchword moving forward, and the overall quality and tone of representations of Mormonism in the national media point to a brighter future for the Mormon image in the American mind—which may change, but certainly will not disappear.

While Haws’s book is an invaluable first step toward filling the enormous gap in scholarship on Mormonism after World War I, it is best regarded as an overview of major news coverage of the period and important responses by the LDS Church’s public relations arm. Haws provides limited in-depth analysis of the trends he charts and the rhetoric he catalogs. He does, however, make a number of tantalizing observations that call for further study. Chief among these is the importance of the growing divide in the American mind between individual Mormons, who, Haws argues, are generally regarded as good or at least acceptable, and the institution of the LDS Church, which is generally viewed with suspicion at least and open derision at worst. While he points out this dichotomy throughout the book, he does not closely examine the reasons behind it or the implications of the disparity for the relationship between Mormons and non-Mormons going forward. He also does not place this dichotomy in its larger context not only in the history of Mormonism in the United States—where this divided response has been a staple since the nineteenth century—but also in American history more broadly. In fact, minority groups—religious,

ethnic, or otherwise—have routinely been viewed through this lens, with decent, redeemable individuals constructed as held in thrall to a dangerous organization or community. The rhetoric of anti-Catholicism, for example, exhibited just this dichotomy throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Placing Haws’s observations about the differences between images of Mormon individuals versus Mormon institutions into this broader context not only opens up important questions about America’s relationship to the Mormons, but also presents the opportunity to use the Mormon experience as a case study of religious intolerance in the United States.

This lack of context impacts many facets of the book, as Haws again and again raises issues with connections to larger questions about American religious history but does not engage these broader issues. For example, while discussing how Mormons suffered in the 1970s and 1980s from the Religious Right’s accusations that the LDS Church was a “cult,” Haws makes reference to American fears around the time of the 1978 Jonestown massacre but does not go on to discuss the ways in which the fear of cults swept the United States during this period. Americans panicked during these years about Eastern religious traditions and other unfamiliar minority religions, supposedly widespread Satanic ritual abuse, and sexual abuse more generally, and, worried that their children would be seduced into false and dangerous religious organizations, turned to “deprogrammers” whose methods often looked a great deal like those they accused cults of employing to “brainwash” their members. These popular fears swelled in the 1970s, peaked in the 1980s, and largely died away in the 1990s—following precisely the arc of the heightened fear toward and suspicion of the Saints that Haws describes in this period. Yet Haws neither discusses this context nor attempts to unpack the role that these larger fears played in shaping the Mormon image in these years.

Also key to Haws’s discussion of the changing Mormon image, particularly in the 1980s, is the role of the resurgent Religious Right. But Haws does little to place the evangelical anti-Mormonism he carefully charts within the broader context of the culture wars, in which

the Religious Right represents only one side of an ongoing and heated discussion of major social issues in the United States. By eliding liberal voices, Haws misses the growing strain of liberal anti-Mormonism that made itself felt across the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Liberal opposition to Mormonism was not simply a product of the LDS Church's 2008 support for California's ban on gay marriage (which Haws does discuss at some length). Rather, contemporary liberal opposition is rooted in the social issues that brought the church under fire in the 1960s and 70s and has remained a consistent presence in American culture. Haws himself notes, for example, that raising Mitt Romney's Mormonism in a closely contested 1994 senatorial election secured Ted Kennedy a win in traditionally liberal Massachusetts (pp. 209–10). And liberal attacks can be just as ugly as conservative ones, as when comedian Bill Maher used clips from that evangelical standby *The God Makers* to “explain” Mormonism to viewers of his 2008 film *Religulous* (a source that Haws did not include in this study). In sidelining liberal voices, especially after 1980, Haws tells an incomplete story.

The absence of Maher's *Religulous* raises another issue in *The Mormon Image*: its near total exclusion of popular culture sources. While Haws discusses a handful of images of Mormons found outside journalistic media, he largely ignores the huge number of representations of the Latter-day Saints in popular culture sources including fiction writing, television, and film. Not only could these sources have deepened his discussion of general trends in representation across this period, but they might also have done a great deal to either reinforce or, in many cases, complicate the trends he charts. Often when Haws notes the resurgence of an image he describes as long dormant, that image was in fact alive and well throughout the period in popular culture. In particular the violence that he regards as newly resurrected around the time of Mark Hofmann's murders had long been a staple of depictions of Mormonism in books and film—which in fact explains the relevance of the Mountain Meadows Massacre to Helen Whitney's 2007 documentary, which Haws uncritically noted was regarded by many Mormons as giving too much air time to the 1857 incident. Haws quotes journalist

Peggy Fletcher Stack as saying, regarding the resurgence of negative rhetoric in the news media during Mitt Romney's 2008 campaign, that the negative "undercurrent never went away" (p. 208). He would have been better equipped to discuss the sources of the backlash against Romney in that persistent undercurrent had he done more to examine the popular books, films, and TV shows that kept non-Mormon Americans' suspicions about the Mormons alive.

The question of other forms of media points to another issue raised by Haws, as well as Jan Shipps in her essay "Surveying the Mormon Image": the rapid proliferation of new media platforms since 1960 has radically altered the landscape on which the Mormon image is manufactured and disseminated. In her 2000 essay Shipps noted that print media was no longer the dominant vehicle for news in the United States and had not been for some time, and the number and variety of sources have only increased since then. This begs the question why, then, does Haws primarily focus his inquiry on print news media? And furthermore, why doesn't he address the ways in which new media contributes to the shape of the Mormon image through new formats, the radically increased speed at which information can be disseminated (sometimes at the expense of editing and fact-checking), and the deprofessionalization of content production? To put it another way, how can we compare how Mitt Romney fared in 2008 and 2012 to how his father fared in 1968 without asking whether George Romney's religion would have remained off-limits if readers could have shared their comments on newspaper articles with thousands of others in real time or if private citizens could have created viral YouTube videos in the 1960s?

Regardless of unanswered questions and undermined sources, this book provides a rich resource for those interested in the ongoing tension between Mormons and non-Mormon America. In particular, it provides a valuable overview of the push and pull between images of the Saints in the news media generated by non-Mormons and the communications designed by the church to better explain LDS beliefs and practices to the non-Mormon public. It also raises a number of important issues that invite future scholarship. But perhaps the book's

greatest contribution to our fledgling exploration of Mormonism after World War I is Haws's emphasis on dialogue. This concept is key not only, as Haws argues, to the future of Mormons and their public image in the United States, but also to Mormon studies scholarship. Future studies of Mormonism and the Mormon image will benefit from Haws's example and should be mindful that representations of the Saints are the product not of one group or the other, but of the ongoing interaction between Latter-day Saints and their non-Mormon neighbors as they work both with and against each other.

Cristine Hutchison-Jones earned her PhD in religious and theological studies from Boston University. Her research interests include American religious history, religious intolerance in the United States, and representations of minorities in American culture. She is the author, most recently, of "The First Mormon Moment: The Latter-day Saints in American Culture, 1940–1965" (in *The Lively Experiment: Religious Toleration in America from Roger Williams to the Present*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda, 2015) and is currently revising her dissertation, "Reviling and Revering the Mormons: Defining American Identity, 1890–2012," for publication. She is administrative director of the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology, and Bioethics at Harvard Law School.

Review Panel

David G. Stewart Jr. and Matthew Martinich. *Reaching the Nations: International LDS Church Growth Almanac, 2014 Edition*. Henderson, NV: Cumorah Foundation, 2013.

Reviewed by Carter Charles, Gina Colvin, Wilfried Decoo, Matthew Heiss, Eustache Ilunga, Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, David M. Morris, Marcello Jun de Oliveira, Taunalyn Rutherford, Charles and Mercy Sono-Koree, and Walter van Beek

Introduction

SCHOLARS INTERESTED IN GLOBAL MORMON STUDIES need reliable global statistics. In the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the church's own meticulous internal statistics are not publicly available. Where, then, can researchers start to make sense of Mormonism's global proportions?

David Stewart and Matthew Martinich's *Reaching the Nations (RTN)* makes a major contribution to global Mormon studies (in this discussion, the strain represented by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) by providing reasonably accurate estimates of worldwide retention and activity rates. The sheer effort and potential utility of their work cannot be underestimated.

Evaluating the book as a whole, the *Review's* international panel of reviewers found strengths and weaknesses. Because of the panel's size,

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we are unable to include each author's full contribution in the print version of this composite review. However, long-form versions of reviews are available on the *Review's* website.¹ The first section of the composite review covers what the panel saw as the strengths of *RTN*, including its revised worldwide statistical picture. The second section identifies areas for improvement, including revising factual inaccuracies about specific countries and specific church units, rethinking explanations for why LDS growth or retention is lagging, using more rigorous sources, and recognizing and correcting America-centric interpretations.

These reviews themselves contribute to the emerging picture of Mormonism (in its Salt Lake City-administered variety) as a global religious phenomenon. The review panel includes professional academics at secular institutions, historians employed by the LDS Church, independent scholars, and LDS Church employees with no academic training but with a strong command of the facts on the ground. The panel therefore provides a snapshot of the various stages of development in Mormon studies around the world.

These reviews show that despite the LDS Church's administrative homogeneity, on a week-to-week basis its members around the world are in fact having very different kinds of religious experiences. Carter Charles's discussion of the overlap between church practices and voodoo in Haiti and Walter van Beek's discussion of the meaning of secularism in the church's European settings both point to ways in which regional context shapes church members' religious experiences and expectations. This is particularly relevant given the fact that the American social and cultural landscape continues to inform the religious horizons of the majority of leaders within the highest administrative levels of the LDS Church.

The multiple perspectives brought to bear on this ambitious global project leave us with unanswered questions. If the *RTN* estimate of 30 percent total activity for the entire church is correct—and the authors' success in estimating activity on a country-by-country basis suggests that it is—then of the 15 million LDS members worldwide, 4.5 million are

1. <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodical/msr-v3-2016/>. Not all of the reviewers have fuller versions of their reviews posted here.

considered active. This downward revision is a corrective to exuberant predictions of LDS Church growth that would locate the church's global significance in inevitable demographic expansion and the establishment of the world's next great religious tradition.²

Perhaps a new way of thinking about the LDS Church and its global significance is that while the church is a small religious tradition in worldwide terms, it is still a very large church. As a church with a worldwide membership, it achieves a remarkable degree of administrative, ritual, and cultural coherence. Is this coherence due to the dominance of American culture at the administrative levels? Or is it due to other factors such as the Mormon tradition's emphasis on religious practice and local organization, an emphasis that creates strong and recognizable patterns around the world even as it allows for tremendous cultural variation? Future researchers will be able to rely on the statistical cartography established by *Reaching the Nations* in order to chart in greater detail the ways in which the forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity transform the landscape of global Mormonism.

—Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, *University of Auckland*

2. The most famous proponent of this view has been eminent sociologist Rodney Stark, who has argued that Mormonism presents sociologists of religion with the opportunity to witness “an extraordinarily rare event, the rise of a new world faith,” and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would “soon achieve a worldwide following comparable to that of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and the other dominant world faiths.” Rodney Stark, “The Rise of a New World Faith,” in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members*, ed. James T. Duke (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 9–27; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 131–49. On the other side of this story is Rick Phillips, who in 2006 concluded that Mormon membership claims are inflated and that to call Mormonism an emerging “world religion” was premature. Rather, he said, the LDS Church is a “North American church with tendrils in other continents.” Rick Phillips, “Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 10/1 (August 2006): 53–68.

Part 1: Contributions

RTN presents a much-needed statistical
picture of global Mormonism

Brazil

Anyone with an academic or intellectual interest in Mormonism will cheer the publication of *RTN*. Ambitiously setting out to “provid[e] the most comprehensive statistics, historical data, and analysis on LDS Church growth available at present,” this almanac is unquestionably both an asset and an important tool for Mormon scholars and students of Mormonism, as well as a watershed work for Mormon studies. . . .

The *RTN* chapter on Brazil is long and detailed. Although Brazil cannot boast nearly the same historical ties to Mormonism as the United States, Mexico, or Canada, its almanac entry is covered in 26 printed pages as opposed to 16, 12, and 11, respectively. This attention to detail for Brazil shows in the abundance of historical anecdotes and a cogent timeline on the evolution of the LDS presence in Brazil, possibly comprising the most comprehensive collection of facts and factoids on Brazilian Mormonism in any one publication. Additionally, its discussions are admirably open, candid, and insightful.

—*Marcello Jun de Oliveira, independent scholar*

France, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, French Guyana

The quantitative and visible results of [Stewart and Martinich’s] endeavor are really impressive. It is a full-time job, and there is work for far more than two people.

—*Carter Charles, Université Bordeaux Montaigne*

Ghana

Overall, this chapter gives a good, basic foundation for understanding the LDS Church in Ghana. As with all such works, almanacs, factbooks, and so on, this is a good but superficial beginning in that it covers a lot of ground in a few pages. In my opinion, such a work should be a

scholar's starting point and would, hopefully, direct such an interested person into primary source documents.

—*Matthew Heiss, LDS Church History Department*

New Zealand

RTN is an ambitious project. Without the formal cooperation of the LDS Church, the gathering of LDS demographic and statistical information is complex.

—*Gina Colvin, University of Canterbury*

The Netherlands

Here we have an honest and informed assessment of where the LDS Church stands globally. The fact that this had to be an outside job (though it's not an outsider's job) is revealing. When I worked in church leadership, especially during my term as stake president, I had more information at my disposal than these authors have. They have to work with membership statistics, general retention figures, and attendance estimates. How they would have loved to have had access to all the three-monthly reports that the church routinely collects from its stakes and units: accurate sacrament meeting attendance, Relief Society and Sunday School and priesthood meeting attendance, ward demographics, and the like. *RTN* fills a void the church itself creates, as it publicizes membership statistics only. . . . As such, this almanac is a correction—even if not voiced as such—of the official LDS use of figures, which aims at giving an impression of a steadily growing church, of an unstoppable force on a predetermined pathway of success. . . . Long reared on a tradition of success-as-evidence-of-truth, I recognize that new discourse on the church as a global player still has to be developed, and seemingly this new discourse is coming up from below, not from on high.

—*Walter van Beek, Tilburg University*

RTN's statistical estimates are solid and usable

Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mongolia, Thailand, Cambodia

RTN figures are reasonably accurate in the case of the LDS Church's Asia Area. For example, Stewart and Martinich correctly estimate that there are around 3,000–4,000 actively practicing Latter-day Saints in Hong Kong. In the case of Taiwan (10,000, or 17 percent of around 57,900), Mongolia (3,000, or 27 percent of around 11,000), Thailand (3,000, or 15 percent of 19,600), and Cambodia (3,500, or 27 percent of 12,800), *RTN's* estimates of actively practicing members are still generally high, but in the ballpark. Since active lay participation in the church community is one of Mormonism's defining features, these new figures are immeasurably helpful for scholars of Mormonism in its global iterations.

—*Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, University of Auckland*

India

In the Hyderabad Stake and the rest of the Bangalore Mission, average attendance numbers of roughly 100 in congregations is still a good estimate; however, the number of congregations has grown. Retention rates in India are relatively high, particularly for Asia, as the article correctly states. India reports 40 percent activity, and this could even be as high as 50 percent in some areas. One native church leader in the Bangalore Mission explained that in recent years the emphasis on quality rather than quantity in missionary work has yielded more committed members who have been determined to go on missions and marry in the temple, which has led to retention rates above 50 percent and some as high as 80 percent.

—*Taunalyne Rutherford, Claremont Graduate University*

Part 2: Suggested Improvements

RTN contains numerous factual inaccuracies
regarding countries and cultures

Belgium

A few probes show that *RTN*'s general data also come from inaccurate sources or have been muddled in rewriting or in summarizing. For example, in the entry for Belgium (pp. 64–71), the geography reads that “Middle Belgium [is] also known as Wallonia” and that “mountains occupy Ardennes in the southeast of Belgium.” Wallonia is not “Middle Belgium” but comprises the whole southern half of Belgium; the Ardennes is not a different region from Wallonia, but a natural region situated in the southeast of Wallonia; there are no real “mountains,” but slowly rising hills and plateaus to about 2,200 feet above sea level. Next, the explanation in the entry on “other commonly spoken languages” is painfully inaccurate toward certain groups (while each of the “basic sources” gives correct information). The entry on Belgium further mentions that “the Spanish controlled Belgium from 1519 to 1713” (no, from 1556 on),³ that “Napoleon invaded Belgium in the late eighteenth century” (no, he didn't),⁴ that “Belgium colonized the Congo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (no, only in part of the twentieth century), that “cigarette consumption rates are high” (no, they are among the lower rates in Europe),⁵ and that tobacco belongs to “the major crops” (no, it's only 0.4 percent of total crops and is to disappear).⁶ The entry lists

3. The error is frequent in English online sources, probably copied one from another. The error may have crept in as the year when Charles I decreed the juridical status of *new* overseas territories or when he became Charles V, Roman-German emperor. The region became Spanish when it was inherited by Philip II of Spain in 1556.

4. The French revolutionaries of the First Republic invaded the region in 1793 and annexed it to France. It was already well integrated into France when Napoleon took over.

5. Witold Zatoński et al., “Tobacco Smoking in Countries of the European Union,” *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine* 19/2 (2012): 181–92.

6. See http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/statistieken/organisatie/statbel/informatie/statbel/-in_de_kijker_archief/in_de_kijker_2012/Tabak_in_cijfers.jsp. See also <http://statbel>

a few significant medieval cities but fails to mention Bruges—the most famous one for tourists around the world. References in footnotes do not always reflect the content of the preceding sentences, so sources are not always clear (e.g., note 93 on page 65). Each of these problematic items may seem trivial, but an accumulation of little errors reveals a lack of rigor and undermines credibility of the whole.

—*Wilfried Decoo, Brigham Young University, University of Antwerp*

France

It is forbidden by law in France to conduct ethnic surveys.⁷ This means that, officially, no one knows the exact ethnic make-up of the country. It comes therefore as a surprise to see that the authors provide specific percentages for six major groups of peoples: French (80.9 percent), North African (9.6 percent), Sub-Saharan/Black African (4 percent), German (2.5 percent), Italian (1.5 percent), and Other (1.5 percent). Comments under those percentages specify that the “Other” category “include[s] Basque and immigrant groups from Africa, South East Asia, and the Caribbean” (p. 645). Very confusing! Where else in Africa could immigrants come from if they are not from North Africa and the Sub-Saharan/Black African part of the continent? I doubt the authors meant South Africa.

It is also just as confusing to learn that the 1.5 percentage of “Other” also includes Caribbean peoples. Which ones? Guadeloupeans and Martinicans? Or does it also include—as it should because the Caribbean comprises many more islands than just Guadeloupe and Martinique—immigrants from Haiti (like me) and the Dominican Republic, for instance?

—*Carter Charles, Université Bordeaux Montaigne*

.fgov.be/nl/binaries/-A5_NL_kerncijferslandbouw_2013_tcm325-228435.pdf.

7. Article 8 of the 1978 French law on privacy (also called “Law on Information and Liberties”) states, “It is forbidden to collect or process information of a personal nature which shows, directly or indirectly, the racial or ethnic origins, the political, philosophical, or religious opinions, or the Union affiliation of peoples; or which relates to their health or sexual lives” (my translation). In that regard, one mayor is under investigation for having acknowledged that his city has specific statistics making it possible for him to know how many Muslims attend the public schools.

Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, French Guyana

The background information provided for Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, and French Guyana suffers from minor to major inaccuracies. For example, a statement like “corruption scandals involving the [Haitian] president include kidnappings and an increasing number of murders” (p. 171) definitely needs to be backed by solid sources. Hearsay cannot do in such a case.

True, fewer and fewer Haitians practice voodoo, but it was already a massive understatement to estimate that at 2 percent; adding *only* takes us to the abyss of inaccuracies. Voodoo, which can take many forms, structures the life of most Haitians. Some of them find no problem attending a church meeting in the morning and a voodoo ceremony at night—and there are better sources than the *CIA World Factbook* to verify that kind of information.⁸ The transition from one practice to another is possible because of historical connections between voodooism and Christianity and because the Haitians are very open and liberal when it comes to religion. This explains why the family ostracization that ensues when some people “forsake Voodoo religion and practices to join the [LDS] Church” must be a very marginal thing, but the authors are right in the case of Muslims in France.

—Carter Charles, *Université Bordeaux Montaigne*

8. A handy source in Mormon circles is Jennifer Huss Basquiat’s “Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Voodoo, and the LDS Faith in Haiti,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37/3 (Winter 2004). Since the authors’ policy seems to discount academic sources, one needs only to turn to this official LDS one that they cite on page 173 to read: “The difficulty for some members lies in having practiced both voodoo and traditional Christianity before joining the Church. . . . They did both before, and it’s hard to realize they can’t do both now.”

*RTN contains factual inaccuracies
pertaining to LDS church units*

India

This entry is a fairly accurate picture of the LDS Church in India. However, the omission of the May 2012 formation of the Hyderabad Stake in the “LDS History” section lessens its credibility. The creation of the stake was an extremely historic and important event for members all over India. The information in the entry seems to reflect LDS Church conditions as of 2009, with a quick update in early 2012. As a result, the numbers for the branches in Delhi are low. Rather than an average of 50, there are now closer to 75 members on average who attend each week.

—*Taunalyn Rutherford, Claremont Graduate University*

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The entry contains various minor errors that could be corrected in future editions. For example, the city Uvira is listed as having no LDS congregations when it actually has two branches (one in Uvira and one in Kalunda), and the Kinshasa Mokali Stake was created in 2012, not 2013.

—*Eustache Ilunga, LDS Service Center for the
Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Ghana

Minor inaccuracies exist, such as the misspelling *Boron*, which should be *Brong*,⁹ and the omission of the first Area Authority Seventy to be called from Ghana, Elder Emmanuel Ohene Opare (called in 1998).

—*Charles and Mercy Sono-Koree, LDS Church
history advisers in the Africa West Area*

During my review of the chapter on Ghana, I found a few inaccuracies: 125 people were baptized in Cape Coast on the first day, not 80 as

9. It should be noted that the *CIA World Factbook*, from whence the languages section seems to have been copied, also has *Boron*, but is followed by *Brong*.

reported on page 421. And rather than write that “some of the greatest growth occurred during the period when the Church was banned by the government . . .,” which is historically problematic since there was no overt missionary work or baptisms performed during the “Freeze” (the time when the LDS Church was banned in Ghana), I would say that great growth occurred as the result of the Freeze.

—*Matthew Heiss, LDS Church History Department*

RTN's interpretations of LDS Church growth can be debated

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The statement “Poverty appears to be the largest obstacle for the church’s progress in the country” can be relative, as in some instances it appears that poverty makes most Congolese people humble and receptive to the preaching of the gospel, which adds to the rapid growth of the church.

—*Eustache Ilunga, LDS Service Center for the
Democratic Republic of the Congo*

The Netherlands

Secularism [cited in *RTN* as a major impediment to LDS Church growth] is a much more complex phenomenon that, at least in Europe, is not an opposition to churches but a structure that relegates denominations to a specific place within an overarching secular public place. Also, European secularism takes its distance from organized religion but not from individual spirituality in its many forms. Some functions of churches are well preserved as well, such as serving as a public moral conscience (not a strong point of the LDS tradition) or as grassroots organizations of care. But types of secularism differ within Europe, and this dynamic is not given much room in the present volume. Thus, some obvious differences between countries tend to disappear: Estonia is in fact much more secular than its Lithuanian neighbor, like the difference between Slovenia and Slovakia. As secularism is a pervading phenomenon in

Europe (and a rising one in the United States), this could have been treated with more empathy.

A second point is the notion of barriers to growth. Secularism has been mentioned, but other factors routinely invoked are nominalism (the fact that people identify with a church without practicing) and deep adherence to a specific Christianity, like Roman Catholicism. If all three—secularism, nominalism, and adherence—are barriers, then not much remains as the population to missionize. My experience is that especially the “nominalists,” or marginal members of dominant denominations, form the most fertile recruiting ground, at least among the non-immigrants. Though these people are usually not looking for another organized religion, they are open to change.

—*Walter van Beek, Tilburg University*

United Kingdom

The commentary offered some reasonable suggestions, but while it seemed like a flowing narrative, it again neglected sources or references. In fact, it is curious as to how some of the conclusions can be arrived at, especially where future growth or national outreach is possible. The article highlights three cities where most growth can be predicted, but two of these are small towns. Ellesmere Port and Margate are in serious decline both in terms of industry and business, and it is most difficult to see how an LDS expansion can take place in these conditions. I have to also challenge the assumptions of high temple attendance and the speculating of prospective temples in Birmingham and Cardiff, as well as one in Scotland. This is not the message of area and local leaders.

—*David M. Morris, Durham University*

Sources used lack scholarly rigor

United Kingdom

Despite so much being available in terms of primary and secondary sources, it is the *LDS Church News* that underpins the United Kingdom

entry. This is disappointing considering the rich array of research and sources on British Mormonism. In fact, considerable amounts of work have been done at different levels of study from the lay historian narrative to academic studies up to the doctoral level. For example, consulting the *Manuscript History of the British Mission* provides detailed statistics between 1837 and 1900. For example, by 1852 there were more than 32,000 Latter-day Saints in Great Britain, more than the rest of the worldwide church. The fact that emigration was being promoted may explain why so many Latter-day Saints were found in Utah by 1870 (a fact highlighted in the article). However, while there were around 110,000 British convert baptisms between 1837 and 1900, only around 46,000 of those emigrated, and not all to Utah. The article does not reflect correctly these figures. Furthermore, historical data are available from *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, which published the figures for the branches, missions, and pastorates for 130 years (1840–1970). There is no reference to the *Star* or apparently other historical sources. This is disappointing, as the whole article lacks an authoritative scholarly base. Most of the citations relate to leadership changes or events gleaned from the *LDS Church News*. Moving from the history element to the commentary, I was excited to see the beginnings of new insight into the behavior and culture of LDS members.

—David M. Morris, Durham University

General overview of Reaching the Nations, volume I

Church News is the main source for data and events. Over the whole volume, RTN refers to 2,123 articles in *Church News*, 236 in the *Ensign*, and 34 in the *Liahona*. However, this main reliance on PR-inspired church publications is problematic. First, it results in a choppy presentation of local church history, with possible gaps. Some rubrics in the entries read like a series of erratic snapshots, dictated by the fortuitous availability of a *Church News* or *Ensign* article. Negative events, such as major internal crises or conflicts, which could be revealing for an analysis of hurdles in development, are basically missing. Second, one must wonder how accurate the information is. For example, from a *Church*

News article about Belgium, *RTN* claims that 80 people were baptized in 1888.¹⁰ Research has shown this to be implausible.¹¹ . . .

Why not have also turned to the scholarly literature on aspects of the international church? Nearly all documents are a few clicks away. From its start in 1974 through 2012, the *Journal of Mormon History* published eighty-two scholarly articles about the LDS Church in foreign countries, many of which deal also with present-day Mormonism. *RTN* does not cite a single one, nor any from *BYU Studies*, which also carries a fair amount of articles on the international church. . . .

In the same vein, when dealing with Mormon membership developments, any serious approach would refer, for example, to Thomas Murphy for Guatemala; to Henri Gooren for Nicaragua; to Mark Grover, David Knowlton, or Raymond Tullis for Latin America in general; to Caroline Plüss for Hong Kong; to John Hoffmann or Jiro Numano for Japan; to Walter van Beek for the Netherlands; to Ian Barber and David Gilgen or Marjorie Newton for New Zealand; to Tamar Gordon for Tonga; to Christian Euvrard for France; and so on. The scholarly basis for *RTN*'s announced analysis of "issues that have favored and hampered growth in the past" is therefore extremely weak.

—Wilfried Decoo, *Brigham Young University, University of Antwerp*

10. Chris Miasnik, "The Church in Belgium: Membership Has International Flavor," *Church News*, December 7, 1996. Note that *RTN* muddles the title of the article: "The Church in Belgium: Membership has international flavor in Church version of United Nations."

11. An Burvenich, "Het ontstaan van de Kerk van Jezus Christus van de Heiligen der Laatste Dagen in België, 1861–1914" (master's thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1999). The story is based on a single sentence in Mischa Markow's reminiscences, more than forty years after the alleged event, and on his own hearsay from a single source decades earlier. As far as could be determined, mission records and missionary journals of the time make no mention of these baptisms.

America-centric perspectives weaken
RTN's accuracy and analysis

India

The “Cultural Issues” section reads like a returned-missionary report rather than the perspective of a native member and reveals an American bias. This America-centric perspective is also evident in the general information on India stemming from the fact that the main source seems to have been the CIA website referenced in the bibliography. The article is helpful in giving one view of India and the condition of the LDS Church there, but it should be seen as no more than what it is: an encyclopedic reference.

—*Taunalyn Rutherford, Claremont Graduate University*

Brazil

For an academic reference work, the quality and analysis of the collected data leave much to be desired. Most of the references (250 out of 258) for the chapter refer to one single official LDS Church source or to church publications (3 out of 5). All of the populational data are sourced to the US State Department (5 out of 258), all both outdated and wrong. Other data mentioned, such as membership in other Christian denominations, are never sourced. Crucial data from the 2000 Brazilian Census are mentioned but only briefly discussed and never sourced, and the more updated data from the 2010 Brazilian Census are entirely ignored. Published analyses on Mormon populational data from both the 2000 and 2010 Census are also ignored. Historical trends that inform religious shifts from census and statistical data available from 1940 to 2010 are also ignored. Information on social, racial, and cultural issues are never sourced and include some demonstrably wrong, obviously Americentric misconceptions. Many assertions specifically about the LDS experience in Brazil are neither sourced nor databased.

—*Marcello Jun de Oliveira, Independent Scholar*

New Zealand

The New Zealand chapter demonstrates how cautious researchers need to be when dealing with both cultural diversity and national statistics. It is a rule of thumb when writing about national characteristics that authors ensure that they are speaking *to* the citizens of that nation, even if only imagining them as an audience. In doing so, researchers oblige themselves to become participants in, rather than simply observers of, unfamiliar cultures. This volume, while impressive in breadth, demonstrates how vital local knowledge and contextual understanding are. It appears that while sourcing population data, the authors have attempted to make sense of our data for an American audience who might think more in terms of blood quantum than New Zealand does. This would explain the “Mixed” and “Other” and “Unspecified” ethnic categories they listed.

Additionally, it is important to follow local conventions for referring to non-Anglo groups. *Māori* is always written with a macron, and *Tongan*, *Samoan*, *Hindu*, and so on, refer to peoples with discrete identities and so do not typically take the English suffix *-s*.

Not only do the sources need to be much clearer, statements such as “Maori is spoken proficiently by a quarter of the ethnic population” should be qualified. As New Zealand is a country that is home to diverse “ethnic” groups, it is difficult to discern exactly to whom the authors are referring. Notwithstanding, 25 percent “proficiency” would be highly desirable but is equally highly improbable.

Overall, we applaud the authors for such noble aspirations and are impressed with the amount of backbreaking work so clearly put into this almanac. However, we would suggest strongly that in following editions the authors enlist local researchers where possible in order to provide a more nuanced and less American-centric perspective on the international growth and development of the LDS Church.

—*Gina Colvin, University of Canterbury*

Book Reviews

Brandon S. Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson, eds. *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*. 2nd edition. Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2014.

Reviewed by Philip Barlow

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IT NEVER OCCURRED TO MY YOUNGER SELF to enroll in a geography course. Mea culpa. Forces of modern technology conspire to make us less literate than we might be regarding our space and its implications. Cars, radio, telephones, television, and airplanes have this ironic effect—muting for some the significance of region even as they transport us to wider spaces. This irony patterns that of Facebook and texting, which can multiply yet trivialize our relations with “friends.” The radical democratization of society brought in particular by the Internet has many virtues. Yet it is also arguably related to today’s selective erosion of community and regard for institutions, typified by the widening movement of the religious Nones: “I’m spiritual, not religious.” Whether one celebrates or laments the trend, it behooves students of religion and history not to ignore it. Location *matters*.

Space becomes place when inhabitants interpret it. Place is intrinsic to much of religion. We sense this when we imagine a Hindu ritually entering the Ganges River or on pilgrimage toward the sacred city of Benares, when we observe Muslims around the world facing Mecca during each of their daily prayers, when we consider the promised land

of Abraham's ancient covenant and the consequent contested space in turmoil today and for millennia prior. We must think spatially to comprehend the potent zones of holiness embraced by different constituencies in old or modern Israel: the nation as a whole, Galilee, Bethlehem, Judea, Jerusalem, Gethsemane, the Dome of the Rock, the temple, the holy of holies, the mercy seat.

In the world's most religiously complex nation, the United States, geography has affected most everything. The religion of America's earliest inhabitants *was* the land, and the spirits, peoples, herds, crops, and cosmos that interacted with it. Lakota aligned their tepees with sacred points on the horizon. Africans made Americans against their will had their minds, fate, and religion shaped by a land that grew cotton. Puritans erected chapels in the literal and symbolic centers of their New England towns.

From its earliest days, no religion has proved more inherently spatial than Mormonism. The Book of Mormon is nothing if not a sacralized interpretation of American space. And scarcely months after organizing the new Church of Christ, Joseph Smith proclaimed a geographical revelation (D&C 29) that would control Mormon history for a century. If not for "the Gathering," Mormon history as we know it would unravel.

Under the direction of editors Brandon Plewe, Kent Brown, Donald Cannon, and Richard Jackson, more than forty researchers from BYU, the seminaries and institutes, and the church's historical department have teamed with a dozen others to grapple with their religion across time and space by assembling *Mapping Mormonism*, the finest and most comprehensive historical atlas of Mormonism. Published in 2012, the 2014 second edition includes modest additions: recently called General Authorities, Utah voting patterns in the 2012 election, new buildings accruing on BYU's campus, and updated church statistics. Its 270 pages boast more than five hundred maps, timelines, and charts, supported by brief historical narratives. This is an achievement to celebrate for anyone serious about understanding this complex, fascinating, and consequential religion. *Mapping's* importance may be grasped by comparing it to its more modest predecessor, *Historical Atlas of Mormonism* (1994), which featured seventy-eight simpler, two-color maps.

Mormonism is more fundamentally about relations than doctrines or scripture, just as math is basically about relations and only incidentally about numbers. And relations among events, facts, and phenomena across time and space are what the atlas depicts. Cartography and poetry share a definitional trait in *compression*; there is enough information compacted into even single examples of the excellent maps and timelines of *Mapping Mormonism* to dazzle the careful reader.

Maps do require careful readers. As all remembering (history) entails forgetting (necessary selection of topic and sources and shaping of narrative), so also all maps are white lies that tell the truth of the landscape. Conceptions in any visual representation may obscure potential or unnoticed competing conceptions; topics chosen may hide (even from their creators) those unchosen or unthought or differently imagined. Politics, bias, psychology, and chauvinism may lurk in something so apparently innocuous as the convention of placing North America above South America, since above and center implies superiority to below and margin, there being no objective “above” and “below” in the space in which the earth moves. If we grant ourselves an awareness of such hazards of mapping, it remains that the representations in *Mapping Mormonism* tend to be lucid and skillful. Many are handsome and imaginative. They represent the state of the art of modern cartographic techniques. The full-color visuals and high-quality paper alone would render this an expensive volume to produce. The modest price tag signals a bargain and unquestionably represents a well-subsidized enterprise.

Four sections organize the treatment: “The Restoration,” “The Empire of Deseret,” “The Expanding Church,” and “Regional History.” The range of topics the atlas addresses seems at first glance exhaustive. Beyond inevitable subjects—Nauvoo, the westward colonization—the atlas maps the historical basis for a trait still evident in Salt Lake City: the geography of the town’s businesses owned by Mormons between 1860 and 1910 and those, trending to the south side of downtown, that were owned by “Gentiles” in an era when Mormonism morphed from a defiantly independent kingdom toward statehood and national acceptance. Two atlas pages embody the hoary Mormon impulse to map the

Book of Mormon onto the American landscape, displaying ten maps among the almost ninety geographical theories the atlas informs us have been published since 1830. The splintering of Mormonism that broke out soon after the murder of Joseph Smith is demonstrated in surprising detail, with almost eighty churches still extant that claim more than a few members. As the most numerically significant of these, apart from the large LDS Church, the Reorganized Church (now Community of Christ) receives cartographic and narrative attention, as do the Restoration Branches (nationally and in more detail in the Independence–Kansas City area), which broke from the liberalizing RLDS Church in and after the 1980s.

Two dozen pages of the atlas treat the church in the Mideast (including the Iran mission in the late 1970s) and in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. The authors do not skirt controversial matters, including the infamous massacre at Mountain Meadows in 1857. One map displays all property in Brigham City in 1880 owned by families practicing, respectively, monogamy or polygamy. After seven decades of determined gathering to their Zion in the Rocky Mountains, a “great outmigration” of Saints, leaving Utah for education and fortune, changed the distribution of church members, affected the outlook of many, and eventually altered the church’s own perspective on the world. This inversion from gathering to scattering is graphed, cartographed, and analyzed, including vignettes and photographs of nineteen figures who went on to make their mark in the church and the wider world by 1970. All such topics merely sample the dozens the atlas addresses.

This superior work deserves the year’s “best book” plaudit it received from the Mormon History Association (2013)—more notable because the association does not often grant such honor to a reference volume. This apt tribute naturally does not mean that the work could not be improved or extended. In some instances, population maps too full of dense, overlapping, proportional circles—cast in deference to contemporary cartographic style—present as artistic chaos; they would have communicated more intuitively if rendered as older-fashioned, shaded, choropleth maps. Other maps confuse by being too dense with

information, too small, and accompanied only by obscure or overly innovative legends (some of which are even hard to find). Reproductions of certain documents are illegible while lacking a transcription, such as Henry Bigler's diary noting the 1848 employment of Mormon Battalion veterans by John Sutter after the discovery of gold in California (p. 78). This leaves the innocent merely to behold an old document of interest, if only we could read it. Occasional timelines or legends have markings or shadings whose purpose I could not divine.¹ The volume's extensive bibliography is useful but of erratic quality (see entries under "Latter-day Scriptures," for example), often including titles from Deseret Book and church education materials while lacking more penetrating treatments.

Such flaws shrink in proportion to the atlas's magnificent contribution. Refinements, additions, and updates could be added indefinitely to a work so ambitious as this one. Nonetheless, one interrogative gauge of a great book is, to what future work shall it provoke us? Beyond the treasures the atlas offers, what may its arrival mean for the future study of the Mormon spatial past?

I offer two suggestions in response. The first is that serious and aspiring scholars should consider the atlas in company with Richard Francaviglia's terrific *Mapmakers of New Zion* (hot off the press from the University of Utah, 2015). Whether by neologism or a more graceful term, there is such a genre as *cartographigraphy*. Francaviglia's treatment is uniquely capable of casting *Mapping Mormonism*, as a cartographical enterprise, into historical context. This may, in turn, stimulate the imagination of some future graduate students to ponder, where to from here?

One road to which that query might lead is deeper analysis of the meaning and implications of the spatial relations that *Mapping* uncovers for us. This, in turn, might induce in us additional productive charting. *Mapping Mormonism* is a visual treasure of historical information. Still, there is more "what" than "so what?" in this book. The observation is not to chide the editors and contributors for lacunae in their fine gift

1. The simplest and most harmless example is on p. 81: What is the import of the episodic gray shading on the narrative legend parsing the graceful map overlooking the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847?

to us, but to suggest that the size of their accomplishment may create the mirage that all has been done. We now have maps that tell us much of the routes of the pioneers toward Brigham Young's Zion, but have we sufficiently explored the liminality of the trek for those who did and did not "cross over"? We progress in visualizing the space occupied by Mormonism's international growth, but to what extent have we probed how this spread correlates to Correlation, and Correlation to the changing character of Mormonism, and this change to the broadening crisis of faith besetting so many—with geographical unevenness? Is there correspondence between the midwestern home of the Community of Christ and the transforming path of its recent decades?² What does it mean to be Mormon in Utah rather than in Seattle, Birmingham, or Johannesburg? What does it mean to be "not Mormon" in Utah? Garrison Keillor discerns that "in Minnesota, everyone is a Lutheran, whether they are Lutheran or not," but the joke would not transpose to Utah, and thereby hang many tales. Did Wallace Stegner exhaust the task of portraying "Mormon country," or do there remain unheard Stegners and Kathleen Norrises to disclose the Mormon people and their land(s) to us and themselves?³

In 1977 two nearly identical *Voyager* spacecraft lifted from Earth. Traveling at 38,000 miles per hour for thirteen years, they at last passed Neptune, the outermost planet of our solar system. With several years of lobbying, Carl Sagan and others persuaded NASA command to send a signal to *Voyager 1*, on Valentine's Day 1990, to briefly turn back toward our home planet to take a family snapshot of our sun and its system of planets.⁴

2. See Philip Barlow, "Space Matters: A Geographical Context for the Reorganization's Great Transformation," *Journal of the John Whitmer Historical Association* 24 (2004): 21–39.

3. I'm thinking of works in the spirit of Stegner's *Mormon Country* (1942) and *The American West as Living Space* (1987) or Kathleen Norris's *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (1993).

4. Many officials at NASA were concerned that taking a picture of Earth near to the Sun risked damage to the spacecraft's video system.

From that distance of almost four billion miles, Earth registered as barely a solitary pixel—a “pale blue dot” in Sagan’s words—among the 640,000 pixels in the resulting photograph. The picture became an instant icon, spawning wonder about the speck we call home, for this almost indiscernible dot was the birthplace of every known person and all events of our planet’s history. It has been the stage for every war waged by a Caesar or a Genghis Khan to claim more of the blue pixel—and every peace that ever ensued. Every hopeful love and every broken heart, every symphony written and performed, every plague, every stegosaurus and bacterium, every evolved species to arise and every one to fall extinct. Every passion, every discovery, every secret, every prayer.

Simon and Garfunkel serenaded us into noticing that, short of Frank Lloyd Wright,

architects may come and
architects may go and
never change a point of view.

But *Voyager 1* went, took a snapshot, and changed our point of view. The snapshot put Copernicus on steroids: Earth *really* is not the Center.

Among those who write and chart and map the Mormon universe, is there a scholar to arise who may yet baptize the dead Copernicus: not merely adding to our information but changing our perspective?

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Samuel Morris Brown. *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Charles L. Cohen

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ELBOWING ITS WAY SMARTLY into a dense historiographic field, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth* treats Joseph Smith as a supremely creative theologian whose doctrines dealt with a central conundrum unsolved (to his mind) by the prevailing religious culture of his day: how to conquer death. Early nineteenth-century American Protestants confronted life's end with a complex routine that Samuel Brown denominates "holy dying," a multifaceted performance that included the dying person accepting death in front of an attentive audience (thereby demonstrating his or her salvation) and mourners certifying that claim through proper expressions of grief in hopes they would all meet again in heaven. However consolatory in theory, this complex practice left souls sensitive to its underlying tensions unable to gain assurance of a blessed eternity. What if the dying or the living failed to act out their parts, thereby bringing the salvation of the departed or the faith of the bereaved into question? Mainstream Protestant theologies, whether Calvinist or Arminian, only aggravated such doubts since the former made election arbitrary while the latter premised the possibility of backsliding.

Like others of his day, Brown holds, Smith was further vexed by providentialism's inherent conundrum. On the one hand, if God does indeed govern the world perfectly, how can he value the close attachments human beings make, since he wantonly dismembers so many of them? Conversely, if he does indeed value them, why does he terminate so many prematurely? Whereas many scholars have pointed to the multiple, discordant truth claims voiced by antebellum sects as the fundamental problem that Smith aimed to resolve, Brown identifies a different prophetic concern: surmounting death and creating "transmortal"

communities in which human beings live with their loved ones forever. Mormonism, he posits, emerged via Smith's constant negotiation with "the inevitability of death, the intensity of human revulsion toward it, and the inscrutability of God's Providential will" (p. 35).

Part 1 of *In Heaven as It Is on Earth* rehearses the personal and cultural sources of Smith's particular preoccupation with overcoming death and details his evolving response. His peculiar urgency to avert the grave's terror issued from his inability to dispel the shock of his eldest brother's premature death coupled with his highly original interpretations of cultural commonplaces like the cult of the corpse, treasure seeking, and contemplating the Indians' fate. In the shadows cast figuratively by Alvin Smith's demise and palpably by ancient burial mounds strewn across a sacralized landscape, Joseph's sorties to burrow for gold or unearth skeletons had, Brown asserts, an ulterior, ultimately religious purpose: to disinter knowledge about and from long-deceased ancestors. Encountering angels and their sacred hoard in upstate New York focused this habit into the construction of a religion premised on linking the quick and the dead. Part 2 expositis this new faith's dogmatic and ritual underpinnings. Experiments already under way in Kirtland culminated at the Nauvoo Temple in rites like adoption, patriarchal blessings, baptism for the dead, and celestial marriage that Smith theologized through reconfiguring Plato's Great Chain of Being and instantiated in a sacramental cultus unlike anything ever dreamt in Rome or Geneva. Obeying these rites assured Latter-day Saints that they would enter heaven, an abode neither of single souls praising God in hierarchical array nor of nuclear families sentimentally celebrating their reconstituted domesticity, but a place where individuals already translated to eternal life and those still slogging through their mortal coils formed a single united family whose relationships had been permanently secured by a cosmic genealogy that was perhaps Smith's most radical postulate. Where Protestants spoke of joining the divine family metaphorically, Smith perceived an ontological continuity between (im) mortals that grounded the "literal family connectedness of humans and God" (p. 278). Mormons would conquer death because they were the stuff that gods are made of.

Conceptualizing Smith's theology as a holism opens important new perspectives on a variety of historiographic debates. Joseph's treasure hunting, Brown avers, should be understood neither as irrelevant to his later career (contra some Mormon apologists) nor as opportunistic fortune hunting that discredits the Book of Mormon (pace some debunkers), but as early efforts to disinter the secrets of the dead, an impulse that the more mature Smith—seer and prophet—would elaborate. Early Mormonism borrowed from Masonry, but the Nauvoo Temple was no ersatz lodge; Smith translated Masonic imperatives to gain esoteric knowledge and achieve immortality into a ritual cultus that linked living and dead within a sacerdotal community sealed to enjoy everlasting life collectively. Polygamy was most radical not in its threat to conventional morality but as part of a larger, full-fledged assault on Protestant familial arrangements and the version of eternity they postulated. Smith's "heaven family" consisted of a "pan-human allegiance" (p. 242) constituted through a "new and everlasting covenant" in which plural marriage was only one element creating a "heavenly network of belonging" (p. 243) that would endure forever. Aggregating these insights argues against positing Smith as preeminently a magus, a post-revolutionary prophet, a quondam Mason, a sexual communitarian, or a specimen of spiritual flotsam queer even by the standards of upstate New York's burned-over district. Each accurate to a degree, none of these characterizations do him full justice; in Brown's rendering, the Prophet was greater than the sum of his parts.

Brown's intense focus on Smith's theology as ultimately a means to conquer death obscures other ways of conceiving it. The "conquest of death" is a heuristic device activated by Brown's invocation of sociologist Peter Berger's judgment that a religion's credibility lies in how it prepares people to die; hence there is something circular about taking Berger's remark as a normative valuation of what religion is only to announce that, lo and behold, early Mormonism precisely fits the bill. If one starts with the similarly defensible assumption that religion constitutes a highly effective means for creating social cohesion, one might with justice argue that Smith was reacting less to his society's culture of

holy death than to its perceived dislocations, including stresses on traditional family life and the multiplication of religious truth claims—in which case his theology might be understood as an exercise in family reconstruction.

I wish that Brown had come to terms with Smith's profound preference for straightforward exegeses, a quality that Brown rightly emphasizes, albeit sometimes in expressions—for example, Smith was “assiduously” (p. 91) or “marvelously” (p. 124) literal—whose qualifiers go annoyingly unexplained. Smith's meanderings into translating Egyptian papyri and rewriting the King James Bible bespeak a capacity for imaginative hermeneutics, but his theological genius issued from a default literalism—witness how he arrived at what Brown calls his “divine anthropology”—that deserves thorough scrutiny. Nonetheless, Brown has accomplished a brilliant and coherent excursus of Smith's theology that forefronts his originality by fully contextualizing him within the wider religious culture of antebellum America, whose culture of consolation and Protestant divinities, both Calvinist and Arminian, Joseph found inadequate. Whether seer or charlatan, prophet or con man, Smith was foremost a folk intellectual who refashioned conventional materials, religious and secular, in strikingly novel ways. Brown demonstrates that Smith challenged Protestant doctrine and worship to provide Latter-day Saints with a sacred surety that loving human relationships outlast death if one performs the right ritual regimens. This accomplishment warrants Smith more serious consideration as a first-rank theological mind than he generally receives.

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Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young, eds. *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Reviewed by Randall J. Stephens

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IN HIS 1997 CLASSIC, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity*, the Vanderbilt University historian Paul Conkin took up the sprawling subject of America's *sui generis* religions. Of course, even new faiths had their roots deep in European soil. That was the case even if practitioners refused to acknowledge it. "North America provided special opportunities for religious innovation," observed Conkin. "The desire for immigration and population growth and the eventual absence of an established church all combined to provide opportunities for religious prophets and reformers."¹

A whole range of questions about such American originals continues to fascinate scholars and lead researchers down fruitful paths. Several related questions—some that are real head-scratchers, ideal for the classroom or seminar table—deserve our attention. Why did some eras of American history prove more vital to religious creativity and fecundity than others? What accounts for the nineteenth-century profusion of religious mavericks, prophetesses, and seers? How do we make sense of innovation? Fittingly, religious studies scholar Stephen Stein has taken up the question of religious innovation for those groups on the margins of America's religious culture. Stein remarks: "It is impossible to understand outsiders without a clear appreciation for the ways they dissented consciously from the mainstream. Any effort to tell the story of religious people at the edges must deal with both the margins

1. Paul Keith Conkin, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), vii.

and the mainstream, for tensions and dissent are at the heart of the outsider experience.”²

Perhaps the most perplexing questions that follow such observations are: How have religious outsiders (to borrow R. Laurence Moore’s term) imagined their relative place in the cosmos? How have they understood and thought through their relationships to other traditions? *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* takes up many of the above questions and others as well. As a whole the chapters explore the dynamic, sometimes messy, yet always fascinating ways that Mormons made sense of their place within Christian and biblical history and tradition. Such stories resonate across space and time. Hence the inclusion of other traditions and Mormons’ reflection on these works out wonderfully.

Stalwarts in new religious movements—be they Disciples of Christ, Adventist, Pentecostal, Jehovah’s Witnesses—need to locate themselves within the arc of Christian history. If a new revelation, set of doctrines, or visions are essential for the true faith, then almost certainly new light will need to be cast on denominations and historical traditions of other colors. Many Pentecostals, for instance, held that a “latter rain” of the Spirit was being poured out in the last days. After hundreds of years of apostasy, the true apostolic Christianity of the New Testament was being restored. What is more, they were at the center of the drama.

Latter-day Saints—suffering persecutions and developing their own ideas of salvation history—rethought apostasy and their place among the historical churches. In the introduction to this volume, Wilcox and Young handily summarize the book’s purpose: “*Standing Apart* explores how the idea of apostasy has functioned as a category to mark, define, and set apart ‘the other’ in the development of Mormon historical consciousness and in the construction of Mormon narrative identity” (p. 3). The contributors’ intricate, sometimes counterintuitive ways of exploring this theme make up one of the many strengths of this volume. It

2. Stephen J. Stein, “Religious Innovation at the Edges,” in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture*, ed. Peter W. Williams (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 23.

also aligns the book with a recent trend in Mormon studies. Books by Spencer Fluhman, Patrick Mason, Kathleen Flake, and others are showing us that Mormon history is not as tidy as once imagined and are also revealing the stark differences that separate the Mormon twenty-first-century present from the movement's nineteenth-century past.

Several chapters note that even though the great apostasy, the declension of the church, has played an instrumental role in Mormonism, it has seldom received commensurate scholarly attention. That is unfortunate, in part because the subject is so varied and rich. The book makes clear that the very variety of ideas about the great apostasy make it impossible to speak of one standard interpretation. Hence, Christopher Jones and Stephen Fleming reveal the many nuances that existed among early Mormon theories of apostasy, ranging “from harsh and blanket condemnations to more conciliatory” ideas about Christian history (p. 56).

Other contributors in the first section (“Contextualizing the LDS Great Apostasy Narrative”) focus on the key interpreters of the great apostasy—James Talmage, B. H. Roberts, and Joseph Fielding Smith among them—who set the tone for believers. Eric Dursteler observes that many popular LDS notions of apostasy, influenced as they are by such interpreters, still draw on outmoded Burckhardtian ideas about the “Dark Ages” and the “Renaissance.” Matthew Bowman zeroes in on the critical function of confessional historians and their links to similar Protestant authors. Likewise, Miranda Wilcox uncovers “how religious communities tell historical narratives to define and maintain their distinctive identities” and how “these historical narratives function as cultural traditions transmitted to and renewed by each succeeding generation” (p. 95). It is little wonder, then, that Mormons during the Cold War would have understood key concepts of their faith quite differently from how their antebellum predecessors did. In some ways it is reminiscent of how premillennial and postmillennial theologies have changed, morphed, or faded with succeeding Protestant generations.

A second section of *Standing Apart* is organized around the theme “Renarrating the Apostasy: New Approaches.” Models for a usable past are carefully laid out. Cory Crawford takes on the LDS understanding

of history and the Hebrew Bible. The biblical canon itself, argues Crawford, contains different views and arguments and a range of ideas about the divine in history. The Bible could, he concludes, “provide a heuristic model for rethinking diversity in LDS historical narratives” (p. 142). Matthew Grey looks at ideas of Jewish apostasy in the time of Jesus and “suggests some ways in which the Jewish world of the New Testament can be reconceptualized in light of Latter-day Saint scripture” (p. 148). Taylor Petrey continues with a focus on the early church and the challenges of doctrinal diversity. If the early disciples of Jesus, to whom Paul ministered, were a “diverse lot,” asks Petrey, “how does acknowledging this diversity challenge the way that Mormons situate themselves as heirs of the pure church established by Christ?” (p. 174). Historically, too great a focus on the “purity” of the early church has obscured or paved over the real diversity that existed in the first century. In a related sense, as Lincoln Blumell points out in his chapter, the first ecumenical council of the ancient church at Nicaea has not received the critical attention and scrutiny it deserves. Blumell contends that a more subtle understanding of the council and creed would aid dialogue with other traditions and give Mormons greater self-understanding. Ariel Bybee Laughton considers the Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley. She uses comparative history—of Arian Christians in the fourth century and Mormons in the twenty-first century—to explore the boundaries of Mormon belief, while using Nibley to rethink heterodoxy and the usefulness of the label *Christian*.

Further examining the idea of the Dark Ages, as Dursteler did in the beginning of the volume, Spencer Young and Jonathan Green rethink how Mormons have (mis)understood the Catholic tradition and the Protestant-Catholic conflicts of the sixteenth century. Both call for a sympathetic reading of other past traditions. “Latter-day Saints who desire a more informed treatment of Mormon doctrines and practices,” Young counsels, “should make a reciprocal effort in their treatments of the doctrines and practices of other traditions” (p. 254).

Moving beyond Christianity and providing further insights on charitable views of other traditions, David Peck considers how the Qur’an treats other faiths. Lessons can be learned, Peck recommends, in how Islam

“engage[s] other religions in an inclusive, nonbinary fashion” (p. 302). John Young, like others in this collection, calls for a new approach to understanding apostasy. He proposes a more expansive idea of God’s work in history and “a more nuanced view of humanity’s interaction with God than the traditional LDS narrative contains” (p. 310).

Terryl Givens offers a helpful epilogue to draw together some of the themes that make up *Standing Apart*. Givens, fittingly, turns to Joseph Smith, who called on believers to embrace the past and view themselves in continuity with it. By contrast, says Givens, “Mormons have largely adopted an apostasy narrative that emphasizes radical loss and abrupt reinstitution” (p. 336). In Givens’s view such a perspective is at odds with Joseph Smith’s actions and language.

This collection is ambitious and wonderfully readable. The book surely will appeal to Latter-day Saints, though, as an outsider to the tradition, I cannot help but wonder how many feathers it will ruffle. Will the average man or woman in the pew be willing to reconsider tradition, history, and belief as the authors in this collection recommend? Beyond its appeal for the faithful, *Standing Apart* would make for excellent reading in a graduate seminar on American religion or in an upper-division undergraduate course. The questions asked about the past and historical interpretation, along with the connections made to other traditions, draw it far out of the strict realm of Mormon history. *Standing Apart* is a model of how scholarship can contextualize a religious tradition and appropriately challenge the devout. Finally, it reveals just how dynamic, vibrant, and contested the Latter-day Saints’ understanding of the past and of apostasy has been from the start.

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Michael Hicks. *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir: A Biography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Stephen A. Marini

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THE MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR: A BIOGRAPHY is the most accessible and authoritative history of this unique musical ensemble yet published. Despite the vast number of newspaper articles and performance reviews that have appeared about the celebrated ensemble, there are surprisingly few book-length treatments of its origins and development, and most of them have tended toward hagiographic account and heroic narrative. For more than a half century, the standard work has been *A Century of Singing: The Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle Choir* (1958), by longtime choir director J. Spencer Cornwall, supplemented in 1979 by Gerald A. Petersen's *More Than Music: The Mormon Tabernacle Choir* and Charles Jeffrey Calman's *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir*. Michael Hicks wrote briefly but penetratingly about the choir in *Mormonism and Music: A History* (1989); his new book, however, mines archival sources including confidential interviews with choir directors and records of the First Presidency, as well as an accumulating bibliography of recent scholarly articles and monographs about the choir to develop a comprehensive and insightful critical perspective on Mormonism's premier public institution.

The broad outlines of the choir's life are well known to Mormons and musicians alike, but Hicks adds details and commentaries that consistently illuminate and sometimes transform the familiar story. Hicks calls this account a "biography" rather than a history or an interpretation, which he narrates as both an insider and an outsider, a professor of music at Brigham Young University who does not seem to have been a member of the choir but has lived his entire life under its musical and cultural aegis. Hicks's biography integrates three principal dimensions of the choir's life: its development as a musical organization, its role as a

religious institution in the LDS Church, and its status as a public expression of Mormonism to the wider world. To each of these areas Hicks brings special strengths, including detailed commentary on repertoire and performance practice under each conductor; close attention to the complex and often-conflicted relations between conductors, their choir presidents, and the First Presidency; and careful description of the choir's landmark performances, tours, broadcasts, and recordings.

The background information in the first chapter of *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir* unfortunately suffers most from overreliance on received Mormon tradition. Hicks casts the earliest Mormon musical debate as a contest between the early American singing school's tradition of music literacy and performance instruction and the restorationist imperative of Alexander Campbell's influential Christian movement that rejected all technical instruction in music for believers as a violation of New Testament mandate. But Campbell endorsed singing school tune books as early as 1835 and urged his followers to achieve the highest standards of sung praise. Where Campbell did challenge Mormon musical practice was in his rejection of all instruments, including organs, in the performance of sacred song. Brigham Young, a vigorous supporter of singing schools, settled the matter by incorporating plans for a huge organ into the design of the 1867 Salt Lake Tabernacle. Hicks also calls "All Is Well," the tune for "Come, Come, Ye Saints," a "pioneer song" and a "trail song" when it was in fact a singing school tune published in B. F. White's *Sacred Harp* in 1844 and later, in a version closer to Mormon usage, in William Hauser's *The Hesperian Harp* (1848). More puzzling still is the complete absence of any reference to Emma Hale Smith, who compiled the first collection of Mormon hymn texts, in a study of the choir for whom the performance of hymns in worship has been an essential part of its repertoire and mission.

Once the story turns to the construction of the 1867 Tabernacle and the permanent organization of the choir, however, Hicks's narrative sparkles. Of particular interest is the replacement of American singing school music and performance practice by European theory and repertoire—and an abiding Victorian taste for a large-scale choral

sound—brought by British converts John Charles Thomas and George Careless, who took on leadership of the choir in its earliest years. Young's enthusiastic endorsement of these changes set a surprising and lasting mandate of popular European classical repertoire for this most American of ensembles.

The core of Hicks's biography is his examination of a century of remarkable innovations and legendary conductors beginning with the appointment of Evan Stephens as choir director in 1890. Under Stephens the still-obscure choir triumphantly took the second-place prize in the national "eisteddfod," or singing competition, at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Hicks shows that President Wilford Woodruff endorsed the high cost, unprecedented travel, and national exposure that the contest risked as "a chance to garner massive good will with outsiders" (p. 40) at a time of the church's protracted struggles over polygamy and Utah statehood. The church subsequently promoted the choir's success as a mission and public relations strategy, a controversial mandate that still persists today. Hicks also details Stephens's dismissal by President Joseph F. Smith in 1916 as the first of several such incidents in which a conductor's sense of artistic ambition and institutional autonomy has been brought to ground by the church's insistence that the choir serve first and foremost as a musical and spiritual resource for the Mormon community.

Under Tony Lund, Stephens's successor, the choir made its decisive advance into national radio broadcasting. Once again the church was the initiator, creating station KSL in Salt Lake City and endorsing the choir's first live local broadcast in 1924. Five years later the choir embarked on what would be the most important single episode in its history, the national network Sunday broadcast eventually known as *Music and the Spoken Word*, first on NBC, then on CBS, where it still thrives. Hicks provides rich details about network competition for the program, the choir's developing choral style and repertoire for radio performance, and behind-the-scenes conflicts after 1939 between Lund's successor Spencer Cornwall, organist Alexander Schreiner, host and homilist Richard Evans, and choir president Ike Stewart, who represented church interests.

By 1952 the Tabernacle Choir was on its way to becoming “America’s choir,” as Ronald Reagan later called it, a position coveted, as Hicks demonstrates, by church presidents from Heber Grant to David McKay and symbolized by a European tour in 1955 and performances at the inaugurations of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Reagan, George Bush, and George W. Bush. Audio technology also brought the choir to its zenith as a recording ensemble. Already a pioneer in stereophonic recording, the choir under conductor Richard D. Condie released its spectacularly successful version of Handel’s *Messiah* with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1959, followed by a Grammy award-winning performance of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” in 1960. A string of subsequent popular Christmas recordings eventually developed into today’s series of annual televised and video-formatted holiday performances. Hicks’s detailed account of the ongoing artistic and commercial rivalries behind this media expansion offers an eye-opening perspective on the business side of the choir empire.

Hicks’s concluding chapter follows the careers of conductors Jay Welch, Jerold Ottley, Craig Jessop, and current director Mack Wilberg, checked and balanced by the aggressive leadership of church presidents Spencer Kimball and Gordon Hinckley and choir presidents Oakley Evans, Wendell Smoot, and Mac Christensen. During the 1980s and 1990s the choir under Ottley undertook an increasingly frenetic schedule of staple choir performances; church leadership, on the other hand, mandated a return to traditional hymns in Mormon worship, at one point restricting the choir to singing only hymn arrangements at general conference. After Jessop’s appointment as conductor in 1999, an institutional transformation began with the creation of the Orchestra at Temple Square to accompany the choir and the Bonneville Corporation, the choir’s own recording label. Although the choir continued to expand into secular repertoire and venues, its corporate management became more tightly controlled by the church. With the appointment of Mormon composer Mack Wilberg as conductor in 2008, Hicks suggests,

the choir had in a sense come full circle to Evan Stephens's era in which "homemade" music and church mission should prevail despite continuing popular success. Hicks's final assessment, an insightful and useful one, is that "the Choir's ongoing career" might best be understood as "the simple persistence of three distinct ideas: a brand, a system, and a spectacle" (p. 169).

Michael Hicks's book demythologizes much of the legendary lore surrounding the choir without in any way diminishing its extraordinary achievements. He replaces that lore with carefully documented accounts of what actually makes up the choir's daily life—its rehearsals, choral technique, and repertoire; the politics of its artistic leaders, in-house managers, and church overseers; and the ongoing struggle to find a stable mission that will enable an internationally celebrated performance ensemble to harmonize with changing demands of the globalizing church it serves. *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir: A Biography* is required reading not only for Mormons and musicians, but for anyone who wants to learn about the realities of world-class music making in a hierarchical religious community.

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Craig Harline. *Way Below the Angels: The Pretty Clearly Troubled but Not Even Close to Tragic Confessions of a Real Live Mormon Missionary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014.

Reviewed by Anne Blue Wills

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THE PLOT OF CRAIG HARLINE’S UNEVEN MEMOIR follows his adventures as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to Belgium in the mid-1970s. Predictably, the experience is much harder than he expects—full of what he calls “rough stuff” (p. 265)—in part because of the myths and expectations that flavor Mormon culture. This heroic model demands a missionary who knows scripture perfectly and can answer every non-Mormon’s questions convincingly, bonds seamlessly with his mission companion, and brings in a convert at least once a month. All of this missionary effectiveness arises from the missionary’s unshakeable faith and complete reliance on the Holy Ghost’s blessing of his work.

As his title indicates, Harline’s experience did not match this “One True Story” of the Mormon missionary (p. 259). The considerable effort he and his mission companions expend tracting, “proselyting,” and meeting with inquirers does not lead so automatically to conversions. The work frustrates and exhausts, pitching the young Harline into a crisis of faith. He pokes considerable fun at himself and everyone else—senior and junior mission companions, potential converts, mission zone leaders, his bishop, the predominantly Catholic population of Belgium, elderly people, overweight people. He documents his many foibles as a missionary but, in some of the book’s more poignant sections, also tells how those experiences prompted his groping toward a less orthodox, more humanistic faith.

His title also signals one of the major weaknesses of the book: Harline’s tale is “pretty clearly troubled but not even close to tragic.” Is that enough to make us want to read the book? What sets Harline’s account

apart as remarkable? If potential readers are in search of a memoir recounting an unusual yet somehow typically human story, Harline's account will disappoint. One can see or read versions of this narrative in classic LDS cinema such as the drama *God's Army* (2000) or the comedy *The R.M.* (2003). Ryan McIlvain's semiautobiographical novel *Elders* (2013) more artfully tells a very similar story.

The book falls short, too, as an engaging story. The narrative reaches some powerful plateaus. Much of the book, however, focuses on the considerable tedium of LDS missionary life and on the callow reflections of an American teenager trying to live in an unfamiliar culture. Moreover, in his telling, Harline relies heavily on typographical tricks whose overuse may wear on the reader's patience. He particularly favors long, inexplicably hyphenated phrases: In praise of the missionary endeavor, he writes that there is indeed "something to be said for compulsory living-with-people-you-wouldn't-ordinarily-choose-to-live-with" (p. 75). Similar examples are too numerous to list and distracting in the extreme. Harline also builds lists of sentence fragments whose organizing theme fades after the third or fourth paragraph of partial thoughts. Other habits—overuse of italics and irony punctuation, for instance—signal that Harline may not trust his readers to pick up the tensions between official myth and individual experience. The literary quality of this story, therefore, falls short of the standard set by other contemporary LDS memoirs such as Joanna Brooks's *Book of Mormon Girl* (2012) or similar seeker memoirs such as Carlos Eire's *Learning to Die in Miami* (2011) and Gary Shteyngart's *Little Failure* (2013).

As noted, Harline does mine some powerful moments from his experience. "The whole mission business," he writes, "was more about suffering a little with people and feeling connected to them than it was about baptizing them" (p. 219). The young Harline, faced with arduous and apparently unproductive missionizing, eventually stumbles into deep awareness of the Belgian landscape, whose ancient quiet speaks to him in ways that cannot be reduced to bullet points in a pocket-size missionary handbook. He also forms connections with ordinary Belgians that solidify into enduring friendships. These friends tend to be

the ones who take a liking to Elder Harline but tell him they just are not interested in listening to the church's gospel discussions—the lessons that, in the One True Story of LDS missionaries, lead smoothly to conversion and baptism. His “understanding of what goodness was” began to be less rooted in rules and regulations and more “from just seeing it personified in two ordinary- and even stereotypical-looking Belgianlanders named Yvonne and Raymond” (pp. 234–35). Harline realizes, too, that he loves to study and indeed loves church and meetings and gathering with other missionaries. His vocation as a prolific Reformation historian who teaches at Brigham Young University clearly grew from his mission experience. All of these insights clarify for the young Harline a “totally silent thought/feeling that calmly but overwhelmingly entered the emptiness [he felt] inside . . . *Just be yourself*” (p. 120).

Beyond the narrative arc of Harline's transformation, the book raises issues worth pondering within and beyond LDS circles. Religious communities in the United States tend to engage in scrupulous examination of sexual behavior to the exclusion of real conversation about the holiness of human sexuality, and the LDS community (at least in Harline's 1970s) was no exception. In preparation for his mission, and once while he is in the field, the young Harline voluntarily goes before his bishop to confess sexual sins that amount to little more than accidentally brushing a girl's arm. He writes to another girl to ask her forgiveness for another gaffe, which she had not remembered or sought an apology for. These trivia in a context of such scrupulosity signal a need that Amy Frykholm has explored masterfully in her book *See Me Naked: Stories of Sexual Exile in American Christianity* (2012). The scruples distract from knowing self and others as sexual beings whose desire could teach us something about God's own desiring for relationship. Harline's befuddled teenage self serves as a caution not only to the LDS community but also to other communities: religious authorities that shame young women and men into avoiding each other as sexual beings until the moment they are ready to marry and start a family want it both ways.

The book raises theological questions for any Christian who ponders grace and works, the power of the Holy Ghost, divine Providence, and the reality of evil. Young Elder Harline pushes himself to “get . . . worthy” (p. 14) and bemoans the moment when he and his companion “lost” a potential convert (p. 110). He struggles, as do many Christians, to find exactly where human effort makes its contribution to the spreading of God’s kingdom. Harline’s experiences also illustrate perennial tensions at work between individual responsibility and institutional claims to religious authority. Moreover, his story evinces the ethical, cultural, and theological tangles intrinsic to conversionary missions.

Some of the book’s strangeness of tone and plot may relate to some mixed signals about Harline’s intended audience. He teaches at Brigham Young University. Yale University Press publishes his historical writings. Eerdmans published this book and all but dominates the field when it comes to books about and for American evangelicals. So is *Way Below the Angels* a Mormon apologia, addressed to them? Harline’s continuing affiliation with BYU suggests that he remains an LDS Church member in good standing. His spiritual awakening in Belgium did not apparently propel him out of the church into an embrace of traditional evangelical Christianity. His own children, he notes, have completed their own missions. So why would his story appeal to evangelical Christian readers? It certainly confirms some of the worst Mormon stereotypes—that Saints are brainwashed, that those converted by missionaries are only responding to coercion and therefore fall away rapidly. It does not build clear bridges to evangelical readers. Perhaps, then, he addresses his book to other Latter-day Saints. Yet Harline’s withering snark about lax preparation and naive missionaries and his powerful suspicion about the ethics of proselytizing would seem to disqualify his story as church-approved reading. Maybe, then, Eerdmans and Harline hope that this book will signal to other LDS authors that they have friends in Grand Rapids. Maybe we can look forward to more (and more diverse) Mormon voices coming from Eerdmans. And that would be a good thing.

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Donald S. Lopez Jr. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Biography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Greg Wilkinson

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THE *TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD* IS A *TERMA*, a Tibetan treasure text. Starting in the eighth century CE, texts were buried in the ground and, according to Buddhist predestinarian teachings, buried in the minds of future Tibetan lamas as well. Several hundred years later, the lamas who were prepared to understand and interpret the texts discovered them. (Tibetan Buddhist teachings suggest that those who found *terma* knew of their locations because they were the ones that buried them in a past life.) These texts were often represented as a restoration of original, authentic Buddhist teachings and were significant in developing perceptions of Tibetan Buddhism as a distinct tradition. Those with background in Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism may not be surprised to find comparative analyses between *terma* and the Book of Mormon. These texts share some similarities in their narratives of provenance and discourse of legitimation. Donald Lopez, in his “biography” of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, notes these but goes well beyond identifying similarities in the textual traditions of Mormonism and Tibetan

Buddhism. Rather, he puts forth a bold and creative thesis related to how, in his view, the Book of Mormon and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* share a cultural relationship with what he terms “American spiritualism.” For Lopez, these works represent important modern case studies about how texts become scripture (p. 129).

Mormon studies scholars may be distracted by some errors in Lopez’s historical narrative, for instance with his mixing up of William Hale and Martin Harris (p. 16). Lopez lacks expertise in LDS history, it is true, but to be fair, his objectives are theoretical and focused more broadly on interpretations of metaphysical religion in America. His intended audience ranges well beyond specialists in Mormon history, to be sure. Still, scholars of Mormonism might justifiably object to the fact that Lopez fails to provide normative analysis that might distinguish types of ecstatic experiences within a broadly defined American spiritualism. Smith and the Book of Mormon are lumped, without qualification or distinction, with other instances of nineteenth-century religious expressions ranging from Mormon schismatic leader James Strang’s translation attempts and Kate and Margaret Fox’s séances with the devil and the recently departed (some of which the girls later recanted) to Madame Blavatsky’s auto-writing during the formation of the Theosophical Society.

That experiential reductionism notwithstanding, it seems clear that Lopez’s goal is not to disparage Joseph Smith (or any other purveyor of American spiritualism)—far from it. Rather, he strives to check overly romanticized views of an exotic Tibet, some even touted by academics. Lopez essentially forces a question on scholars: Why are Tibetan *terma* strangely exotic and yet the Book of Mormon simply strange? He answers the question with a gesture toward historical proximity, a point familiar to Mormon studies specialists: “The fate of the text rests not on its content, but on the degree to which the circumstances of its composition remain shrouded from the light of history. How much do we know about the time when the newly composed text was backdated? In the case of the Mahāyāna (Buddhist) sutras, we know very little. In the case of the Tibetan treasures, we know something. In the case of

Joseph Smith, perhaps we know too much” (pp. 138–39). Lopez then argues that the works brought to light by Smith, Blavatsky, or *Tibetan Book of the Dead* translator and propagator Walter Evans-Wentz are discredited not through any measure of intrinsic value but simply because they were born in a time too soon and in a place too close (p. 148). New canonical texts, especially in modern America, invite disparagement and even death (p. 147). Evans-Wentz’s new scripture avoided harsh criticism or violence, Lopez notes, through his “donning the Urim and Thummim of the scholar” in order to fabricate an ancient Asian provenance. This in effect created necessary separation from other texts brought forth during the nineteenth century’s spiritual efflorescence (pp. 149–50). Still, for Lopez, there is no objective difference between the texts brought forth by Smith and Evans-Wentz; to claim one, for Lopez, is to perpetrate a type of academic colonialism (p. 149). His invocation of the Book of Mormon, in other words, attempts to protect Buddhism from a kind of cultural “othering” he discerns in popular and academic discourse alike. He then argues for a view of “world religions” that is more self-aware; he envisions classrooms that still include the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* with English translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Tao Te Ching* along with Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* and the Book of Mormon within a discussion of how these texts are interpreted from the context of American spiritualism (pp. 119, 146–48).

His historical missteps notwithstanding, Lopez’s perspective provides benefits to scholars of American religion, regardless of specialization. For scholars of Mormonism, Lopez’s could be an intriguing theory because it provides an argument for the Book of Mormon’s significance in modern religious history through greater contextualization within American metaphysical religious traditions. This volume represents Lopez’s third publication on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (or *Bardo Thodol*, as it is known outside the West), and all three works share much in both content and argument.¹ The most significant addition made by this “biography” is Lopez’s attempt to contextualize Walter

1. See Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 46–87; and W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The*

Evans-Wentz's translation of the *Bardo Thodol* with a direct connection to the Theosophical Society and an indirect connection to Joseph Smith (1805–1844) and early Mormonism. His first chapter provides a brief summary of the Smith family's move to New York from Vermont, Joseph Smith's visions of the angel Moroni, and Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon. These narratives are presented dispassionately, and while footnotes are few, it seems that Lopez is heavily (or perhaps exclusively?) relying on Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (Knopf, 2005) for his understanding of early Mormon history. The subsequent chapters provide a brief and yet effective summary of Buddhist teachings, history, and texts. A description of Walter Y. Evans-Wentz's (1878–1965) journey in finding, translating, and introducing the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* to the world follows thereafter, and the book's conclusion and codex bring together American spiritualism and Tibetan Buddhism through an analysis of Joseph Smith's translation projects, which included the Book of Mormon and an Egyptian funerary text that Smith presented as the "Book of Abraham."

For Lopez, understanding the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* must begin with understanding Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, who was influenced by the works of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891). A Russian émigré and spiritual medium, Blavatsky founded the American Theosophical Society and gained a wide reputation for her esoteric teachings and psychic abilities. Through auto-writing and letters that would materialize in a cabinet, Blavatsky was a conduit for a group of ancient masters she called *mahatmas* ("great souls"), whom she first encountered in Tibet. In 1919 Evans-Wentz, a devoted member of the Theosophical Society, located the *Bar do thos grol* (literally, "liberation in the intermediate state [through] hearing") in the Sikkim province of India. Despite never having been to Tibet or having any ability to read Tibetan, Evans-Wentz translated the text into English with the help of Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868–1923). Evans-Wentz's translation has sold over half a million copies and has been more central to subsequent translations

Tibetan Book of the Dead (London: Oxford University Press, 2000). Lopez provides a new foreword and afterword for the new edition published in 2000.

and incarnations than even the original Tibetan text. Lopez argues that Evans-Wentz's ability to make the text relevant for an American audience derives from many factors, but probably none more significant than his knack for speaking to popular curiosity about both death and Tibet, which in turn tended to romanticize Tibet and widen the text's relevance beyond its liturgical roots (p. 11).

As a liturgical funerary text, Lopez's subject has limited application and significance within Tibetan Buddhism. Accordingly, Lopez's biography is not of the original *Bardo Thodol* per se, but of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*—as created through English translation and American contextualization. Lopez argues that the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in English is not really about Tibet and not really about the dead. Indeed, the text that Evans-Wentz translated into the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is not a text that many Tibetans own or have read, and a great many of them have probably never heard of the text (p. 1). In the West the book has gained wide relevance as *Bardo* has been reinterpreted to mean states of consciousness, ecstatic experiences, and even hallucinogenic episodes. Lopez, then, parses the *Bardo Thodol* from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, arguing that the latter is more the result of a process of invention and creation than translation and interpretation (pp. 115–27).

Lopez is thus drawn to the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century analogue for “scripture making.” The Book of Mormon is distinct in content from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, clearly, and yet Lopez argues for similarities in ecstatic provenance and reception history. First, he sees that both texts provide a specific definition of spirituality, which he defines as direct contact and communication with the spirits of the dead. For Smith, this occurs through the translation process and through angelic tutelage. Smith testified that the Book of Mormon provides a conduit for contemporary understanding of a people long dead and forgotten. For Evans-Wentz, the *Bardo Thodol* provides esoteric knowledge and ritual processes for communicating with the recently departed (pp. 4–7). Evans-Wentz also believed that his text provides a rare opportunity to read the teachings of ancient Tibetan masters who died over a millennium ago. Both Evans-Wentz and Smith provided textual evidence for

tangible communication with spiritual entities, creating a more literal definition of mysticism. While the process of bringing forth these texts can be seen as miraculous, Smith and Evans-Wentz offer an exact record from ancient prophets in their respective traditions rather than relating what was heard or felt through the ecstatic experiences. Both texts, at least, argue that religious leaders long ago carefully and laboriously wrote texts with the specific intent of instruction and edification for subsequent generations.

Second, Lopez argues that texts are sacred signs, providing religious instruction through their content while also alluding to greater esoteric knowledge in the context of a foundational urtext. For both Smith and Evans-Wentz, their translated texts argue for an open canon within Buddhism and Christianity. Both believed that these new scriptures supported and verified the core texts of their canons. Lopez argues that for Smith the urtext was the Bible (especially its nineteenth-century interpretations), with the Book of Mormon providing another testament for Christianity and opening the Christian canon to new possibilities. The Book of Mormon established Smith's authority but was certainly not the last word on Mormon theology. For Evans-Wentz, the urtext was Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* (p. 118).² His enthusiasm for the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* related to its forming an essential link, in his view, between Blavatsky's esoteric doctrines and the religions of Tibet. Far beyond the book's content, its provenance provided evidence for Blavatsky's ecstatic experiences, which she claimed were gained through relationships with ancient religious gurus in Tibet.

Third, both texts are simultaneously timeless and timely, prepared and buried for a time and yet seen as a universal message with relevance for all religious believers. For Smith, the timely and timeless aspect was wrapped within the religious idea of a restoration of gospel "fulness" that established continuity between his new movement and a pure, original religion established with Adam. For Evans-Wentz, Tibet represented a mystical ideal that could convey ancient truths taught, in

2. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1888).

one form or another, by all of history's religious adepts (pp. 80, 102–3). Blavatsky claimed her *mahatmas* were scattered throughout the world but had eventually congregated in Tibet. For her, the mahatmas did not convey the sectarian teachings of a single Buddhist tradition but the broad esoteric teachings that underpin all Buddhist rituals and ecclesiastical structures. (This claim for an esoteric foundation of exoteric expression and sectarian division is a common idea in Buddhist studies communicated effectively by Kuroda Toshio.)³

Probably the most important lesson from Lopez's work for scholars of Mormon studies relates, albeit indirectly, to Lopez's claim that Evans-Wentz's influence contextualized scripture that eventually became much more American than Tibetan. The original text certainly is ancient, liturgical, Buddhist, and Tibetan—yet malleable enough for American readers to project their own interpretations onto it (a process of likening the scripture unto themselves), thus expanding the text's significance and relevance. It is true that Lopez is dealing with a text with more transparent and observable origins than is the case with the Book of Mormon. Scholarship on the Book of Mormon has long been torn over LDS claims of the work's original antiquity and religious and secular attention to its nineteenth-century appearance. Lopez's analysis, in the end, can spur scholars of Mormonism to delve deeper into what made the text relevant in its modern setting. LDS scholars need not leave behind questions of historicity to appreciate the significance of such a question. Whatever one takes as the mechanics or religious significance of Joseph Smith's translations, in other words, Lopez's work underscores the point that his translations certainly entailed a kind of purposeful connection of the text to his world, as all translations do. On this, both the Book of Mormon's LDS apologists and its more secular appraisers might agree.

Put another way, one can wrestle with the magical and mystical narratives surrounding the provenance of the *Tibetan Book of Dead*,

3. Kuroda's theory on Buddhism's exoteric-esoteric system is commonly called *kenmitsu taisei*. For a good explanation of the theory in English, see Taira Masayuki, "Kuroda Toshio and the Kenmitsu Taisei Theory," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 23/3–4 (1996): 427–48.

but Evans-Wentz's work is not rendered insignificant by the fact the source material remains available and has been the object of subsequent translations and interpretations; for Lopez, Evans-Wentz's unique contribution of contextualization is not rendered irrelevant by source-text verification. While not a perfect analogue, this kind of attention toward a text's contemporary reframing represents another avenue of research apart from the ancient-versus-nineteenth-century gridlock over the Book of Mormon. The lack of source material or original records (gold plates and reformed Egyptian) can spur arguments that the Book of Mormon can only be studied as a nineteenth-century work and not as an ancient record. LDS scholars can reject that zero-sum proposal and yet still be enriched by its implications for comprehending their scripture's modern significance. Has Lopez, in other words, in his attention to American esotericism, offered clues to the Mormon scripture's limited but durable resonance in the nineteenth century? At very least, Lopez has demonstrated, again, that a text's claims to antiquity, and the concomitant debates surrounding such a claim, need not be the sole or primary way to explain its power in the modern world in which it emerges. Source problems and questions of historicity do not diminish the cultural significance of such religious texts—one might include the Bible itself alongside Lopez's discussion of texts whose originating narratives have come under scrutiny in the context of modernity's legitimizing acids. Lopez certainly shows this to be the case with Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, as well as Evans-Wentz's treasure texts (pp. 153–55).

On the book's dust jacket, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp writes, "Lopez argues that persistent threads in American religious life—the tradition of the 'found' text as a repository for ancient wisdom, and a philosophical interest in life after death—help explain the overwhelming success of the book and its endurance as a cultural artifact." Maffly-Kipp accurately observes that these "persistent threads" can be maintained through the expectations of the audience rather than the academic evidence that underpins the text's provenance or content, and also that endurance as a "cultural artifact" will persist along the evidence continuum for

source texts from the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Donald Lopez's biography of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is potentially an intriguing and enjoyably provocative read for those interested in Mormon studies. It is at very least creative and unexpected: one of the most prolific scholars of Asian religions and an eminent specialist in Tibetan Buddhism explaining one of the most prominent Tibetan texts in the West through a connection to Mormon history. I suggest that Lopez's use of the Book of Mormon illustrates one facet of the advance of Mormon studies from a minor academic interest—historically characterized by apologetics, devotionalism, or debunking—to a viable specialization within religious studies. Mormon studies scholars could profitably follow Lopez's example and thus propel this advance by welcoming conversations with specialists from other fields and by enthusiastically engaging their forays into Mormon topics.

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Jedediah S. Rogers, ed. *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2014.

Reviewed by Adam Jortner

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MORMON SCHOLARS AND CONSPIRACY THEORISTS have been salivating over the publication of *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History*—a formidable collection of primary sources edited by Jedediah S. Rogers.

The recondite Council of Fifty has been shrouded in mystery ever since its founding by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1844. Consequently, both scholarly and popular thinking on the Council has tended towards terms like “shrouded in mystery” and other clichés more associated with *MonsterQuest* or Jesse Ventura than with nineteenth-century religion. As Rogers writes, the apprehension of some American voters in 2012 surely stemmed in part from the “rumors about a frontier shadow government” spawned by the secrecy of a Mormon organization that went defunct a century before Mitt Romney campaigned for office (p. xvii).

Indeed, discussions of the Council easily and frequently run into claims of theocracy. For conspiracy theorists, such a term usually ends all debate; for scholars of the Mormon experience, the word opens the conversation. Rogers’s eloquent introduction never directly defines *theocracy*, but it nevertheless gives readers a tidy overview of the activities of the Council and their blending of religious and political imperatives. The Council’s “ultimate purpose was to establish a worldly kingdom that would usurp all others and receive Jesus at his Second Coming,” Rogers explains. In that sense, the Council was “the embryo kingdom of God upon the earth,” in the phrasing of one Council member, and would, in Rogers’s words, “grow until it achieved its destiny of world domination” (pp. 2–3). In the next breath, however, Rogers reminds readers that these grand dreams never came to pass; after half a decade of active work governing the Latter-day Saint exodus from Illinois and organizing the theoretical State of Deseret, the Council became “non-functional.” Despite a brief renaissance under John Taylor, the Council never again played a significant role in LDS history, and it was certainly not the “shadow government” of Brigham Young’s Utah, as some have claimed (p. 12). Its ultimate disappearance, of course, should not obscure its importance or its merging of secular and religious power. It was intended as a “bridge to the Millennium,” a divinely instituted group tasked with reshaping the networks of power and community. Initially this directive appears to have meant campaigning for Joseph Smith for president; later, it involved legislating moral behavior, economic standards, and other legal matters for Deseret.

It is impossible to disperse the clouds of uncertainty surrounding the Council, at least until the church releases the documents to the public, but Rogers has made the most thorough effort yet by assembling this volume. Rogers scraped together what might previously have been considered odds and ends—references to the Council, its membership, and its actions—scattered through dozens of different sources. Everything in the *History* is available elsewhere; these are not secret documents or WikiLeaked esoterica, but rather the diaries, reminiscences, journals, and other documents relating to the debates, decisions, and thoughts of Council members. Although the official minutes of the Nauvoo council are scheduled for publication by the LDS Church, they were not available to Rogers. Rogers proceeded without them, using transcriptions of the minutes found elsewhere. For the most part, however, the volume consists of entries from diaries, letters, and journals that recapitulate or summarize events and discussions from Council meetings. The resulting multiplicity of voices offers a rich documentary vein.

For example, the *History* includes a transcript of the minutes of an 1882 Council meeting on the Edmunds Bill, as well as journal entries describing the meeting from Wilford Woodruff, Franklin D. Richards, and John Henry Smith (pp. 284–95). Readers can therefore examine the rough recap of the discussion as well as what some members thought of the speeches and their relative importance. In cases where the minutes are unavailable—as for the April 25, 1844, conclave at an unidentified location in Nauvoo—readers can peruse the various versions of the meeting as recorded by participants, in the above case Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley Pratt, and George Miller (pp. 48–50). For Mormon history enthusiasts outside the state of Utah—for whom even a copy of Wilford Woodruff’s diary can be hard to find—this collection is a welcome addition to the repository of printed LDS primary sources.

Professional scholars may be disappointed in the presentation of the documents. Rogers provides an omnibus list of sources at the beginning of the volume, but he also attributes the sources in gray scale at the end of each selection. This organization results in some cumbersome flipping back and forth, especially when the selected documents are

several pages long. The quotations are also arranged chronologically by the event described, not by the date of the document. Thus on occasion events remembered thirty or more years after the fact are placed next to primary sources recorded on the day of the event in question, a schema that gives some historians headaches. Moreover, some of the quotations are quite brief—a sentence or even less—which raises the question of why Rogers bothered to include them. For nonprofessionals, however, these organizational problems will seem little more than a trifle.

Like almost any historical discussion of the Council of Fifty, this volume is haunted by the work of Klaus Hansen, who wrote the foreword, and D. Michael Quinn, whose transcriptions of LDS Church materials provided the documentary base for some of its texts. “In cases where I was able to verify Quinn’s transcripts against the originals,” Rogers notes in the bibliography, “they proved accurate” (p. 394). Because Hansen and Quinn worked without the Council of Fifty minutes, some of what they wrote was speculative, which in turn has generated a historiography and public discussion freighted in uncertainty. “Possible,” “alleged,” “supposed,” and the aforementioned “shrouded in mystery”—these are the terms of the discussion involving the Council of Fifty. But no more: Rogers’s volume has collected the works of the members of the Council themselves, who in turn were mostly open about their objectives and operations. Documents from the 1880s reveal that the Council, with President Taylor, chose the territorial delegate to Congress and instructed members “as to who to vote for” (pp. 307–8). Forty years previous, the Council played a central role in Smith’s presidential campaign, according to an 1855 letter of George Miller: “It was further determined in council that all the elders should set out on missions to all the States, get up electoral tickets, and do everything in our power to have Joseph [Smith] elected President” (p. 49). These documents have been used before, by Hansen, Quinn, and others. Their collection and presentation, however, especially in a volume largely free of an interpretive or argumentative structure, should permit historians of all stripes—professional and amateur, Saint and Gentile—to lay aside the language of caution or accusations of unreliability and fully integrate the Council into the history of the Mormon experience.

Yet if historians must jettison their hesitant tone, they must probably lose any subtext of subterfuge. If anything, the *History* reveals the banality of theocracy. Much of the Council's time in the 1840s was spent writing letters to Congress and governors; from 1848 to 1850, there is a surprising amount about the care of cattle. Yet such were the concerns of the Council, acting as a de facto government in Salt Lake. The Latter-day Saints won their Rocky Mountain fastness, but running their kingdom involved a terrific amount of the day-to-day upkeep familiar to any local politician.

Indeed, these pedantic moments make for some of the best reading in the volume. Controlling cattle—"many of which were perishing from cold & Hunger"—in 1849 drove several members of the Council to despair. The Council's committee on cattle threatened to disband, prompting a response by Brigham Young. The president declared that while natural feelings were to let the owner and their cattle "go to Hell . . . duty Says if they will not take care of their cat[t]le, we must do it for them. We are to be saviours of men in these last days" (p. 139). The committee continued its work. If Young was, in John Turner's phrase, "the Great Basin's theocratic sovereign,"¹ that title seems just a little smaller when considering that Young needed to ply his close associates with a millennial harangue just to get them to secure a basic food source.

The arrangement of the documents in the *History* allows for numerous such contextualizations that should question the emphasis if not the content of scholarly discourse on territorial Utah. Turner's characterization of Young as a theocrat in *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet*, for example, is followed by Turner's brilliantly argued discussion of the fate of Ira E. West, a Saint accused of theft. Young wanted West executed; the Council eventually agreed to sell West at auction. (There were no buyers.) There is no doubt the events occurred, nor is there any doubt of the egregiously violent language of Young and the Council. "I want their cursed heads to be cut off that they may atone for their Sins," said one Council member (p. 161).

1. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 185.

It is easy to read these 1849 pronouncements, as Turner implies, as initial steps down a road that eventually led to Mountain Meadows. Yet West's case occupies barely two paragraphs in the Council of Fifty documents and is embedded in a much longer and more technical series of directives concerning fencing, collection of fines, canal construction, mail delivery, and bounties to be paid for hunted animals, including 530 magpies (pp. 157–64). The extraordinary vehemence of Utah justice was part of a larger bureaucratic regime; punishment was part of the problem of government. If mid-century Utah was a theocracy—and it was, by most definitions of that term—then the documents contained herein have a great deal to tell us about both Utah and theocracy. It is tempting to interpret theocrats of all kinds through their most extreme pronouncements, to see in the fate of West the explanation for LDS control over Utah: the iron grip of retributive justice keeping frightened Mormons in thrall, Mountain Meadows a teleological framework for Utah history. It is harder, but perhaps more valuable, to try to interpret the prosecution of West (and the massacre) in the context of dealing with delivering the mail and feeding the cattle. Rogers's collection should encourage the academy to try a little of the latter approach.

The LDS Church has scheduled the Nauvoo minutes for publication as part of the Joseph Smith Papers. Yet as Hansen writes in the foreword, “We don't yet know what the contents of the minutes might be, but . . . the church's editors will find themselves hard-pressed to produce anything as thorough and fine” as the *History*. Rogers has compiled a fair number of the minutes, but more importantly, he has set those minutes in context, showing how Council members interpreted their mission and how exactly they put their decisions into practice. This *History* is not a comprehensive account of the Council, but it is a nigh-comprehensive look at the world of the Council and its ideology. It is a vision of “Mormon political aspirations before Americanization” (p. 15)—a sober collection of the fierce and hallowed ideology that established hegemony in a Rocky Mountain homeland. No discussion of Mormon theocracy or organization can be complete without it, and it deserves a place on the shelf of every serious scholar of the Latter-day Saint experience.

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