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The Archive of Restoration Culture, 1997–2002

Richard Lyman Bushman

When I first began work on *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* in 1996, I realized that reconstructing the cultural environment of the Prophet would be one of my largest tasks. I could scarcely conceive how to go about probing the huge quantities of sermons, newspapers, journals, pamphlets, books, artworks, and private diaries that possibly bore on the restoration of the gospel in the 1820s through the 1840s. Yet the culture of that period bore directly on the success of the young church under Joseph Smith's leadership. People would never be able to grasp theological ideas that were entirely foreign to them. They would need a basic preparation for the Prophet's revelations, making the cultural environment crucial to understanding how the Restoration came about.

Faced with this apparently insuperable difficulty, it occurred to me that my problem was the problem of every historian interested in early history of the Church. We all need information about the sources as they relate to the distinctive doctrines of the Restoration. I would deal with many of the issues in my biography, but subsequent researchers would think of new questions about Joseph's times. All of these historians would benefit from a collection of materials from the world in which Joseph Smith flourished.

So was born the concept of "The Archive of Restoration Culture," an assemblage of source materials illuminating contemporaneous thought about the prominent principles of the Restoration. I am pleased now, a decade later, that this massive research database is now available on the BYU Studies website.

As my initial ideas began to take shape, I proposed to Ronald Esplin, then director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of Latter-day Saint

History, that we assemble a few well-qualified students each summer to work on the project. Characteristically, he at once saw the merits of the idea and promised to raise funds for the first summer. We wanted to invite advanced LDS undergraduates and graduate students from all over the country, and we knew we had to offer them a small stipend in lieu of summer employment as well as defraying living expenses in Provo. Though Ron might find the money for one year, the project would require outside support to continue. Fortunately, I was able to turn to David and Karen Davidson, a couple sympathetic to scholarly ventures, who were acquainted with other potential donors. They took on the job of fundraising and within a year obtained pledges that sustained these summer seminars for five years.

About ninety young scholars submitted applications for the first Archive of Restoration Culture Summer Seminar in 1997. Six were admitted. They were a crucial component in the overall development of the Archive, because only by working together could we refine our purpose. The general idea of collecting information on Joseph Smith's cultural environment had an immediate appeal; deciding exactly how to go about it presented new questions every day as we met for eight weeks through that first summer.

The first step, we decided, was to construct an abbreviated inventory of what we called "Distinctive Doctrines of the Restoration." We circulated the list widely and assembled a group of experienced scholars to amend it as they saw fit. As we began poring through the materials, new ideas suggested themselves and the list grew ever longer. By 2002, in the sixth year of the seminar's life, the Archive included the topics listed below.

We also had to devise a form for recording relevant documents as we found them in the source materials. Besides the usual citation data, we decided that the researcher should comment on the nature of each source so that future readers would have the benefit of the researcher's judgment about its biases and purposes. We also asked the researchers to explain why they thought the passage was relevant to LDS doctrines (it is not always obvious). We wanted to get down everything the researcher learned while poring through the material. Finally, a generous excerpt from each source was recorded. We hoped that subsequent researchers, looking for information on topics ranging from Abraham to Zion, would find enough in the Archive to decide about the relevancy and value of a source. A few paragraphs were no substitute for the entire passage in context, but we wanted to offer enough to help researchers choose whether or not to take the next step.

At first we believed we needed an intricate cataloging system to lead scholars to the right page. That problem solved itself as search engines improved. Now it is possible to type in a keyword like “intelligence” or “priesthood” and bring up every source in the electronic Archive where these words appear. To make the implications of a passage clear, the researchers headed their report pages with key words that were implied in the passage. An excerpt might be all about apostasy, for example, without using the term. So the researcher inserted the term in the heading to ensure that future scholars would find the related passage.

We began the first summer by looking at religious periodicals in the 1820s and 1830s, the decades most relevant to the Restoration. In subsequent summers we reviewed the references to Joseph Smith’s background in Fawn Brodie’s *No Man Know My History* and John Brooke’s *The Refiner’s Fire*, the books in the library of Manchester, New York, and every other relevant place we could think of. Overall we created over a thousand entries from hundreds of sources. Meanwhile, besides submitting entries, the summer fellows prepared papers for the annual Smith Institute symposium on “The World of Joseph Smith.” These have been published separately by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History in two volumes, 1997–1999 and 2000–2002.

A few examples from the Archive give an idea of the materials that were collected. Here are five excerpts from non-Mormon sources treating doctrines circulating within Christianity in Joseph Smith’s day.

1. An Embodied God

I would ask, if the Divine being is divisible, Is he not material? if he has NO body, how can he be substantial? and, if he has no PARTS, how can he BE or EXIST, at all? What difference can there be between saying God has NO BODY; and flatly declaring that he is NO-BODY? I cannot split this hair; and therefore, I cannot perceive wherein this doctrine of God’s having no body differs from ATHEISM. Surely every christian knows, or ought to know (with St. Paul,) that there are not only bodies terrestrial, but bodies celestial also; and as it is plain there can be nobody without its corresponding essence it must evidently follow, there can be no essence without its corresponding body: Material essences have material bodies; and spiritual essences have spiritual bodies also.

John Hargrove, *A Sermon, on the True Object and Nature of Christian Worship; Delivered at the Opening of the New Jerusalem Temple, in the City of Baltimore* (1800), 16.

2. Degrees of Glory

There will be different degrees of glory; some apartments being vastly superior to those of others. In the heavenly house, there is room for ever

soul of man. . . . But as our Lord prepares the mansions, they will be exactly suited to our circumstances; and those of the lowest order will be perfectly glorious.

J. Edmondson, *Scripture Views of the Heavenly World* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1849), 41.

3. The Trinity, Purgatory, and Infant Baptism

For the instruction of others, particularly young preachers, I here observe, that many words are now in use to describe some principal part of doctrine, which are not in the scriptures. . . . If the word and doctrine are both unscriptural, it is in vain to undertake to prove from the bible that which is not once named there. The word *trinity* is an unscriptural word, and so is the doctrine, and we may as well prove *purgatory* from the bible, as the trinity; for neither of them are mentioned there. . . . [Baptism] is in the bible; but there is no account of baptising infants there; and all said in favor of that is invention.

Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels, and Sufferings of Elias Smith*. Vol. I (Portsmouth, N.H.: Beck and Foster, 1816), 141.

4. Eternal Progress

Another element in the happiness of the redeemed is its progressive character. The saints above, beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, “are changed into the same image *from glory to glory*.” Thus they make perpetual advances towards the perfection of the great Supreme.

Man, then, is destined to unceasing advances, and innumerable stages of existence. Having attained to the resurrection, is no reason why he should advance no farther and higher. There are some infinitely lofty mansions in our Father’s house; and we may rise from one to another through infinity, thus continually approximating to the nature of Jehovah, without ever attaining to his absolute perfection.

J. J. Kerr, *Future Recognition; or, The Blessedness of Those Who Die in the Lord* (Herman Hooker, 1847), 60, 61–62.

5. Restoration and Dispensations

This now is a dispensation of that time mentioned, of a gathering in of heavenly spirits to Christ, out of the reformed Paradise. But there is yet a fuller time and dispensation to come, that shall answer to the Jerusalem above, which is said to come down. Here is a Mount Sion church to be gathered out from among all churches of men, by *the preparing ministry of an Elias spirit*; who is to make ready against the Lord’s return from that solemnized wedding with the present triumphant church. Now what is meant by this Elias spirit, but such a spirit as hath power to transform and translate at pleasure? THIS ELIAS IS NOT AN ABSTRACTED GHOST, BUT IS IN CONJUNCTION WITH A FLAMING BODY OF LIGHT. This was that which the apostles eyed much in their days, and had the revelation thereof FOR THE LATTER AGES.

Jane Lead, *Divine Revelations and Prophecies* (1700; reissued 1830), 31.

What should be made of all this data remains to be seen. That will be the task of historians and religious scholars for years to come. These materials will help lay a cultural foundation for thorough assessments of the significance, uniqueness, responsiveness or commonality of the revelations and teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith when compared with the intellectual and religious milieu of the early American Republic.

From the beginning I worried that the enormous labor on this Archive would go to waste. I had seen ambitious data-gathering projects disappear from sight and never put to use. Too often information of keen interest to one generation of scholars fades into insignificance for another. I would benefit from the Archive as I wrote my biography of Joseph Smith, but would anyone else?

That seemed to be the fate of the Archive of Restoration Culture until John W. Welch, editor in chief of *BYU Studies* proposed to make the Archive available to researchers through the BYU Studies website, and Josh Probert prepared the somewhat outdated computer files, making the data publishable. The Archive can be accessed via the website at byustudies.byu.edu. Hard copies of the Archive are also deposited in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University and the Church Archive in Salt Lake City. The master copies reside at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship.

I am grateful to all of the parties who facilitated the formation of the Archive of Restoration Culture, and especially to Ronald Esplin and Jill Derr, directors of the Smith Institute, to Karen and David Davidson and the generous donors they assembled, and above all to the more than forty fellows who came together over six years to reconstruct the world of Joseph Smith.

This Archive is organized under the following subjects and with these searchable terms:

Revelation, Spiritual Gifts

Visions, dreams, revelations
 Angels
 New scripture
 Tongues, healings
 Miracles to confirm revelation
 Magic, money-digging, working
 with the rod, handling snakes
 Prophets
 Salvation through knowledge

Book of Abraham

Abraham
 Ur
 Egyptus
 Egyptian
 Astronomy
 Kolob
 Ancient of Days
 Priesthood from the fathers
 False priesthoods

Book of Mormon

Secret combinations
 Great and abominable church
 Liahona
 Opposition in all things
 Elephants and horses in America
 Destruction of an ancient people
 Translation
 Native American history
 and religion
 Tree of Life
 Urim and Thummim and
 seerstones
 Pre-columbian migrations
 to America
 Cataclysmic events at crucifixion
 Arabian peninsula
 (land of Bountiful)
 Christ to other peoples

Bible Revision, Book of Moses

Translation
 Prophets
 Enoch
 Melchizedek
 Moses and authorship
 of Pentateuch
 Elijah
 Elias
 Cain
 Christianization of the
 Old Testament
 Corruption of biblical texts

Ritual and Ceremony (nontemple)

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper
 Infant baptism
 Baptismal covenant
 Mode of baptism
 Laying on of hands for the gift of
 the Holy Ghost
 Patriarchal blessings

Zion

New Jerusalem, City of Zion
 Enoch
 Consecration
 The poor
 Common property in the
 New Testament
 Inheritance in Zion
 Gathering
 Judges in Israel, office of Bishop
 Land of promise
 Religion and government
 Religion and the economy

Priesthood and Church

Melchizedek (High) priesthood
 Aaronic priesthood
 Apostles
 High priests
 Seventies
 Elders
 Bishop
 Priests
 Presidency
 Patriarchal blessings
 Church discipline
 High councils
 Lay priesthood and preaching
 Proselyting
 Descent of authority
 Basis of authority
 Keys
 Stakes and wards
 Conferences
 Name of church
 Ordination
 Priesthood and lineage
 Order
 Paid clergy
 Priestcraft
 One true church
 Priesthood oath and covenant
 Women's role
 Missionary work

Redemption

Atonement
Justification
Sanctification
Judgment
Jesus Christ
Fate of those without gospel
Seeing God
Men become gods
Unpardonable sin

Creation

God's purpose in creation
Eternity of matter
Council in Heaven
Lucifer
Plural worlds
Adam
Eve
Garden of Eden
The fortunate fall
Earth and the environment

Afterlife

Spirit world
Three degrees of glory
Resurrection
Eternal life
Hell
Spiritual death
Sons of perdition
Glory
Endless punishment
Unpardonable sin

Temple

Endowment of power
Washings and anointings
Pentecost
Eternal marriage
Baptism for the dead
Covenant
Seal and bind
Learning

Plural marriage
Spiritual wives
Mysteries of God
(esoteric knowledge)

Israel

Jews
Native Americans as Israel
Restoration of Israel to
knowledge, to their lands, to
favor with God
Old and New Jerusalem
Covenants with Israel
Gentiles
Descent of Israel
Gospel for Israel
Ten Tribes
Moses, Elias, and gathering
of Israel

God

God's body
Elohim
Jehovah
Holy Ghost
Three separate beings
Plurality of Gods
Progressive
Spirit of Christ; light of Christ
Mother in Heaven
Throne of God (Kolob)

Humanity

Agency
Spirit, soul, and body
Word of Wisdom
Spirit child of God
Intelligence and intelligences
Premortal existence
Spirit and matter
Race
Happiness as God's purpose
for man
Purpose of mortal life

Last Days

Destruction
Second Coming
New Church
Preparation of the earth and
preceding events
Millennial conditions
Location of Second Coming
Places of refuge
Judgment Day
Renewal of the earth

History

Primitive Church
Apostasy
Restoration
Sectarian strife
Corruption of the churches
Old Testament as context for
doctrine
Modern recapitulation of biblical
events
History, religion, and civilization
Divine mission of the United
States
Dispensations

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