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“WE LATTER-DAY SAINTS ARE METHODISTS”: THE INFLUENCE
OF METHODISM ON EARLY MORMON RELIGIOSITY

by

Christopher C. Jones

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Christopher C. Jones

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Christopher C. Jones in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

“WE LATTER-DAY SAINTS ARE METHODISTS”: THE INFLUENCE OF METHODISM ON EARLY MORMON RELIGIOSITY

Christopher C. Jones

Department of History

Master of Arts

Historians have long noted Joseph Smith’s early interest in Methodism. Demographic studies of early Mormon converts have demonstrated further that many of those attracted to the Mormon message on both sides of the Atlantic came from Methodist backgrounds. These two points, and the many similarities between Methodist and Mormon beliefs and practices, have led many scholars to suggest that Smith’s church was influenced by the Methodists who joined the movement. This thesis explores the Methodist backgrounds of those Methodists who converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1830, when Joseph Smith formally organized his church (originally called the Church of Christ), to 1838, when the Latter-day Saints moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, and the church experienced a transformation in its theology, worship practices, and organizational structure. I argue that Methodism fundamentally shaped the ways that early Mormonism developed in its first eight years. This was a result of both

Methodism's rapid growth and expansive influence in antebellum America and the many early Mormon converts who had previously affiliated with Methodism.

This thesis contains four chapters. Chapter 1 examines the historiography on the subject, summarizing the demographic studies previously conducted and the conclusions drawn by other historians. It also provides the theoretical framework that shaped the thesis. Chapter 2 analyzes the conversion narratives of the early converts to Mormonism who came from Methodist backgrounds. I show that these converts generally maintained a positive view of Methodism even after their conversion to Mormonism, and viewed their belief in dreams and visions and the acceptance of charismatic religious experience they were taught while Methodists as instrumental in their eventual acceptance of the Mormon message. Chapter 3 explores an extended analysis of Joseph Smith's various recollections of his "first vision" within the context of Methodist conversion narratives of the era. By analyzing the first vision within the Methodist context, I seek to harmonize key discrepancies in Smith's early and later narratives while still allowing each version to speak for itself. Chapter 4 surveys early Mormon church organization and worship and compares it to that of early American Methodism in an effort to better contextualize early Mormonism within the culture from which it arose and developed. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the lasting influence of Methodism on Mormon religiosity.

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Many people deserve recognition for the assistance they have each provided me in the process of writing this thesis. The faculty and staff of BYU's History Department have provided invaluable support over the course of the last two years. My committee has been enthusiastic about my research from the beginning and each member has offered helpful critiques and suggestions throughout the process. Grant Underwood has been an able advisor and mentor through each stage of researching and writing this thesis. That his own research interests match so closely my own is a happy coincidence, and as a result, his feedback has gone far beyond my early expectations. Spencer Fluhman deserves thanks not only for his role as a member of my committee, but also for helping inspire my initial interest in religious history. It was he who first suggested that I major in history as an undergraduate. Over the course of the last five years, he has consistently encouraged my research and taken more time to meet with and listen to me than I can adequately thank him for. My first graduate seminar was taught by Susan Rugh, and her command of nineteenth-century U.S. history introduced me to additional sources and constantly reminded me of the need to look at the larger cultural issues in my research. She agreed to work on my committee even after she assumed administrative duties, and she never made me feel like she did not have time to meet or to critique my work. I consider all three members of my committee not only mentors but good friends.

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The staff and employees of the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Harold B. Lee Library (BYU) and the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, were helpful in providing sources along the way. Additionally, I spent a week at the United Methodist Archives and History Center of the United Methodist Church in Madison, New Jersey. Christopher Anderson and the staff there ensured that my time was productive by efficiently providing requested sources and suggesting others I was not aware of. I am grateful for their professionalism and expertise.

Finally, I thank my family for their love, support, and encouragement. My parents supported from day one my decision to pursue graduate studies, and have helped in numerous ways throughout the course of my studies. My parents-in-law provided similar support, including a place to stay, transportation, and food during

my research trip to New Jersey. I also want to thank my grandmother Ruth Cannon, who is perhaps more proud of my research than anyone, and who has also fed me nearly every Sunday for the last six years. My wife Karim has been unflinchingly supportive of my research throughout our relationship. She never complained to me about the many late nights and weekends I spent on campus instead of at home with her. I cannot express my gratitude and love to her enough. I dedicate this thesis to my grandfathers, Kenneth Lynn Cannon and Collins Elmer Jones, scholars and historians in their own right who, despite having passed on, inspired in their grandson a love and enthusiasm for the past.

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CHAPTER 1

“ONE OF THE GREAT IRONIES OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY”:

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

In his 1993 address to the Mormon History Association, Nathan Hatch offered his assessment that “one of the great ironies of American religious history is the parallel origins of the Methodist and Mormon movements, the most revered and the most despised of American churches on the eve of the Civil War.”¹ Expanding on some of the ideas expressed earlier in his *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Hatch then compared the two movements’ beginnings, noting both groups’ radical origins as small sects that stressed the reality of revelation from heaven, accepted the validity of miracles and prophetic dreams and visions, and emphasized experiencing the divine. “Both empowered ordinary people,” he wrote, “by taking their deepest spiritual impulses at face value, by shattering formal distinctions between lay and clergy, by releasing the entrepreneurial instincts of religious upstarts, and by incarnating the gospel in the vernacular—in preaching, print, and song.”² However, Hatch stopped short of commenting on specific connections between the two groups—a curious omission considering that many early converts to Mormonism came from Methodist backgrounds

¹ Nathan O. Hatch, “Mormon and Methodist: Popular Religion in the Crucible of the Free Market,” *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 24.

² Hatch, “Mormon and Methodist,” 25.

and that Joseph Smith himself flirted with Methodism as a young man. This project thus began with a simple question in mind—did Methodism directly influence Mormonism? That is, are the similarities between early American Methodism and early Mormonism outlined by Hatch merely parallels, or is there a more direct connection between the two movements?

Nathan Hatch was not the first to notice the similarities between Methodism and Mormonism, and I am certainly not the first to ask such questions. In fact, over the course of the last forty years, a number of historians studying Mormonism have pointed to both the ways that early Mormon theology, worldview, and church organization resembles that of their Methodist counterparts and commented that Mormonism seemed to attract those who had previously been Methodists.³ Among the more significant studies making these connections was Larry Porter's 1971 dissertation on the origins of the Mormon Church in New York and Pennsylvania.⁴ Porter noted many important figures in the early LDS church who came from Methodist backgrounds, including Solomon Chamberlain, Brigham Young and his brothers, and Emma Hale Smith. He also analyzed Joseph Smith's interest in Methodism as a teenager that ultimately led to Smith's first vision

³ The first major book-length study to note the similarities between Methodism and Mormonism was Milton V. Backman, Jr., *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970). Fawn Brodie and Whitney Cross had earlier noted that Mormonism first emerged from a culture in upstate New York infused with religious revivalism that included many Methodists. See Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1945); and Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950).

⁴ Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1971). Porter's dissertation was published in 2000 as Larry C. Porter, *A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and BYU Studies, 2000).

experience.⁵ Three years later, in 1974, Laurence Yorgason's master's thesis confirmed that Methodist converts to Mormonism were not limited to those mentioned by Porter. In his demographic survey of one hundred individuals who converted to Mormonism between 1830 and 1837, Yorgason found that nearly 20% of those converts were Methodists at the time of their conversion to Mormonism—as many as came from any other religious group. He also discovered that 40% of the converts grew up in Methodist homes, making the number of those who had at some point affiliated with Methodism significantly higher than the next closest religious organization.⁶ A later study by Mark Grandstaff and Milton Backman of the “social origins of the Kirtland Mormons” found a similar percentage of Mormon converts who came from Methodist backgrounds. Roughly 25% of Mormons were previously Methodists at the time of their conversion, while over 30% had parents who were Methodists. Again, no other single religious group rivaled the Methodists in the number of converts to Mormonism in its early years.⁷

That a large percentage of early Latter-day Saints came from Methodist backgrounds is perhaps not surprising given the fact that by 1830, when the Mormon church was officially organized, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest

⁵ Porter also examined the Methodist minister George Lane, who was identified by some contemporaries as the minister who rebuked Smith's recitation of his visionary experience. See Porter, *A Study of the Origins of the Church*, 19-23. Porter also published an expanded analysis of George Lane and his possible involvement with early Mormonism. See Larry C. Porter, “Reverend George Lane—Good ‘Gifts,’ Much ‘Grace,’ and Marked ‘Usefulness,’” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 321-40.

⁶ Laurence Milton Yorgason, “Some Demographic Aspects of One Hundred Early Mormon Converts, 1830-1837” (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974). 42-43.

⁷ Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman, Jr., “The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons,” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 2 (1990): 56. The figures provided above combine those converts identified as “Methodist” and those identified as “Reformed Methodist” by the authors.

Protestant denomination in the United States.⁸ But Mormon success among the Methodists was not limited to the United States. In 1990, a collection of essays on the Mormon experience in Canada was published. Richard Bennett's study of Mormonism's early presence in eastern Canada confirmed that Latter-day Saint missionaries found success among Methodists there, including a group of Primitive Methodist seekers that included future apostle and church president John Taylor.⁹ Mormonism experienced even greater success among Methodists across the Atlantic in the British Isles. Malcolm Thorp's 1977 survey of "the religious backgrounds of Mormon converts in Britain" from 1837 to 1852 revealed that a disproportionate number of English converts came from Methodist backgrounds—something quite significant since there were four times as many Anglicans as Methodists in England at the time.¹⁰ Thorp's analysis of Methodist converts to Mormonism was expanded upon first in 1992 by James Allen, Ronald Esplin, and David Whitaker in their study of the first apostolic missions to the British Isles (1837-1841), and the following year by Grant Underwood in his *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*.¹¹ Both studies further explored the appeal of the Mormon gospel to

⁸ Edwin Gaustad and Philip Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219-28, 374.

⁹ Richard E. Bennett, "'Plucking Not Planting': Mormonism in Eastern Canada, 1830-1850," in *The Mormon Presence in Canada*, ed. Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott, John E. Foster, Howard Palmer, and George K. Jarvis (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 23-24. See also G. St. John Stott, "John Taylor's Religious Preparation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 123-28.

¹⁰ Malcolm Thorp, "The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts in Britain, 1837-1852," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 51-65.

¹¹ James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whitaker, *Men With a Mission: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles, 1837-1841* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 326-329; and Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 129-31. See also Grant Underwood, "Millenarianism and Popular Methodism in Early Nineteenth Century England and Canada," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 29 (Spring/Fall 1994): 81-91.

these English Methodists and also attempted to locate where these converts fell on the ever-expanding spectrum of Methodists in the early nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the possible influence of Methodism on Joseph Smith and his church began to receive further treatment as well. Both Donna Hill's 1977 biography of Mormonism's founding prophet and Richard Bushman's 1984 *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* devoted some space to an analysis of the similarities between early Mormon beliefs and practices and those of the Methodists.¹² Their initial ideas were then expanded upon by several later studies, including Janet Ellingson's 1997 PhD dissertation, which noted several similarities between Methodist and Mormon church organization and worship services.¹³ Under the tutelage of Richard Bushman, Kathleen Flake and Marie Mackey each took on the details of the early Mormon conference system. Both concluded that the Methodist precedent was probably borrowed by Joseph Smith in developing his own system of conferences and councils.¹⁴

More recently, studies analyzing the appeal of Mormonism to early converts have pointed to different reasons for Mormonism's success among Methodists. Steven Harper concluded that it was "the empirical and revelatory blend by which [Mormonism] simultaneously catered to the metaphysical, rationalistic, and democratic" that attracted

¹² Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (New York: Doubleday, 1977); and Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

¹³ Janet Ellingson, "Becoming a People: The Beliefs and Practices of the Early Mormons, 1830-1845" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1997).

¹⁴ Kathleen Flake, "From Conferences to Councils: The Development of LDS Church Organization, 1830-1835," in *Archive of Restoration Culture Summer Fellows' Papers, 1997-1999* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History, 2000), 1-8; and Marie Mackey, "Priesthood and Ecclesiastical Structure in Early Nineteenth-Century Methodism and Mormonism," in *Archive of Restoration Culture Summer Fellows' Papers, 1997-1999* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History, 2000), 43-50. Bushman incorporated both Flake's and Mackey's research into his updated and expanded biography of Joseph Smith. See Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005).

early converts, including many Methodists.¹⁵ Stephen Fleming, meanwhile, has argued that “Mormonism spoke ... to those with a worldview imbibed through certain cultural and religious inheritances,” including an embracement of charismatic religious experience that appealed to “enthusiastic Methodists,” and well as “‘hickory’ Quakers” in the Delaware Valley.¹⁶

In spite of all of the research on the topic over the last forty years, no extended and detailed study to date has focused solely on the similarities between Methodism and Mormonism and the potential influences of the former on the latter. Stephen Fleming’s recent research probably comes the closest in attempts to answer that question, though it addresses larger issues as well.¹⁷ Fleming’s work, together with all of the above-mentioned studies, have been helpful to me in my own research for this project. In addition to providing me with a general understanding of the topic at hand, these various studies have pointed me to additional sources and raised further questions connected to Methodism and Mormonism. What is presented in the following chapters is not simply a synthesis of previous scholarship. My own extensive research in both Methodist and Mormon primary sources led me to additional insights not pointed out by previous historians. While each of chapters presents that research at length, two preliminary notes deserve mention here.

¹⁵ Steven C. Harper, “Infallible Proofs, Both Human and Divine: The Persuasiveness of Mormonism for Early Converts,” *Religion and American Culture*, 10, no. 1 (2000): 99-118.

¹⁶ Stephen J. Fleming, “‘Congenial to Almost Every Shade of Radicalism’: The Delaware Valley and the Success of Early Mormonism,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 17, no. 2 (2007):132. See also Stephen J. Fleming, “The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism,” *Church History* 77, no. 1 (March 2008): 73-104.

¹⁷ See especially Fleming, “The British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism,” 73-104. See also Stephen J. Fleming, “John Wesley: A Methodist Foundation for the Restoration,” *The Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 (2008): 131-149.

First, not only did Methodists dominate the ranks of those who converted to Mormonism in its early years, but they also swelled the ranks of the church's early hierarchy. In addition to Joseph Smith's flirtation with Methodism, other early notable leaders with Methodist backgrounds include Brigham Young, Oliver Cowdery, John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, William E. McLellin, David W. Patten, and Thomas B. Marsh. In fact, eight of the original twelve members of Mormonism's Council of Twelve Apostles had previously been Methodists at some point prior to their conversion to Mormonism.¹⁸ Additionally, several important women in the movement were raised as Methodists, including Joseph Smith's wife Emma Hale, whose Methodist upbringing would ultimately shape key components of Mormonism, including its hymnology. These former Methodists were thus situated to leave an important mark on their new religious community.

Secondly, the Methodists who converted to Mormonism generally embraced enthusiastic religion. In his analysis of Methodist converts to Mormonism in Great Britain, Grant Underwood noted that "not all Methodists seeking a charismatic religion were 'come-outers.'"

Some, including a number who later converted to Mormonism, could not bring themselves to formally dissociate with Wesleyanism. Therefore, it may be more helpful to look at Methodism as encompassing a spectrum of religious attitudes and ideas rather than one particular set of beliefs and behaviors. Toward one end of the spectrum would be found those individuals, whatever their denominational affiliation, who were interested above all else in enjoying a vital, gifted Christianity and who often espoused a millenarian eschatology. Given the tendency of early Mormon

¹⁸ For a helpful compilation of biographical sketches that identifies many early Latter-day Saint leaders' prior religious affiliation(s), see "Appendix 6: Biographical Sketches of General Officers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-47," in D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 533-613; and "Appendix 2: Biographical Sketches of General Officers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Appointed 1839-1932," in D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 641-725.

missionaries to stress both the “signs following belief” and the “signs of the times,” it is not surprising that a greater percentage of Methodist converts [to Mormonism] . . . came from that end of the spectrum.¹⁹

In England, these Methodists often united with either the Primitive Methodist Church or other small schismatic groups that sought to maintain what they saw as pure (or “primitive” Wesleyanism). Underwood’s analysis appears to be equally true of those Methodists who converted to Mormonism in the United States and Canada. As the Methodist Episcopal Church increased in size and respectability in the first half of the nineteenth century, it gradually moved away from its charismatic and visionary Wesleyan heritage. Mormon missionaries found success among those Methodists who continued to embrace “experimental” religion. While many of these individuals maintained their membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church, others united with the Reformed Methodists (including Brigham Young and his family) or other smaller Methodist schisms (like the one John Taylor was a part of in Canada). Whether in or out of the larger body of Methodists in the MEC, these converts to Mormonism—like those studied by Underwood in England—were “interested above all else in enjoying a vital, gifted Christianity.”

I have not benefitted alone from Mormon historians and their work, either. The recent surge in the quality and quantity of scholarly treatments examining early American Methodism have similarly influenced my research. One year after his address to the Mormon History Association, Nathan Hatch published an article in which he lamented “the scholarly neglect of American Methodism.” “Methodism,” Hatch argued, “far more than Puritanism, offers insight into the distinct character of religious life in the United

¹⁹ Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*, 130.

States.”²⁰ The subsequent years have witnessed a veritable outpouring of scholarly works examining in great detail the Methodist experience in early America. Those particularly helpful to my own research include Dee Andrews’s *The Methodists and Revolutionary America*, David Hempton’s *Methodism*, Christine Heyrman’s *Southern Cross*, Cynthia Lyerly’s *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, Russell Richey’s *Early American Methodism* and *The Methodist Conference in America*, Lester Ruth’s *A Little Heaven Below*, Ann Taves’s *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, Karen Westerfield Tucker’s *American Methodist Worship*, John Wigger’s *Taking Heaven By Storm*, and a volume of essays edited by Nathan Hatch and John Wigger entitled *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*.²¹

Examining these influences transmitted from one community to another serves as an interesting case study of what French anthropologist Marcel Mauss termed the “contact and exchange” theory.²² Recent scholarship in the field of Religious Studies has borrowed Mauss’s thesis that every culture bears the imprints of groups it has come in contact with—that is, certain characteristics adopted and adapted to fit the group’s own

²⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism,” *Church History* 63, no. 2 (June 1994): 178.

²¹ Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997); Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996); Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000); Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); John W. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Nathan O. Hatch and John W. Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000).

²² Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

needs and worldview. Catherine Albanese, for instance, explained that “whatever their ascribed religious identity, Americans were professing religions that bore the signs of contact with those who were other and different.”²³ Albanese, together with Russell Richey, John Wigger, and other historians of early American Methodism have utilized the theory of contact and exchange to explore both the cultural matrix out of which Methodism arose and that which it fostered in early America. Richey’s 1991 volume, *Early American Methodism*, examined what he termed the “four languages of Methodism”—that is, the discursive communities that each helped shape Methodist identity in early America.²⁴ Catherine Albanese summarized Richey’s argument by explaining that these four languages “were products of the contact” with other religions in America—“goods that they had received and integrated in and through an economy of religious exchange.”²⁵ But, perhaps more importantly, Albanese noted, “Methodist contact worked outward as powerfully as it worked inward,” and pointed to John Humphrey Noyes’s Oneida community and the Holiness-Pentecostal movement as two examples of religions influenced directly by Methodism. I propose here that Mormonism presents an additional religious movement that emerged in the wake of the Second Great Awakening and, in its earliest manifestation, bore markers of Methodist influence.

Comparative studies of religion necessarily present difficulties. Attempting to trace the genesis of one group’s theology and religious practices from another religious community is difficult because of the lack of primary sources that actually document

²³ Catherine Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 203.

²⁴ Richey, *Early American Methodism*.

²⁵ Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 215.

such transmission. Such is the certainly the case in this study. In the preface to his 1984 book, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, Richard Bushman noted the difficulty of tracing the origins of Mormon thought and experience: “In the first stages of composition this book was titled ‘The Origins of Mormonism,’” he noted. “The word ‘Origins’ was dropped when the actual complexities of identifying the sources of Mormon belief and experience bared themselves. An attempt to trace all the images, ideas, language, and emotional structure of a movement as elaborate as Mormonism became more evidently elusive and futile as the work went on.”²⁶ John L. Brooke’s attempt at tracing the genesis of “Mormon cosmology” was notoriously criticized by Mormon historians for this very reason.²⁷ One reviewer explained that “the primary problem with the volume is that it suffers from ... ‘parallelomania’”—that is, “the tendency to exaggerate similarities and the assumption that parallels prove provenance.”²⁸ Recognizing those difficulties, I have attempted to be careful in not overstating what the sources actually state. While few serious scholars of Mormonism would doubt that Joseph Smith and his followers did, in fact, draw from his cultural surroundings, the trouble is attempting to *demonstrate* the specific sources of influence. Nevertheless, by paying close attention to the language used by early Mormons to describe their religious experience, one can draw parallels that *suggest* a direct influence. I argue in the pages that follow that Methodism was one of the more important sources which influenced the shape of the early Mormon movement.

²⁶ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 3.

²⁷ John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁸ Grant Underwood, “Review of *The Refiner’s Fire*,” *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (May 1996): 323.

Chapter 2 analyzes the conversion narratives of the early converts to Mormonism who came from Methodist backgrounds. I show that these converts generally maintained a positive view of Methodism even after their conversion to Mormonism, and viewed their belief in dreams and visions and the acceptance of charismatic religious experience they were taught while Methodists as instrumental in their eventual acceptance of the Mormon message. Chapter 3 explores an extended analysis of Joseph Smith's various recollections of his "first vision" within the context of Methodist conversion narratives of the era. By analyzing the first vision within the Methodist context, I seek to harmonize key discrepancies in Smith's early and later narratives while still allowing each version to speak for itself. Chapter 4 surveys early Mormon church organization and worship and compares it to that of early American Methodism in an effort to better contextualize early Mormonism within the culture from which it arose and developed. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the lasting influence of Methodism on Mormon religiosity.

I have limited the scope of my study by both location and time. For a variety of reasons, I have chosen to focus almost exclusively on Mormonism from the time of Joseph Smith's first vision in 1820 until 1838, when the headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints moved from Kirtland, Ohio, to Missouri and then to Nauvoo, Illinois. The move to Nauvoo was accompanied by an expansion of Mormon theology and worship that took it in directions that went far beyond previous norms (and away from its early Methodist influences). Because of the chronological scope of my thesis, I have also limited my study to Methodism and Mormonism in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

“I HAD RELIGION, BUT MY MIND WAS NOT WHOLLY SATISFIED”: METHODIST CONVERTS TO MORMONISM AND EARLY MORMON IDENTITY

Joseph Smith’s autobiographical narrative of Mormonism’s beginnings—penned in 1838-39 and now included in the Latter-day Saint canon of scripture—rehearsed, among other things, the events leading up to what has become commonly known as the “First Vision.” This vision served as the catalyst for what Mormons collectively call “the Restoration.” According to Smith, the vision came in response to his deeply-felt concern for his personal salvation and confusion over which of the various competing sects popular in his rural New York community taught the true gospel. “Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together?” Smith wondered. After “attend[ing] their several meetings as often as occasion would permit,” he recalled, “my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them.”¹ There is some evidence that Joseph did, in fact, briefly affiliate with the local Methodist

¹ Joseph Smith, “History—1839,” in *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 270-71. The portion of the history that recounted the first vision was penned in 1838, but the earliest manuscript of the completed history was produced in 1839.

congregation.² As noted in chapter one, many other early Mormons—on both sides of the Atlantic—came from the ranks of Methodism as well. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that by 1830, when the Mormon church was officially organized, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.³ But it appears that an inordinate percentage of Mormon converts came from Methodist backgrounds, either being raised in a home with Methodist parents and/or uniting with Methodism as adults.⁴ Mormon missionaries likewise found great success among Canadian Methodists in the late 1830s, and in similar fashion across the Atlantic, Methodism provided “the source of a disproportionate number of early English converts”—something quite significant since there were four times as many Anglicans as Methodists in England at the time.⁵

Historian Grant Underwood has observed that Mormonism’s “kinship with early Methodism did not go unnoticed by the Saints,” and has pointed to evidence that they felt

² See Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 37. There is no surviving contemporaneous account suggesting that Smith ever actually joined a Methodist class; all documents asserting that he did are remembrances published years after Smith died. The earliest record comes from Orasmus Turner, a former printer’s apprentice at the *Palmyra Register*, who in 1851 remembered that Smith caught “a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road,” and later became “a very passable exhorter in the evening meetings.” Another former apprentice at the same newspaper recorded in his history of Mormonism in 1867 that “at one time [Smith] joined the probationary class of the Methodism church in Palmyra, and made some active demonstrations of engagedness.” See Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1851), 214; and Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 18.

³ Edwin Gaustad and Philip Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219-28, 374.

⁴ See Table in Stephen J. Fleming, “John Wesley: A Methodist Foundation for the Restoration,” *The Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 (2008): 142. See also Fleming, “The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism,” *Church History* 77, no. 1 (2008): 73-104.

⁵ Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 129. On Mormon success in Canada, see Richard E. Bennett, “‘Plucking Not Planting’: Mormonism in Eastern Canada, 1830-1850,” in *The Mormon Presence in Canada*, ed. Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott, John E. Foster, Howard Palmer, and George K. Jarvis (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 24-26. For the figures detailing British converts, see Malcolm Thorp, “The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts in Britain, 1837-1852,” *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 51-65.

some connection with John Wesley and his church. Parley P. Pratt, noted Mormon apostle and missionary, and the religion's most prolific author, included one of Wesley's sermons in the British Mormon periodical, *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star* with the headline "JOHN WESLEY A LATTER-DAY SAINT, in regard to the Spiritual Gifts and the Apostasy of the Church!!"⁶ Mormons, however, were not always quite as enthusiastic in their appraisals of Wesleyan religion. Just three years prior to dubbing Wesley a sort of proto-Mormon, Pratt decried Methodism in his 1838 pamphlet, *Truth Vindicated*. Written as a response to a "Mr. Sunderland, a Methodist editor," Pratt declared Methodism "a system of idolatry; a false and perverted Gospel," and "a system of priestcraft of the deepest dye."⁷ Pratt was not alone in his seemingly contradictory views of Methodism. Many early Latter-day Saints—including important Mormon leaders Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Thomas B. Marsh, who came from Methodist backgrounds—reflected similarly on their affiliation with Methodism.

It is those converts to Mormonism who came from Methodist backgrounds who are the subjects of this chapter. More specifically, this chapter analyzes how those individuals rhetorically situated their prior affiliation with Methodism in their newly-assumed identities as Mormons. To better contextualize this analysis, it is important to look at the ways that Mormons in the nineteenth century more generally contrasted themselves and their religion to the larger culture of antebellum America. Detailed studies of how Mormons related to specific religion are limited, both in number and in

⁶ Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*, 130. See "John Wesley a Latter-Day Saint," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, June 1841, 23.

⁷ Parley P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled: Zion's Watchman Unmasked, and Its Editor, Mr. R.L. Sunderland, Exposed; Truth Vindicated; The Devil Mad, and Priestcraft in Danger!* (New York: Printed for the Publisher, 1838), reprinted in *The Essential Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 47.

scope. What has been done has focused primarily on Catholics and Jews.⁸ What is needed is a better understanding how Mormons viewed themselves and their standing as God's chosen people in relation to their immediate, primarily evangelical Protestant neighbors, with whom they shared a number of communal characteristics, including theology and manner of worship. This chapter seeks, in part, to fill this historiographical gap by examining how early Mormons viewed Methodism, as revealed in their public and private discourse and writings.

Studies of Mormonism's relationship to the larger Evangelical Protestant culture in which it was born and in which it developed have emphasized the discursive boundary markers used by early Mormon preachers and writers in their collective attempt to establish their identity as the divinely-appointed heir to Christ's New Testament church. R. Laurence Moore argued that such an approach was necessary for the nascent church, suggesting that "Mormons had to invent an identity for themselves and that required them to maintain certain fictions of cultural apartness." He ultimately concluded that

Mormons were different because they said they were different and because those claims, frequently advanced in the most obnoxious way possible, prompted others to agree and to treat them as such. The notion of Mormon difference, that is, was a deliberate invention elaborated over time.⁹

To Moore, this rhetorical aspect of early Mormonism is the distinguishing characteristic of Latter-day Saint identity in antebellum America. It began with Joseph Smith's narrative of Mormonism's beginnings. As discussed above, Smith recorded that

⁸ See, for example, Matthew J. Grow, "The Whore of Babylon and the Abomination of Abominations: Nineteenth-Century Catholic and Mormon Mutual Perceptions and Religious Identity," *Church History* 73, no. 1 (2004): 139-167; Arnold H. Green, "Jews in LDS Thought," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994): 137-64; and Arnold H. Green, "Mormonism and Islam: From Polemics to Mutual Respect and Cooperation," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 198-220.

⁹ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31-32.

his “object in going to enquire of the Lord was to know which [church] to join.” The response he received set the tone for later Latter-day Saint attitudes towards the Christian community. “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 [and] that those professors were all corrupt.”¹⁰ Other historians and religious scholars have pointed to other distinguishing marks of the early Latter-day Saint movement, such as restorationism and millennialism, and argued that they are better avenues through which to understand early Mormon identity.¹¹ However, even those authors admit that Mormon sermons and writings—which reveal how Mormons saw themselves—are crucial to understanding that identity.¹² Richard Hughes, in his work examining the restorationist impulse in early Mormonism, stated that Mormons “put an infinite distance between themselves and their religious neighbors by identifying themselves” as God’s chosen people, the same as Israelites of old and New Testament Christians were. “This notion of restoration made it abundantly clear,” he suggested, “that God had sanctioned one true church and that all others were false.” Furthermore,

¹⁰ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:272-73.

¹¹ Tangible examples of this identity—including Mormonism’s attempts to establish a communitarian society and the building of sacred Temples—are more appropriately seen as manifestations of the restorationist and millennialist impulses, rather than distinctive identifying markers in and of themselves. On this point, see Jan Shipps, “The Reality of the Restoration Ideal in the Mormon Tradition,” in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 181-195.

¹² See Richard T. Hughes, “Soaring with the Gods: Early Mormons and the Eclipse of Religious Pluralism,” in *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion*, ed. Eric A. Eliason (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 23-46. For more on the restorationist impulse in early Mormonism, see Richard T. Hughes, “Joseph Smith as an American Restorationist,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 31-39. On millennial thought in early Mormonism, see Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*.

this identity left “no room for abstractions, ambiguities, or shades of gray.”¹³

The conclusions of these authors are in need of moderate revision; an examination of early Latter-day Saint writings reveals that the attitudes of many Mormons towards certain Christian groups—especially Methodists—were more nuanced. It appears that the generalized statements of historians like Laurence Moore and Richard Hughes have only taken into account how Mormons saw themselves in contrast to the larger and vaguely-defined evangelical Christian world in which they lived. This approach, however, ignores another crucial element that directly affected how individual converts to Mormonism defined their new religious identity—how they situated their previous religious associations in conversion narratives and personal testimonies.

While early Mormon rhetoric concerning an apostate Christian world and the necessity of a restoration certainly did effectively create a distinct Mormon identity, some of the ways in which Mormon preachers and writers constructed Methodism in their writings demonstrates that there was indeed occasional but significant “abstractions, ambiguities, [and] shades of gray” in efforts to contrast Mormonism with its Christian neighbors. While many Mormons routinely criticized the doctrines of creedal Christianity and those they portrayed as its hypocritical practitioners, others—including many Mormons who converted from Methodism—presented a far more sympathetic portrait of Methodism. Their time as Methodists was seen as crucial to their eventual acceptance of the Mormon message. Recent research in the fields of American religious history and cultural anthropology has begun to analyze how individuals in New Religious

¹³ Hughes, “Soaring with the Gods,” 27-28, 40.

Movements and charismatic groups have negotiated their prior religious identity.¹⁴ In his recently-published monograph on the rise of Holiness Christianity and Pentecostalism in the American South, for example, historian Randall Stephens explores how Pentecostal converts from the Holiness movement in twentieth-century America talked and wrote about their prior Holiness affiliation post-conversion. He concludes that the “new pentecostal message compelled converts to concede that their former holiness experiences” were insufficient.¹⁵ Individuals then constructed an image of Holiness Christianity in their minds in one of two ways—they saw their prior religion as either incomplete or inauthentic. This inclusion of their former religious affiliation in their narratives of conversion to the new religious movement was crucial.¹⁶ “Inauthentic” carried with it the connotation of being false in some sense, and expressions of this sort were often found in specific critiques of Methodism and the Holiness movement. Pentecostal convert H.H. Goff, for example, compared “the holiness people” to “the foolish virgins without the oil” because they did not accept certain spiritual gifts.¹⁷ Similar examples can be found in the writings and sermons of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and other Mormon converts from Methodism.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); and Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier, eds., *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

¹⁵ Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁶ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 11. The early Holiness movement grew out of Methodism in America, and even the later Pentecostal movement maintained key features of Wesleyan religion, including its focus on sanctification, charismatic and experiential religion, and a pronounced missionary impulse.

¹⁷ Florence Goff, *Fifty Years on the Battlefield for God: Being a Sketch of the Life of Rev. J.A. Hodges; Coupled with Some of the Lord's Dealings with H.H. Goff and Wife, Evangelists of the Free Will Baptist Church* (Falcon, NC: 1948), 51; as cited in Stevens, *The Fire Spreads*, 222.

Joseph Smith's stated attitude towards Methodism squares with his generally negative portrayal of other Christian groups. While Smith may have been "somewhat partial to the Methodist sect" as a young teenager, it appears that as he grew older, his views grew more negative. In one sermon in 1834 he "exposed the Methodist Discipline in its black deformity,"¹⁸ and on another occasion expressly denounced Methodism for "hav[ing] creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church."¹⁹ At an 1835 meeting in which the High Council was to determine whether to accept A.J. Squires back into full fellowship, who sought to return to the Mormon fold after "he had been in temptation and fallen into error, so much so as to go and join the Methodists," Smith addressed the council and "spoke at considerable length on the impropriety of turning away from the truth and going after a people so destitute of the spirit of righteousness as the Methodists."²⁰ More usually, though, he simply grouped Methodism together with other religions in his general critiques and comments on other Christian religions. In an 1843 sermon, he thus admitted that some good could be found in other religions and counseled his followers to "embrace ... any truth" found among the "Presbyterians, ... Baptist[s], Methodist[s] &c."—to "get all the good in the world" in order to "come out a pure Mormon."²¹ In an 1844 sermon on "the doctrin[e] of Election," meanwhile, he focused on the contrast between the Presbyterian and Methodist theology.

¹⁸ William E. McLellin Diary, December 5, 1834, in *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831-1846*, ed. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, UT and Urbana: BYU Studies and University of Illinois Press, 1994), 152.

¹⁹ Joseph Smith, "8 April 1843 (Saturday Morning)," in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), 183-84.

²⁰ Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds. *The Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing Co., 2002), 150.

The doctrin that the Prysbyterianians & Methodist have quarreled so much about once in grace always in grace, or falling away from grace I will say something about, they are both wrong, truth takes a road between them both. ... the doctrin of the scriptures & the spirit of Elijah would show them both fals & take a road between them both.²²

Brigham Young was likewise critical of certain aspects of Methodist religion. In his case, it was not that Methodism's unscriptural doctrine that bothered him, but rather a lack of emphasis on theological and doctrinal matters altogether that left him unsatisfied. In reflecting upon his religious wanderings and confusions as a young man, he remembered going to hear the noted Methodist itinerant Lorenzo Dow preach. "I, although young in years and lacking experience," Young recalled, "had thought a great many times that I would like to hear some man who could tell me something, when he opened the Bible, about the Son of God, the will of God, what the ancients did and received, saw and heard and knew pertaining to God and heaven."

So I went to hear Lorenzo Dow. He stood up some of the time, and he sat down some of the time; he was in this position and in that position, and talked two or three hours, and when he got through I asked myself, "What have you learned from Lorenzo Dow?" and my answer was, "Nothing, nothing but morals." He could tell the people they should not work on the Sabbath day; they should not lie, swear, steal, commit adultery, &c., but when he came to teaching the things of God he was as dark as midnight.²³

John Taylor's harshest criticism of Methodists came in response to attacks leveled at Mormonism during his time as a missionary in the British Isles. While laboring on the Isle of Man in 1840, Taylor received a cold response from the local Methodist minister, who derided Mormonism and urged his congregants to steer clear of the Latter-day Saint

²¹ Smith, "23 July 1843 (Sunday Afternoon)," in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 234.

²² Smith, "10 March 1844 (Sunday). At Temple," in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 330.

²³ Brigham Young, "The Training of Children," June 3, 1871, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1872), 14:197-98.

missionaries. In response, Taylor authored three anti-Methodist pamphlets. The title of the last one captures the essence of the content and tone of all three—*Truth Defended and Methodism Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting*.²⁴ Taking a page out of Parley P. Pratt’s influential tract *A Voice of Warning*, Taylor compared Methodist teachings concerning the nature of God, ordinances, and authority to the Bible and, not surprisingly, found Methodism wanting in a column-by-column comparison. It mirrored Pratt’s previous comparison of Mormonism to “false Christianity of the nineteenth century” in general, except that Taylor compared biblical quotes with excerpts from the Methodist *Discipline*.²⁵ Taylor also singled out Methodism’s attachment to their creeds and their *Discipline*, arguing that “every one who is acquainted with Methodism knows ... [that] they are considered of that importance that the neglect to attend to, their mode of church government and believe in them will exclude a preacher from his office, and a member from the church, although they may fulfil *the whole law of God*.”²⁶ Furthermore, Taylor suggested, “the discipline is held sacred, and its authority considered equal, nay superior, to the scriptures.” In an attempt to win converts Taylor proposed that “if a conscientious man only saw into the nature of the discipline which he subscribed to, and

²⁴ John Taylor, *Truth Defended and Methodism Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting: Being a Reply to the Third Address of the Rev. Robert Heys, Wesleyan Minister to the Wesleyan Methodist Society in Douglas and its Vicinity. And also An Exposure of the Principles of Methodism* (Liverpool: J. Tompkins, 1840). The other two pamphlets penned by Taylor are *An Answer to Some False Statements and Misrepresentations made by the Rev. Robert Heys, Wesleyan Minister, in an Address to His Society in Douglas and its Vicinity, on the Subject of Mormonism* (Douglas: Penrice and Wallace, 1840); and *Calumny Refuted and the Truth Defended; Being a Reply to the Second Address of The Rev. Robert Heys, Wesleyan Minister to the Wesleyan Methodist Societies in Douglas and its Vicinity* (Liverpool: J. Tompkins, 1840).

²⁵ Taylor, *Truth Defended and Methodism Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting*, 11-12.

²⁶ Taylor, *Truth Defended and Methodism Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting*, 10.

profess to believe in, he would at once be led to lay it aside as absurd, unscriptural, dogmatical, and dangerous.”²⁷

Sometimes, however, these same leading Mormons—like many of the Holiness converts to Pentecostalism Randall Stephens studied—could talk about Methodism not as “inauthentic,” but rather as “incomplete.” Seeing Holiness religion as simply “incomplete,” Stephens suggested, left open the option to construct one’s previous religious affiliation as an important step in embracing the full gospel truth. Whereas H.H. Goff focused on what Holiness Christians lacked, other Pentecostal preachers like G.F. Taylor highlighted, “the doctrines of sanctification, divine healing, and the premillennial coming of Jesus” he was taught in the Holiness movement “were precursors” to his accepting the doctrines of “baptism of the Spirit and tongues speech” that he encountered and embraced in Pentecostal religion.²⁸ Similar examples can be found in the writings of nineteenth-century Mormon converts from Methodism.

The most striking example of this pertaining to Joseph Smith is also one of the most problematic because it comes not from a Mormon source, but a Methodist one, and no corroborating evidence has been found to substantiate the episode. In his autobiography, the noted Methodist circuit rider Peter Cartwright recalled a meeting he had had with Joseph Smith in Springfield, Illinois, at some point during the early 1840s. Cartwright remembered that the two of them “fell into a free conversation on the subject of religion and Mormonism in particular,” and that Smith told him that “he believed that

²⁷ Taylor, *Truth Defended and Methodism Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting*, 11.

²⁸ G.F. Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride* (Dunn, NC: n.p., 1907); as cited in Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 204-05. This mode of discourse did not force the individual to sever all ties with his former religion and allowed the convert to continue to identify his prior church as personally important and not altogether wrong. Furthermore, it allowed the convert to maintain that *he* was not altogether wrong in originally embracing his former religion.

among all the Churches in the world the Methodist was the nearest right, and that, as far as they went, they were right.”

“Indeed,” said Joe, “if the Methodists would only advance a step or two further, they would take the world. We Latter-day Saints are Methodists, as far as they have gone, only we have advanced further, and if you would come in and go with us, we could sweep not only the Methodist Church, but all others, and you would be looked up to as one of the Lord’s greatest prophets.”²⁹

These comments attributed to Smith are even more difficult to accept as accurate in light of other statements made by him concerning Methodism throughout his ministry. While there is no record that authenticates Cartwright’s attributed statement to Joseph Smith, the suggestion that Methodism contained more truth than other religions of the era, and consequently was a more effective instrument in preparing individuals for the Mormon message, found expression in the words of Brigham Young, John Taylor, and other early Mormons. Both Young and Taylor consistently spoke of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in positive terms. In an 1865 sermon on the subjects of “final rewards and punishments,” Brigham Young reflected on the state of “that celebrated reformer,” John Wesley. “Where is John Wesley’s abode in the other world?” he asked, and then answered his own question.

He is not where the Father and the Son live [because] ... he did not receive the gospel as preached by Jesus Christ and His apostles; it was not then upon the earth. The power of the Holy Priesthood was not then among men; but I suppose that Mr. Wesley lived according to the best light he had, and tried to improve upon it all the days of his life. Where is the departed spirit of that celebrated reformer? It occupies a better place than ever entered his heart to conceive of when he was in the flesh.³⁰

²⁹ Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, with an introduction by Charles L. Wallis (Nashville: Abingdon Press reprint, 1984), 225-226.

³⁰ Young, “Personality of God—His Attributes—Eternal Life, Etc.,” June 18, 1865, in *Journal of Discourses* 11:126.

In another sermon, Young reminisced on his apostolic mission to England years before. He remembered that he “never passed John Wesley's church in London without stopping to look at it.” Young then proceeded to answer his own question regarding not only Wesley’s state in the hereafter, but also his place in history. “Was he a good man?” Young asked. “Yes; I suppose him to have been, by all accounts, as good as ever walked on this earth, according to his knowledge. Has he obtained a rest? Yes, and greater than ever entered his mind to expect.”

Why could he not build up the kingdom of God on the earth? He had not the Priesthood; that was all the difficulty he labored under. Had the Priesthood been conferred upon him, he would have built up the kingdom of God in his day as it is now being built up. He would have introduced the ordinances, powers, grades, and quorums of the Priesthood: but, not holding the Priesthood, he could not do it.³¹

At least in this instance, the difference between Mormonism and Methodism had nothing to do with heretical doctrine or hypocritical ministers engaging in priestcraft, as other Mormon writers (and even Young himself) had occasionally suggested. Rather, he emphasized that it was a simple matter of priesthood authority being present only in Mormonism.

John Taylor likewise seemed to hold Methodism in a privileged position. This should not be too surprising, since Taylor had been a preacher and class leader in a small Canadian Christian group that split from the larger Methodist community and followed what they saw as pure Wesleyanism.³² In his unpublished autobiography, Taylor recalled

³¹ Young, “Nature of Man—Happiness—Influence of God's Spirit Upon Mankind, etc.,” July 3, 1859, in *Journal of Discourses* 7:5.

³² For more on Taylor’s affiliation and gradual discontent with Methodism, see G. St. John Stott, “John Taylor’s Religious Preparation,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, No. 1 (Spring 1986): 123-128.

his own conversion to Methodism:

When I was about sixteen years of age, I heard the Methodist doctrine preached and as it seemed to me more of a matter of fact, personal thing that the Church of England, with which I was nominally united, I became a Methodist. I was strictly sincere in my religious faith and was very zealous to learn what I then considered the truth; believing that every good and perfect gift proceeded from the Lord.³³

Central to Taylor's subsequent conversion to Mormonism was this quest for truth. While he acknowledged enjoying "frequent manifestations in dreams" during his time as a Methodist, Taylor suggested that the Methodism of his day was not the pure Methodism introduced and preached by John Wesley and other early Methodists.³⁴ In his responses to the anti-Mormon rhetoric he encountered while a missionary in the British Isles, Taylor drew parallels between the persecution experienced by the earliest Methodists and that he experienced as a Mormon. In response to these attacks leveled at his religion by British Methodist ministers, Taylor suggested that "Mr. Heys seems to have forgot the time when Methodist ministers were belied and slandered, as we are now belied and slandered by him. He must recollect that it is not long ago since the finger of scorn was pointed at the Methodists, and the lip of reproach and tongue of scandal were employed against them." Early Methodism, then, was a companion of sorts to Mormonism, as evidenced in Taylor's mind by the persecution they had received as an upstart and new sect. "I would have him to remember 'the rock from whence he was hewn; and the pit from whence he was dug,'" Taylor wrote. "Then they were despised, persecuted, and cast out; but is it different with them now." He concluded by invoking Wesley and other early Methodists

³³ John Taylor, "History of John Taylor by Himself," Microfilm of manuscript, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 267.

³⁴ Taylor, "History of John Taylor by Himself," Church History Library, 267.

as preachers of a purer religion. “Surely Messrs. John Wesley, John Nelson, Fletcher, and Bramwell, who were ornaments of the Methodist society, would have been ashamed to have been found in the situation in which Messrs. Heys and Livesey have placed themselves in.”³⁵

Based on the statements of Young and Taylor, it appears that while John Wesley held a privileged place in their minds, Methodists of their day did not. Other early Mormons picked up on this trope as well. William Appleby, for example, wrote in an 1844 pamphlet that “there are hundreds and thousands, meek humble hearted souls, . . . who are living up to the best light and knowledge they have received.”³⁶ Appleby then singled out John Wesley as *the* example of such persons. After quoting Wesley on the necessity of spiritual gifts in Christ’s church and again on the issue of Priesthood authority, Appleby concluded:

[B]ut he nor any of the rest ever said that God had given them a special revelation, to build up a church. They have a part of the Gospel, but not the fullness of it. But as I said before they have been the means of doing much good, and they will be rewarded for it. *It has paved the way for the establishing of the Kingdom Daniel had reference to, that was to be set up in the “latter days” by the God of heaven, and not by man.*³⁷

While in the example of John Taylor, the compliments paid to Wesley and his religion appear to be nothing more than an apologetic response to anti-Mormon material, in the case of William Appleby, and to a lesser extent, that of Brigham Young, a more

³⁵ Taylor, *An Answer*, 9.

³⁶ William I. Appleby, *A Dissertation on Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream: Showing That the Kingdom Spoken of by Daniel the Prophet Was Not Set Up in the Days of the Apostles; and the Order of the Kingdom Set Up Then Explained. Also: The Rise and Faith of the Most Notable Orthodox Societies of the Present Day, Together With A Synopsis of the Origin and Faith of the Church of “Latter-Day Saints,” Comparing Their Faith with the Faith of Other Societies* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking, and Guilbert, 1844), 20.

³⁷ Appleby, *A Dissertation on Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream*, 20. Emphasis added.

direct connection between Methodism and Mormonism is illustrated. Their writings and sermons cited above employ a certain rhetorical strategy that demonstrates an effort to negotiate their previous religious affiliation with the Methodist movement. This mode of discourse further indicates their high appraisal of John Wesley and some of his fundamental teachings. Wesley's Methodism thus "paved the way" for the advent of Mormonism. Both Young and Appleby pointed to Priesthood authority as the distinguishing feature that Methodism lacked.

This trope is even more pronounced in the writings of other Latter-day Saint converts from Methodism. These individuals likewise situated Methodism in their narratives as an instrument to prepare the world for Mormonism. However, in these instances, it took on a more personal tone. These persons suggested that Methodism was specifically well-suited in preparing them to personally receive the Mormon gospel. Appleby's own autobiography illustrates an awareness of this very approach. Appleby quoted one Alfred Wilson, whom Appleby had converted to Mormonism while on a mission in New Jersey. Wilson explained, "I enjoyed myself somewhat and received a certain portion of the Spirit of the lord while in the Methodist Church. [But] I never knew what true religion or the Spirit of the Lord was until I became a member of the Church to which I belong."³⁸ John Taylor's wife, Leonora Cannon, likewise maintained a positive view of Methodism after converting to Mormonism. Her niece, Ann Cannon Woodbury, remembered that her aunt told her that she "enjoy[ed] herself in class meetings" while a

³⁸ William Appleby, "Autobiography and Journal of William Appleby," typescript of original, Church History Library, 31-32.

Methodist.³⁹ Nancy Tracy similarly remembered that she “took great delight” in attending Methodist “Sunday Schools” as a youth. “I wanted to get religion and to be as happy as others seemed to be,” she wrote, “but I could feel no different.”⁴⁰ Still, she “thought the Methodists the best of any” and continued attending their meeting until the first Mormon elders came through her town and she became convinced of the truth of their message.⁴¹

Brigham Young’s brother Phinehas likewise noted that during his time as a Reformed Methodist, “I had religion, but my mind was not wholly satisfied,”⁴² and Orson Hyde remembered that while a Methodist, “I enjoyed myself as well as the light and knowledge I then had would allow me. I believe that God had mercy and compassion upon me, and that if I had died at that time, I should have received all the happiness and glory that I could appreciate or enjoy.”⁴³ Henry Boyle, who like Hyde briefly affiliated with Campbellism after Methodism but before Mormonism, sounded almost exactly like Hyde when he commented that during his time as a Methodist, he “was not satisfied that all was right. [Y]et I done the best I knew how, I lived up to the light and knowledge I

³⁹ Ann Cannon Woodbury, Autobiography, in *Cannon Family Historical Treasury*, 2nd ed., ed. Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1995), 159.

⁴⁰ Nancy Tracy, “A Short Sketch of the Life and Travels of Nancy N. Tracy” (1885), 1, typescript of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT (hereinafter HBLL). Nancy Tracy’s conversion narrative was first pointed out to me by Rachel Cope. See Rachel Cope, “‘I Wanted with All My Heart to be Good’: Nancy Tracy’s Conversion Process,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association, Springfield, IL, 2009. Tracy recorded her conversion narrative on three different occasions. I draw on all three in this paper.

⁴¹ Nancy Tracy, “Narrative by Mrs. N.N Tracy” (1880), 1, typescript of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁴² Phinehas Young, “Life of Phinehas Howe Young—Written by Himself,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁴³ Orson Hyde, “Autobiography and History of Orson Hyde, 1805-42,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, November 19, 1864, 744.

was in possession of.”⁴⁴ George Frederick Jarvis similarly described his own frustrations as a Methodist. While he was discouraged that no existing church fit the ancient pattern, he remained a Methodist until he found one that did.⁴⁵ Lorenzo Dow Young, who like his brother Brigham, struggled to fully embrace the Methodism of his brothers, nevertheless admitted that he “was somewhat affected by the intense religious feeling” at Methodist revivals.⁴⁶ Expressions of this sort, in which converts to Mormonism remembered their years as Methodists with fondness, appear to have been accepted by the Mormon missionaries who taught them. Samuel Harrison, for example, recalled a conversation he had with a Methodist man who was contemplating converting to Mormonism. “He asked me if I thought that the Methodists and other religious people enjoyed any thing like religion, or what it was that caused them to feel happy,” Harrison wrote.

I told him that every person that lived up to the light that they had, always felt justified, “but,” said I, “if light is made known to them more than what they already have, and they reject that light, they never will feel like as they did before they knew it. Now I appeal to you as a man—can you, with the light that you have received from the Latter-day Saints, enjoy the Methodist religion?” He said, “No, I can not.” “Now,” said I, “wherein you have rejoiced in Methodism, embrace the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and you shall rejoice ten fold.”⁴⁷

John Smith recalled a similar experience with a prospective convert—a “preacher ... about 60 years of age a German by birth.” Ever since first becoming convinced of the

⁴⁴ Henry G. Boyle, *Autobiography*, typescript of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁴⁵ George Frederick Jarvis, *Diary, 1888-1890*, photocopy of original, Church History Library.

⁴⁶ Lorenzo Dow Young, *Fragments of Experience: Faith-Promoting Series*, Book 6 (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 25. For more on the Young family’s Methodist background, see Larry C. Porter, “The Brigham Young Family: Transition between Reformed Methodism and Mormonism,” in *A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Andrew C. Skinner (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2007), 249-280.

⁴⁷ Samuel Harrison, “Foreign Correspondence,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, December 9, 1854, 782.

Mormon message, Smith recorded, this man “had been preaching [the] whole gospel as he called it.” Still, he asserted that Methodism contained some truth and was “very usefull.”⁴⁸ This manner of distancing themselves from their evangelical neighbors, then, did not necessitate completely rejecting and condemning their former religious affiliation. Rather, it was a matter of degrees of truth. In Methodism, these converts felt, they had found portions of true religion that uniquely prepared them to accept the fullness of the gospel (or “the whole gospel,” to use one convert’s words).

The portion of true religion most of these converts, both male and female, reportedly enjoyed while Methodists was generally centered around charismatic experience. Many of the spiritual gifts recorded in the New Testament by Paul were singled out by converts as instrumental in the initial appeal of Methodism and later as crucial to their acceptance of Mormonism.⁴⁹ Stephen Fleming’s recent insightful research on Mormon converts in the Delaware Valley concluded that “many converts ... showed an eagerness to embrace the Mormons’ promised supernaturalism when the missionaries arrived,” and that “early American Methodists were likely candidates to find Mormon supernaturalism appealing since Methodism itself drew upon the same impulses.”⁵⁰ Thomas B. Marsh, one of the original twelve apostles called by Joseph Smith in 1835, affiliated with Methodism briefly before leaving organized religion and becoming an independent “seeker” before uniting with the Latter-day Saints. The story of his conversion to Mormonism illustrates the importance of the visionary culture embraced by

⁴⁸ John Smith, Journal, January 1833, Church History Library. 3-4.

⁴⁹ The best treatment of Methodism’s visionary and prophetic culture is John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁰ Stephen J. Fleming, “‘Congenial to Almost Every Shade of Radicalism’: The Delaware Valley and the Success of Early Mormonism,” *Religion and American Culture* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 140, 142.

Methodism. During his time as a Methodist, he remembered, he “tried for two years to be a genuine Methodist but did not succeed. . . . I compared Methodism with the Bible, but could not make it correspond.” Nevertheless, he admitted that he “had [obtained] a measure of the spirit of prophecy” while a Methodist, which assisted him in recognizing the truth found in Mormonism.⁵¹ Another of the original Mormon apostles, David W. Patten, recorded similar experiences. Describing his time as a Methodist, Patten wrote:

I lived in the enjoyment of his Spirit for three years, during which time, by dreams and visions, many things were made known unto me, which were to come; and from the teachings I received of the Holy Spirit, I was looking for the Church of Christ to arise in its purity according to the promise of Christ, and that I should live to see it.⁵²

Patten remained unsatisfied until 1832, when he received “a letter from my brother in Indiana,” who told him of Joseph Smith’s Church of Christ. While Patten had “received of the Holy Spirit” before, he reported that upon receiving news that his brother “had received the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands of the Elders of the Church,” his “heart [lept] for joy.” After his baptism, he enjoyed spiritual gifts seemingly unavailable to him while a Methodist. “I recorded many remarkable cases of healing, which occurred under my administration,” he reported. “Almost daily, the sick were healed under my hands.”⁵³ Other autobiographies and memoirs included similar statements. The experience of Phineas Young, who believed that in Methodism he had found true religion but was left unsatisfied until he embraced Mormonism, illustrates this principle well. His unpublished autobiography explains that in his early search for truth, he “gave

⁵¹ Thomas B. Marsh, “History of Thomas B. Marsh,” *Deseret News*, March 24, 1858, 2.

⁵² David W. Patten, “History of David W. Patten,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, June 25, 1864, 406. This history was compiled after Patten’s death and, as noted in the *Millennial Star*, is “composed principally from his own journal;” cf. D.W. Patten, *Journal*, 1832, Church History Library.

⁵³ Patten, “History of David W. Patten,” 407; cf. Patten, *Journal*, 1832, Church History Library.

[his] name to the Methodist Reformed Church, and was thus numbered with that body.”

He was baptized by immersion (“that being the only method or mode I could acknowledge, or that in any way satisfy my mind”), and soon after “received license to speak in public.”⁵⁴

I felt a great responsibility resting upon me, and I prayed continually to God to make me holy, and give me power to do good. While in this state of mind I had a very singular manifestation. ... I felt like one alone, for I could pray for nothing but to become holy. And I had got in a corner as much to myself as possible; when all of a sudden I saw the Heavens open and a body of light above the brightness of the sun descending towards me, in a moment it filled me with joy unutterable, every part of my system was perfectly light, and perfectly happy; I soon arose and spoke of things of the Kingdom of God as I never spoke before. I then felt satisfied that the Lord had heard my prayers and my sins were forgiven.⁵⁵

The remarkable manifestations Young experienced while a Methodist enabled him to exercise other spiritual gifts, and prepared him to later accept the gospel taught by Latter-day Saint missionaries. Jacob Gibson likewise testified that prior to his affiliating with Mormonism, he joined the Methodists and at one of their camp meetings, “Got converted and I believe changed as I was very Powerfully raught uppon.” The only thing lacking in Gibson’s mind was authoritative preachers—“I think if I only had the right sort of teachers I wood of done first rate.”⁵⁶ Yet another Mormon convert from the Methodist tradition, Job Smith, believed that his own conversion experience “had the effect to make me a very anxious candidate for baptism when [Mormon] Apostle [Wilford] Woodruff afterwards arrived.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Young, “Life of Phinehas Howe Young,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁵⁵ Young, “Life of Phinehas Howe Young,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁵⁶ Jacob Gibson, Journal, 1814-1877, Church History Library.

In each of these instances, the conversion experiences enjoyed as Methodists were viewed as not only authentic, but instrumental in preparing the person to accept the Mormon message. While in the case of David W. Patten, additional spiritual gifts were not received until after his conversion to Mormonism and ordination to the priesthood, Phinehas Young enjoyed the gift of healing the sick before his conversion.⁵⁸ With the assistance of his brother John and at the admonition of a heavenly voice, Young reportedly healed a dying girl through the administration of laying hands on her head and praying over her. Around the time that Young was beginning to embrace the Methodist religion and enjoy these spiritual gifts, he moved to Mendon, New York, where he participated in a revival of religion with other Methodists and Reformed Baptists. It was there, in 1830, that he (and many other eventual converts to Mormonism) was introduced to the Book of Mormon. After reading and studying the book, he became convinced of its truth. Nevertheless, he was not prepared to abandon Methodism entirely. “I still continued to preach, trying to tie Mormonism to Methodism, for more than a year,” he remembered. “[W]hen I found they had no connection, and could not be united,” he concluded that “I must leave one and cleave to the other.”⁵⁹ As Stephen Fleming has concluded elsewhere, “The Mormon conversion experience was not a rejection of the

⁵⁷ Job Smith, “The United Brethren,” *Improvement Era*, July 1910, 819. The United Brethren were a “highly enthusiastic splinter group of Primitive Methodism.” See Fleming, “The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest,” 73.

⁵⁸ This is most likely due to the distinction between the Methodist Episcopal Church, with which Patten was aligned, and the Reformed Methodist Church, with which Phinehas Young affiliated. The Reformed Methodists accepted and embraced “the gift of healing, by which physical maladies might be removed, through the power of faith” in an attempt to reclaim “the power of living faith possessed by the primitive fathers of Methodism.” As cited in P. Douglass Gorrie, *The Churches and Sects of the United States: Containing a Brief Account of the Origin, History, Doctrines, Church Government, Mode of Worship, Usages, and Statistics of Each Religious Denomination, So Far as Known* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1850), 58-60. See also Porter, “The Brigham Young Family.”

⁵⁹ Young, “Life of Phinehas Howe Young,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLI.

converts' evangelical conversion experience. ... [Nor] did it delegitimize" the experience, though "it did diminish [its] significance."⁶⁰ Perhaps because he, his family, and a few other Reformed Methodists had embraced the revelatory message of Mormonism, Young spent the first few months after converting traveling to other Methodist conferences and spreading the Latter-day Saint gospel.

The Young family found some success among their friends and acquaintances in Mendon, and other notable converts to Mormonism near their New York home. Notable converts in the region include Brigham Young's Methodist brother-in-law John P. Greene and Solomon Chamberlain.⁶¹ Chamberlain's autobiography, penned in 1858, recalled his years of religious searching and wandering as a young man. "About the year 1814 or 1815, the Reformed Methodists broke off from the Episcopal Methodists. I was in hope that they were right. I found them to be more right than the Episcopal, and joined them."⁶² Shortly after uniting himself with the Reformed Methodists, Chamberlain experienced a vision, wherein the Lord showed him "that there were no people on the earth that were right, and that faith was gone from the earth, excepting a few and that all churches were corrupt."⁶³ Though Chamberlain defined all other churches as corrupt and lacking in truth, he still admitted that his affiliation with Methodism allowed him to experience the vision. Like Phineas Young, he stressed that during his time as a

⁶⁰ Fleming, "The Religious Heritage of the British Northwest," 102.

⁶¹ Greene united himself with the Reformed Methodist Church in 1825, and then in 1828 joined the Methodist Protestant Church, in which church he was a licensed traveling preacher. See Porter, "The Brigham Young Family," 276, n29.

⁶² Solomon Chamberlain, "Autobiography, 1788-1850," 4-5, photocopy of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL. For more on Chamberlain, see Larry C. Porter, "Solomon Chamberlain—Early Missionary," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 3 (1972): 314-18; and Larry C. Porter, "Solomon Chamberlain's Missing Pamphlet: Dreams, Visions, and Angelic Ministrants," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 2 (1997-98): 113-140.

⁶³ Chamberlain, "Autobiography, 1788-1850," L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL, 4.

Methodist, he “believed in gifts and miracles as the Latter-day Saints” did.⁶⁴ Another Young brother, Lorenzo Dow Young—who was named after the Methodist itinerant preacher Lorenzo Dow—in a short biographical statement summarizing the life of his father, John Young, noted that “he was always a Methodist until he was a Mormon.”

He was at first an Episcopal Methodist but afterwards, in common with many others, became a Reformed Methodist. These undertook to practice some of the Bible doctrines now taught by the Latter-day Saints. I once knew my brother John and Calvin Gilmour, a brother Methodist, leave their work and travel on foot over to the town of Tyrone, a distance of twenty four miles, to administer to my sister Fanny, who they had heard lay at the point of death. They all believe in the gift of healing and, through faith in the administration, my sister recovered.⁶⁵

It was the quest for spiritual gifts, especially the gift of healing, and a belief in visions, miracles, and prophecy that led many unsatisfied Methodists to embrace Mormonism. Peter Cartwright remembered that one of his Methodist congregants who visited the Mormon city of Nauvoo in the early 1840s reported that the Mormons he encountered promised him additional spiritual gifts if he joined the Latter-day Saints:

They told him ... that the best and holiest men and women among the Mormons had been members of the Methodist Church. They told him that if he would join the Mormons and live faithful, that in a very little time he would have the gift of tongues, and the gift of healing, so that by faith he would raise the dead as did the first Christians.⁶⁶

For those Reformed Methodists who converted to Methodism and already embraced the gift of healing, like the Young brothers and Solomon Chamberlain, two

⁶⁴ Chamberlain, “Autobiography, 1788-1850,” HBLL, 5. For more on the visionary nature of Reformed Methodist charismatic religion, see William Pitts, *The Gospel Witness: Containing Evidence that the Holy Ghost is Given to All that Believe. Together with the Journal of a Travelling Preacher; and the Religious Experiences of Several Persons. To which is Subjoined A Sermon Delivered by an Indian* (Catskill, New York: Junius S. Lewis and Co., 1818).

⁶⁵ James Amasa Little, “Description of John Young by Lorenzo Dow Young,” Church History Library.

⁶⁶ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, 260-61.

crucial things were highlighted as instrumental in their decision to accept the Mormon message—the Book of Mormon and priesthood authority. But it was through dreams and visions experienced while Methodists that they came to accept the truthfulness of those things. Solomon Chamberlain, for example, recalled that an angelic visitor instructed in a dream “that there would a book come forth, like unto the Bible,”⁶⁷ while Joseph Young remembered that he “had experienced many visions” regarding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.⁶⁸ Phinehas, meanwhile, found that through the priesthood “the power of the gospel might be made manifest.”⁶⁹

Nearly all of these converts—from various types of Methodist backgrounds—thus emphasized that Methodism was not entirely devoid of truth and, in fact, was instrumental in their eventual acceptance of Mormonism. Nancy Tracy put it plainly. Describing her time attending Methodist meetings, she wrote: “I did not know that the true Gospel was so near my door and that I was being prepared to receive it with all my heart, as was the case.”⁷⁰ As Stephen Fleming and others have suggested, the success of Mormon missionaries among Methodists in America was a result of “Mormonism's unabashed claims to supernatural power”—a message very attractive to those who either already possessed or yearned for a robust supernaturalism.⁷¹ Grant Underwood likewise concluded that in England, “Given the tendency of early Mormon missionaries to stress

⁶⁷ Chamberlain, “Autobiography, 1788-1850,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL, 5.

⁶⁸ Joseph Young, *Diaries, 1844-1881*, 6:18-21, Church History Library.

⁶⁹ Young, “Life of Phinehas Howe Young,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁷⁰ Nancy Tracy, “Life History of Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy, Written by Herself” (1890), 2-3. typescript of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁷¹ Fleming, “Congenial to Every Shade of Radicalism,” 143. For those Methodists who were unsatisfied with Methodism and had not experienced the spiritual gifts they later enjoyed as Mormons, they nevertheless maintained that the general embrace of visions and miracles by the Methodists opened their minds to the possibilities of supernatural and miraculous religion.

both the ‘signs following belief’ and the ‘signs of the times,’ it is not surprising that a greater percentage of Methodist converts” to Mormonism “were interested above all else in enjoying a vital, gifted Christianity.”⁷² Thus, Methodist converts to Mormonism selectively embraced the portions of their Wesleyan upbringing that coincided with what they were taught as Mormons, including visions, miracles, healings, and various manifestations of spiritual gifts. In doing so, they asserted that Methodism contained more truth than other forms of religion and was thus uniquely qualified in preparing them to accept the message preached by Mormon elders.⁷³

Beyond that observation, though, are intriguing insights into how many early Mormons saw themselves in relation not only to their Protestant neighbors, but also to their Methodist pasts. The generally positive assessment of their previous affiliation with Methodism by Mormon converts is significant for two primary reasons. First, it suggests that historians have perhaps overstated their case in proposing that early Mormon sermons and literature treating the Protestant “other” left “no room for abstractions, ambiguities, or shades of gray.”⁷⁴ In an essay focusing on Mormon notions of “peoplehood,” historian Charles Cohen observed that “the identity of any self-selecting group depends on what attributes confer membership and how rigorously insiders patrol

⁷² Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*, 130. See also Grant Underwood, “Millenarianism and Popular Methodism in Early Nineteenth Century England and Canada,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 29 (Spring/Fall 1994): 81-91.

⁷³ Such claims were likewise made by Mormon converts from other religions, including Campbellites. See Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*, 25-27; and Steven C. Harper, “Infallible Proofs, Both Human and Divine: The Persuasiveness of Mormonism for Early Converts,” *Religion and American Culture* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 103-07.

⁷⁴ Hughes, “Soaring with the Gods,” 40.

their boundaries against outsiders.”⁷⁵ As his analysis demonstrates, the degree of rigor with which Mormons have historically “patrol[ed] their boundaries against outsiders” has been quite flexible, and as this chapter illustrates, Methodist converts to Mormonism provide one striking example of this flexibility. In their memoirs and Mormon conversion narratives, these converts managed to both stress the uniqueness and institutional truth claims of the Mormon church and also describe their prior Methodist affiliation as not only good, but also instrumental to their acceptance of Mormonism. The general Mormon understanding of apostasy and restoration may not have always allowed for good to be found in other religions, but among individuals, converts routinely stressed that such was indeed the case. This more positive assessment of other Christian religions found in select writings of early Mormonism, wherein matters of true religion certainly do have abstractions, nuances, and shades of gray, suggests that early Mormon identity was more flexible and accommodating than previous studies have proposed.

Secondly, the positive treatment of Methodism by converts to Mormonism highlights the recognition of the influence of an important strain of Methodism on early Mormonism—the visionary and charismatic nature of true religion. This visionary worldview that embraced prophetic dreams, divine signs, and spiritual gifts was inherited by early Mormonism from the cultural surroundings in which it was born. Furthermore, it was reinforced by these many early converts from Methodism, for not only were visions, dreams, and healings what led them to Mormonism, but similar experiences after their conversion helped shape the early Mormon community.

⁷⁵ Charles L. Cohen, “The Construction of the Mormon People,” *Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 1 (2006): 32.

CHAPTER 3

“HAVING A FORM OF GODLINESS BUT THEY DENY THE POWER THEREOF”: METHODIST CONVERSION NARRATIVES AND JOSEPH SMITH’S FIRST VISION

Five years before his death, John Wesley penned his “Thoughts Upon Methodism,” reflecting upon the movement’s past and its future prospects on both sides of the Atlantic. At the time of his writing in 1786, Wesley had seen the movement he helped start in the 1730s grow from a small band of students to a transatlantic church numbering over 100,000 adherents. The Methodist Episcopal Church alone numbered 57,000 by 1790.¹ Secure in his faith that Methodism would continue to expand long after his death, he was less sure if the movement would succumb to the societal pressures brought on by continued growth. The quest for respectability and further expansion, Wesley worried, would rob Methodism of “the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.” “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America,” he explained. “But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.”²

The subject was one that had concerned Wesley since his early days at Oxford, and

¹ John Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4-5. See also the tables included in Wigger’s Appendix, 197-99.

² John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon Methodism,” in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 527. Hereafter cited as *Works*.

one that he revisited throughout his ministry; alluding to the New Testament passage 2 Timothy 3:5, Wesley routinely stressed that true religion must include both the form and the power of godliness.³ As early as 1743, he had exhorted his followers to “seek after the power as not to despise the form of godliness,”⁴ and on another occasion emphasized the necessity “to explain and defend this truth.” If Methodists denied the spiritual witness, he explained, “there is a danger lest our religion degenerate into mere formality; lest, ‘having a form of godliness,’ we neglect if not ‘deny, the power of it.’”⁵

Such discursive emphasis on the power of religion found its way into Charles Wesley’s poetry and hymns as well. In one hymn “describing formal religion,” he described the sojourn of one who “rested in the outward law,” but “knew [not] its deep design”:

Long have I seemed to serve thee, Lord,
With unavailing pain;
Fasted, and prayed, and read thy Word,
And heard it preached—in vain.

Oft did I with th’ assembly join,
And near thy altar drew;
A form of godliness was mine—
The power I never knew.⁶

³ See, for example, John Wesley, May 31, 1763, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-1765)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Works*, 21:413; Wesley, Sermon 22, “Sermon on the Mount II” (1725) V2:6, in *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler, *Works*, 1:498; Wesley, Sermon 11, “The Witness of the Spirit II” (1767) V1:2, *Works*, 1:285; Wesley, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” (1743) in *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, *Works*, 11:48; Wesley, Sermon 150, “Hypocrisy in Oxford,” (1741) *Works*, 4:398-400.

⁴ Wesley, September 22, 1743, *Journals and Diaries II (1738-1743)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, in *Works*, 19:341.

⁵ Wesley, Sermon 11, “The Witness of the Spirit II” (1767) V1:2, in *Works*, 1:285.

⁶ Charles Wesley, “Long Have I Seemed to Serve Thee, Lord,” Hymn #88 in John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for Use of the People Called Methodists* (London: J. Paramore, 1780), 90.

Such a message resonated with Methodists in the late eighteenth century, and became an integral part of their identity and efforts to claim and establish a separate authority from the Church of England. The 1787 *Form of Discipline, for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church* thus explained that “We are thoroughly convinced, that the Church of England, to which we have been united, is deficient in several of the most important Parts of Christian Discipline; and that (a few Ministers and Members excepted) it has lost the *Life and Power of Religion*.”⁷ The same message would continue to be a crucial point for Methodists in the early nineteenth century, as they confronted the Calvinism of Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches in the United States, and competed with other evangelicals for converts. Several of Francis Asbury’s journal entries reflect such a view. While traveling in New England—the historical stronghold of Congregationalism and Calvinism in America—Asbury remarked that if there had once been true religion in the region, its power and influence had diminished:

I do feel as if there had been religion in this country once; and I apprehend there is a little in form and theory left. There may have been a praying ministry and people here; but I fear they are now spiritually dead; and am persuaded that family and private prayer is very little practised: could these people be brought to constant, fervent prayer, the Lord would come down and work wonderfully among them.⁸

The message was also preached in Methodist sermons and noted by circuit riders and missionary societies in their annual reports. An 1824 sermon by Richard Watson, for

⁷ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Form of Discipline, for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (New York: Methodist Episcopal Church, 1787), Section 3, 5. Emphasis added.

⁸ Francis Asbury Journal, 4 June, 1791, as published in Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, eds., *Volume 1, The Journal, 1771-1793*, vol. 1 of *The Journals and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton (London and Nashville: Epworth Press and Abingdon Press, 1958), 676-77.

example, lamented that “the majority of professing *Christian* men” possess “a ‘form of godliness,’ but deny its power, or live in utter disregard of it.”⁹ Most commonly, however, the theme showed up in Methodist conversion narratives published in the many short biographical sketches of pious men and women in Methodist periodicals and the book-length memoirs of itinerant preachers. In these narratives, individuals recounted their journey from sin to grace, describing in detail their activities as either an unchurched sinner or a nominal and unsatisfied Christian, their initial conviction of guilt, and finally their transforming experience of conversion. While a large number of converts to Methodism in early America were religious seekers with no prior denominational affiliation, many others were raised as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Congregationalists. Initially attracted to Methodist camp meetings and revivals by their interdenominational character, these persons soon became aware of the difference between Methodism and their various churches. That difference was to be found in the Methodist emphasis on “experimental religion”—in Wesley’s words, “religion of the heart.”

As Lester Ruth has noted, in addition to the strident anti-Calvinist message of various evangelical denominations, “early Methodists in America were equally concerned to challenge the merely ‘formal’ religion that they discerned in other churches.” This realization, Ruth continues, “led them to lament their upbringing in non-Methodist settings.”¹⁰ In several published conversion narratives, such dissatisfaction was described

⁹ Rev. Richard Watson, “Divinity, Man Magnified by the Divine Regard: A Sermon,” in *The Methodist Magazine*, February, 1824, 44. For an example of an annual report from a missionary society, see “Extracts from the Third Annual Report of the South-Carolina Conference Missionary Society,” in *The Methodist Magazine*, May 1824, 197.

¹⁰ Lester Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2005), 70.

explicitly in terms of the form and power of religion. While the church of the person's upbringing may have possessed some outward *form* of religion, it lacked the *power* to convert the individual to Christ. Thomas Coke, in recounting the life of his late wife, Penelope, described her early religiosity as a member of the Church of England:

[S]he regularly attended divine service in the Established Church with her parents and the rest of the family; and on these occasions her apparent devotion was so far superior to that of others of her age and acquaintance, as to excite the attention of many who had then an opportunity of marking her conduct. ... Still, however her devotion did not appear in her own estimation to flow from a proper principle, because it did not lead to those gracious effects by which the genuine servants of God are distinguished. ... It was a form of godliness with its power; for the heart was unchanged and unrenewed by divine Grace.¹¹

Freeborn Garrettson cast his Episcopalian upbringing in similar (though more personal) terms. "During this time of my self-secure state," he recalled, "I had a form of godliness." He then detailed what specifically this meant. "[I] attended church constantly, ... fasted once a week, prayed frequently every day in secret places, endeavored to attend strictly to the Sabbath, often reprov'd open sin, and denied myself of what the world calls pleasure."¹² Still, Garrettson remained unsatisfied with his religiosity. About this time, he heard a Methodist sermon that particularly resonated with him and ultimately triggered an emotional and intense conversion. "I was immediately surrounded with a divine power. ... I saw a beauty in the perfections of the Deity and felt that power of faith and love that I had ever been a stranger to before."¹³ In Episcopalianism, Garrettson had found the form of godliness, but in Methodism he had experienced the power. In fact, that

¹¹ "The Grace of God Manifested: Memoir of Mrs. Penelope Goulding Coke, by Her Husband the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D.," *The Methodist Magazine*, November 1818, 431-32.

¹² Robert Drew Simpson, ed., *American Methodist Pioneer: The Life and Journals of The Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 1752-1827* (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1984), 43.

¹³ Simpson, *American Methodist Pioneer*, 44-45.

experience *was* the power. As one historian summarized, “early Methodists were never satisfied with a mere affirmation of rational belief that one understood Christ saved sinners.” Rather, “they sought to lead a person into an inward experience of assurance that Christ had saved *her* or *him*. This was *experimental* religion, and anything less fell short of true Christianity in their opinion.”¹⁴ The sermons, oral testimonies, and extemporaneous exhortations of the camp meeting, together with the published accounts of conversion narratives, set a standard for the unconverted to strive for. Or as Lester Ruth put it—“they created the expectations that shaped the salvation experiences of others in their circles.”¹⁵

All of this serves as useful context for understanding not only early Methodist identity, but also the larger culture of popular religion that Methodists helped shape in the early American republic. As John Wigger has noted, “[b]ecause of Methodism’s spectacular success, in many ways its beliefs and practices came to define the context from which future popular religious movements in America would emerge.”¹⁶ The religious movements of Ellen G. White, La Roy Sunderland, and William Miller in antebellum America, and the Holiness and Pentecostal movements of the later nineteenth century, were all shaped to some degree by the Methodist backgrounds of their respective

¹⁴ Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 68.

¹⁵ Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 69.

¹⁶ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 195.

leaders and/or early converts.¹⁷

Another (though perhaps less expected) example of Methodism's outward influence can be found in the beginnings of Mormonism. More specifically, Methodist religiosity shaped the religiosity of Mormonism's founder and first prophet, Joseph Smith. It was, after all, Joseph Smith's youthful experience at Methodist camp meetings that led to his "first vision" in 1820, in which the teenage boy claimed that heavenly beings—God the Father and Jesus Christ—visited him and gave instructions to restore a pure and primitive version of Christianity.¹⁸ Smith recalled years later that "there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of the country."¹⁹

He continued:

During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness, but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings <as often> as occasion would permit. But in process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them.²⁰

Mormons today often pass over the relatively positive impression Methodism made

¹⁷ See Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 128-65 for more on the influence of Methodism on Sunderland and White. The two best treatments of Holiness and Pentecostalism both repeatedly note the Methodist influence on the movements. See Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ The fullest account of young Joseph Smith's involvement at the Methodist revivals in western New York is D. Michael Quinn, "Joseph Smith's Experience at a Methodist 'Camp-Meeting' in 1820," Expanded Version (Definitive), *Dialogue Paperless* 3 (December 2006): 1-110, <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/content/?p=35> (accessed April 14, 2009).

¹⁹ Joseph Smith, "History—1839," in *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 269-70.

²⁰ Smith, "History—1839," in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:270.

on their beloved prophet, instead focusing their narrative(s) on the confusion the revivals produced in young Smith's mind, and viewing Methodism, along with the Presbyterian and Baptist churches he also mentioned by name, as examples of the apostate Christian world in need of the restoration of divine authority and truth. Even more than that, though, modern Mormons view Joseph Smith's visionary experience as the first documented communication of that restored truth. They emphasize the supposed singularity of his vision, suggesting that the first restored truths manifest to Smith dealt with the nature of deity. Not only did he see God the Father and Jesus Christ (thus in the minds of Mormons negating the doctrine of the Trinity), but also learned that they were real, personal beings with bodies of substance.²¹

Historians, on the other hand, have long noted the similarity of Smith's account with those recorded by other visionaries in the early American republic. As early as 1946, Smith's most notorious biographer Fawn Brodie suggested that visions like Smith's "were common in the folklore of the area," and described two such accounts.²² It was in 1965 that the 1832 account first came to the attention of historians, and other historians immediately began carefully examining the document.²³ Articles comparing it to the

²¹ The following statement of former church president Gordon B. Hinckley is representative of the standard Mormon understanding of the first vision: "[I]n 1820, in that incomparable vision, the Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph. They spoke to him with words that were audible, and he spoke to Them. They could see. They could speak. They could hear. They were personal. They were of substance. They were not imaginary beings. They were beings tabernacled in flesh. And out of that experience has come our unique and true understanding of the nature of Deity." Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Stone Cut Out of the Mountain," *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 84.

²² Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life Story of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1946), 22.

²³ Paul Cheesman, a graduate student at Brigham Young University, found the account in "a journal ledger in the Church Historian's Office [in] Salt Lake City" and included it in his master's thesis, though he incorrectly dated the account to 1833. See Paul R. Cheesman, "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating to Joseph Smith's Earliest Visions" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965), Appendix D, 126-32.

other known accounts, noting both the similarities and noticeable differences, appeared shortly thereafter, and in 1971, the subject received a book-length treatment.²⁴ In the most detailed and thorough analysis of the literary structure and form of the known recitations by Smith of his first vision, two Brigham Young University English professors concluded that in his 1832 account of heavenly visions, Joseph Smith drew upon “a traditional form of spiritual autobiography familiar to him and those around him,” and that this earliest record of his experience followed “the well-established pattern in recounting a conversion.”²⁵ More recently, Smith’s biographer Richard Bushman argued that Joseph Smith initially “understood the experience in terms of the familiar” and consequently “explained the vision as he must have first understood it, as a personal conversion.”²⁶

The Christian conversion narrative has a long and storied history, dating back to the biblical account of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. While Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin each recorded accounts of their personal conversions, it was not until the seventeenth century that the conversion narrative became a popular phenomenon.²⁷ Puritans in early colonial New England required the relation of a conversion experience from all prospective church members, which were then recorded in official ecclesiastical records and sometimes in the private journals of both preachers

²⁴ See Dean C. Jessee, “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 275-296; James B. Allen, “Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision—What Do We Learn from Them,” *Improvement Era*, April 1970, 4-13; and Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971).

²⁵ Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, “Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 33, 36.

²⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 39. Bushman initially made this argument in his earlier biography of the Mormon prophet. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 56-59.

²⁷ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, “‘My chains fell off, my heart was free’: Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England,” *Church History* 68, no. 4 (December 1999): 913.

and parishioners.²⁸ One result of this Puritan practice was the emergence of an established format for these narratives—a format later adopted and then adapted by evangelicals in the early American republic to fit their own needs and their own theology.²⁹ By the time of the advent of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, evangelical Protestants were including conversion narratives in short biographical eulogies in denominational periodicals and the published autobiographies of clergymen. The intent was to provide in print models of appropriate “conversion and righteous living” from which the unconverted could learn and imitate in acting out their own spiritual journeys.³⁰

Joseph Smith, whose participation and interest in the revivals surrounding him as a youth is documented not only in his own memoirs, but also those of neighbors and family members, probably heard many such conversion narratives and testimonies as a youth—in print, from the pulpit, and in camp meeting song. Indeed, as mentioned above, the 1832 account written by Smith as part of an ultimately abortive attempt to record the history of his nascent church, reads much like the conversion narratives that appear in numerous journals of other early American evangelicals. Another account—this was recorded in 1835—maintained the basic features of the earlier version but also, according to one study, signaled a “shift [in] emphasis” by Smith “from forgiveness of his personal

²⁸ Literature treating the Puritan conversion narrative is extensive. See, for example, Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Douglas L. Winiarski, “Souls Filled with Ravishing Transport: Heavenly Visions and the Radical Awakening in New England, 1742,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2004): 3-46.

²⁹ Jerald C. Brauer, “Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism,” *The Journal of Religion* 58, no. 3 (July 1978): 227-43.

³⁰ Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140-41.

sins to his greater concern regarding the ‘different systems’ of religion in the world.”³¹ By 1838, however, Smith’s understanding of his first vision had developed even further. In comparing the earliest account against the more widely-known (and now-canonized) narrative recorded in 1838, historians have proposed that by the time the latter was written, “the transition from plow-boy to prophet was complete” and the 1838 “account of the original theophany thus takes on a significance far different from the earliest visions.”³² As Richard Bushman put it, by 1838, “Joseph’s own salvation gave way to the opening of a new era of history. The promise of forgiveness through faith in Christ was dropped from the narrative, and the apostasy of Christian churches stood as the central message of the vision.” This later account, in contrast to the earlier versions, “supplied the church with a founding story.”³³

This point is an important one. It is revealing in that it demonstrates Joseph Smith’s expanding conception of his own role—and that of his followers—in the providential history of which early Mormons saw themselves as an integral part. Nevertheless, suggestions that the 1838 account diverges sharply from the Protestant pattern of evangelical conversion narratives appear to be overstatements. While Bushman and others are right to note that “the promise of forgiveness through faith in Christ was dropped from the narrative”—at least in an explicit sense—a more careful study of Methodist conversions reveals that Smith’s 1838 account still retains the basic structure

³¹ Lambert and Cracroft, “Literary Form and Historical Understanding,” 37.

³² Lambert and Cracroft, “Literary Form and Historical Understanding,” 37.

³³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 40. Of course, as James Allen has pointed out, Joseph Smith’s First Vision did not come into common and popular usage as the genesis of the church’s “founding story” until well after Smith’s death. See James B. Allen, “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought,” *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43-61. See also Kathleen Flake, “Re-Placing Memory: Latter-day Saint Use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Religion and American Culture* 13, no. 1 (2003): 69-109.

and most crucial aspects of the narrative style.

Furthermore, later rehearsals of Smith's early visionary experience recorded in the 1840s demonstrate further that the emphasis in the earlier accounts on his "conviction of sins" and singular desire "to obtain mercy" remained consistent in Smith's understanding. One of these accounts—recorded in Mormon convert Alexander Neibaur's journal in 1844—additionally suggests that Smith's desire to "get religion" and receive forgiveness of his sins were intimately tied to his early interest in Methodism—an idea also present in the 1838 account.³⁴ While Methodist conversions share much in common with those of other evangelicals in the early American republic, their autobiographical narratives possess some unique (and important) features as well.

Previous historians were right to situate Joseph Smith's visionary experience within the context of evangelical conversion narratives generally, but exploring his experience more specifically within the Methodist variation on that tradition illuminates key aspects of Smith's narrative of the events. In the conclusion to her book on religious experience, Ann Taves explained that in "approaching the experiencing and explaining of religion historically," she sought "to make the larger point that the experience of religion cannot be separated from the communities of discourse and practice that gave rise to it *without becoming something else*."³⁵ The same point is relevant here. Even as Joseph Smith reinterpreted his earliest vision to assume larger meanings that were crucial to the development of early Mormon identity, the fundamental narrative remained constrained

³⁴ Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:461.

³⁵ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 353. Emphasis in original. Latter-day Saint historians have recently begun to call for the utilization of "communities of discourse" theory to early Mormonism. Grant Underwood, for instance, suggested that such an approach will yield "a more nuanced understanding of LDS thought." Grant Underwood, "A 'Communities of Discourse' Approach to Early LDS Thought," in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities*, ed. James M. McLachlan and Loyd Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 27.

by the discursive community of Methodist conversion literature from which it emerged.

While Joseph Smith's initial understanding of the event recorded in the earliest accounts reads much like the descriptions earnest evangelicals scribbled in their journals and church leaders published as short vignettes in denominational periodicals, the much longer and more-detailed 1838 account of Smith's vision of deity bears a keen likeness to the voluminous conversion narratives included by Methodist itinerant preachers in their published autobiographies and memoirs. These accounts, printed and circulated widely among interested readers in antebellum America, are generally straightforward and unapologetic in their prose. Their intent is clear—to celebrate the work of God in the lives of these Methodist heroes, and to assert the historical importance and divine truth of the Methodist message. Furthermore, these veteran Methodist preachers sought to present through their published memoirs what they saw as an accurate and fair portrayal of Methodism to their American audience. One "D.W.C." thus introduced the autobiography of Jacob Young by rhetorically (and humorously) asking, "What! another autobiography of an itinerant?" And then answering, "Yes, my friend, another autobiography. And why should there not be another, and even still another." The reason was clear and simple in Young's mind:

With regard to those old veterans of the cross, who, by their sacrifice, toil, and fidelity to God, laid the foundations and reared the noble fabric of Methodism. Let them enter into history. Let their heroism, their devotion, toils, and triumphs be placed upon record. No class of men have been more overlooked in American history; and yet none have higher claims to a noble and generous recognition in that history, than the pioneer Methodist preachers. It is but just now that the substantial service done by such men to their country, as well as to their God, is beginning to be understood.³⁶

³⁶ Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young, with Incidents, Observations, and Reflections* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857), 3.

The conversions narratives embedded into these larger autobiographies (usually appearing as the primary focus of the first or second chapter) served not only to reinforce the importance and appropriate method of conversion, but also to document, as the above-cited preface put it, “the foundations [of] ... Methodism.” Joseph Smith’s 1838 history similarly encompassed much more than merely reciting his visionary conversion, and was written to “put all enquirers after truth into possession of the facts as they have transpired” regarding Joseph Smith’s personal history and that of the Mormon church.³⁷ Nearly all conversion narratives included in the autobiographies followed this pattern of narrating one’s personal conversion to speak to larger issues. Peter Cartwright, for instance, explained that his autobiography “would necessarily connect with it a history of the rise and progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the great valley of the Mississippi.”³⁸

The larger issues the narrator addressed through reciting his or her conversion narrative were not limited to rehearsing denominational history, either. Numerous historians of gender and race have pointed out that often times, the conversion narrative could be used to critique social and cultural norms that denied women and racial minorities autonomy. As Carolyn Haynes has pointed out, “the conversion narrative offered [an individual] a straightforward and accepted mode of communication” which he or she could then use to critique aspects of the society. By doing so, the individual “was able to achieve a form of bifocality within his [or her] narrative and, thus, invite his [or

³⁷ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:267.

³⁸ Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curts, 1856), v.

her] audience to see Protestantism and America in a new perspective.”³⁹ Methodism, according to Haynes, was “uniquely suited” to diverse people’s needs because of its “more radical egalitarianism.”⁴⁰ Joseph Smith similarly drew upon this established and respected narrative form to not only describe his conversion, but attach to it historical and theological significance, pointing to what he saw as the apostate Christian world to necessitate the restoration of Christ’s church.

As Dee Andrews and others have documented, there are certain “distinct features” of Methodist conversion narratives.⁴¹ Virginia Brereton identified five stages that nearly all autobiographers include in their conversion stories:

(1) life before the conversion process began, when narrators more or less ignored the question of salvation; (2) a period when the narrators became acutely aware of their sinfulness and of the possibility that they would be damned forever; (3) the surrender to God’s will in conversion proper, during which converts felt the oppressive sense of sinfulness lifted and gained confidence or at least hope that they were saved; (4) a description of the narrator’s changed behavior and attitudes, resulting from the conversion; and (5) an account of periods of discouragement and low spiritual energy followed by renewals of dedication.⁴²

In the first stage, the writer describes his or her life before the conversion process.

Most commonly, this included an account of the religious affiliation of the author’s

³⁹ Carolyn A. Haynes, *Divine Destiny: Gender and Race in Nineteenth-Century Protestantism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 30-31. Haynes’s study focuses on the conversion narrative of a Pequot Indian convert to Methodism, William Apess. For examples of women’s conversion narratives, see Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women’s Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Barbara L. Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); and Susan Juster’s partial response in Susan Juster, “‘In a Different Voice’: Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post-Revolutionary America,” *American Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1989): 34-62.

⁴⁰ Haynes, *Divine Destiny*, 29-30.

⁴¹ Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 87.

⁴² Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 6.

parents and often noted that in spite of their membership in the Church of England, or the Presbyterian or Congregational church (or occasionally, their unchurched status), they had been raised by devout parents who imparted to their children a belief in God and desire to serve him. Thomas Smith recalled that his mother instructed “my infant mind in the principles of our holy religion,” and Ezekiel Cooper recalled that his parents, members of the Church of England, “were hospitable to strangers and benevolent to the indigent.”⁴³ After praising his parents, the itinerant preacher then shifted his focus and lamented the spiritual shortcomings of his life before Methodism. Cooper was thus “sorrowful to relate [that] we were all too great strangers to any thing truly spiritual,” while Charles Giles, whose unchurched parents “nevertheless had a high respect for the canons of morality,” mourned the religious climate of his childhood—“religion,” he explained, “consisted chiefly in hollow form. . . . Holy living, deep piety, and experimental religion, were matters not critically understood.”⁴⁴

Joseph Smith thus began the earliest recorded account of his conversion utilizing this standard trope. “I was born . . . of goodly parents who spared no pains of instructing me in <the> christian religion.”⁴⁵ He elaborated on this in his later account, noting that it was not until he was into his teenage years that “My Fathers family was proselyted to the

⁴³ David Dailey, *Experience and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Thomas Smith, Late an Itinerant Preacher of the Gospel in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Compiled Chiefly from his Journal* (New York: Lane and Tippet for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1848), 9; Ezekiel Cooper, *Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America. Chiefly Drawn from the Diary, Letters, Manuscripts, Documents, and Original Tracts of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, Compiled by George Phoebus* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), 12.

⁴⁴ Cooper, *Beams of Light*, 12; Charles Giles, *Pioneer: A Narrative of the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labours of Rev. Charles Giles* (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sanford for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844), 15-17.

⁴⁵ Smith, “History—1832,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:3.

Presbyterian faith and four of them joined that church.”⁴⁶ But Presbyterianism did not satisfy Smith. In an 1844 account, he explained that “He wanted to get Religion too ... but could feel nothing.”⁴⁷

The second stage Brereton identified in these narratives described the sinner’s conviction of his or her depraved state of being. This was usually prompted by some sort of “personal crisis” for an individual. This could be family troubles, poverty, a recent death, or, as was most often the case, a personal concern for one’s salvation. After spending a day engaging in dancing and merriment, Peter Cartwright “began to reflect on the manner in which I had spent the day and evening, I felt guilty and condemned. ... [A]n awful impression rested on my mind that death had come and I was unprepared to die.”⁴⁸ Jacob Young had “spent five or six years since the Spirit of God seemed to have left” him, and came “to the conclusion that my day of grace was gone forever.”⁴⁹ As mentioned already, Joseph lamented his inability “to get Religion” and “feel & shout like the Rest” that he saw at the revival meetings. The adolescent boy was left to lament that he “could feel nothing.”⁵⁰ He further explained that “if any person needed wisdom from God, I did, for how to act I did not know and unless I could get more wisdom that I then had, would never know.”⁵¹ Typically, it was a particular biblical passage that triggered the conviction and attendant hope for conversion. Among Methodist converts, this almost

⁴⁶ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:270.

⁴⁷ Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:461.

⁴⁸ Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 36.

⁴⁹ Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 38.

⁵⁰ Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:461.

⁵¹ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:271.

always came after hearing Methodist preaching for the first time. Elijah Woolsey put it bluntly: “I cannot say that I ever heard any preaching that reached my heart until I heard the Methodists.” Furthermore, “I never attended the preaching of the Methodists ... without feeling conviction, and I must say that no preaching seemed to me like theirs.”⁵² Benjamin Abbott, “a professed presbyterian” who experienced “the Spirit of God” only intermittently prior to his conversion, became convicted after he heard a particularly poignant sermon at a Methodist revival. The Methodist minister, he remembered, “preached with power; the word reached my heart in such a powerful manner that it shook every joint in my body; tears flowed in abundance, and I cried out for mercy.”⁵³ Philip Gatch admitted that up until the time he first heard Methodist preaching, “I did not know the way to be saved from my guilt and wretchedness.” But God soon sent “the Gospel into our neighborhood ... through the instrumentality of the Methodists.” He recalled that the first Methodist sermon he heard “was accompanied to my understanding by the Holy Spirit. I was stripped of all my self-righteousness. It was to me as filthy rags when the Lord made known to me my condition.”⁵⁴ Joseph Smith’s conversion process was sparked under similar circumstances. “[I]n the place where we lived,” he explained, a religious revival “commenced with the Methodists,” and after hearing a sermon on (and then reading) “the Epistle of James, First Chapter and fifth verse,” he recalled that

⁵² Elijah Woolsey, *The Supernumerary; or, Lights and Shadows of Itinerancy, Compiled from Papers of Rev. Elijah Woolsey, by Rev. George Coles* (New York: G. Lane and C.B. Tippet for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1845), 7, 12.

⁵³ Benjamin Abbott, *The Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott: To Which is Annexed a Narrative of His Life and Death by John Ffirth* (Philadelphia: Solomon W. Conrad for Ezekiel Cooper, 1801), 6, 10.

⁵⁴ John M’Lean, *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1854), 9-10.

Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again. ... At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion or else I must do as James directs, that is, Ask of God.⁵⁵

The third stage of the conversion process is the conversion itself. While Methodist periodicals and the writings of itinerant preachers often boasted of the large numbers of converts made at the camp meeting on the mourner's bench or sometimes in the more intimate class meetings, the personal conversions of the writer almost always occurred in private. After months of attending revivals and worrying about his standing before God for some time, Benjamin Abbott finally "went to a lonely place and kneeled down to pray."⁵⁶ Henry Boehm escaped "into the upper loft of the mill" where he worked and "on his knees, in an agony of deep distress," asked God for forgiveness.⁵⁷ Joseph Smith likewise "retired" into a secluded grove of trees behind his family's home—a "place where [he] had previously designed to go" and "looked around" to make sure he was alone.⁵⁸ Oftentimes, the seeker's conversion came after attempting to pray in a way out of his or her ordinary personal routine. For some, this was praying in solitude. At the advice of his Methodist co-worker, Alfred Brunson decided to pray in private for forgiveness. He explained his normal routine thus: "[W]hen I lay down at night and rose in the morning I would pray mentally, or *think* a prayer for mercy and forgiveness." But "on his

⁵⁵ Smith, "History—1839," in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:269-71. The suggestion that Smith first heard a sermon on the biblical passage by a Methodist preacher comes from his brother William Smith's remembrances. See *Deseret Evening News*, January 20, 1894, 11.

⁵⁶ Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours*, 12.

⁵⁷ J.B. Wakeley, *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; Being Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Rev. Henry Boehm* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875), 17.

⁵⁸ Smith, "History—1839," in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:272.

[the Methodist friend] suggestion, I sought for a place for retirement, and found one.”⁵⁹ Benjamin Abbott, seeking additional strength from the Lord, prayed “for the first time ... with a vocal voice.”⁶⁰ In nearly the same language, Joseph Smith explained that prior to his visionary conversion, he “had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.”⁶¹ The point trying to be made was that in order to experience true conversion, one had to put forth concerted and extra effort.

Another distinguishing characteristic of these conversions was an encounter with the Devil (alternately described as a dark force or being). Though not present in all conversion narratives, the theme is prevalent enough to warrant attention. While limited in its geographical scope, Christine Heyrman’s excellent work on evangelicals in the early American South, indicates the widespread fear among lay evangelicals of Satanic opposition, especially among prospective converts recently convicted of their sins. “Indeed, as evangelical pastors well knew,” she explained, “what sometimes accompanied the first throes of repentance was a sinner’s sheer terror of being snatched into hell by a devil trying not be cheated of triumph.”⁶² Sometimes the devil would mentally torment the individual for months. This theme is especially pronounced in Benjamin Abbott’s narrative. One day shortly after his initial conviction, while traveling home, Abbott became convinced that “the devil was behind me in the waggon with his

⁵⁹ Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer: or, Incidents of the Life and Times of Rev. Alfred Brunson, A.M., D.D., Embracing a Period of Over Seventy Years, Written by Himself* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872), 47.

⁶⁰ Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours*, 12.

⁶¹ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:272.

⁶² Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 57. Heyrman devotes an entire chapter to early evangelical understandings of Satan. See chapter 1, “Raising the Devil,” 28-76.

hand just over my head, threatening to take me away both soul and body.” That same night, as he lay down to sleep, he recalled that “my mind was filled with awful apparitions. I thought I saw devils ready to take me.” Having survived each of these episodes physically unharmed, Abbott experienced one final encounter with the devil before he experienced conversion. Just as he kneeled down in solitude to pray, “the devil suggested to my mind that there was somebody hid in the woods, and they would laugh at me.” While perhaps not as physically threatening as his earlier encounter with Satan, it made enough of an impression to persuade him to move “to the other end of the field” and attempt to pray again.⁶³ Another preacher was, in the words of Dee Andrews, so distraught by ‘Lucifer’s’ alarming presence during his conversion that he suffered a nervous breakdown.”⁶⁴ In Joseph Smith’s own encounter with “the power of some actual being from the unseen world,” he was astonished at the being’s ability “to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.”⁶⁵ The notion that the Devil had an active interest in stopping the conversions of these persons served, in the minds of the narrators, to demonstrate the importance and reality of their conversion.

In those instances where Satan attempted to tempt and torment the person, the convert was always rescued from the adversarial force by what Dee Andrews called, a “feliculously timed redemption experience.”⁶⁶ This was the climax of the conversion

⁶³ Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours*, 12.

⁶⁴ William Glendinning, *The Life of William Glendinning, Preacher of the Gospel, Written by Himself* (Philadelphia: Printed for the author, at the office of W.W. Woodward, 1795), 19-35; as quoted in Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 82.

⁶⁵ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:272.

⁶⁶ Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 87.

experience. Often the individual experienced a vision in which God the Father, Jesus Christ, and/or angels appeared. Other times the person was permitted a view of heaven.

This is clear in Smith's narrative.

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 gradually untill it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me, I saw two personages whose brightness and glory defy all description standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me calling me by name and said pointing to the other "This is my beloved Son, Hear him."⁶⁷

Mormon historians aware of evangelical visions of deity in this era have pointed to this claim made first in the 1835 account and then repeated in Smith's 1838 history—that Smith saw not only "the Lord," as earlier versions had suggested, but rather the Father *and* the Son—as further evidence of Smith's attempts to distinguish his own experience from those of other visionaries. "The Protestant pattern" of conversion, they have asserted, included visions "of one personage"—usually Christ.⁶⁸ But such was not the case among Methodists. In fact, as John Kent has pointed out, "when Wesleyans had visions they were as likely to be of the Father as of the Son," as often were of both.⁶⁹ Benjamin Abbott thus "saw, by faith, the Lord Jesus Christ" who said to him, "*I died for you,*" and "then looked up, and by faith I saw the Ancient of Days, and he said to me, '*I freely forgive thee for what Christ has done.*'"⁷⁰ In similar fashion, Philip Gatch recorded that "the Spirit of the Lord came down upon me, and the opening heavens shone around

⁶⁷ Smith, "History—1839," in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:272.

⁶⁸ Lambert and Cracroft, "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," 36.

⁶⁹ John Kent, *Wesley and Wesleyans: Religion in Eighteenth Century Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 116, 123.

⁷⁰ Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours*, 16.

me. By faith I saw Jesus at the right hand of the Father. . . . The Lord said by his Spirit, ‘You are now sanctified, seek to grow in the fruit of the Spirit.’”⁷¹ The conversion proper being complete, the new convert was left in a state of almost inexpressible joy. This is what Virginia Brereton identified as the fourth stage of conversion—the immediate rewards of the conversion. In the 1832 account of his vision, Joseph said his “soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me.”⁷² In the 1844 recounting of the vision, Smith simply described his post-vision state of being as “comforted.”⁷³ Elijah Woolsey similarly described that, following his conversion, the Lord’s “Holy Spirit brought comfort to my poor soul” and “I was enabled to believe, and all was joy and peace.”⁷⁴ Dan Young also noted that his “soul enjoyed sweet peace” and Henry Boehm recorded that “my heart [was] strangely warmed.”⁷⁵ The conversion had a transforming effect on the now-converted soul, and prospective converts could likewise expect joy and peace to accompany their conversion.

The fifth and final stage of conversion identified by Brereton came after the conversion in the form of continuing temptation and repeated renewal of faith. Such persistent temptation, the writers informed their readers, did sometimes result in mild backsliding but never in serious sin. Peter Cartwright thus explained that in the years following his conversion, he occasionally succumbed to the temptation. “[T]hough I have been since then, in many instances, unfaithful,” he wrote, “yet I have never, for one

⁷¹ M’Lean, *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch*, 18.

⁷² Smith, “History-1832,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:7.

⁷³ Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:461.

⁷⁴ Woolsey, *The Supernumerary*, 15.

⁷⁵ Dan Young, *Autobiography of Dan Young, A New England Preacher of the Olden Time* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1860), 20; Wakeley, *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years*, 17.

moment, doubted that the Lord did, then and there, forgive my sins and give me religion.”⁷⁶ Others weren’t as lucky and doubt crept in. “It was not long before the devil came and powerfully tempted me to doubt my conversion and regeneration,” Ezekiel Cooper recollected. “However,” he continued, “I [again] felt the deliverance from guilt, from the fear of death and hell, a hatred to all sin, and an unspeakable joy in my soul.”⁷⁷ Crucial to the person’s renewal was his joining a Methodist society. “O how I needed the help arising from Christian communion!” Cooper explained, also noting that his decision to “form acquaintance with the Methodists” ended up being “a great blessing.”⁷⁸ Importantly, Joseph Smith’s 1838 history is the only autobiographical account of his early visions that includes this fifth and final step. Smith explained that he “was left to all kinds of temptations.” One reason was that he united with no religious group and was consequently left to “mingl[e] with all kinds of society.”

I frequently <fell> into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the <foibles> of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God. <In making this confession, no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins: a disposition to commit such was never in my nature; but I was guilty of Levity, & sometimes associated with Jovial company &c., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been.>⁷⁹

Smith’s subsequent renewal came one night while praying “to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies” and hoping for reassurance of “of my state and standing before him.” In response to his supplication, an angelic being appeared in his

⁷⁶ Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 38.

⁷⁷ Cooper, *Beams of Light*, 18.

⁷⁸ Cooper, *Beams of Light*, 18-19.

⁷⁹ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:275-76.

room and explained that God had an important work for him to perform.⁸⁰ That work was the translation of an ancient record, ultimately resulting in the publication of the Book of Mormon and the formal establishment of the Mormon church, finally providing Smith with the sort of society that could help him and others rebuff further temptation.

Even though the several sources cited above are, with the exclusion of Smith's different accounts, those recorded by Methodist itinerant preachers, the various stages and characteristics of conversion were not uniquely Methodist and were common among nearly all evangelicals. Charles Finney's visionary conversion in a secluded grove of trees, for example, includes all of the standard stages and closely parallels Joseph Smith's experience.⁸¹ However, such visionary accounts were perhaps more common among the Methodists in early America, who "leaned toward the enthusiastic side" in the spectrum of religious experience.⁸² There is, additionally, one very important characteristic of Methodist accounts that separates their narratives from others. "The most distinguishing characteristic of Wesleyan conversion," Dee Andrews has written, "was also its most prosaic: the decision to join a Methodist society." Whereas "Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and many Baptists came to their religious experiences after years of familiarity with Scripture and Reformed theology," she explained, "Methodists customarily joined Methodist societies *after* their awakening, in many cases, often after their full conversions."⁸³ Jacob Young celebrated the fact that after he and the several members of his family had experienced conversion, they collectively joined the

⁸⁰ Smith, "History—1839," in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:276.

⁸¹ See Charles Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney, Written by Himself* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1876).

⁸² Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 191.

⁸³ Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 91.

Methodists. “Father and mother, and almost the whole family, embraced religion and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church.”⁸⁴ Immediately following his conversion, Ezekiel Cooper “resolved to form an acquaintance with the Methodists, and to join society as soon as I conveniently could.”⁸⁵ Methodist preachers apparently instructed audiences at camp meetings and revivals that they should unite with the Methodists after conversion. The author of an anti-Methodist tract from the 1820s expressed frustration at this:

A seventh evil of Camp Meetings is, that the Methodists *design* and *use* them as their greatest means of making proselytes of their own denomination. ... They may design and attempt to turn men from sin, to God; but they certainly do design at Camp Meetings, to make as many proselytes as they possibly can, whether they are made Christians or not.

...

Examine the measures they employ to induce persons of other denominations to attend. They invite, and even urge them. They would be ashamed, and detected in their design, if they asked them plainly to become Methodists; but they can ask them to go to Camp Meeting, and there make them Methodists, and not be suspected. They urge, most commonly, the young to attend. If there be any revival in the place, they circulate their invitations most industriously; and assure the thoughtful, that they “will get religion.”⁸⁶

This helps contextualize Joseph Smith’s later accounts of the “unusual excitement on the subject of religion” that “commenced with the Methodists” near his boyhood home. “Some were contending for the Methodist faith, Some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist, for notwithstanding the great love which the Converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion,” Smith remembered, “it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the Priests and the Converts were more

⁸⁴ Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 49.

⁸⁵ Cooper, *Beams of Light*, 18.

⁸⁶ *Camp-Meetings Described and Exposed; and “Strange Things” Stated* (n.p., n.d.), 9.

pretended than real. . . . [A]ll their good feelings one for another (if they ever had any) were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest of opinions.”⁸⁷ While Smith “kept [him]self aloof from all these parties,” he still “attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit” in an effort “to get Religion”—“to feel and shout like the rest.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, it highlights the consistency between Smith’s earlier accounts and his later accounts. While forgiveness for his sins preoccupied the earlier account, and the concern with which church was right consumes the later narrative, within the Methodist tradition, the two were not mutually exclusive questions. In fact, they were intimately tied together. Perhaps Joseph Smith asked “which of all the sects was right” precisely because he felt that forgiveness of his personal sins was intimately tied to his joining a certain church. This is even more pronounced in the 1844 account recorded in Alexander Neibaur’s journal. The petition in Smith’s prayer there was not “which of all these sects was right,” but more specifically, “must I join the Methodist Church[?]”⁸⁹ The answer he claimed to receive—“No, they are not my People, [they] have gone astray” was probably not what Smith expected to hear. In one sense, the promise of Methodist ministers—that God would personally answer the teenage boy’s prayer—proved to be right. Smith experienced the visionary conversion so many other Methodists had reportedly experienced, and there was nothing particularly unorthodox about what he reported. The difference, of course, is in the answer to Smith’s prayer. Compare the answer Smith received in answer to his prayer with that of Benjamin Abbott:

⁸⁷ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:270.

⁸⁸ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:270; Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:461.

⁸⁹ Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:461.

At the time of my conviction I used to consider what church or society I should join, whether the baptists, presbyterians, or methodists; but at this time the Lord said unto me, “You must join the methodists, for they are my people, and they are right.”⁹⁰

Furthermore, in contrast to the conversion narratives of Freeborn Garrettson and others who celebrated that Methodism possessed not only the form but also (and more importantly) the power of religion, Joseph Smith reported God’s condemnation of other sects, including Methodists:

[T]he 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 teach for doctrines the commandments of men, *having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.*”⁹¹

Smith thus drew upon the same biblical imagery that John and Charles Wesley had used to define their movement, that Francis Asbury had carried over into American Methodism, and that multitudes of Methodists had used to contrast their former religious lives with what their new religion offered. Only Smith utilized the passage from 2 Timothy to denounce, not celebrate, Methodism. The Methodists, he reported, no longer had the power of godliness, and only a dead form remained.

This explains as well as anything the somewhat severe reproving Smith reported receiving from the Methodist minister he related his vision to. “[H]e treated my communication not only lightly but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil.”⁹² Benjamin Abbott received the same response from the Presbyterian minister to whom he reported his vision. After relating “my conviction and my conversion,” Abbott wrote, “he

⁹⁰ Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours*, 17.

⁹¹ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:273. Emphasis added.

⁹² Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:273.

paid a strict attention, ... and then told me that I was under strong delusions of the devil.”⁹³ Such a response did not surprise Abbott, who was sure that there was not “one converted christian among” the Presbyterians he knew, but it did leave Smith “greatly surprised,” probably because of the many other Methodists of the era who related visions and dreams accompanying their conversion experiences. It is also interesting to note that the specific Methodist minister identified as the one in whom Smith confided—George Lane—would later work as a publisher for the Methodist Episcopal Church, where he published a number of the autobiographies discussed here.⁹⁴ Of course, as historians have pointed out, Methodism underwent a significant shift in its attitudes towards enthusiastic religion and acceptance of dreams and visions that occurred about the time Joseph Smith was participating in Methodist revivals. In fact, Jon Butler pinpointed 1820—the very year Smith reported having his first vision—as a key turning point. “Methodists’ distinctive and popular syncretism faded after 1820,” he explained.⁹⁵ Picking up on this point, historian Stephen Fleming recently noted that “the rejection of Smith’s vision by the Methodist preacher ... suggests that those looking for the kind of supernaturalism Smith sought, and which had been accepted on the edges of Methodism decades earlier, would now have to look elsewhere.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours*, 19-20.

⁹⁴ Joseph Smith never mentioned Lane by name as the Methodist minister who censured him for telling his vision, but his associate Oliver Cowdery did, a claim later repeated by Smith’s brother, William. See Oliver Cowdery, “Letter III,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 42; and William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), 6. For more on George Lane and his relationship with Mormonism, see Larry C. Porter, “Reverend George Lane—Good ‘Gifts,’ Much ‘Grace,’ and Marked ‘Usefulness,’” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 321-40.

⁹⁵ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 241.

⁹⁶ Fleming, “The British Northwest and the Rise of Mormonism,” 81-82.

This point is further demonstrated in the language used by Smith in contrast to that found in other Methodist conversion narratives written around the same time. Whereas Methodists of the day carefully qualified the nature of their visionary experiences with phrases like “by faith, I saw ...” or by affirming that it was just a dream, Smith affirmed unambiguously that “it was nevertheless a fact, that I had had a vision. ... I had actually seen a light and in the midst of that light I saw two personages, and they did in reality speak to me. ... I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it.”⁹⁷ It was thus not necessarily a matter of what Joseph Smith experienced, but rather how he explained it. The straightforward and sure language he used to describe his vision filtered its meaning, making it more threatening to the Methodist minister in whom he confided.

Like others during this era, Smith utilized a common and accepted literary form not only to relate his conversion, but also to critique aspects of the surrounding culture. In this case, Smith leveled his critique at what he saw as a divided and divisive Christian church. As demonstrated in chapter two, such a message resonated with those Smith attracted to the Mormon religion, many of whom critiqued the Methodists as having rejected their heritage as those who embraced visions, dreams, and miraculous religion. The charismatic nature of Mormonism filled a void for these disenchanting Methodists, but at the same time allowed them to maintain some allegiance to their former religion. As the next chapter will illustrate, Joseph Smith and other Methodist converts to

⁹⁷ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:274. Compare Smith’s language with that of Dan Young, who affirmed that his vision of Christ was “a very singular dream,” but nothing more. See Young, *Autobiography of Dan Young*, 28-29. On this point, Susan Juster has noted that “Evangelicals were very careful in the language they used to describe their visionary experiences, always conscious of the porous line separating faith from superstition. They used words like ‘seemingly’ and ‘by faith’ to signal their awareness of the enormous channels of truth and knowledge. ... In general, visions should be *seen*—not felt or heard in any physical way—and seen by the ‘eye of faith’ alone.” See Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 115-16.

Mormonism brought with them key features and practices of Wesleyan religion and worship. In doing so, they invested them with new meanings that shaped early Mormon worship and structure.

CHAPTER 4
“ONLY WE HAVE ADVANCED FURTHER”: THE METHODIST
CONTEXT FOR EARLY MORMON ORGANIZATION
AND WORSHIP

In 1839, Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic celebrated the movement’s one hundred year anniversary. At a centennial celebration in America, noted preacher George Cookman of the Methodist Episcopal Church reflected on the rise and progress of the movement, rhetorically asking, “*What, then, is Methodism?*” Answering his own question, he explained that “*Methodism is a spirit. It is the spirit of Bible truth and Christian charity. ... And what is that spirit? We answer, ‘Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.’ That, sir, is Methodism.*” Cookman continued:

Methodism, sir, is a *revival of primitive New Testament religion*, such as glowed in the bosom and was seen in the lives of the apostles and martyrs.

It is a *revival of the vital, fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith*.

It is a *revival of the original New Testament organization*, particularly in restoring the itinerancy and brotherhood of the ministry, and the *right* administration of church discipline.

It is a *revival of the social spirit*, the free and ancient manner of social worship.

It is, above all, a *revival of the missionary spirit*, which, not

content with a mere *defensive* warfare upon Zion's walls, goes forth *aggressively*, under the eternal promise, to the conquest of the world.¹

As revealed in Cookman's sermon, Church organization and religious experience were paramount to how Methodists defined themselves against what they termed the "sectarian" world. These two characteristics, combined with "vital, fundamental doctrines" of the Christian faith, constituted a "revival" or "restoration" of "primitive New Testament religion." All of this was, according to Cookman, central to true and sincere religion—religion that possessed both the "form *and* power of godliness" discussed in the last chapter.

The parallels to Mormonism are striking. As discussed in Chapter 1, however, comparative studies of religion necessarily present difficulties. Attempting to trace provenance of one group's theology and religious practices from another's is difficult because of the lack of primary sources that actually document such transmission. Such is the certainly the case in this study. Despite the high numbers of Mormon converts who came from Methodist backgrounds, and the generally positive appraisal of Methodist religion by those individuals, there are no sources suggesting a direct borrowing of Methodist beliefs and practices by early Mormons. Few serious scholars of Mormonism would doubt that Joseph Smith did, in fact, draw from his cultural surroundings. And by paying close attention to the language used by Smith and early Mormons to describe their religious experience, one can draw parallels that *suggest* a direct influence. The trouble, though, is attempting to *demonstrate* the impact of those influences. In an effort to be careful on this point, what I propose in this chapter is not that the source of early Mormon

¹ George G. Cookman, *Speeches Delivered on Various Occasions* (New York: George Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840); reprinted as "George Cookman Celebrates Achievements at Centennial," in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 245-46. Emphasis in original.

worship and church organization was the Methodism in which many early converts were nurtured. Rather, I suggest here that examining the parallels and precedents to these Mormon practices found in early American Methodism provide us with a fuller understanding of one likely source from which Joseph Smith and his followers drew in the creation and development of Mormon religiosity.

In the earliest recorded account of his “first vision,” Joseph Smith reported that in his early religious wanderings he “found that ~~man~~ <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.”² The vision he experienced soon after, in which Christ informed him that all churches were “wrong” because they “teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof,”³ confirmed his earlier impressions of an apostate Christian world. This idea developed and expanded as Mormonism grew into its identity as the restored Church of Christ.⁴ The apostate Christian world necessitated a restoration of the primitive church, complete with newly-bestowed authority and freshly-revealed doctrine, church organization, and direction for proper worship. The preface to the collection of Smith’s revelations known as the *Book of Commandments*, written as if the voice of God himself, thus chastised Christians of the day for having “strayed from mine ordinances, and ... broken mine everlasting

² Smith, “History-1832,” in *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 6-7.

³ Smith, “History—1839,” in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:273.

⁴ See Richard E. Bennett and Amber J. Seidel, “‘A World in Darkness’: Early Latter-day Saint Understanding of the Apostasy, 1830-34,” in *Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History*, ed. Roy A. Prete, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 55-69.

covenant.” In response, the Lord explained that he “called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments.”⁵ Those commandments and revelations detailed the proper order of the Church of Christ, which Latter-day Saints took to mean the same order that existed in the primitive New Testament Church and among God’s chosen people throughout time.

The *Book of Commandment’s* preface also hinted at one of the key aspects of the restoration—spiritually empowered messengers sent forth to proclaim the new gospel. “[T]he fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world,” the revealed preface read. Another revelation received in February 1831 made this point even more clearly. This revelation, Joseph Smith commented, “embrac[ed] the law of the Church.” It began by addressing the “elders of my church” and commanded them to “go forth in my name, every one of you, . . . go forth in the power of my Spirit, preaching my gospel, two by two, in my name, lifting up your voices as with the voice of a trump, declaring my word like unto angels of God.”⁶ These early Mormon missionaries, uneducated and untrained in theological matters, took as their model the New Testament apostles and followed the injunction in the Gospel of Luke, traveling from house to house “carry[ing] neither purse, nor scrip.”⁷ An 1832 revelation reiterated the connection between Christ’s New Testament apostles and his modern Mormon missionaries. “And as I said unto mine apostles, even so I say unto you; for you are mine apostles,” it read.

⁵ *A Book of Commandments, For the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Zion, MO: W.W. Phelps & Co., 1833) 1:3-4; hereinafter *Book of Commandments*. The section and verse in the current *Doctrine and Covenants* is 1:15-17; hereinafter *Current D&C*.

⁶ *Book of Commandments* 44:5-7 (Current *D&C* 42:5-6).

⁷ Luke 10:4.

It is expedient that I give unto you this commandment, that ye become even as my friends in days when I was with them travelling to preach this gospel in my power; for I suffered them not to have purse or scrip, neither two coats: behold I send you out to prove the world, and the laborer is worthy of his hire.⁸

As Richard Bushman summarized, these missionaries wrote in their diaries and histories as if “composing another Book of Acts.”⁹ John Whitmer, an early convert placed in charge of writing the nascent church’s first history, thus described the fruits of the Elders’ labors. “The disciples increased daily, and miracles were wrought, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, and the Church grew and multiplied in numbers, grace, and knowledge.”¹⁰ In a similar vein, these missionaries often rendered their personal diaries and journals in biblical language. Reynolds Cahoon, for example, called his account of his missionary travels “the Acts of Reynolds,” while Orson Pratt titled each of his missionary diaries the “Book of Orson,” “the Second Book of Orson,” and so on.¹¹ The intent is clear—these missionaries thought of themselves as Latter-day apostles, with the same commission as Christ’s New Testament disciples.

This band of uneducated itinerant preachers, traveling the countryside preaching the gospel and oft-times relying upon strangers for the lodging and food, was of course not without precedent. In contrast to the settled preachers assigned to an isolated

⁸ *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God* (Kirtland, OH: F.G. Williams & Co., 1835), 4:10, 13; hereinafter *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835) (Current *D&C* 84:63, 77-79).

⁹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 154.

¹⁰ John Whitmer, *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer*, ed. Bruce N. Westergren (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 56-57.

¹¹ Reynolds Cahoon, Diary, Church History Library, Salt lake City; Elden J. Watson, ed. *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: E.J. Watson, 1975). For more on this point, see Janet Ellingson, “Becoming a People: The Beliefs and Practices of the Early Mormons, 1830-1845” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1997), 124-25.

congregation in the established Congregational and Episcopalian churches, many upstart evangelical groups in early America utilized an itinerant preaching force to find and preach to potential converts. Methodists and Baptists were especially adept at spreading their message this way.¹² The Methodists were the most effective of these groups in this regard; “the Baptists,” John Wigger has noted, “simply could not match the canvassing power of the Methodist itinerants who preached nearly every day.”¹³ Nathan Hatch, whose study of vernacular preaching in early America examined itinerant missionaries in various churches, found something “particularly striking” about not only the Methodist ability to spread their message this way, but also the Mormons. According to Hatch, both groups possessed “a relentless drive to spread their message as widely as possible, what the Methodist *Discipline* called ‘the continual extension of that circumference on every hand.’” Furthermore, Methodists and Mormons employed a similar method to carrying out their plan. “Both movements,” Hatch continued, “did this by a strategy of transforming earnest converts into preachers with unprecedented speed and urging them to sustain a relentless pace of engagements in order to confront people with preaching everywhere, at any hour of the day or night.”¹⁴

But the similarities run deeper than Hatch suggests. Before the Mormons were reenacting the Book of Acts, Methodists were attempting to revive New Testament Christianity through the instrumentality of an itinerant ministry. As George Coleman explained, Methodism “is a *revival of the original New Testament organization*,

¹² For a comparison of Methodist and Baptist itinerants, see Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997), 86-116.

¹³ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 60.

¹⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 140.

particularly in restoring the itinerancy and brotherhood of the ministry” and “above all, a *revival of the missionary spirit*.”¹⁵ Charles Giles, another Methodist preacher, similarly described the circuit riders in terms reminiscent of the Book of Acts. They were “endowed with supernatural power, by which they spoke with tongues and performed miracles. . . . The Spirit of God attended their ministry, and signs and wonders followed them.”¹⁶ Like the Mormons after them, these Methodist preachers sent regular letters to church periodicals, serving both to update church leadership on progress in their assigned circuit and to shore up the faith of other Methodists. The *Methodist Magazine*, published in New York beginning in the second decade of the nineteenth century, generally included such correspondence in their “Religious and Missionary Intelligence” section, aimed to “please and edify the friends of Zion.” One regular writer assumed as his pen name, Theophilus Arminius, the first name being that of the recipient of Luke’s letters that constitute the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts in the New Testament.¹⁷

These nineteenth-century apostles further employed biblical imagery in shaping their identity by noting and celebrating their lack of theological training. Both Methodists and Mormons regularly noted that the New Testament apostles had no theological training. What John Wigger has said of Methodism in early America—that inspiration in the form of “visions, dreams, and supernatural impressions . . . served to validate Methodism in the absence of more traditional hierarchies” is equally true of early

¹⁵ “George Cookman Celebrates Achievements at Centennial,” 245-46.

¹⁶ Charles Giles, *Pioneer: A Narrative of the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Charles Giles* (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sanford, 1844), 60-62.

¹⁷ Theophilus Arminius’s real name was Thomas Hinde. He regularly wrote letters to *The Methodist Magazine* throughout the 1810s and the 1820s. The second half of his pseudonymous name is an homage to Jacobus Arminius, the Protestant theologian whose anti-Calvinist “Arminian” theology was adopted by John Wesley and the Methodists.

Mormonism.¹⁸ Parley P. Pratt, in his widely-disseminated tract, *A Voice of Warning*, thus contrasted the “doctrine of Christ” with the “doctrines of men” by noting that Mormons adhered to the biblical command in Hebrews 5:4—that “no man taketh this honour [to preach the gospel] upon himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron”—while the Protestants, Pratt mockingly suggested, believed that “no man taketh this honour upon himself, but one who has been educated for the purpose, and commissioned by men.” Demonstrating further that the Mormon Elders’ lack of education was intimately tied to their ability to receive inspiration in preaching, Pratt contrasted part of Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians with the “false doctrines of the nineteenth century.”

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it is written he taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and again the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain, therefore let no man glory in man.

For the wisdom of God is foolishness with the world, for it is written, let us educate young men for the ministry, and again let no man preach who has not been educated for the purpose, and especially receive no man who professes to be inspired.¹⁹

Simeon Carter likewise appealed to New Testament narrative in denouncing “learned” preachers he encountered on his missionary journey. His authority, Carter wrote, came from the Holy Spirit, who “has been my joy and comforter, director,

¹⁸ John H. Wigger, “Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, no. 2 (1994): 191.

¹⁹ Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People, Containing A Declaration of the Faith and Doctrine of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Commonly Called Mormons* (New York: W. Sandford, 1837), 205-06, 211. In an ironic twist, John Taylor would later borrow this from Pratt’s pamphlet in his response to and attack on British Methodists. See John Taylor, *Truth Defended and Methodism Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting: Being a Reply to the Third Address of the Rev. Robert Heys, Wesleyan Minister to the Wesleyan Methodist Society in Douglas and its Vicinity. And also An Exposure of the Principles of Methodism* (Liverpool: J. Tompkins, 1840).

instructor, teacher, and guide, and it has not suffered me to be confounded by the high-minded pharisee or priest.”²⁰

Methodist circuit riders and lay preachers were making similar contrasts between themselves and “sectarian preachers” years before the first Mormon Elders. Francis Asbury, as Nathan Hatch observed, was adamant that “the Methodists were distinctive and uniquely apostolic ... because the entire organizational structure, from bishop to circuit rider, was resolutely committed to an apostolic order of sacrifice and itinerancy.”²¹ Asbury thus stressed that the acts and experiences of the New Testament apostles proved that “in all ages to come, unlettered men should be raised up to preach the gospel with the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.”²² Thomas Ware expressed a similar sentiment. “Grace, rather than human learning, qualifies a man to preach.”²³ The experience of William Capers is illustrative. When he first felt the call to preach, Capers remembered suggesting to an experienced circuit rider that he should pursue “a regular course of divinity studies ... without interruption for several years.” The senior itinerant, William Gassaway, shot down the proposal, explaining that such was not the Methodist way. “He admitted that on my plan he might learn more theology, and be able to compose a better thesis,” Capers wrote. Gassaway then proceeded to explain that “the force of preaching” depended less on “a well-composed sermon, or an eloquent discourse” than it

²⁰ *The Evening and the Morning Star*, September 1832, 46.

²¹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 82.

²² Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, 3 vols. (Nashville and London: Epworth Press and Abingdon Press, 1958) 3:481.

²³ Thomas Ware, *Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware, Who Has Been an Itinerant Methodist Preacher for More Than Fifty Years* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1839), 175.

did on “the blessing of God” and “the naturalness and truthfulness of the preacher’s postulates. . . . The true question was as to usefulness, not eminence.”²⁴ This is crucial to understanding early Methodist preaching—their central aim was to move their audience, to induce in their listeners conviction, a point perhaps aided by their lack of theological education.²⁵

The first Mormon missionaries likewise utilized common sense reasoning and emotional appeals in their preaching, seeking to leave an impression on their listeners. In fact, many of sermons they preached differed little from those of other Christians of the day, focusing on shared gospel principles rather than uniquely Mormon doctrinal innovations.²⁶ The intent was, according to an early revelation received by Joseph Smith, to “preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth” so that “he that receiveth the word of truth . . . receive it by the Spirit of truth.”²⁷ More than one convert remarked that it was the missionaries’ presentation that convinced him of the truth of the Mormon message. They described the way the Elders’ message (or the Mormon literature they read) made them *feel*. Levi Hancock thus remarked that the first time he heard the Mormon message, “there seemed like a wash of something warm took me in the face and ran over my body which gave me feeling I cannot describe. . . . It is truth. I *feel* it.”²⁸

²⁴ William Capers, “Autobiography,” in *Life of William Capers, D.D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; Including an Autobiography*, ed. William Wightman (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing, 1859), 83-85; as cited in Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 74.

²⁵ See Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 71-78.

²⁶ See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 280; Ellingson, “Becoming a People,” 119-20; and Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 135-40.

²⁷ *Book of Commandments* 53:17-19 (Current *D&C* 50:17-21).

²⁸ Levi Hancock, “Diary of Levi W. Hancock,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT (hereinafter HBLI).

Whether or not Mormons intentionally borrowed the idea for itinerant missionaries from those around them, “[t]he Methodist precedent,” as Richard Bushman summarized, “probably helped Mormon converts understand what was expected.”²⁹ Such was certainly the case with Solomon Chamberlain and Phinehas Young, who after converting to Mormonism, each proceeded with their usual preaching along their assigned circuit. Only now they preached of the Book of Mormon. Chamberlain recalled that “I thot if I could see the reformed Methodists I could convince them of the truth of the Book of Mormon. I accordingly went to one of their conferences, where I met about 40 of their preachers and labored with them for two days.”³⁰ Young, meanwhile, “continued to preach” along his normal route “for more than a year” until he finally concluded that Mormonism and Methodism could not be connected.³¹

In addition to the Methodist precedent for the Mormon itinerancy, the duties and responsibilities of Mormon elders, priests, teachers, and deacons in a revelation on church organization entitled “The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ” mirrored in many respects the various officers and functions of the Methodist priesthood. Janet Ellingson, commenting on the similarities, noted that the recipients of the revelation, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, were probably “influenced by [their] understanding of the Methodist organization.” “The basic organization,” she explained, “with elders who had general oversight responsibilities along with exhorting and

²⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 153. See also Marie Mackey, “Priesthood and Ecclesiastical Structure in Early Nineteenth-Century Methodism and Mormonism,” in *Archive of Restoration Culture Summer Fellows’ Papers, 1997-1999* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History, 2000), 49, which makes the same point.

³⁰ Solomon Chamberlain, “Autobiography, 1788-1850,” 11, photocopy of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

³¹ Phinehas Young, “Life of Phinehas Howe Young—Written by Himself,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

baptizing, and local teachers who monitored the daily spiritual well-being of the members, closely paralleled the Methodists' structure of itinerant preachers and local class leaders.³²

Indeed, the duties of the Mormon teacher as outlined in the "Articles and Covenants" resemble closely those prescribed for class leaders in the Methodist *Discipline*. Mormon teachers were "to watch over the church always and be with them, and strengthen them, and see that there is no iniquity in the church. . . . And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty; . . . to warn, expound, exhort and teach, and invite all to come unto Christ."³³ The Methodist class leader, meanwhile, was to "see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to enquire how their souls prospers; [and] to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require."³⁴

The "Articles and Covenants" also instructed "the several elders composing this church of Christ . . . to meet in conference once in three months, or from time to time as they shall direct or appoint, to do church business whatsoever is necessary."³⁵ This system of quarterly conferences to conduct business also resembled that of the Methodist Episcopal Church. As Russell Richey has demonstrated, "American Methodism ordered and structured itself through conferences."³⁶ According to Richey, the conference served

³² Ellingson, "Becoming a People," 77-79. For an extended analysis of the "Articles and Covenants," see Scott H. Faulring, "An Examination of the 1829 'Articles of the Church of Christ' in Relation to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants," *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): 57-91.

³³ *Book of Commandments* 24:38-41 (cf. Current *D&C* 20:52-59).

³⁴ *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, With Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Hall, 1798), 133.

³⁵ *Book of Commandments* 24:43 (Current *D&C* 20:61-62).

three primary functions for early American Methodists, which he identified as “polity, fraternity, and revival.” The Methodist conference was a time to conduct ecclesiastical business, a time of reunion for itinerant preachers, and a setting in which to worship with leadership and laity alike.

The Methodist *Discipline* outlined the polity function of the conference: “to call together ... all the travelling and local preachers, exhorters, stewards, and leaders of the circuit, to hear complaints, and to receive appeals. To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the societies in [a] district.”³⁷ The several diaries and memoirs of itinerant preachers and presiding elders reveal the fraternal and revival aspects of the meetings, in addition to further clarifying on the sort of business conducted. Peter Cartwright’s autobiography, for example, describes multiple meetings in which licenses were granted and revoked, itinerants were assigned to new circuits, and members were disciplined. He also recounts reunions with old friends, meeting newly admitted and prospective circuit riders, and perhaps more than anything else, the edifying worship services conducted in conjunction with the conference. To Cartwright, the polity, fraternal, and revival aspects of the conference worked together to refresh and revive the gathered laity and leadership. He thus summarized one quarterly conference in 1822 by rejoicing that “the Methodist Church received an impetus and strength at this meeting, that vastly increased her usefulness, her members, and religious respectability.”³⁸

Kathleen Flake described the Mormon equivalent of these meetings as “the

³⁶ Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996), 13.

³⁷ *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, 46.

³⁸ Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curts, 1856), 159.

experience of holding Methodist meetings with Moses in their midst.”³⁹ By this she meant that not only did early Mormon conferences imitate the Methodist quarterly schedule, but that “in virtually every respect these early LDS conferences were identical to those of the Methodists.”

Sermons were preached; spiritual gifts tested; and social problems disposed of, together with the financial business of the growing church. Equally important to those present were the outpourings of the Spirit which confirmed the holiness of the work in which they were engaged.⁴⁰

Like the many quarterly conferences Peter Cartwright recalled attending in his autobiography, these Mormon conferences were aimed to “inspire [attendees] with fresh zeal and energy in the cause of truth.”⁴¹ Where the Mormons diverged from the Methodist precedent was in the presiding authority present at these meetings—the “Moses in their midst,” as Flake put it. “[T]he presence of Joseph Smith in their decision-making midst,” she explained, ultimately “caused [his followers] to change their understanding of church order even as they were practicing it in familiar ways.”⁴² By 1833, Smith was investing the Mormon conference system with “new and different content” and functions. While the quarterly system of meetings more or less persisted, the term “conference” gradually came to be understood as a general gathering of members for the purpose of worshipping together and listening to Joseph Smith’s inspired counsel.

³⁹ Kathleen Flake, “From Conferences to Councils: The Development of LDS Church Organization, 1830-1835,” in *Archive of Restoration Culture Summer Fellows’ Papers, 1997-1999* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History, 2000), 1.

⁴⁰ Flake, “From Conferences to Councils,” 1-2.

⁴¹ Manuscript History of the Church, A-1, 42, Church History Library; published in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1902), 1:86.

⁴² Flake, “From Conferences to Councils,” 3. While the presence of such a recognized authority as Smith certainly shaped many early Mormon conferences in ways different than most local Methodist conferences, Methodist elders often deferred to Bishop Francis Asbury’s decision-making authority at conferences in which he was present. For an example of one such conference, see Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 24.

“Council,” meanwhile, became the preferred term for the conducting of ecclesiastical business among the church leadership, which gradually expanded from a group of elders, priests, teachers, and deacons to a more complex and hierarchical system that by 1835 included three governing “councils” in charge of leading the church—the First Presidency, with Smith as President; High Councils in each of the church’s two central locations—Ohio and Missouri; and the Council of the Twelve Apostles.⁴³

What Flake was either unaware of or ignored in her otherwise excellent analysis was that Methodism actually experienced a similar shift in how it understood the role and functions of conference. Lester Ruth’s recent book on the development of Methodist quarterly meetings in early America reveals that in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the revival and liturgical functions of the conference largely came to define quarterly meetings.⁴⁴ In 1804, the Discipline lengthened the official title of the business portion of the meeting from “quarterly meeting” to “quarterly meeting conference.”⁴⁵ While Mormons thus adopted *council* to refer to the administrative aspect of *conference*, the Methodists had instead chosen to more narrowly define *conference* as that business portion of the broader meeting’s agenda. “The change,” according to Ruth, “indicated a novel attempt to distinguish the quarterly meeting as a whole from the business section now designated as the ‘quarterly meeting conference.’ ... The business, though important, was often moved to the periphery as quarterly meetings became the first true

⁴³ See Flake, “From Conferences to Councils,” 4. For helpful organizational charts, see Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 455-57.

⁴⁴ Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000).

⁴⁵ *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 12th ed. (New-York: T. Kirk for the Methodist Society, 1804), 19.

extended meetings for American Methodist worship and revival.”⁴⁶ Despite their divergence in preferred vocabulary to describe the business and worship portions of their religiosity, Mormon worship services would in many respects resemble those of the Methodists.

Recent scholarship examining early Methodist worship posits that contrary to early treatments that portrayed such worship as liturgically impoverished, Methodists in early America were actually quite sacramental. “Instead of liturgical shallowness,” argues Lester Ruth, “early American Methodists practiced an amazing complexity of services and rituals.”⁴⁷ These various services—including not only the popular and large camp meetings, but also the more intimate and frequent class meetings, love feasts, prayer meetings, and watch nights—gave early American Methodism “a peculiar identity.” Of course, as Karen Westerfield Tucker has pointed out, these services were not “terribly original” and “share affinities with non-Methodist, even non-American, forms.” Methodists, however, utilized these existing forms “to reinforce their Arminian claims that all persons, in every place, should be offered an opportunity, and indeed persuaded, to accept and embrace God’s boundless love.”⁴⁸ The same could be said of the early Mormons. They too drew upon “available resources” in their attempts to spread their message and establish a Zion society. In worship, as in organizational structure, Mormon practices closely paralleled those of the Methodists.

⁴⁶ Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, 42-43.

⁴⁷ Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79.

As in Methodism, early Mormon church organization was directly tied to worship. What Nathan Hatch called “the organizational genius of Methodists and Mormons,”—that is, the system of itinerant preachers, small classes or branches, and the empowerment of common people to lead those efforts—was “centrally directed in a fixed, even authoritarian, system.”⁴⁹ This organizational style and emphasis on discipline in which church leaders enforced strict boundaries of orthopraxy was crucial to creating an atmosphere in the relatively restricted class meetings and love feasts in which the converted shared intimate experiences with one another and invoked God’s blessings (and oft-times his presence) on the group of believers.

John Wigger has written that “[t]he class meeting was the most basic building block of early American Methodism.”⁵⁰ It was also the fundamental venue for Methodist worship. There, class members would confess their faults, bear testimony, and exhort one another. They would sing and pray as well, all directed at invoking God’s presence.⁵¹ In addition to class meetings, Methodists employed prayer meetings, love feasts, watch nights, and camp meetings as part of what Wigger called the “social principle” of Wesleyan religion. Such meetings were to supplement regular Sunday worship and helped differentiate Methodists from their neighbors in the early American republic.

Mormons similarly utilized a combination of Sunday and weekday worship services. Joseph Smith’s early revelations did not specify in detail appropriate forms of worship. Instead, they exhorted “the inhabitants of Zion” to “observe the Sabbath day to

⁴⁹ Nathan O. Hatch, “Mormon and Methodist: Popular Religion in the Crucible of the Free Market,” *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 33.

⁵⁰ Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 81.

⁵¹ See Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 83-87.

keep it holy,”⁵² and counseled Elders to “conduct the meetings as they are led by the Holy Ghost”—instructions fairly ambiguous and open to interpretation and adaptation. As already discussed, the “Articles and Covenants” also commanded priests, teachers, and deacons, in the absence of an elder, “to warn, expound, exhort and teach,” but gave no further details regarding specific procedure.⁵³ In counsel and in practice, these early Latter-day Saint worship services resembled those of the Methodists. The General Council of bishops and presiding elders of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1789 determined that “the exercise of public worship on the Lord’s day, shall be singing, prayer, and reading the Holy Scriptures, with exhortation or reading a sermon, in the absence of a preacher.”⁵⁴ In both Methodism and Mormonism, instructions for Sunday worship allowed for flexibility in how the meetings were carried out. Commenting on this point, Karen Westerfield Tucker explained that one reason for Methodists’ “avoidance of formalism in worship” was because it could “potentially stifle the Spirit. . . . Simplicity was preferred, since the unadorned gospel message was best represented to plain folk by simple means.”⁵⁵ The same was equally true of early Mormonism.

In all of these meetings and forms of worship, the goal was to create an atmosphere which was conducive to experiencing the divine. As previously stated, the supplemental worship meetings preferred by Methodists included class meetings, prayer meetings, love feasts, and camp meetings. The prayer meeting, in some ways similar to class meetings, included “[e]xtemporaneous prayers, Scripture readings, hymn singing,

⁵² *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835) 22:4 (Current *D&C* 68:29).

⁵³ *Book of Commandments* 24:39, 41 (cf. Current *D&C* 20:52-59).

⁵⁴ Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists, in the United States of America; Beginning in 1766, and Continued Till 1809* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 153.

⁵⁵ Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 11.

conversations, and testimonies.”⁵⁶ Occasionally, though less frequently, they also included a short sermon. These small group meetings could either be scheduled or could occur spontaneously wherever Methodists gathered. Peter Cartwright thus recalled that “[o]ne night I heard of a prayer-meeting near by where I lodged.” His account of the meeting describes both the general order such meetings followed and the effects. “I went, took the book, read a chapter readily, sung a hymn clearly, knelt and prayed with more than my accustomed liberty, and got happy,” Cartwright recorded. “The family wept. We talked, wept, and sung together, and I felt as independent of the devil ... as if there were no such beings in the world.”⁵⁷ Itinerant preacher William Jessop’s account of a similar meeting is even more explicit in documenting the charismatic experience enjoyed by participants. After singing and prayer, he recorded with excitement that “at the end of the meeting the blessed Samaritan passed by and paid us a glorious visit. The Holy Ghost descended upon us [in] mighty rushing wind, and the glory of God filled the house where we were. The shout of a king was in the midst, and many souls rejoiced in the Lord.”⁵⁸

Mormonism likewise utilized this system of small and intimate gatherings to supplement their larger Sunday services. By the mid-1830s, Sunday worship in Kirtland, Ohio, had settled into a standard schedule that consisted of morning, afternoon, and evening meetings. The morning service included congregational singing, vocal prayer, and one or two short sermons. The afternoon session mirrored closely the morning service, except that the Lord’s Supper was generally administered in this afternoon

⁵⁶ Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 230. For more on the order and structure of Methodist prayer meetings, see Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, 84-85.

⁵⁷ Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 131.

⁵⁸ William Jessop, Journal, 9 February 1788, as cited in Lester Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2005), 195.

gathering.⁵⁹ Prayer meetings were held on Sunday evenings and weeknights. These much smaller gatherings resembled those often conducted in Methodist classes and at quarterly conferences—exhortation was offered, hymns were sung, and testimonies were born. Joseph Smith’s journal notes his repeated attendance at these prayer meetings. The entry in his journal for October 25, 1835, for instance, reads, “at evening I attended prayer meeting opened it and exorted, the brethren & Sister[s] about one hour, the Lord poured out his spirit and some glorious things, were spoken in the gift of toungs, and interepreted concerning the redemption of Zion.”⁶⁰

Church meetings in Mormonism’s peripheral regions—the branches organized by missionaries—followed a similar format. Sunday services conducted by traveling elders—in which the Lord’s Supper was administered and converted persons were baptized—were often supplemented with Sunday evening meetings and weeknight services that centered around prayer, exhortation, and group singing. William E. McLellin’s journal entry for August 21, 1831 details a typical Sunday:

Sunday 21st The Brethren met at brother Lewis’s and had a sacrament meeting. bro. J. Corrill Lectured from the 1st Chapter of Gallatians. His remarks were very plain and conclusive. A number of brethren and sisters spoke of the marvelous works of God & of their willingness and determinations to serve him & keep all his commandments. ... The meeting was dismissed and we assembled again at the schoolhouse, near, that evening and held a praymeeting. ... I really felt happy that I had seen the day that I could meet with such a people and worship God in the beauty of Holiness.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Milton V. Backman, Jr., *The Heaven Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 277.

⁶⁰ Joseph Smith, Journal, 25 October 1835, in *JSP, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, 73.

⁶¹ *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831-1836*, ed. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, UT and Urbana: BYU Studies and University of Illinois Press, 1994), 34.

After organizing a branch of the church in an outlying region, a Mormon missionary would typically instruct the newly baptized converts to meet together regularly. As in Methodist prayer meetings, exhortation and prayer, interspersed with singing, defined the general procedure of these Mormon meetings.⁶²

Like most Christians in antebellum America, singing was an integral part of early Mormon worship services. Many of the hymns sung at Mormon meetings were borrowed from other denominations. When Joseph Smith's wife Emma was commanded by revelation to compile a selection of hymns for use in Latter-day Saint worship, she relied upon her copy of a Methodist hymnal from her youth that was intended to be used by "the pious of all denominations."⁶³ As Michael Hicks has shown, at least fifty of the ninety hymns included in that first Mormon hymnbook "were overtly borrowed and rewritten Protestant hymns," among which were hymns penned by both John and Charles Wesley, as well those written by English dissenters popular among (and popularized in America by) the Methodists, including Isaac Watts and Edward Perronet.⁶⁴

In addition to class and prayer meetings, Methodists participated in what Karen Westerfield Tucker characterized as the "great festivals" of Wesleyan religion. These

⁶² See Matthew A. Crawford, "Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1834" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007), 106-07; and William G. Hartley, "The McLellin Journals and Early Mormon History," in Shipp and Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin*, 277-79.

⁶³ Jay Leon Slaughter, "The Role of Music in the Mormon Church, School, and Life" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1964), 49. Emma Smith's compilation was published in 1835 as *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, OH: F.G. Williams & Co., 1835). For more on the hymns sung at Methodist worship meetings, see chapter 6, "The Music of Methodist Worship," in Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 156-75.

⁶⁴ Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 20. See also Hicks's recent essay on the hymns actually sung by early Latter-day Saints. Michael Hicks, "What Hymns Early Mormons Sang and How They Sang Them," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 95-118.

included the love feast, watch night, and the camp meeting.⁶⁵ The love feast was modeled after Methodists' understanding of the agape feast of the early Christians, and was adopted by John Wesley after he was exposed to the Moravian practice of the ancient ritual. Wesley explained his vision for the Methodist version:

In order to increase in them a grateful sense of all His mercies, I desired that one evening in a quarter all the men in band, on a second, all the women, would meet; and on a third, both men and women together; that we might together "eat bread" (as the ancient Christians did) "with gladness and singleness of heart." At these love-feasts ... our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed, not only with "the meat which perisheth," but with "that which endureth to everlasting life."⁶⁶

The general format for these meetings outlined by Wesley persisted in early American Methodism. Often, attendees would fast in preparation for their "feast." Once gathered, they would sing, pray, listen to a short sermon or exhortation, solicit a collection for the poor, and partake of a ritual meal of bread and water. In some cases, the sacramental meal of bread and wine would be substituted for the bread and water. Central to love feasts, though, was the bearing of testimony by lay members and preachers alike.⁶⁷ The theme of the love feast was captured nicely in the following verses from a hymn penned by New York Methodist Ebenezer Hills:

Come, Jesus, crown our feast of love.
We come to meet thee here.
Send down thy Spirit from above
And drooping souls to cheer. ...

Here, Lord, thy children thou dost meet,
To feed the hungry child

⁶⁵ Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 60-81.

⁶⁶ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 267-68.

⁶⁷ Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 61-62.

The bread of life divinely sweet,
Through Jesus reconciled. ...

Glory to God, come, taste, his love,
Brethren and sisters all.
In streams of blessings from above
From heaven now may it fall. ...

A feast of love we then shall keep
Of perfect love professed,
At God's right hand then take a seat
And reign among the blest.⁶⁸

In Kirtland, Mormons often gathered for similar meetings. After the completion of the first Mormon temple there, these meetings were held regularly on the first Thursday of each month. Milton Backman summarized the procedure of these meetings:

The meeting usually commenced at ten o'clock in the morning and continued until four in the afternoon. During most of these meetings, the white cloth curtains were lowered, dividing the main floor of the temple into four compartments. Consequently, what had been one meeting became four, each presided over by an elder. Members sang, prayed, and bore their testimonies, describing manifestations of the power of God in their lives and exhorting others to live the gospel.⁶⁹

Mormons, however, did not refer to these meetings as "love feasts." Such language was used for another type of Mormon meeting. William W. Phelps, the most prolific of all early Mormon hymn writers, wrote a distinctly Mormon hymn to celebrate what he called a "feast of fat things":

There's a feast of fat things for the righteous preparing,
That the good of this world all saints may be sharing; ...
Come to the supper—come to the supper—
Come to the supper of the great Bridegroom. ...

Go gather the willing and push them together,
Yea, push them to Zion (the saints' rest forever,)

⁶⁸ Ebenezer Hills hymnal, Hymn 46, Ezekiel Cooper Papers, vol. 24; as cited in Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 213-14.

⁶⁹ Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, 280.

Where the best that the heavens and earth can afford,
Will grace the great marriage and feast of the Lord.⁷⁰

It appears that the first Mormon “feasts” of this sort were primarily concerned with feeding the community’s poor. Instead of passing around a collection plate for the poor as the Methodists did, they instead invited the poor to feast with them. Bishop Newel K. Whitney apparently established this practice in response to a revelation commanding him to “travel round about and among all the churches, searching after the poor to administer to their wants.”⁷¹ Such gatherings combined a literal feast of plentiful food with elements of worship, including the singing of hymns and exhortation.⁷²

Over time though, yet another Mormon service assumed the title of “feast.” “Blessing feasts,” as they were called, were held in conjunction with the receiving of one’s patriarchal blessing.⁷³ Often two or three families would gather in one family’s home to worship together and receive patriarchal blessings from Joseph Smith, Sr. William W. Phelps wrote to his wife describing his attendance at one such meeting in 1835:

I attended a feast at the house of Bro. Zera S. Coles; about sixty guests were present, a number of whom were blessed by Father Joseph Smith[.] ... This was the first and greatest blessing feast I have ever attended. The greatest solemnity and harmony prevailed. ... We sang “There’s a feast of

⁷⁰ “Hymn 35,” *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints*, 48. For more on this hymn, see Hicks, “What Hymns Early Mormons Sang and How They Sang Them,” 100-01.

⁷¹ *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835) 4:22 (Current *D&C* 84:112).

⁷² See Mark L. Staker, “‘Thou Art the Man’: Newel K. Whitney in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 42, no. 1 (2003):114-15.

⁷³ In 1833, Joseph Smith began “blessing” the men closest to him. In 1833 or 1834, Smith ordained his father as official church Patriarch, and Joseph Smith, Sr. began giving blessings that revealed an individual’s Israelite lineage and made certain promises to the person. The fullest treatment of Patriarchs and patriarchal blessings to date is Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). A number of the early blessings have been collected and published as H. Michael Marquardt, ed., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007).

fat things”, “O Behold the Lord is nigh,” etc. The greatest wishes of the guest[s] were that we might soon celebrate a feast in the land of Zion.⁷⁴

Nancy Tracy recalled another blessing feast just two months after the one Phelps attended. “[W]e made a feast,” she wrote. “[W]e were to receive our Patriarchal Blessings under the hands of Father Joseph Smith[.] we invited until the house was full partook of refreshments and wine received our blessings and had instructions from some of the twelve that was present and it was a feast to our souls.”⁷⁵ Joseph Smith occasionally attended these feasts as well, recording in his journal on one occasion, “suffice it to say that we had a glorious meeting,” and after another one, “our hearts were made glad while partaking of the antipast of those Joys that will be poured upon the heads of the Saints w[h]en they are gathered together on Mount Zion to enjoy each others society forever more.”⁷⁶

In what it perhaps the most striking example of resemblance to the Methodist love feast in early Mormonism, Wilford Woodruff described a portion of the “Solumn assembly” held in the Kirtland Temple on April 6, 1837:

After the Presidency Closed their remarks the twelve were Called upon to break bread for the multitude (as Jesus did in the days of the Apostles) that they might all be filled. They did so & we were all filled & was made glad. ...

⁷⁴ W.W. Phelps, December 16, 1835, *Journal History of the Church*, 1; available on *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), DVD 1; this entry was also included in Bruce Van Orden, “Writing to Zion: The Williams W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835-1836),” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 3 (1993): 568-69. Some commentators have suggested that these “blessing feasts” were the same thing as those “feasts” instigated by N.K. Whitney on behalf of the poor. However, Phelps wrote “There’s A Feast of Fat Things” in celebration of the latter nearly an entire year before he attended “the first and greatest blessing feast” referred to here, indicating that there were two types of feasts present in Mormon worship.

⁷⁵ Nancy Tracy, “A Short Sketch of the Life and Travels of Nancy N. Tracy,” (1885), 5, typescript of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁷⁶ Joseph Smith, *Journal*, 29 December 1835, in *JSP, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, 139; and 7 January 1836, in *JSP, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, 146.

After the feast was Closed thanks was returned to GOD with uplifted hands to heaven this being about the setting of the son. All had the privilege of returning to their houses that felt disposed & the rest might spend the night in the house of the Lord in prayer, & exhortation, praise & thanksgiving.

At about candle light the meeting commenced with great interest. Joseph requested the congregation to speak their feelings freely & pray according to the spirit. The saints began to open their mouths & they were filled with language unto edification one a prayer another exhortation some a doctrin & a psalm others a tounge, some an interpretation. Prophecy was also poured out upon us & all things was done decently & in order & the night was spent gloriously by the saints. Much of the gifts of the gospel rested on us.⁷⁷

In this example, not only is there a simple feast and the bearing of testimonies, but in a language similar to that used by Methodists, the ritual feast is identified as a social meal in the tradition of those from “the days of the Apostles.” Even more significantly, though, Woodruff’s journal affirms that the result of the intimate feast and meeting was the reception of spiritual gifts used to edify all in attendance.

Two other aspects of the meeting described by Woodruff are noteworthy in light of early nineteenth-century Methodist practices. First, it was part of a protracted meeting—that is, a long meeting that combines various forms of worship often held over the course of several days. As mentioned previously, Methodist quarterly conferences in the early American republic expanded to include not only meetings for the elders to conduct church business, but also various worship services. With the adoption of the camp meeting as an integral part of those quarterly conferences in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Methodists came to favor a protracted meeting format that combined church business with camp meeting, prayer meetings, and love feasts. Secondly, the meeting described by Woodruff was a late night service. In addition to the camp meeting

⁷⁷ Wilford Woodruff, Journal, 6 April 1837, as cited in *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 1:135.

and love feast, the other “great festival” of Methodism in early America was the watch night. Initially designed by John Wesley as the Methodist take on a similar Moravian night service, the watch night was primarily intended as an alternative to worldly evening activities and was often reserved for Christmas eve and New Year’s eve. But in America, it became a less-formal and more spontaneous affair. Karen Westerfield Tucker summarized the watch night as practiced in early America:

The expectation of every watch night was the outpouring of the manifold blessings of God. The themes of repentance, ... readiness for the eschatological judgment, and watching and waiting all were intended to provoke a response of faith. These emphases were sometimes reinforced by the inclusion of other ritual acts at the watch night, such as the love feast, baptism, and reception into church membership.⁷⁸

These services, unlike the camp meeting and even the class meetings held at quarterly conferences, were restricted to converted church members, and when deemed necessary consisted solely of clergy. The all-night service described above by Woodruff fits this general pattern; following a worship service attended by a large congregation, a select group of priesthood brethren decided to gather for exhortation, instruction, prayer, a ritual meal, and most importantly, to experience together a range of spiritual gifts. The 1837 meetings surrounding the “solemn assembly” detailed in Wilford Woodruff’s journal were not new among the Latter-day Saints, either. Similar protracted meetings that combined worship services similar to those Methodists participated in at quarterly meetings occurred among the Mormons in conjunction with the construction and dedication of the first Latter-day Saint temple in 1835 and 1836.

Lester Ruth has persuasively argued that the various services conducted at Methodist quarterly meetings were each part of what John Wesley called the “means of

⁷⁸ Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 66-67.

grace”—that is, “certain practices and occasions through which God was thought to convey grace.”⁷⁹ Traditional treatments of Methodism’s great festivals—especially studies examining the camp meeting—have generally interpreted these services almost exclusively as means of convicting and converting grace. That is, the sole purpose was the conviction and conversion of unchurched sinners. One historian thus summarized the purpose of the camp meeting in the introduction to a 1974 book on the subject by explaining that “Aimed at converting the population from irreligion to the church, camp-meeting religion offered not only a coherent view of man’s place in the world, but also a way of handling the difficulties of life on the frontier.”⁸⁰

More recently, however, historians of Methodism have emphasized that the camp meeting is best understood “not only as an instrument for obtaining conversions but also sacramentally, as a place that physically represented sacrality and a place enchanted with the presence of God.”⁸¹ Converted Methodists would gather from regions near and far for the quarterly meetings. Contrary to suggestions that such meetings were designed solely as a means of converting convicted sinners, then, these meetings were largely gatherings of the faithful seeking additional religious experience. For some, this further experience would be sanctification, which would often occur in similar fashion to the visionary conversions experienced by Methodists discussed in chapter three, except that it was described in language that demonstrated a surety that one had experienced “holiness” or

⁷⁹ Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 191. See also Ruth’s book-length analysis of worship at Methodist quarterly meetings, *A Little Heaven Below*.

⁸⁰ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 4.

⁸¹ Steven D. Cooley, “Manna and the Manual: Sacramental and Instrumental Constructions of the Victorian Methodist Camp Meeting during the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Religion and American Culture* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 134.

“perfection”—the two most commonly used words used by sanctified Methodists in describing their experience.⁸² But even for those who did not experience this second blessing, attendance at the quarterly meeting often refreshed and revived one’s commitment to the pursuit of holiness. Jessee Lee thus celebrated the close of one camp meeting by rejoicing in “the quickening influence of the Holy Ghost upon the hearts of believers.”⁸³ Another Methodist leader noted that the camp meeting’s primary purpose was to serve as a sacred retreat for the church to meet together and then “return to the world transformed.”⁸⁴ Thus worship at quarterly meetings served to spiritually empower the attendees so that they might increase in their daily devotion and piety.

This notion of spiritual empowerment—of an additional blessing bestowed upon a community of believers gathered for that purpose—found expression in early Mormonism, too. In July 1830, Joseph Smith received a revelation announcing that the church “should go to the Ohio,” with the promise that “there you shall be endowed with power from on high.”⁸⁵ In the months following the community’s move, additional revelations repeated the promise, this time with further instructions. A revelation received in early 1831 commanded the Saints, “sanctify yourselves and ye shall be endowed with power.”⁸⁶ In process of time, the promised endowment came to be connected with the construction of the temple and intimately tied to notions of the priesthood. In 1834,

⁸² Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 101-07.

⁸³ Jessee Lee, as quoted in John M’Lean, *Sketch of Rev Philip Gatch* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1854), 131.

⁸⁴ Gilbert Haven, quoted in George Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple* (Boston: John Best, 1873), 3-6; as cited in Cooley, “Manna and the Manual,” 132.

⁸⁵ *Book of Commandments* 40:28 (Current *D&C* 38:32).

⁸⁶ *Book of Commandments* 45:16 (Current *D&C* 43:16).

Joseph Smith received a revelation in which the Lord explained that “the first elders of my church should receive their endowment from on high in my house, which I have commanded to be built unto my name in the land of Kirtland.”⁸⁷ It was in and through the priesthood that Latter-day Saints “found a key to the godly powers they longed for.”⁸⁸ By locating spiritual empowerment in priesthood, Joseph Smith took a different approach than Methodists and other evangelicals. Whereas Methodists sought to convict sinners of guilt and to sanctify converted souls through preaching and exhortation aimed at humbling the individual, Smith utilized a system of ritual washing, anointing, and blessing.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the endowment of power sought by the Saints maintained key components suggestive of Methodist influence.

Methodists in nineteenth-century America imbued their camp meetings with sacred significance, utilizing a variety of biblical allusions to describe the events that took place. Among the biblical imagery used were allusions to temple building and the day of Pentecost.⁹⁰ One Methodist thus described the camp meeting setting: “It is like God’s ancient and holy hill of Zion on her brightest festival days, when the priests conducted the processions of the people to the glorious temple of Jehovah.”⁹¹ Philip Gatch thus suggested that the groves in which Methodists worshipped were “God’s first temples” while others variously referred to camp meetings as “the house of God” and the “gate of

⁸⁷ Current *D&C* 105:33.

⁸⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 159.

⁸⁹ Ellingson, “Becoming a People,” 126-63; and Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 314.

⁹⁰ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 112.

⁹¹ Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw*, 65-66; as cited in Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 107.

heaven.”⁹² Yet another Methodist, meanwhile, noted that no other event he could think of could compare to the camp meeting in terms of the pouring out of God’s spirit, “except the account in scripture of the day of Pentecost. Never, I believe, was the like seen since the apostolic age.”⁹³

Such descriptions, of course, bear striking resemblance to the language used by Mormons to describe the events that took place during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, or as they preferred to call it, the “House of the Lord.” Joseph Smith thus prayed in the dedicatory prayer:

O Jehovah, have mercy upon this people, and as all men sin forgive the transgressions of they people, and let them be blotted out forever. Let the anointing of thy ministers be sealed upon them with power from on high. Let it be fulfilled upon those on the day of Pentecost; let the gift of tongues be poured out upon thy people, even cloven tongues as of fire, and the interpretation thereof. And let thy house be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory.⁹⁴

Both Methodists and Mormons thus drew upon such biblical imagery because each sought to confirm their identity as God’s chosen people in the same sense that Old Testament temple builders and New Testament disciples were God’s people. But such expressions—both within Methodism and Mormonism—were not merely metaphors. The physical manifestation of God’s presence was very real to both groups. Conversions, visions, glossolalia, and the pouring out of God’s Holy Spirit permeate the reports of both Methodist camp meetings and Mormon temple worship. One report of a Methodist camp

⁹² Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer; or, Incidents of the Life and Times of Rev. Alfred Brunson, A.M., D.D., Embracing a Period of Over Seventy Years*, Vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Hithcock and Walden, 1872), 64-65; and “Revivals of Religion; Communication from a gentleman in Troy,” *The Western Christian Monitor*, October 1816, 516.

⁹³ Phillip Cox, “Extract of a Letter from Mr. Phillip Cox, dated Brunswick-County, Virginia,” *Arminian Magazine*, November 1788, 93.

⁹⁴ The text of the prayer was published in the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, March 1836, 278-79. It has since been canonized as *Doctrine and Covenants* Section 109.

meeting in 1816 summarized that “[t]hey have indeed a little Pentecostal season! The dear little children are speaking with new tongues, and in a new language.”⁹⁵ Ezekiel Cooper recalled that at one quarterly meeting, “How the love of heaven burned on the altars of our hearts! The place was truly awful because of God’s presence! It appeared like the very suburbs of heaven.”⁹⁶ Nancy Tracy described her experience at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in similar language:

In the spring following, the Temple was finished and dedicated. We continued for two days, and they were two of the happiest days of my life. The fitting hymn that was composed for the occasion was “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning.” It was verily true that the Heavenly Influence rested down upon that house, and the people were glorious and long to be remembered. Heavenly beings appeared to many. I attended both days. I felt that it was heaven on earth, and I said, “Shall we always enjoy such blessings?”⁹⁷

Over the course of four months—from January to April 1836—Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, experienced what they most often referred to as a “pentecostal season.” Throughout January, February, and March, Latter-day Saints gathered within the temple’s walls to sing, pray, exhort, and enjoy an abundance of spiritual gifts. As Steven Harper summarized, “the Kirtland Temple made these witnesses heirs of the Israelite Patriarchs and the Apostolic Church.”⁹⁸ During those same months, Joseph Smith instructed the priesthood of the church, introducing various ordinances that included the

⁹⁵ “Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Hancock County, Georgia, to his Brother in Bryan County, dated April 10, 1816,” *The Western Christian Monitor*, August 1816, 379.

⁹⁶ Ezekiel Cooper to “Dear Brother,” 14 August 1789, Ezekiel Cooper Papers; as cited in Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 196.

⁹⁷ Nancy Tracy, “Life History of Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy, Written by herself” (1890), 9; typescript of original, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, HBLL.

⁹⁸ Steven C. Harper, “‘A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed’: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, ed. John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book, 2005), 329.

ritual washing of feet and anointing with oil. Additionally, he taught them an organized shout as another facet of proper worship in the temple. The “Hosanna Shout,” as it has come to be known among Mormons, has received only moderate attention from historians. Richard Bushman, in his biography of Joseph Smith, noted that the Kirtland Temple dedication “closed with a ceremonial gesture—a shout in the Methodist tradition,” but offered no further commentary.⁹⁹ Earlier treatments of the shout’s origin and history emphasized that the shout was a part of Joseph Smith’s restoration of proper temple worship and that he probably first became aware of such practices from his translation of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰⁰ More recently, Jacob Olmstead attempted to situate the Hosanna Shout within the developing thought of Joseph Smith and the surrounding culture of his day. As Olmstead showed, the spontaneous shouts of joy and praise common to the culture of evangelical revivals in the early nineteenth century found expression in early Mormonism, too. In worship meetings and following baptisms and blessings, various Latter-day Saints like Ebenezer Robinson “shouted aloud, ‘Glory to God.’”¹⁰¹ Noting that the organized shouts of Hosanna in 1836 appear to represent something different than those spontaneous shouts, Olmstead argued that “the shout, ...led by a priesthood authority and ...given as a congregation ... illustrate[s] the critical differences between the shouting practiced by Protestant religions of the day and the

⁹⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 317.

¹⁰⁰ Reed Durham, “What is the Hosanna Shout?” *New Era* 3, no. 9 (September 1973): 14-15; Lael J. Woodbury, “The Origin of the Hosanna Shout,” in *Sperry Lecture Series* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 18-22; and Steven C. Heath, “The Sacred Shout,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 115-23.

¹⁰¹ As cited in Jacob W. Olmstead, “From Pentecost to Administration: A Reappraisal of the History of the Hosanna Shout,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 12.

ritual introduced by Joseph Smith.”¹⁰² Such a characterization of the shouting common to camp meetings is only partially correct, though.

Methodists in the early American republic were widely known for their ritual shouting at camp meetings. In contrast to the erratic and more random individual shouts of praise and joy common to evangelical (as well as early Mormon) worship, the “shouting Methodists” earned their nickname and reputation for the systematized shouts that Ann Taves described as a form of “interactive performance,” in which Methodist preachers responded to the “congregational pressure” to “develop a more interactive preaching style. This congregational pressure,” she explains, “most likely had its roots in the call-and-response styles to which Africans were accustomed.”¹⁰³ What started as a grassroots movement to adapt interactive performance as a component of public worship eventually became a largely-accepted approach to camp meeting religion by both black and white Methodists in the early nineteenth century, and was later influential on the worship styles of other religious communities that had roots in the Methodist tradition. Taves identified Methodist-turned-mesmerist La Roy Sunderland, Methodist-turned-Adventist Ellen White, and the Holiness and Pentecostal movements of the later nineteenth century as examples, arguing each was “informed by and in turn reconstituted the [Methodist] shout tradition.”¹⁰⁴

Like the forms of shouting developed by these Methodists, the “Hosanna Shout” practiced by Latter-day Saints was intentional and planned. In addition to engaging both

¹⁰² Olmstead, “From Pentecost to Administration,” 14.

¹⁰³ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 81. Taves devotes a full chapter to the “Shouting Methodists” in *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 76-117.

¹⁰⁴ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 117.

clergy and laity in an interactive performance, Methodist shouting was reinforced with “movement and music,” both intended to invoke God’s presence. While the bodily movement in camp meetings often included the various jumping, barking, and falling exercises so widely-associated with camp meetings in early America (and so severely criticized by Joseph Smith and other early Mormon leaders), it could also manifest itself in congregants forming prayer circles or simultaneously standing all at once in response to the pouring out of God’s Spirit on the congregation.¹⁰⁵ Neither of these latter manifestations was foreign to early Mormonism, and the second manifestation, in fact, occurred during the course of the 1836 temple dedication. Near the close of the meeting, Joseph Smith explained,

Brother George A. Smith arose and began to prophesy, when a noise was heard like the sound of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the Temple, and all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; other saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels, which fact I declared to the congregation.¹⁰⁶

The music selected to be sung by the congregation at the Kirtland Temple dedication likewise reinforced the shouting tradition of Methodist camp meetings. One hymn sung—entitled “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning,”—was written specifically for the temple dedication by W.W. Phelps. It reiterated not only the biblical imagery used to describe the worship services in the temple—including allusions to both the Old and New Testament symbolism mentioned earlier—but celebrated the shout as an integral part of temple worship:

We’ll sing and we’ll shout with His armies of heaven:

¹⁰⁵ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 101.

¹⁰⁶ *Manuscript History of the Church*, Volume B-1, note J, Addenda, 3; available on *Selected Collections*, DVD 1.

Hosanna, hosanna to God and the Lamb!
Let glory to them in the highest be given,
Henceforth and forever, amen and amen.¹⁰⁷

The hymn immediately followed the hosanna shout, thus driving home the message and further engaging the congregation in the interactive worship at hand. Worship in the first Mormon temple, then, shared much in common with the camp meetings of the Methodists. Mormons sought to establish their temple as a sacred place. Like their Methodist forebears, these Mormons defined sacred space by utilizing biblical typology in their discourse, singing, and praying—all aimed at producing a sacred space “in which God’s presence and power might be known.”¹⁰⁸ Yet for Mormons, the shout took on new meanings. Whereas the shout was a means of celebrating God’s immediacy in Methodist worship, in Mormon temple worship it was “an important element to the sealing portion of [the] ordinances” introduced by Joseph Smith in 1836.¹⁰⁹ Joseph Smith thus recorded in his journal the day of the dedication that “We then sealed the proceedings of the day by shouting hosanna to God and the Lamb 3 times sealing it each time with Amen, Amen, and Amen.”¹¹⁰ It is also important to note that whereas Methodists repeatedly alluded to the shout at the laying of the cornerstone of Zerubbabel’s temple in Ezra 3 in an effort to justify the practice of shouting, Mormons employed no such biblical imagery in their descriptions of the Hosanna Shout.¹¹¹ At most, they indirectly drew upon the biblical imagery of the gathering of Israel and the day

¹⁰⁷ *A Collection of Sacred Hymns*, 121. For a sampling of Methodist camp meeting hymns emphasizing shouting, see Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, 229-33.

¹⁰⁸ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Olmstead, “From Pentecost to Administration,” 14.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Smith, Journal, 27 March 1836, in *JSP, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, 211.

¹¹¹ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 112.

of Pentecost, but only insomuch as the shout was a part of the larger services conducted in the Kirtland Temple.

The dedicatory services of the Kirtland Temple incorporated more than just “a shout in the Methodist tradition,” though. As mentioned above, the services—held over the course of several days—resembled the protracted meetings of Methodist quarterly conferences and included a variety of meetings both large and small. Two days after the dedication, Smith met with his counselors in the temple, where they felt inspired to gather the leading authorities of the church together for a special meeting. What started as a meeting of instruction and exhortation that appeared no different than a typical prayer meeting ended up lasting all night. The group of gathered elders performed ritual washing of one another’s feet, and then, according to Smith’s journal, “we partook of the bread and wine. The Holy S[p]irit rested down upon us and we continued in the Lords house all night prophesying and giving glory to God.”¹¹² The next morning, a larger group of brethren assembled in the temple, where Joseph explained that he and the others “had spent the night previous waiting upon the Lord in his temple” and that “it was expedient for us to prepare bread and wine sufficient to making our hearts glad, as we should not probably leave this house until morning.” The order of procedure consisted of preaching, exhortation, and blessings, which continued “until 5 o clock in the morning.” Miraculous manifestations of God’s presence occurred—some spoke in tongues, “the Savior made his appearance to some, while angels ministered to others.” Smith’s journal entry for the day concluded:

[I]t was a pentecost and enduement indeed, long to be remembered for the sound shall go forth from this place unto all the world, and the occurrences of this shall be handed down upon the pages of sacred history to all

¹¹² Joseph Smith, Journal, 29 March 1836, in *JSP, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, 213.

generations, as the day of Pentecost, so shall this day be numbered and celebrated as a year of Jubilee and time of rejoicing to the saints of the most high God.¹¹³

With the promised endowment elders could now do as Joseph Smith had prayed in the dedicatory prayer. “We ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them; And from this place they may bear exceedingly great and glorious tidings, in truth, unto the ends of the earth.”¹¹⁴

Methodist ministers sought similar blessings. As mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, Charles Giles joyfully declared that many preachers were “endowed with supernatural power, by which they spoke with tongues and performed miracles. . . . The Spirit of God attended their ministry, and signs and wonders followed them.”¹¹⁵

In early Latter-day Saint temple worship, as in Joseph Smith’s conversion narrative, the Mormon prophet incorporated standard forms and services from the surrounding culture, yet imbued them with additional or new meanings. As discussed in chapter two, early Mormon converts from Methodism understood their prior religion to possess important elements of true religion. As such, they likely saw Mormon adoption and adaptation of the itinerancy, small worship meetings, and the shout tradition—all aimed at invoking God’s presence on a community of believers—as an extension of the truth they had received while Methodists. This idea is perhaps best expressed in the conversation Peter Cartwright remembered having with Joseph Smith. In Cartwright’s reconstruction of the exchange, Smith told him that “We Latter-day Saints are

¹¹³ Joseph Smith, Journal, 30 March 1836, in *JSP, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, 213-16.

¹¹⁴ *Messenger and Advocate*, March 1836, 279.

¹¹⁵ Giles, *Pioneer*, 60-62.

Methodists, as far as they have gone, *only we have advanced further*” and that “among all the Churches in the world the Methodist was the nearest right, and that, as far as they went, they were right.” What the Methodists lacked, according to Cartwright’s recollection of Smith’s counsel, was “the gift of tongues, of prophecy, and of miracles.”¹¹⁶ Based on the utilization by Smith and the Mormons of various forms of Methodist worship and organization aimed in large part at accessing those gifts, perhaps Smith’s statement is more revealing than it first appears. Methodism presents a number of striking parallels to early Mormon religious experience.

When the Latter-day Saints left Ohio and Missouri for their new home in Nauvoo, Illinois, a shift in theology and worship accompanied the shift in geographical center of the church. It was there in Nauvoo that polygamy was introduced, Joseph Smith’s theology expanded, and most important to this analysis, temple rituals took a decidedly Masonic turn. Nevertheless, some key elements from the Kirtland era persisted, including the Hosanna Shout.

Other residual elements of Methodism’s influence on Mormonism similarly persisted well after the first decade of Mormonism’s existence. Indeed, the mass conversions of Methodists to Mormonism in the British Isles beginning in the 1840s and continuing throughout the nineteenth century meant that Mormonism would continue to be shaped by the experience and expectations of those converts. One British convert, Fanny Stenhouse thus recalled “Mormonism in England” in the 1840s, noting that “The Mormons were then simply an earnest religious people, in many respects like the

¹¹⁶ Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 151.

Methodists, especially in their missionary zeal and fervour of spirit.”¹¹⁷ In August 1877, Wilford Woodruff recorded a vision in which the signers of the American Declaration of Independence and “fifty other eminent men” appeared to him requesting that they be vicariously baptized into the Mormon church. Among the “other eminent men” was John Wesley. In addition to being baptized in their behalf, Woodruff also vicariously ordained three men to the Mormon high priesthood—Christopher Columbus, Benjamin Franklin, and John Wesley.¹¹⁸ Stephen Fleming recently proposed that “the special distinction” granted to these three men “suggests that they played a particularly important role” in “the Restoration of the gospel.”¹¹⁹ It certainly suggests that this was true in Wilford Woodruff’s mind. But Methodism’s influence persists even in modern Mormonism. Latter-day Saints to this day participate in the “Hosanna Shout” at the close of the dedicatory prayer for each newly-built temple, the hymns of Charles Wesley are still regularly sung in Sunday worship services, and Mormons still organize their ecclesiastical year around general and local conferences. Few Latter-day Saints, though, are aware of the Methodist connection and precedent for these various practices. Instead, these influences, removed in the minds of modern Mormons from the Methodist community of discourse from which they developed, have become something else entirely.

¹¹⁷ Fanny Stenhouse, “*Tell it All*”: *The Story of a Life’s Experience in Mormonism. An Autobiography: By Mrs. T.B.H. Stenhouse* (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington & Co., 1875), 47.

¹¹⁸ Wilford Woodruff, “Not Ashamed of the Gospel,” September 16, 1877, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: William Budge, 1878), 19:229.

¹¹⁹ Fleming, “John Wesley: A Methodist Foundation,” 131.

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