The Reverend Dr. Peter Christian Kierkegaard's "About and Against Mormonism" (1855)

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Born on July 6, 1805, the Danish Lutheran priest Peter Christian Kierkegaard, brother of philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, was an exact contemporary of Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Both men devoted their lives to the refinement and advancement of their religious beliefs, albeit within very different sociohistorical contexts, and both had profound impacts on the shape of the religious landscape in their home countries. While Peter Christian Kierkegaard, as the most eloquent and influential advocate of the views of the controversial nineteenth-century Danish religious reformer N. F. S. Grundtvig, concentrated on bringing about the shift from state-controlled to populist Protestant Christianity in Denmark, Joseph Smith professed to have restored the original church of Jesus Christ on the earth and set in motion a groundswell of worldwide missionary efforts designed to bring the news of this restoration to the four corners of the earth. Although Smith never set foot in Denmark, nor Kierkegaard in America, their ideological paths did cross in the late summer of 1854, slightly more than four years after the first emissaries of the LDS Church arrived in Denmark. Kierkegaard discovered that the Mormon missionaries had begun preaching in his parish, which encompassed the towns of Pedersborg and Kindertofte, near Sorø on the main Danish island of Zealand, and took it upon himself to combat their influence on his parishioners.

Kierkegaard’s initial encounter with the Mormons consisted of a few conversations with local missionaries followed by attendance at a cottage meeting, where Kierkegaard was invited to respond to the missionaries’ preaching. In his diary entry for August 1854, Kierkegaard describes the sequence of events as he experienced it:
Walking across BYU campus one snowy evening in January 2004, I fell into conversation with a man walking close by. When I mentioned that my PhD studies were in German and Danish, his eyes lit up and he asked if I was familiar with a text about the Mormons written by the brother of the famous Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard that he had recently discovered on microfilm in the Harold B. Lee Library. The man was BYU philosophy professor David L. Paulsen, and our casual conversation led to a three-year collaboration on the translation and annotation of that very text, Peter Christian Kierkegaard’s “About and Against Mormonism,” which appears in English translation for the first time in this article.

As I translated Peter Christian’s text, I began to investigate the historical context of his remarks and how they fit in to the early history of the LDS church in Denmark. Tens of thousands of Danes, including four of David L. Paulsen’s great-great-grandparents and my great-great grandmother, joined the LDS Church in the second half of the 19th century, often despite severe persecution. At first glance, it seemed that Peter Christian’s text could be dismissed as run-of-the-mill anti-Mormon propaganda, but the more I learned about Peter Christian’s life and beliefs, particularly his disagreements with his brother Søren about the state of Danish Christendom, the more I realized that his text was, in fact, an important part of a dialogue between Peter Christian, Søren, and the LDS missionaries about the all-important element of personal choice inherent in religious freedom, which had been granted in Denmark in 1849 for the first time since the adoption of Christianity there in the ninth century. Discovering how hard-won true religious freedom was for the early Scandinavian Saints and how courageously they exercised that freedom has helped me to appreciate even more the many freedoms which I enjoy and to exert myself to use those freedoms actively and responsibly.

Julie K. Allen
On the 4th–5th discovered that the Mormons had come to Pederborg and Kindertoft. Spoke with one who was visiting in Pederborg town. Spoke with [Mathias C.] Hemerdt, who was with him and who has attended their meetings (for a long time?) elsewhere. With many others at his home, all of whom had been re-baptized in H—. On the 13th attended their meeting in Haugerup at Hemerdt’s home and testified against them, God be praised, with noticeable effect.1

Despite his belief that his remarks at the cottage meeting had effectively refuted the missionaries’ claims, Kierkegaard apparently regarded the missionaries as a significant enough threat to the Danish church as a whole to warrant further effort, and so he adapted his impromptu remarks at the meeting in Hemerdt’s home into a formal presentation that he delivered in local schoolhouses and then published twice. It was first published in January and February 1855 as a two-part article titled “Om og mod Mormonismen” (About and Against Mormonism) in Dansk Kirketidende (Danish Church Times), an influential organ for conveying the views of the Danish state church; then the article was published later that summer as an independent pamphlet by C. G. Iversen.2 The article is reproduced in full on pages 113–56 in this journal.

The motivation for Kierkegaard’s efforts can be found in his diary entries, particularly from March and June 1855, which reveal his annoyance over the continued presence and increasing success of the LDS missionaries in his parish. Given Kierkegaard’s intensive intellectual and religious training in the Kierkegaard home, his doctoral degrees in theology and philosophy, and his vaunted skill as a debater (he was known as “the debating devil from the North”), it is not surprising that Kierkegaard’s response to the preaching of three minimally educated lay Mormon missionaries is stunning for its erudition, density, and scathing wit. He was by no means as gifted a writer as his brother Søren, but his friends and enemies alike readily admitted that he was a masterful public speaker. In dry printed prose, Kierkegaard’s convoluted sentences and complex logical chains can be daunting at times to unravel, but if we try to imagine hearing those same words from the mouth of the brilliant Reverend Dr. Kierkegaard at the pinnacle of his career, as he amused and scolded his audience by turns, we can...

1. Peter Christian Kierkegaard, Journal, 1850–59, August 4, 1854, Det Køgelige Bibliotek (Danish Royal Library), Copenhagen, Denmark. All translations from Danish texts are by Julie K. Allen.
perhaps catch a glimpse of the “noticeable effect” he believed his words to have had on those of his parishioners who had begun to investigate this new American religion.

Kierkegaard’s rebuttal of the missionaries’ speeches is also notable for its relative objectivity. Though he mocks some of the missionaries’ claims that he regards as “secondary,” for example that Joseph Smith found a set of gold plates or that the record on those plates documents the migration of sixth-century BC Israelites across the ocean to the Americas, Kierkegaard devotes the bulk of his time to considering the missionaries’ foundational doctrinal points seriously and exhaustively rather than resorting to personal slanders or rumors. As a result, his tract provides valuable insights into both the doctrines being taught by early LDS missionaries in Denmark and some of the central points of divergence between their representation of Joseph Smith’s restored gospel and Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the Grundtvigian conception of Christianity.

Kierkegaard’s Support for Grundtvigian Doctrines

The latter distinction is particularly important, because Kierkegaard, although he would seem to represent the official position of the Danish state church by virtue of his office as pastor and his prominence in Danish intellectual life at the time, was in many ways as much a rebel against the established traditions of Danish Lutheranism as Joseph Smith was to conventional Christianity in general. By publicly promoting Grundtvig’s reformist doctrines, particularly the primacy of the oral transmission of doctrine and the inadmissibility of governmental involvement in religious matters, Kierkegaard had made himself persona non grata not only with the leadership of the church, notably Bishops Mynster and Martensen, but also with his brother Søren, who felt that Grundtvigianism posed the most significant threat to true Christianity in mid-nineteenth-century Denmark. Peter Christian Kierkegaard’s Grundtvigian sympathies caused him to be denied—twice—the professorship at the University of Copenhagen that he dearly wanted. Instead of obtaining a professorship, within a year of his publication of “About and Against Mormonism” he was appointed bishop of Aalborg, which was a promotion, but one that brought about his exile to “Jutland’s Siberia” and thus his effective removal from Copenhagen’s intellectual circles.

In refuting the missionaries’ teachings, Kierkegaard refers frequently to the Danish state church as the “holy universal Church” rather than as Folkekirken (the People’s Church), a term he himself had coined in an article in the early 1840s and which had become the official designation of the Danish state church in the Danish constitution of 1849. Much of
Kierkegaard’s opposition to the possibility of the restoration of the church of Jesus Christ, by Joseph Smith or anyone else, hinges on the Grundtvigian belief, derived from the writings of the second-century church father Irenaeus, that the oral confession of faith in Jesus Christ and the oral transmission of doctrine binds all Christians together into a single church that is the body of Christ. By this reasoning, Kierkegaard argues that there is an unbroken oral chain of legitimacy linking the church established by Jesus Christ while he lived on the earth to the Christianity practiced in Denmark in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the Danish church has been Protestant since the sixteenth century and Kierkegaard never exhibits any sympathy for Catholic doctrine, he argues, along with Grundtvig, that true Christianity accesses the authority of Jesus Christ directly through the continued oral transmission of doctrine and the common confession of faith by the people of the church.4

**Kierkegaard’s Attitudes toward Religious Freedom**

Of greater long-term impact than his doctrinal disagreement with the Danish ecclesiastical establishment, however, was Kierkegaard’s instrumental role through articles and speeches and later while serving as minister of education and culture in bringing about the passage of laws that dissolved Denmark’s traditional parish bonds and allowed for the establishment of free-choice congregations within the church throughout the entire country, rather than just in Copenhagen, where that freedom was

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well established. These two innovations contributed significantly to the liberalization of the Danish state church after the mid-nineteenth century, and Kierkegaard’s support of these measures illustrates his fundamental belief in individual freedom of religion, albeit within the framework of mainstream Protestantism, which had just been established by the Danish constitution of 1849. Unlike many of his fellow Danish clergymen who spread slanderous reports and instigated physical harassment of Mormon missionaries and converts, Kierkegaard’s opposition to Mormonism as set forth in “About and Against Mormonism” seems to be based in sincere disagreement on specific, fundamental doctrinal issues and questions of scriptural interpretation rather than disapproval of peripheral issues such as Joseph Smith’s supposed personal shortcomings or even the practice of polygamy among the Latter-day Saints in Utah, which had been unknown in Denmark until its announcement by LDS Scandinavian Mission President John Van Cott in October 1853.5

Kierkegaard’s dispassionate discussion of Mormonism—which he rather humorously associates with other heretical groups whose names begin with the letter “M,” including Montanists, Manichees, Monophysites, Monothelites, Mohammedans, and Mennonites—situates Mormonism as a movement within a larger context of dissenters from mainstream Christianity. Kierkegaard’s article thereby gains significance for an audience outside the Mormon community, as Mark Noll has pointed out about a contemporaneous Catholic anti-Mormon essay, “Mormonism in Connection with Modern Protestantism,” by taking into account the larger social, historical, and theological contexts from which Mormonism had emerged.6 The essay Noll discusses appeared in the influential international Catholic journal La Civilità Cattolica, while the journal in which Kierkegaard’s article appeared, Dansk Kirketidende, was circulated only within Denmark. Dansk Kirketidende functioned as a central clearinghouse for news and opinions relating to the Danish state church, and publication in this journal made the article prominent enough to direct discussion about Mormonism among Danish intellectuals and theologians away from an initial preoccupation with Mormonism’s supposedly scandalous origins to more reflective consideration of its doctrinal positions in relation to those of the main variants of Danish Protestantism.

5. In his diaries and letters, Van Cott frequently mentions the role of the Danish clergy in the persecution of the early Danish Saints. See Annie Van Cott, “Van Cott History,” Typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Despite the fierce opposition to Mormonism within Danish society that manifested itself in street riots, disrupted meetings, and damaged meetinghouses, many Danes were quite receptive to the Mormon missionaries’ message, and most converts gathered to Utah. At the time of Kierkegaard’s polemic, approximately 80 percent of all Danish converts were emigrating to Utah, a wave that continued unabated for several decades, reaching its peak in the 1860s. As a representative example, Mathias C. Hemerdt, the parishioner who hosted the cottage meeting at which Kierkegaard spoke, was baptized into the LDS Church two weeks following the meeting, and he and his family emigrated to Utah the following year. Others of Kierkegaard’s parishioners, a few of whom he mentioned by name in his diary upon learning of their “re-baptism,” followed suit, and the Haugerup Branch of the Church was officially organized in June 1855, almost precisely concurrent with the book publication of Kierkegaard’s tract, which marked the end of his public opposition of Mormonism. After his appointment as bishop of Aalborg in 1856, Kierkegaard continued to combat the spread of various sects in Denmark in public speeches and articles, but he had little more to say on the subject of Mormonism.

For students of Mormon history, Kierkegaard’s text offers important insights into the nature of Mormon missionary work in Denmark, not least by illustrating that Denmark was very much an ideological battleground at the time, a fact that is often obscured in LDS accounts by the impressive numbers of Danish converts to Mormonism. The text also shows the valor of the early missionaries and converts to Mormonism, despite their being less educated and prominent than Kierkegaard. Although Kierkegaard’s erudition and theological training allowed him to challenge the lay missionaries on many points of Christian history, doctrine, and scriptural interpretation, his printed account of the meeting confirms the remarkable consistency between these early, uneducated missionaries’ teachings and contemporary LDS doctrine, while his own arguments, many of which diverge from standard doctrine of the Danish People’s Church at the time,


8. The membership records of the Haugerup Branch from 1855 to 1859 are available on microfiche in the LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City. In Kierkegaard’s diary entry for June 1855, he mentions the conversion to Mormonism of more of his parishioners, including the farmer Niels Nielsen, Nielsen’s hired hand Jens Hansen, whose confirmation Kierkegaard had just performed the previous spring, and the farmer/carpenter Nicolai Sørensen and his wife and son. Kierkegaard, Journal, June 1855.
reveal the doctrinal dissension within Danish Protestantism and within his own family.9 Meanwhile, his self-satisfaction at having effectively warned his parishioners against the Mormon heresy was undermined by the conversions of so many of his listeners and their lifelong dedication to the faith they embraced.10

In fact, the encounter seems to have made much more of an impression on Kierkegaard himself than on any of his listeners; in comparison with his repeated references to the Mormons in his diary, only one person present at the meeting, Isaac Sørensen, left a written record of it, and that without referring to Kierkegaard by name. The missionaries apparently did not find the experience of facing the distinguished Reverend Dr. Kierkegaard significant enough to mention, either to their mission president or in the mission minutes. Yet it is likely that Kierkegaard’s skillful dissection of the missionaries’ claims had a stimulating effect on their preparation for future presentations, which would have served them in good stead, since at least one of the missionaries probably present at the meeting, Christian Daniel Fjeldsted, went on to serve nearly a dozen years more as a missionary and mission president in Scandinavia and later as a Church leader in Utah.11 Moreover, Kierkegaard’s generally serious treatment of the fundamental aspects of LDS doctrine may have prompted his listeners to consider it carefully and prayerfully. A century and a half later, Kierkegaard’s speech not only illustrates the fierce struggle for religious self-determination that took place in Denmark in the mid-nineteenth century but also testifies of the courage of the early Danish missionaries and converts in embracing Mormonism in the face of criticism from people as influential and well-respected as Peter Christian Kierkegaard.

9. Kierkegaard’s support of Grundtvig was the source of considerable disagreement with his brother Søren, whose Attack on Christendom series inflamed Danish society during this same period and led to a breach between the two brothers that was never mended.

10. At least four attendees of the meeting, Hemerdt and his wife and two neighbor boys, Isaac and Frederik Sørensen, were baptized and emigrated to Utah.

11. As far as can be determined from mission and branch records, as well as the personal history of the Danish convert Nicolai Sørensen, the missionaries who preached at the meeting were, most likely, twenty-five-year-old Christian Daniel Fjeldsted, C. R. Rasmussen, and Søren Christoffersen, who was serving as president of the local Søndre Overdem Branch in 1854. Haugerup Branch Records 1855–59, 12–13; Jacob F. Sorensen, History of Jacob Sorensen as Related to His Daughter-in-Law Verna B. Maughan Sorensen, January 1934, Mendon, Utah, typed manuscript, available online at sorensenfamilyhistory.org. After his emigration to Utah in 1858, C. D. Fjeldsted, as he was known in Utah, returned to serve missions in Scandinavia in 1867–70, 1881–84, and 1886–90. He died in Utah in 1905 while serving as one of the seven Presidents of the Seventy.
Summary of Kierkegaard’s Argument

As far as content and strategy are concerned, Kierkegaard’s reaction to the message of the Mormon elders is a fairly typical Protestant response, countering the LDS use of certain biblical verses with standard evangelical interpretations. While he chides the missionaries for imputing certain meanings to these texts, he likewise privileges the readings that his tradition has given to these passages. As such, Kierkegaard’s publication allows readers today to step back into the kind of give-and-take that must have occurred regularly on the streets of Copenhagen and elsewhere in northern Europe as the Latter-day Saints spread their message of the Restoration, the Apostasy, and the need for authority and baptism, and called people to gather to Zion in the mountain West. Kierkegaard’s response is grounded in a form of biblical rationalism, and he selectively quotes biblical verses in an effort to disprove Joseph Smith’s teachings. Additionally, Kierkegaard appeals heavily to the strength of Christian tradition over the centuries. He launches his polemic by attacking five specific details, and then turns most of his attention to three points that he identifies as “central claims.”

In attacking the five preliminary points, Kierkegaard cuts a wide swath. (1) He asserts that John 10:16, which refers to the Savior bringing his sheep “not of this fold,” must be understood narrowly as referring to “the heathen tribes,” not to Israelites in the Americas. (2) He claims that the reunification of the sticks of Judah and Joseph in Ezekiel 37:16 refers only to the millennial reunification of divided Israel, and in no way to the union of the words of scattered Israel in the Book of Mormon and the Bible. He points out that the Book of Mormon was written on metal plates, not on a notched stick as he thinks Ezekiel describes. (3) Kierkegaard reminds readers that blacks were not brought to the United States until the seventeenth century and that this is contrary to the Book of Mormon’s claim about Native Americans having a “skin of blackness” (2 Ne. 5:21). (4) He also objects that the other angel flying in the midst of heaven in Revelation 14:6 cannot refer to Moroni. And (5) he finds offensive the radical anthropomorphism being taught, that God the Father has a body.

In the main body of his publication, Kierkegaard goes on to address what he sees as the three central claims of Mormonism: (1) that the true church of God no longer exists, (2) that baptism has been unmistakably and incontrovertibly distorted and corrupted, and (3) that the Second Coming is near and people must gather with the Mormons in order to escape the impending judgments on the wicked. Actually, Kierkegaard’s argument that the church of God was never lost from the earth is foundational to the ensuing arguments, and all of his three final points reduce to
the same question of whether a great apostasy and loss of divine authority occurred in Christianity or not.

As a Protestant, Kierkegaard sees the church as a simple concept, not as complicated as some want to make it, he says. Kierkegaard defends the state of confusion within Christianity, saying that confusion has been there from the beginning. Each Christian makes sense of God’s revelation in Christ in unique ways. He uses this typical Protestant platform to contest the idea that any one religion can lay claim to being the “only true” Christianity.

In the same vein, he sees the Latter-day Saints’ claim of being Christian to be inconsistent with their rejection of Christianity, and he claims that it will not solve the problem to add one new party to the confusion. He defends the sincerity of Christian theologians such as Augustine and Luther as constituting an unbroken chain of witnesses, and thus the doctrinal dissonance among them and others does not negate the truthfulness of the corporate Christian confession. Needless to say, these assertions are more like declarations of faith than reasoned conclusions on Kierkegaard’s part.

Next, he argues that the Old Testament makes it clear that God covenanted with Israel that he would not let his covenant people perish. Likewise, he asserts, God’s work cannot fail, and faith in a historical savior necessarily implies that he is historically connected with the world until the end of time, citing Matthew 28:19–20, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” He also relies heavily on Matthew 16:18, a scripture most often used by Catholics, that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against [the church],” although these passages can certainly be understood differently.

Consequently, he continues, if the church is the triumphant fulfillment of God’s promises, then the authority and mode of baptism used by the church are correct. Kierkegaard punctuates his polemic by saying that John the Baptist was not the being who appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, but the being was Satan himself. Furthermore, Kierkegaard asks how Joseph Smith could see God if he were not properly baptized. He points out that the Greek word baptizō does not necessarily mean immerse, and he gives examples of children among the believers in the New Testament. Unaware of the Latter-day Saint Article of Faith 8, Kierkegaard scolds the Mormon elders for blindly believing in the accuracy of the Bible and fails to recognize that most of the LDS teachings he questions are not founded exclusively on the Bible.

Kierkegaard then argues that as the church of God is on the earth scattered throughout the fellowship of Christian confession, that church will rise to meet the Lord in the air when he returns. Thus, there is no need for a gathering, as Joseph Smith taught. Kierkegaard says that the Mormon kingdom-building project is anachronous, as God will not
establish his kingdom until Christ returns and that the Millennium will not come until after the resurrection of the dead. Christians should not be constructing spiritual-temporal kingdoms. Leaders like the Pope, he says, just want to amass wealth. Instead, Christians should wait upon the Lord’s return to build the kingdom, for his kingdom is not of this world.

Finally, Kierkegaard concludes with an appeal to reason as the arbiter of Christian truth, but still exhorts readers to obey what he is saying even if it is irrational. He accuses Mormons of appealing to reason, but decrying it at the same time—a move he makes himself. He says that Joseph Smith’s revelations and truth claims are not consistent with reason, and that Christianity is reasonable; but at the same time, he argues that God’s thoughts are above ours, and that sometimes we must accept belief blindly, although God will provide sufficient reasons to believe. Individuals must decide and trust for themselves. Then through Christian praxis (John 7:16–17), they will know the truth of Christian doctrine in a lifelong trial of the veracity of Christianity.

Placing the Article in Perspective

Stepping back from this publication, modern readers will find that Kierkegaard’s treatment of Mormonism is interesting not just for its own sake but also when compared with other mid-nineteenth-century responses to the messages of the Restoration. One other such treatment is the previously mentioned “Mormonism in Connection with Modern Protestantism,” written in 1860 by the Catholic cardinal Karl August von Reisach (1800–1869). Both Cardinal Reisach and Reverend Kierkegaard were vehemently opposed to Mormonism, but each brought different assumptions and different rhetorical strategies to bear in their arguments against the Latter-day Saints. Thinking about those differences opens a window into the particular ways in which Mormonism was perceived by Catholic and Protestant writers at that time.

Both Kierkegaard and Reisach ground their arguments in the question of authority and appeal to the idea of a universal church, but they do so in different ways. For Kierkegaard, the authority to baptize has been passed down through an unbroken chain of believers. For Reisach, the authority has been passed down in an unbroken chain of church authorities. Both cite the rock of Peter as foundational, but for Reisach it represents papal authority and for Kierkegaard the authority of faith and confession. Kierkegaard claims the consolidated authority of Rome leads to tyranny

and apostasy, while Reisach claims the lack of consolidated authority leads to confusion and deception. Reisach rejects Protestantism and views Mormonism as the logical extension of the Protestant Reformation—the dangerous result of decentralized authority. Without the authority of the church to arbitrate disputes, it is only natural that someone like Joseph Smith would emerge seeking to address the errors of the Reformation. For Kierkegaard and others like him, the word of God is contained exclusively in the Bible, and that revelation alone is sufficient. This difference is especially manifest as Kierkegaard’s address is saturated with biblical proof texts, whereas Reisach never cites the Bible in his argument. On three occasions, he imports biblical phrases (from Matt. 16:18, 1 Tim. 2:2, and Heb. 1:1–2), but he does so in gestures of literary flair only and not as sources of doctrine.

Although some historians of Mormonism in Denmark, such as Jørgen W. Schmidt, who mentions the tract in his Danish Mormon Bibliography (1984),13 have long been aware of the existence of Kierkegaard’s text, it appears here for the first time in full English translation and for the first time in print since its initial dual publication in 1855. The BYU Library Special Collections obtained a microfilm copy of the book from the New York Public Library in 1965, upon which this translation is based. In his original text, Kierkegaard included several footnotes, which are marked in the translation with Roman numerals and which appear in italics above the rule line. All of the other footnotes, marked with superscript Arabic numerals, have been added by the authors to facilitate understanding of Kierkegaard’s text and to address many of the concerns he raises about Mormon doctrine in the course of his remarks. Punctuation has been modernized to standard English, but Kierkegaard’s italics and boldface have been retained.


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About and Against Mormonism
By P.[eter] Chr.[istian] Kierkegaard
[Translated by Julie K. Allen]

I. A Speech for an Occasion

Copenhagen: Published by C. G. Iversen. The Scharling Printing House. 1855 [Reprinted from Dansk Kirketidende (Danish Church Times)]

When I discovered last summer that a man in the parish, whose occupation obliged him to travel frequently throughout the area, had, in the course of these journeys outside the parish, been won over by Mormonism, and had therefore immediately offered their speakers his home for their sermons, and that one such meeting was scheduled for Sunday evening, the 13th of August, I also attended and listened for a few hours to their songs and three speakers. I was then given a chance to speak, and what follows is an account of what I said, as memory serves. Over the course...
of it, I discuss the main points of their presentation. I knew well that, first, these itinerant Mormon preachers are themselves ignorant of their party’s actual radical doctrines, so that the whole thing often becomes for them just a sort of revivalist speech without any particular dogmatic content, and that, second, they claim unfamiliarity with the most flagrant Mormon delusions and denounce as lies the evidence from the religious-historical records that demonstrate their errors, thereby causing the common people to develop doubts about such proofs. For these reasons, I decided to strive to challenge only those delusions taught by their sect which the speakers themselves had chosen and publicly presented, and which they thus could neither avoid nor claim to be ignorant of.

I began with a prayer, in which I—conscious of the fact that I had not intruded, neither in the role of teacher nor in this group, for which I was personally responsible since many members of my congregation were present20—called upon the Lord for support to speak, not from or according to flesh and blood or my own weakness, but from the Word and by the power of the Spirit, and concluded my plea with the Lord’s Prayer.

Before I express my thoughts about various aspects of those things which have here been “made known by proclamation,” presented according to “the proper principle,” and explained “in complete accord with reason,” I will be so bold as to ask someone among those here present to take this Bible, which I brought with me just in case, to look up, and, if it be required, read out the scriptural passages to which I may refer, in order to point out to me, or at least take notice, if I should cite them incorrectly. The honored speakers who have had the floor thus far did not, as far as I could observe, have occasion to bring out the Bible to which they so frequently referred,

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20. Since Kierkegaard’s parish included most of the villages around Pedersborg and Kindertofte, it is only logical that most of the people attending the cottage meeting would be members of his parish. The personal history of Isaac Sørensen confirms that he and several other members of the Nicolai and Lene Sørensen family, who also lived in Haugerup, were in attendance. See Isaac Sorensen, History of Isaac Sorensen, transcribed by Rodney J. Sorensen, July 3–4, 1987, online at sorensenfamilyhistory.org.
not even to read aloud what is actually written in it. One can easily obtain
the appearance of proving by the scriptures whatever is at stake if one
dares to be satisfied with occasionally quoting a few random words, which,
while the speaker continues on, sound to a casual listener approximately
like what is actually found in it [the Bible]. If the Mormon gentlemen have
not yet learned this, it does not speak particularly well for either their fun-
damental insights into the subjects they profess to speak of, nor for their
consciences if they know this and still attempt to catch us in such a snare.
We shall, therefore, I think, give ourselves a little more time than they did,
and examine each point of the case more closely before we look into the
many others that follow. The order in which we shall proceed shall be that
we first, as a sort of introduction, investigate somewhat more closely some
of the secondary claims that they have just presented. Thereafter, as our main
concern, we will test the actual foundation of their doctrine and touch on
some of the central claims of their preaching. Since their honorable defend-
ers have today presented such great quantities of tangible nonsense about
specific details, individual elements of the latter points might even be true,
as far as that goes. However, these central claims must still submit to being
tested, namely by having the things their announcers have proclaimed and
emphasized so loudly, which they claim so decisively to speak “according
to the promptings of the Spirit,” compared with those things that we know
from other sources to be the actual common doctrine of their party.

The final speaker said that the Lord himself declared that those sheep
who are not “of this fold” should also hear the voice of the Lord and be
gathered into the one fold under the one shepherd—it is this word that was
fulfilled when he, “as it has now been made known by proclamation,” after
his resurrection in the land of the Jews, went to America and founded his
Church among the peoples there. And there would be a degree of sense
in this speech if the Lord had said something such as: unto these will I
travel. But instead, at the place to which the speaker referred, it reads:

21. All bold type and italics are in Kierkegaard’s original manuscript.
22. By the summer of 1854, the Mormon newspaper in Denmark, Skandina-
viens Stjerne (The Scandinavian Star), was being published regularly, along with
various LDS tracts and pamphlets, so there were many external sources from
which Kierkegaard could have gleaned information about LDS doctrine. Although
Kierkegaard was familiar with the many anti-Mormon publications then in circu-
lution, he is to be commended for the relatively unprejudiced approach he takes
here. He is one of the few Protestant priests (if not the only one) in Denmark at the
time to have given serious attention to the doctrines and teachings presented by
the Mormon missionaries themselves.
“Them also I must bring” (John 10:16), namely, to the sheep of “this fold,” that is, to the Christians of Jewish descent among whom the Lord had already begun to establish his Church. This is where the speaker omitted those of the Lord’s words which prove that he did not by any means speak of a trip to America; he omitted them in order to be able to misinterpret the rest without interference. Is this perhaps how he intends to teach us to treat that which he still calls Holy Writ? The speaker stressed further that the usual explanation, by which we understand the sheep of the other fold to be the heathen tribes who are gradually being gathered into the original Church of Jewish Christians, is false in any case, because the Gentiles have never heard the Lord’s voice, and it states in our scripture that “they shall hear my voice”—what else does that prove, than that the speaker is totally unfamiliar with, or refuses to understand the Bible’s language? In the Bible, Christian preaching, whether it is done by the apostles of the Lord or their successors, whether it is carried out primarily by trained teachers or by the common confession of the entire Church, is consistently and continually spoken of as the Lord’s own Word.

23. In his footnote, Kierkegaard seems to be arguing that when αγω (“ago”) is unaccompanied by a prepositional phrase or dative (which is probably what he means by “alone”) it should be translated as “lead here,” which may be true. Among the scriptures he cites, Acts 19:37 is indeed translated in this very fashion in the King James Version, and one could add “here” to ago’s meaning in John 7:45 (though one could argue that the “here” is implied in the previous phrase by the preposition). Acts 25:6 also lends support to Kierkegaard’s argument; however, his citation of Matthew 21:2, 7 does not make much sense because in these verses ago is not “alone” at all. In Matthew 21:2, ago could very well be translated as “lead,” but the “here” is supplied by μοι (“moi”), the dative of the personal pronoun meaning (in this case) “to me.” Furthermore, in Matthew 21:7 one would have to change “here” to “there” in order for the verse to make sense, which is not what Kierkegaard is arguing for.

24. Although Kierkegaard is unimpressed with the missionary’s exegesis of this passage, Kierkegaard does not show that it cannot refer to people everywhere, including scattered Israel. The missionary was using the traditional LDS exegesis of the passage grounded in 3 Nephi 15:21–23:

And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

And they understood me not, for they supposed it had been the Gentiles; for they understood not that the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching.
“The Word of the Lord is the word which is preached unto you,” wrote the Apostle Peter to the churches in the Middle East (1 Pet. 1:25); “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord,” wrote Paul to the Macedonian Christians (1 Thes. 1:8): in both cases to and about people, who had not had the Lord physically among them. They express themselves thus in accordance with the instructions given by the Lord himself: “He that heareth you heareth me” (Luke 10:16). The Lord himself foresaw the spread of his kingdom to all peoples, though they could not all have him visibly among them, when he testified before the judgment seat of Pilate: “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37).

We have been informed that, according to Ezekiel 37, the Prophet Ezekiel was commanded to take two pieces of wood and to write on one: “for Judah and his brethren,” and on the other “for Joseph and his brethren.” The latter is understood to be none other than the inhabitants of America, who are descendants of the kingdom of the ten tribes with the exiles of Joseph’s tribe at their head; and that is also, as prophecy has led us to expect, why plates were found among these inhabitants of America by Joseph Smith. Now, my friends, I shall not delay by proving that the

And they understood me not that I said they shall hear my voice; and they understood me not that the Gentiles should not at any time hear my voice—that I should not manifest myself unto them save it were by the Holy Ghost.

This idea readily resonates with Latter-day Saints. Doctrine and Covenants 1:38 reads: “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” [emphasis added].

All scriptures quoted by Peter Christian Kierkegaard have been translated directly from the tract by Julie K. Allen.

The Book of Mormon presents the early inhabitants of America not as descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel, which understanding Kierkegaard ascribes to the missionaries, but rather largely as those of the tribe of Joseph and Judah—Joseph through Lehi and Ishmael, and Judah through Mulek. See 2 Nephi 3:4 and Helaman 6:10.
prophet, who was referred to in the quoted scripture and its corresponding image, foresaw only and alone the abolition of the division that had developed among the people of God since the death of Solomon and the days of Jeroboam, through the reunification of all true Israelites in that Church which would, after the coming of Christ, hear the voice of the Lord and preserve his testimony. I shall refer only in passing to the account of how the ten tribes are supposed to have made their way to America more than two thousand years ago, and how they fared there, a story which, when it suddenly surfaces now without any trace or report of it having emerged in the time which has elapsed since, comes at least two thousand years too late to be accepted by any reasonable person as history and not rejected as an entirely unwarranted fairy tale. Instead, I will only allow myself the humble request for clarification as to whether it is due to the length of time that has elapsed since said piece of wood was addressed to Joseph and his brethren or to the distance between the Euphrates and America that Joseph Smith was able to rediscover what was originally a piece of wood as a collection of metal plates. If this thing happened by natural causes, one should certainly be able to demonstrate it by referring to other similar transformations, in which case it would be completely understandable that all those people, who, like King Midas among the heathens of ancient times, want so much to see everything they touch turn to gold, yearn for America, where presumably even a hazel staff that they happen to bring along can be hammered into plates of ducat gold. If, however, the transformation came about by a miracle, then that miracle was particularly unfortunate, since it does not in fact support the doctrine and the revelation, but instead makes it impossible for any reasonable person to recognize Ezekiel’s notched stick in Joseph Smith’s stack of plates.

It was also stated that a segment of America’s original inhabitants became black as a result of their sins. If that is the case, then the poor souls must also have become invisible. The whole thing is reminiscent of

28. Hazel or witch-hazel wood was a preferred material for divining or dowsing rods, and “ducat gold” refers to European gold coins.

a nursery tale told by a peasant, who recounts that some of Eve’s children became elves and trolls because she had forgotten to wash them one morning, and therefore tried to convince God that she had no children except those who were clean. As is well known, all of the blacks who now live in America were either brought there from Africa as slaves during the past 350 years, or are the descendants of such Negro slaves; whereas the original inhabitants of America, whom the Europeans found there and of whom there are still significant remants, are, as everyone knows, at least to ordinary eyes, not at all black, as is attested by the fact that they are often called red men, redskins, etc. As to the claim that the group of people who the honored speaker [the Mormon missionary] so boldly blackened have in truth since been completely eradicated from the earth as a punishment and warning to the rest of us, that is most likely, although he seems to know nothing of it, the purpose of the account of them in the Book of Mormon. But here we encounter once again one of these two-thousand-years-too-recent reports of incredible world events, the effects of which are supposed to have vanished entirely without a trace; it is as if we find we are dealing with a tale from 1001 Nights. In order that stories of this kind of portent, which vanish like will-o’-the-wisps without leaving so much as ashes behind, do not become entirely too ridiculous, they must certainly never be mentioned in proximity to that which not only contemporary

30. Although the Book of Mormon does mention the Lord’s cursing the Lamanites with “a skin of blackness” (2 Ne. 5:21), elsewhere “dark” or “darkness” is used (Jacob 3:9; Alma 3:6). It is of interest to note that the terms blackness and darkness are interchangeable in the Hebrew. See Daniel H. Ludlow, A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 132.

Historically, the understanding of these passages within the Church has never been associated with African Americans. The most common interpretation is that the descendants of the Lamanites are Native Americans. The Book of Mormon also makes it clear that the “curse” of a dark skin can be removed, as is demonstrated by a group of Lamanites whose “skin became white like unto the Nephites” because of their righteousness (3 Ne. 2:15). Furthermore, the LDS Church does not sustain the doctrine, implied by these verses, that there is a direct correlation between skin color and personal righteousness. On the contrary, as Nephi wrote, God “denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Ne. 26:33). For a history of Mormon interpretations of race and the Book of Mormon, see Armand L. Mauss, All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 41–157.

31. A will-o’-the-wisp is a flickering ball of light seen in swampy areas and marshes that recedes or vanishes if approached. Also known as “fool’s fire” or “jack o’lantern,” the phenomenon has often been used to describe a misleading illusion.
texts tell us about Jesus or even the miracles of Moses, but also the things therein that are substantiated by numerous inanimate monuments of all possible kinds, as well as by a continuous, incomprehensibly great chain of mutually corresponding effects in the history of the Jewish and Christian peoples in all places up to the present day, a witness which could not be silenced even if no literature, no architectural ruins or monuments, and no living people remained on the earth.

We have been told that, according to what John saw in his revelation, an angel should appear with an eternal gospel; and that this prophecy was unmistakably fulfilled by Joseph Smith and the doctrine that he brought to the kingdoms of the earth. But this fulfillment is more than a little dubious, regardless of whether it is Mr. Joseph Smith himself who is supposed to be the angel spoken of by John or whether one should understand it as referring to the angels who frequently chatted with him in one corner of America or another. For, as any of us can confirm, John’s angel flies in the midst of heaven or directly under heaven (Rev. 14:6), a description that applies thus far neither to Smith nor to his angels. Nor does it help a great deal that the honored speaker uses the occasion to position himself alongside Joseph Smith, just as in the Revelation of John the first angel is followed by another, who said, “Babylon is fallen, that great city” (Rev. 14:8), in that he [the missionary] also “proclaims” quite loudly for us that Babel has fallen. Not all trumpet blasts have the effect of those that thundered from the trumpets of the tabernacle when they destroyed the walls of Jericho at the Lord’s command (Josh. 6); and though Babel will certainly fall when said angel proclaims it, that does not mean that everyone who trumpets out those words will become either an angel or the conqueror of Babel. “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” said the prophet Paul (1 Cor. 4:20); and just as one does not become a prophet of the Lord simply by donning a sheepskin coat (Matt. 7:15; cf. Zech. 13:4; 2 Kgs. 1:8), neither can one become an angel of the Lord by attempting to borrow wings from the visions and language of the Spirit in the Revelation of John.

God has a body;32 said the same speaker; and on this occasion he blended truth and falsehood so completely together that the whole thing has begun to ferment and become completely indigestible. Yes, God certainly has a

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32. The LDS position is best summed up by a statement from the Doctrine and Covenants: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (130:22). For a discussion of the development of the Mormon understanding of the embodiment of God, see David L. Paulsen, “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” BYU Studies 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 6–94.
physical body, for God is both the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and since the Son became a man and was resurrected from the dead, then of course he did not reclaim his physical body from death in order to put it aside ever again. He ascended to heaven with it, he reigns with it in the glory of Godhood up above, and he shall come again with it to judge the living and the dead, for it has been written that the disciples saw him be taken up and that the angels testified for them that he would come again as they saw him ascend (Acts 1:9–11); indeed, both prophets and apostles have foreseen that all people shall see him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10; John 19:37; and Rev. 1:7). But although the truth of this is apparent to everyone who believes in him, it must, on the other hand, be assiduously differentiated from the doctrine which was just presented, which claims to assign either to God the Father or the Trinity a divine body of his own, as eternal as his essence, the model for Adam’s body. When such a claim is supported by the assertion that God manifested himself in the flesh several times prior to the birth of Christ, to Abraham, to Moses, etc., it is only the result of gross ignorance of that which the scriptures plainly teach, that the Father is revealed not only in the Son (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16), but also that he truly revealed himself to the patriarchs through him as his eternal Word (John 1:1–14), the brightness of his glory (Heb. 1:3), the angel of his presence (Isa. 63:9), and spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his neighbor (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:8), yea, though even Moses could not bear the full sight of his glory and let all his goodness pass before him, so that Moses saw his back parts (Ex. 33:18–34:8). Yet the fact that the claim made today cites for support the word of the Lord to Philip: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9), makes it seem almost like a test that had been administered in order to determine whether we here are not listening and speaking in our sleep. For it must be immediately apparent to those of us who are awake that this scripture shows that the Father has no divine body of his own, for it is here that we hear the Lord explain precisely this matter: it was incorrect when Philip said, “Shew us the Father,” and imagined thereby that he could be seen physically in another way than the apostles had already

33. Latter-day Saints would agree with all of what Kierkegaard says here about Christ’s physical body. Where they disagree is Kierkegaard’s attribution of that body to all three members of the Trinity.

34. Latter-day Saints believe that it was Jesus Christ who, in his pre-incarnate (but still material) humanlike form, visited the ancient prophets, thus making the missionaries’ supposed argument here a non sequitur even from a believer’s perspective. As Jesus himself says in Ether 3:16, a short few years after the Tower of Babel spoken of in Genesis 11:1–8: “Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.”
seen him, namely in the Son. It does not state *there*, as this new doctrine claims, that he who has seen God in the flesh has seen an image very similar to that of the Father, but that one such has seen the Father, who is therefore not physically visible except precisely in the Son.\(^{35}\)

My predecessor in this discussion said that there are now almost 600 different parties, all of whom call themselves Christians; this already demonstrates sufficiently the magnitude of the apostasy, the downfall of the Church, and the necessity of joining the “Latter-day Saints” instead of such a Babel. Well, yes, then, to each his own. For then there will be—since the gentlemen also desire to be considered Christians—hereafter 601 parties, each of which cries out: No, this is the way; no, salvation is to be found here. And then the next heresy which may arise in the future will be able to argue just as these gentlemen have done.\(^{36}\) Its spokesmen will once again say that the confusion of Babylon has come to the 601 sects, so that one ought to flee from them to us, for we are the lattermost Saints with the most recent wisdom—namely Number 602. For my part, I cannot help but think that it is nonsense to begin by attempting to prove that Christianity has failed, on the basis of the fact that there are numerous parties who are in disagreement and yet all wish to be counted as Christian, and then to endorse a new party, which is also in disagreement with all of the others and which also wishes to be counted as Christian. Moreover, I cannot understand at all what is supposedly proved against true Christianity by the multiplicity of contesting parties, all of which claim to be Christian and cannot of course all be such. Or were there perhaps no false Christians and heretical groups in the days of the apostles—though the apostles themselves refer to them in their writings, excommunicate them, and

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35. In a letter to editor John Wentworth of the *Chicago Democrat*, Joseph Smith stated, “I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features.” One reading of this detail is that God and Jesus do have physical bodies that are identical, or at least so identical the young boy was unable to make a distinction between the two. The question remains, however, if the Danish missionaries were aware of this account or not. See “First Vision” in Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 266–67.

36. While this point may sound like an odd one for a Protestant to make, understanding Kierkegaard’s support of the prominent nineteenth-century Danish Reformist priest N. F. S. Grundtvig makes this point less self-condemning. According to Grundtvig, the eternal Church is not sustained by any succession in priestly authority or purity of teaching, but rather by an oral tradition which binds contemporary believers to the original oral traditions established by Christ and perpetuated by the Apostles, as found particularly in the Apostles’ Creed, into a single, universal church.
warn against them? Was it not for precisely this reason that the Church
was founded and true Christianity established on the earth? Or is there
perhaps no honest man left on earth, since it is notorious that nearly all
heretics want to be considered honest? Are there no more virtuous maid-
ens simply because many of those we call by such a title during the mar-
riage ceremony are neither maidens nor virtuous? In short, the fact that
there are many parties, which, while disagreeing amongst themselves,
each individually claim to belong to or represent the Church of the Lord,
proves only that one must not blindly accept everyone as a Christian or a
teacher of Christianity who claims to be such and who rejects the teach-
ings of others, for in these two things must the false preachers, if they do
not wish to start warning against themselves, speak precisely the same as
those who preach the incontrovertible truth. But if one must be wary of
confiding in someone simply because he proclaims himself to be a teacher
of the only true Christianity, then there is most likely no one in whom one
should have less cause to confide than such teachers, who come and go like
migratory birds and who send their disciples on long journeys to far cor-
ners of the earth almost before they can properly learn the new doctrine
with more than their ears and tongues. For precisely such people will do
everything in their power to prevent others from judging them “by their
fruits”;37 one can thus understand the word of the Lord in Matthew 7:16
as applying either to their own conduct, when the temptation sometimes
becomes too strong for them and the sheepskin is too short to conceal the
wolf claws, or to the obvious and unmistakable effects of their teaching in
larger circles, where others faithfully accept and preserve it. Therefore, the
more they encourage crossing the great desert to Utah, where the temple
is being erected and where the Lord will reveal himself one of these days,
the more clearly well-taught Christians must remember the Lord’s words
about false preachers: “When they say that Christ is in the desert, do not

37. Kierkegaard may be referring obliquely to publicized charges of polyga-
mous behavior among Danish converts, but in fact no evidence of any socially
unacceptable behavior is recorded. Instead, most accounts portray the missionar-
ies and their converts as leading quite Christian lives, suffering persecution with-
out retaliation. According to Sørensen, the chief of police in Aalborg, Denmark,
had to rescind an order banning Mormon meetings because he could not dem-
onstrate any damage to the “civil order and common morality” brought about by
these meetings. Sørensen, Rejsen til Amerikas Zion. Den danske Mormonudvan-
dring før århundredeskiftet [The Journey to America’s Zion: The Danish Mormon
Emigration Prior to the Turn of the Century], 30.

The publicized charges of polygamy among Mormons converts in Den-
mark were made by Dr. H. C. Rørdam in 1852. H. C. Rørdam, “Contribution to
Information about the Mormons,” Dansk Kirketidende, April 9, 1854.
follow them there, and when they say that he is in the chambers, then do not believe it” (Matt. 24:23–26); the more we must, of course, realize that since the Second Coming of the Lord will be, according to his own promise, as the light which radiates from the East and shines into the West (Matt. 24:27), those who follow “the Star of the West” to meet him first have been falsely informed. But the more they flaunt great names, claiming that that which they speak is sheer inspiration from the “Spirit”; that it is sheer love, similar to the Savior’s in its deep intensity, with which they, like the honored speaker, impart to us their touching assurances in the midst of their humility; that “apostles and prophets” will soon be found at each train station: yes, all the more are we of course reminded that it is not by humble names and poor appellations (such, for example, as priests or chaplains), but rather as apostles and prophets that the Lord and his apostles taught us to recognize the proud host of false teachers (Matt. 24:11, 24; 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:20); that there are many false spirits (1 John 4:1ff); and that if anyone bears witness of himself, his witness is not true (John 5:31), with the exception of the Lord, who was both able and required to bear witness of himself as of everything, because he alone is the living Truth (John 8:13; cf. 14:6), but who, for our sake, also condescended to quote the testimony of others (John 5:32–34).

At this point, we must conclude our discussion of some of the more isolated inaccuracies and absurdities which we have heard this evening from the three preceding speakers, especially the last, who clearly intended to hit the nail on the head, while the other two had attempted, by means of some not too terribly distorted elements of the common doctrine of sin and mercy, to prepare us for the great news that he would bring. We will now proceed to the consideration of the central claims by which the “new principles” of these gentlemen and their teachers must stand and fall, and which they would therefore be unable, such as they might possibly dare to do with this or that of the previous topics, to apologize for or discount as minor mistakes that they had happened to make during the course of their speeches and which are not relevant to the doctrine itself in any way.

Their central claims are, first, as has been vigorously discussed here, that the Church of the Lord, which he founded among the Jewish people in the olden days, and in which and for which his apostles lived and worked, no longer exists. It is not to be found within the so-called Christianity that now exists on earth, but rather vanished many hundreds of years ago. The last honored speaker phrased it more forcefully than was necessary even from his standpoint when he taught us that this Church of the Lord had disappeared at the time of the “destruction of the apostles,” for which he blamed the “popes.” But even discounting this rather amusing mistake, by which the popes, that is, the Roman bishops with a commonly
acknowledged final authority over the affairs of the Church and a secular power derived from and corresponding to this, arrive rather precipitously on the scene of world history approximately five or six hundred years earlier than they are otherwise detectable there; and discounting the equally suspicious nature of this most recent bit of information, according to which it must be the earliest bishops in Rome after the days of the Apostles, who had until now been considered the friends of the apostles (Linus, cf. 2 Tim. 4:21; Anacletus, Clement, cf. Philip. 4:3), who, in all secrecy, without it even being suspected by anyone until the arrival of the Mormons, succeeded in convincing Emperor Nero or his officials to have Peter and Paul killed as martyrs in Rome—discounting, as I said, these proofs of what happens when one lets one’s mouth direct one’s thoughts instead of the thoughts the mouth, and when one who could perhaps be an attentive listener prefers instead to be a confused teacher: then there can be no remaining doubt that the claim that the Lord’s Church disappeared many centuries ago is both part of the Mormon doctrine and indispensable to them if they are to make any progress and convert anyone who is not ignorant and thoughtless to an incredible degree. The central cornerstone of the new wisdom, which currently comes to us from America, the claim that the Lord’s Church has vanished, is, curiously enough, nearly as old as the holy universal Church itself; nearly all heretics depend upon it and it has been proclaimed to us as an explicit doctrine by nearly every heretical group through the procession of centuries. “That Church, which was the universal one,” we learn in its fourth century from Augustine, “no longer exists, namely according to those who are outside it.” Already a hundred and fifty years earlier it had been proclaimed by one of the many companies of heretics whose names begin with M, namely among the Manichees, that the holy universal Church had perished even earlier than our exalted speaker here dared to estimate its demise, that it had namely perished the day our Lord ascended to heaven, in that even his Apostles, these “spiritless Galileans,” had already misunderstood his teachings and the order of salvation in essentially all aspects. So, the talk of the disappearance of the Lord’s Church from the earth is quite old; and why should it not be? Did he not foretell with certainty that his disciples would suffer the same fate as he himself (John 15:20)? And was not the first event following his ordination to his ministry, when the Spirit descended upon his head on the banks of the Jordan, that the Tempter stood by him and whispered: “Are you God’s Son? No, that is just empty talk and the wild fantasy of your mind.” When throughout the rest of the Lord’s subsequent ministry on the earth, the accusation that he was not who he is and who he claims to be (John 8:24, 25; cf. Luke 22:67–71) was his
constant companion until it triumphantly pointed its finger at him as he hung between two thieves (Matt. 27:39–44): how could it be otherwise than that his Church would be tested by the same fate? How can it then surprise us when the Church, already on the day of its anointing, that is, when the Spirit descended on the little group on Pentecost, and the universal Church was exemplarily completely present while the apostles spoke in all the tongues of the heathens, iv must hear whispers (Acts 2:13) that the whole thing was false excitement and ill-timed intoxication? Thus we must find it all the more understandable; just as when the Church later, through nearly all of its generations, must study the words of the Psalmist: I am peaceful, but when I open my mouth (that is, with the good news) (cf. 1 Tim. 6:13; Rom. 10:10; Mark 8:38), they are prepared for war (Ps. 120:7); and when it must thus hear evil, not just from those who openly hate its Lord, but also from those who, with hypocritical minds and treasonous thoughts, pretend to be his and, as such, proclaim, “See, here is the Christ, or look there (Matt. 24:5, 23), for the Church, which was universal, is no more.”

The above-mentioned accusation that the Church, which the Lord himself established in days of old, has long since dwindled and been destroyed, is, as we can see, an old affair. However, the more the claim itself appears to have the stamp of permanence, such that it will certainly never completely be silenced on earth until the Lord comes again in his father’s glory and fulfills his promise to lead the bride, who is the Church itself, home to the great bridal feast (Matt. 22:2ff; Rev. 19:7ff; 21:2, 9ff; cf. John 3:29; Eph. 5:25–27): the more, on the other hand, is the mark of corruption of the truthful account impressed upon all those who lend their voices to its support and find comfort in it. Proving that Montanists, 39

iv. For a correct account of the Pentecost miracle, in contrast to quite widespread misrepresentations, see Nordisk Tidsskrift for christlige Teologi, vol. 4, page 43f and pages 50–55 [footnote in original].

38. Kierkegaard’s claim here about the importance of Pentecost again reflects his Grundtvigian position. If sacred truths are to be communicated orally, then the day of Pentecost, with its use of all the languages of the heathens (and hence its disposition into different oral traditions the gospel truth) must stand as the supreme culmination of Christian preaching.
39. The Montanists were followers of an early Christian sect, named for its founder, Montanus, dating originally to the second century AD. Montanism was deemed heretical by the early church because of its unorthodox teachings and practices, such as encouraging speaking in tongues (glossolalia), believing in immediate revelation from the Spirit and allowing its prophesies to supersede those of the Apostles, and proclaiming immediate eschatological expectations. See Kurt Aland, “Montanism,” in Lindsay Jones, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion, 15 vols., 2d ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 9:6167–68.
Manichees,40 Mohammedans, Cathars,41 Quakers,42 and whatever else the other sects which have arisen after the establishment of the Church are called, were not founded by Jesus Christ and do not represent his people on earth is a difficult task and is, as a rule, not often nor consistently attempted. Nor is it necessary when the spiritual darkness is not too great; for they obviously lack both the original connection with the Lord and attempt in vain to pass over the centuries which lie between their founding and his departure from the earth. Moreover, time’s trial by fire always goes against them, for not one of them has been able to maintain itself by spiritual power and as a spiritual force for even just a few centuries. Their names would be largely forgotten if the original, now eighteen-hundred-year-old, universal Church did not remember them for the sake of the battles it has fought against them. By contrast, the fundamental aim of all sects and sect founders, their first and last word, is to assert that they are the only people and kingdom which can trace their descent from the days of the Lord and his Apostles without blatant self-contradiction and lies, [and] that all those whose faith and whose baptism no one has yet been able to prove to be different from that of Peter and Paul and John and Irenaeus43 and Augustine

40. The Manichees were followers of the ancient religion of Manichaeism, founded in the third century AD by the prophet Mani, who lived in Babylon (at this time, a province of Persia). Manichees adopted a dualistic view of the universe and saw the conflicts of the earth as a clash between the realm of light and the realm of darkness. See Gherardo Gnoli, “Manichaeism: An Overview,” in Encyclopedia of Religion, 8:5650–59.

41. The Cathars, also known as Albigensians after a region in France in which many Cathars lived, contested what they saw as corruption within the Catholic Church, believed in a Gnostic duality of matter and spirit, and sought to live a “pure” life, their name coming from the Greek καθαρο (“katharoi”), meaning “pure ones.” They rejected the Old Testament as God’s word and subscribed to a strong antimaterialistic worldview, having as a prime goal the liberation of the soul from the body. See Gordon Leff, “Cathari,” in Encyclopedia of Religion, 3:1456–58.

42. Quakers are members of the Religious Society of Friends, founded in seventeenth-century England by George Fox. Quakers teach that every person is able to individually recognize and follow the inner witness of the Light of God. Thus, they believe that access to God is available equally to everyone without the mediation of a paid clergy or the performance of outward sacraments. As such, they have tended to avoid hierarchy and creeds, while striving to live simple, honest, nonviolent, and egalitarian lifestyles. See Hugh Barbour, “Quakers,” in Encyclopedia of Religion, 11:7546–50.

43. A work by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon in the second century AD, entitled Against Heresies, served as the inspiration for Grundtvig’s conception of the primacy of the confession of faith and oral transmission of doctrine as the foundations of Christianity, which then became the cornerstones of Grundtvigian
and Ansgar44 and Luther and us, are not, in fact, the Lord’s people but only pretend to be such over the grave of the real Church. And yet, in their confusion and obduracy and without themselves knowing or desiring it, they themselves function as witnesses for the Church’s unbroken existence. The founders of each sect, though they otherwise condemn their predecessors and are condemned by those who come after them, consistently repeat the claim the Lord’s Church has perished and use all of the tricks at their disposal to prove this claim once and for all. When considered in the light of Truth, however, this claim is nothing more than an unwilling admission that an old building still stands firmly on the spot that they would so dearly like to call an abandoned lot and that this building is precisely the reason that their own new buildings cannot be located anywhere else than the air. It is only therefore that they all insist, despite disagreement among themselves, on the illegitimacy of historical Christianity, because they realize, or at least sense, that history’s witness of the Christian people, their faith, and their confession, testifies against them and against that which they would like to present as the true divine doctrine “according to the proper principles.” The members of these sects—like the false witnesses who testified against the Lord (Mark 14:56–59), and like essentially all false witnesses—are completely incapable of reconciling the differences in their testimony about the Church’s supposed destruction; for some claim the Church collapsed upon the Lord’s departure, others with “the destruction of the apostles,” others in the fourth, seventh, or eleventh century, and so on, ad infinitum. These discrepancies should serve as an involuntary testimony to every impartial person that the Church has been neither verifiably nor recognizably destroyed, and for every enlightened Christian as a sign that these dissenters believe just as little in the historical Christ (he who came in the flesh) as in the holy universal Church.

I would also like to attempt a refutation of the claim in question from other perspectives as well, which will perhaps be more comprehensible to many of my listeners. At least this much is—I hope I dare assume—clear to every one of you, that it causes our reverence for the Lord to suffer, or, more correctly, destroys our faith in him if we let ourselves be seduced into believing that the Church that he founded has been destroyed. Already in Old Testament times, the Lord asked, “What could have been done more

44. Ansgar lived from 801 to 865 and served as the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. “The Apostle of the North,” as he was known, was charged with and primarily responsible for bringing Christianity to Scandinavia.
to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isa. 5:4). That is precisely why neither the ancient covenant nor its people could perish; instead, they are both fulfilled by and transformed into the New Covenant and its people in the fullness of time (cf. Matt. 5:17, 18, and Rom. 11:16–32, as well as Acts 3:25–26). But for this latter people, for the Church that the Lord raised up by his hand from among the Jews and Gentiles, for the vineyard therefore (cf. Matt. 20:1ff), whose countless branches and shoots all ultimately derive from and are connected to the one true vine (John 15:1ff), even with the Tree of Life in the renewed Paradise—for this same vineyard God the Father was able to do more than for the first, as it is written that he said, “What shall I do? I will send my beloved Son” (Luke 20:13), and that he truly sent him, who calls himself and is in fact both the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), and sent him in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sacrifice for sin (Rom. 8:3), for the purpose of sanctifying all those who are of the Truth (John 3:16; 5:24; 18:37). And how could it be possible, if we thus believe in the Son, seriously to pursue the thought and consider it for a few moments to be reasonable or tolerable, that the kingdom which he thus founded should have perished or could perish, even if the heavens and the earth were destroyed, much less before that, much less after the passage of a few generations or a paltry few centuries? How could we abandon the ancient faith, which is the remnant of the consciousness of divinity in the hearts of men, even among the most degenerate peoples on earth, when the truth, even as it is older than the first lie, shall thus also survive the most recent lie and have the last word, when all those mouths that speak falsehoods have been stopped (Ps. 63:11)? Or should we, on the other hand, attempt to persuade ourselves and others that all of the generations which have lived between the days of the ancient Church or even the days of the apostles and Joseph Smith’s and our time, among whom the name of Jesus has been called upon and the Trinity has been worshipped, have been nothing but purely hypocrites and liars, since the kingdom of the Lord, whose voice shall be heard by all those who are of the Truth, has been gone from the earth all that time, throughout twelve or seventeen centuries, because there was not in all that time consistently even two or three who were joined in his name (Matt. 18:20)? Or is there another way out: is there really anyone who can find a tolerable purpose, let alone peace, in the conviction that our Savior was indeed the Son of God, as omnipotent and eternal as the Father and sent by him to the earth to confound the deeds of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8), that he in fact as part of his mission announced and founded a self-proclaimed kingdom of God, a kingdom of truth on earth (Mark 1:15; John 18:36–37) for the inheritance of eternal life (John 3:16), that he truly would invite all men to enter into it through repentance and faith
such that none would be excluded, neither of those peoples who did not see him but must necessarily believe in him through the words of others (John 17:20): and that thus all these great institutions and marvelous prospects should have disappeared, in order that, for example, the kingdom that the princes of this world founded at approximately the same time in Rome under Augustus and Tiberius, could last longer and be understood with greater justification to be an eternal kingdom than that which was founded by such a divine being, and of which it was already prophesied by the prophets that it should neither be eternally corrupted nor left to other people (Dan. 2:44)? I seem to recall that all three of the honored speakers expressed many things about their profound simplicity, upon which they base their claim to the right to be heard and believed more than the rest of us, whom they—and not we ourselves—quickly identified on the same occasions as the wise and clever ones, from whom God, in his wisdom, according to the testimony of the Lord himself and the Apostle Paul, has supposedly concealed the mysteries of the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:25; 1 Cor. 1:18–29). All three of them continued to keep so closely to the same course that not one of them explained in any detail about the simplicity in which they are so advanced, which explains at least in part why they overlooked the fact that the Lord, in the scripture they cited, does not speak of “simpletons” but of “babes.”

It is not, therefore, impossible that their concept of simplicity contains the key to much of that which they teach, as well as to the certainty with which they teach it, and that this same simplicity consists of never thinking a thought completely through [to its conclusion]; therefore, they do not easily notice, let alone become concerned by, the most illogical train of thought and its apparent self-contradictoriness. But however much this can serve to explain their thought processes, it does not serve to recommend them to people who must think, as I at least do, that those who are truly “babes” are those who have a childlike trust in the Lord’s Word (cf. Matt. 18:4; John 5:41), and that the truly “simple” are those who seek for the only needful thing with an undivided heart and therefore also with an unprejudiced view (cf. Luke 10:42 and Matt. 6:21–24 in the text), as well as that

45. Although nepios is translated as “babes” in Matthew 11:25, the most common use of the word in Greek literature is “infant.” However, nepios can also mean “childlike,” “innocent,” and “foolish,” in Greek texts including the New Testament. The New English Bible translates nepios as “simple.” Therefore, in regard to the meaning of Matthew 11:25 and 1 Corinthians 1:18–29, the missionaries’ interpretation is defensible. See Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:912–23.
such people, precisely because they remain in his Word, which is the truth, also understand the truth and are made free by it, and also free from all of the self-contradictions to be found in anyone who serves lies (cf. John 8:31, 32). The oddest aspect of this inauthentic simplicity, which can tolerate the thinking and preaching of things which, by the standards of every simple human thought, directly contradict and mutually exclude each other, such that they could not possibly both be true, is that, when we encounter this simplicity in such teachers, as tonight, if I recall all three presentations correctly, they claim that everything they teach “agrees absolutely with reason.” As anyone can easily recognize, this issue thus becomes, regarding Mormon preaching as a whole and particularly their doctrine of the Apostasy, essentially as follows: Do we consider it to be unreasonable and self-contradictory to believe in the only begotten Son of the Eternal Father, who will come in the fullness of time in order to establish an eternal kingdom of truth and mercy here on earth among the fallen people, and then to claim that this same kingdom perished long ago, long before the earth and the generation from which it was to gather its subjects would perish? We are told that we should be simple and not have any dealings with the wisdom of the wise, but rather to keep our human reason captive to the obedience of faith, which means here: attempt to believe yea and nay about the same matter. But if it occurs to us to raise the small question of why we actually should believe the Mormons and not anyone else who might want to train us to think nonsensical thoughts and self-contradictions, then the answer is: because the doctrines of the Mormons are completely in harmony with reason in all aspects, and therefore free from self-contradictions, agreeing in every particular with every other and in its entirety—that is, then, the same doctrine, which a moment before rejected the involvement of reason as utterly unjustified, which a moment earlier did not want to be tested by the standard of reason but rather be believed as self-contradictory despite reason, now wants to be believed because it is reasonable in each and every way.46

It is therefore self-contradiction, as I have just illuminated comprehensively, not just to claim that the Church of Christ has been eradicated from the earth, since its obvious opponents can convince themselves and

46. Kierkegaard’s challenge here is pertinent, not just for the Latter-day Saints but for every other religion that professes to be an advocate of both reason and faith. Latter-day Saints have, both historically and recently, claimed that their doctrines are in accordance with reason and logic, while at the same time admitting that certain doctrines or practices defy rational explanation. Elder Neal A. Maxwell acknowledged reason, experience, and revelation as three legitimate
each other of that without any real proof or valid reason, though occasion-
ally with the appearance of such and in any case without direct self-
contradiction, but to make such claims and still desire to be a Christian, still
want to believe in him as the true God and a real human being, the Savior
of the world, the founder of the kingdom of God and thereby the receiver
of all those who will come to him and let themselves be saved by him, but
therefore also the judge who will ultimately condemn those who did not
want to believe in him (John 3:18, 19; 12:46–48, cf. 2 Thes. 1:8, 2:10). And
yet our Mormon guides would have us believe all this. In every way, they
lead one down a false path. For if that, which we just saw to be unverifiable,
were verifiable, that his Church has vanished long ago from the earth, then
there would apparently be only one counsel to give all of us, namely that
we must not put our trust in him, either for time or for eternity. It is said
quite correctly, “As the man is, so is his strength” (Judg. 8:21), and thus are
his works. Therefore, if his works have been, as far as their tasks and goals
are concerned, recognizably ordained to last until the end of days, and have
nevertheless succumbed to the forces against which its founder intended
it to contend, and over which he claims to have attained a decisive victory

ways of knowing, declaring that “The Latter-day Saint leader seeks for the intel-
ligent inter-play of reason, experience, and inspiration—a triad of resources—as
ways of knowing, as ways of acquiring full information on which he will base his
decision-making.” Neal A. Maxwell, “A More Excellent Way”: Essays on Leader-
ship for Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 71. Earlier in the
same volume, Elder Maxwell wrote the following:

Reason has these distinct advantages: it can transcend the inevitably
limited individual experience; it can checkrein false inspiration; it per-
mits us to use and build on the experiences, testimonies, and insights of
others; it makes vicarious learning possible; it permits us to extrapolate
from great books and the scriptures for our own lives. Obviously, the
Lord intends that we develop our powers of reason. In the Doctrine and
Covenants, Section 9, verse 8, he stresses the need for each of us to “study
it out in your mind.” In Section 45 he speaks about his intent to “show
unto you my strong reasoning.” However, reason has some distinct limi-
tations: reason by itself is not able to transcend our native wisdom and
intelligence; sometimes reason is applied to skimpy data; often reason
rests on false premises which can be very misleading; reason, unfortu-
nately, at times, is divorced from feeling; reason can become an end in
itself and people can come to worship the process of logic in a kind of
“adoration of the human mind.” (69–70)

Thus, while reason does offer us certain advantages and benefits, it might
be advisable for Latter-day Saints to consider carefully Kierkegaard’s criticism
before claiming that all LDS religious assertions rest exclusively on a reasonable
foundation.
(John 12:31, 32; 19:30): then it is unmistakably not him on whom we should depend to build securely and travel safely through life. Naturally, someone who is otherwise seriously concerned with an immovable truth and an eternal comfort and can, in a spiritual sense, count to five, can hardly be satisfied and soothed by the Mormon wisdom, offered to us here tonight, that the same Church that Christ personally established disappeared at the same time as the “destruction of the apostles,” that is to say more than 1700 years ago, but has been renewed and restored a quarter of a century ago by Joseph Smith in America. Already at this point in our investigation, it is namely easy enough to see that if the work of the Divine Human is supposed to have vanished after the passing of a few human generations because of the corrupt world’s violence and deceit, then S.T. Mr. Joseph Smith’s restoration of the same—which is still under development, insofar as it is perpetually receiving a changing order of salvation by new revelations—cannot expect, with the least reasonableness or probability, greater duration in its uncorrupted form than at the most a few months, unless Smith is to be depicted as something even higher than God’s only begotten Son, which would be both exceedingly unreasonable and blasphemous.

Thus it stands, when the matter is considered in general terms, with our new prophets’ revival of the old talk about the Church as long since dead and buried, and the entirely new report which they connect to the former supposition that the spirit and true nature of the dearly departed—supposedly in accordance with the theory that was famous in its day that the cemetery is the place “where our immortal souls will be buried in the womb of the earth”—has been exhumed in our day in the form of shining metal plates. They are forced to pile contradiction upon contradiction in their attempt to differentiate between those things that are inseparably united in our childhood teachings and the common confession of the Church: faith in the historical Savior, who was crucified by Pilate and resurrected, and in the uninterrupted effective presence of the Holy Spirit in the holy, universal Church, which is historically connected to the Savior until the end of the progression of the world. It is equally impossible truly to reconcile what they claim to accept from the scriptures about the person and works of Christ with what they teach about their own doctrine of the downfall of his kingdom, because the world murdered his apostles just as it had murdered him himself. It is just as impossible to bring these

47. S.T. is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase Salvo Titulo, an expression used when the speaker wishes to refer politely to someone whose title he does not know, demonstrating both Kierkegaard’s command of Latin and his determination to resist the temptation of allowing his remarks to deteriorate into mudslinging.
positions into agreement as it would be to follow Baron von Münchhausen’s 48 famous recommendation of climbing from here to the moon on a rope woven of chaff, which can be cut off below as it is tied on up above. But what shall we therefore think of such a doctrine, especially when we notice that the Lord, according to everything that is known about him and his work, must not just necessarily lose all credibility, if the kingdom of God which he founded has ever vanished from the earth, but also that he himself, precisely under the designation “congregation” or “church,” expressly and emphatically promised the congregation of his faithful uninterrupted continuance here on earth? “Thou are the rock”—thus he spake to Peter in ancient days, as is clearly stated in one of the Gospels with which our distinguished speakers “are in complete agreement”—“and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). 49 And these words of the Lord can in no way, as the Mormon gentlemen would certainly immediately attempt to explain, either exclusively or even primarily, be understood as referring to the assembly of the saints above, or that which we generally and accurately call the triumphant Church. Its members are namely done with death once and for all (Heb. 9:27), and where their hymns of praise can be heard, there

48. Baron von Münchhausen is a fictional character in several collections of stories from the late eighteenth century, which recount his impossible exploits and adventures. The character is based on a German nobleman, Karl Friedrich Hieronymus (1720–97), who served in the Russian military and entertained his friends by telling tall tales of traveling to the moon, riding cannonballs, and moving castles with the aid of a hot-air balloon. For example, see Gottfried August Bürger et al., Die wunderbaren Reisen und Abenteuer des Freiherrn von Münchhausen (Zurich: Nord-Süd Verlag, 1977).

49. The verse here quoted by Kierkegaard does not assert that the original Church was immune to apostasy. In fact, the verse itself is ambiguous in that autes could be referring to either “this rock” (taute te petra) or “the Church” (ten ekklesian), both of which nouns are feminine and would, therefore, correspond with the pronoun. This raises a very interesting exegetical issue because the case could be made that in Matthew 16:18 the Lord was not referring to the Church at all but to the rock itself, a popular view among Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith explained, “Jesus in His teachings says, ‘Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ What rock? Revelation.” Furthermore, the doctrine of apostasy does not mean that the Lord speaks to his children only when His Church is on the earth. On the contrary, LDS leaders have taught that “God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.” Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 274, and “Statement of the First Presidency regarding God’s Love for All Mankind,” February 15, 1978.
death is no more (Rev. 20:14; 21:4). It cannot, therefore, as is the case in the gentlemen’s arguments of which we are speaking here, be presented as endangered and struggling against the might of the kingdom of death. That can only be said of that which has been appropriately dubbed the *militant Church*, the union of the Lord’s disciples in the contemporary world. It is those, therefore, whose society and church the Lord is most likely speaking of when he foresees combat and victory for “His Church,” despite all the efforts and power of the kingdom of death. And in accordance with the same, the Lord speaks in the same place about building his Church on *faith and confession*, that is, the faith which Peter himself had received power to proclaim by grace and which thus became in his heart and mouth the rock of righteousness, for which reason the Lord called him his rock (cf Matt. 16:16, 17). For it must be well known unto all believers that this same faith, inasmuch as we, with God’s help, enter into the triumphant congregation, hereafter shall among all of us be replaced by its dual fruits, by the face-to-face contemplation in its unity with that love by which the God who is love can be all in all (1 Cor. 13:8, 12; cf. 2 Cor. 5:7 and 1 Cor. 15:28). On the other hand, it is obvious to everyone that a society has existed for eighteen centuries, which has undeniably—regardless of whatever else the soul-searching gentlemen of the Mormons or any other race might have against its sincerity—constantly and expressly required a certain confession and accepted a certain faith as the conditions for entrance into the same, as the foundation of the building which calls itself and is known to history as Christ’s Church. Thus, when everything has been considered, there is nothing more for us to do, those of us who have begun to love and know the truth—except once more to express surprise that people who claim to know and believe what the aforementioned scripture states about the Lord and Peter could still have either the blindness or audacity to postulate that the Church has been destroyed—than most sincerely to rejoice at the sight of how that little verse about the stone, which carries the Lord’s Church, is itself also a stone, from which—just as in the fairy tale about lying Hans—no one who has told a lie can escape the same day with a better fate than breaking his legs on it. Or is it perhaps uncharitable, even an ungodly joy, always to disapprove, but never more vehemently than when one stands opposite speakers for whom the great words about...

v. A further exploration of the contents of this part, in contrast to incorrect interpretations, can be found in Nordisk Tidsskrift for christlige Teologi, vol. 1, pp. 91–96 [footnote in original].

50. Here again Kierkegaard’s Grundtvigian emphasis on the oral tradition and its necessarily eternal nature stands out.
their deep love for the rest of us proceed so smoothly through their throats and so lightly over their tongues as we have experienced this evening? I certainly do not believe so. Firstly, because I, once I began to believe in our Lord, chose sides once and for all in the great conflict between him and the spirit that dominates the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2; cf. 1 Jn. 3:8), therefore I cannot refrain from rejoicing every time it occurs anew that his opponents are put to shame by his Word (cf. Luke 13:17). But it must then be our sincere hope immediately thereafter for all those of his opponents who are fundamentally of the truth and who therefore shall come to him eventually, regardless of how long they, in their blindness, refuse to do so, that they will be profited and blessed by experiencing, very soon and very strongly, that they are incapable of kicking against the pricks (cf. Acts 26:14), because they thus—like Paul, after the Lord met him on the road to Damascus—will learn to lay their hands over the mouths with which they have uttered blasphemy against him (cf. 1 Tim. 1:13), before the hour comes when all mouths that speak lies will be sealed forever (Ps. 63:11). In any case it would be better for them quite soon and quite severely to go astray, as it is called, and come to harm amidst the adventures and artifices of evasion and misrepresentation here on earth, if they thereby, however belatedly, can be persuaded to give glory to God, humbly to bow themselves before and faithfully to acquire the Lord’s words of truth and mercy, which have been entrusted by him to that Church which they slander and deride—that would be better than if one of them, God forbid, should finally and decisively run into that rock from which all of the lesser stones over which they stumble derive their firmness and power, and of which it is said: whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it fall, it will grind him to powder (Matt. 21:44).

However, the opponents of the Church, such as we have heard this evening, still say—and this is their second main allegation—that in any case, baptism has been unmistakably and incontrovertibly distorted and corrupted within European so-called Christianity. Different in every particular from the way it was instituted by the Lord and practiced by his apostles, it has no valid claim upon its name, regardless of whether we consider those who are performing it, since they, after all, lack the authority from the Lord to do so, or those who are being baptized, for they are of course feeble and lack the understanding to receive and appropriate it, or, finally, the manner in which baptism is performed, as a few drops of water and a sort of sprinkling with them cannot even rightly be called a shower, let alone—as the only correct and authentic manner of baptism discussed
in scripture—an immersion.\textsuperscript{51} One can preach long and widely on this subject, as the examples this evening sufficiently demonstrate, first about American authority and then about the depth of the waters and water containers to be found in the Promised Land in the Lord’s day, or about how completely the embryo in its mother’s womb is surrounded by water and how carefully, therefore, every last nail on our bodies must be buried in the waters of baptism, as well as how particularly this is supposed to have been emphasized by the Apostles in scriptural passages of which no one has previously been able to make sense. Before we, however, venture into any of this complicated doctrine, it would not be amiss to single out two comments, which certainly seem to have escaped the honored speakers’ notice, but which are of decisive importance for proper judgment, both of the question of the validity of the baptism which has been commonly used throughout all Christendom for hundreds of years and of the prospect that has been so favorably presented to us here of this baptism being superseded by another, namely that which, as it is claimed, has been lost for so long but is the only correct, true, and original baptism. Concerning the first of these two points, it becomes apparent, when not assiduously ignored or intentionally avoided, that a rather unique connection exists between the claims about the Church’s downfall and those of the corruption of baptism, such that the one, all things considered, must stand or fall with the other. For baptism was not just instituted by the Lord in and for his Church, as are many other things (the sacrament, ordinations, etc.), and of which one might well believe that this or that was momentarily altered by his disciples without altogether abandoning or completely ceasing to represent his Church. But baptism is that which, of all of the Lord’s institutions, must be appropriated first, and that by which people first become his disciples: it is nothing other than the entrance into the Church, and not just one entrance among many, but the only entrance into it. The Lord himself reveals this when he commands, “Make disciples of all nations (which

\textsuperscript{51} From Kierkegaard’s extensive treatment of baptism in this section, it seems likely that the missionaries spoke at length concerning this ordinance. Kierkegaard’s comments concerning baptism stem mainly from his belief that Christ’s church could not have suffered apostasy, coupled with his exegesis of certain biblical texts. Although the missionaries seem to have engaged in similar exegetical pursuits (which, as Kierkegaard suggests, may have been beyond their grasp), the most clear scriptural teaching for Latter-day Saints on baptism comes from 3 Nephi 11:18–41. Here, the need for direct authority is demonstrated as well as a descriptive explanation of how baptism is to be performed, including the need for immersion.
means, as our fathers aptly expressed it, to ‘Christianize’ all people),
baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19). This is verified by the history of the Church
over eighteen centuries, during which baptism has represented the distinc-
tion between it and the world; and concerning this matter—to mention it
in passing—even the Mormons are of the same opinion, such that it is also
by a so-called baptism that one can gain admission to, and entrance into
their, as it is called, only true Christian community. If the baptism which
the Lord instituted—even if only for several centuries, and even if time is
not calculated even half as generously as our Mormon preachers would
like—has indeed been abolished everywhere and replaced throughout
Christendom by an invalid ceremony of man’s own making, an unauthor-
ized and illegitimate, powerless and meaningless sprinkling of small chil-
dren, who, moreover, should not even have been baptized at the age and in
the mental condition in which they found themselves, then the obvious
consequence, unless one could possibly discover a group of people who
have continued to live on earth all that time and, what is more, have
attained the age of several hundred years, is that the Church has died
out and vanished along with the last person who was baptized in the cor-
rect and original manner. But that, as we have just considered and assured
ourselves anew, cannot be, if it was in fact founded by the Son of God in
whom we believe. Furthermore, if the Church was destroyed centuries ago,
then there can be no more proper baptism, for such baptism requires, as
our speakers themselves have been so eager to remind us, authority from
the founder of the Church, a commandment from him to undertake such
an act. It is true, according to the Church’s own account and that of the
scriptures, that he gave such authority to his Church or to the community
of his disciples; and he promised them that he would remain with them
until the end of the world (Matt. 28:19–20). This is, however, precisely why
that same authority cannot have any meaning, if that community, despite
his promise, has passed away; in any case, then, this authority can in no
way be passed on, not by angels or stars, clouds or rivers, or whoever else
one might decide to appoint as Baptists in place of the Church, even when
it, like others who have departed by death, is thought to have fallen into
decay, which anyone must admit is valid. But if we then ask, in this context,
the question about whence the Mormon baptism derives its authority, the
second comment to which I referred earlier intrudes here of its own accord.
For the unmistakable observation is this: the Mormon baptism, whether its
origins are traced back to Joseph Smith himself or to one of his earliest
disciples or friends, who baptized him and by whom he was baptized, can
never recommend itself to the conscience of anyone but, what is more, no
matter how the case is presented, it always appears as reprehensible. If it is
claimed on the one hand that the one who performed the first baptism was himself properly baptized, that is, according to what we have recently understood from the Lord’s words in Matthew 28:19–20, baptized by the Church, to which the Lord gave the authority and empowered to do so, and promised his presence and support until the end of the world: then the charge that the Church vanished “long ago” and that baptism has been corrupted “for centuries and everywhere” is just an entirely unfounded and groundless claim, or, to speak in plain Danish, a gross lie and an impertinent slander. For Joseph Smith was born in this century, in the same year as I was, and neither he nor his friend could have been baptized before his birth, just as it is certain enough that baptism, both in 1805 and 1705 and 1605 was administered everywhere in Christendom as it is now with regard to all of the elements of which the Mormons disapprove, so that it has at least not been changed for us poor souls after the gentlemen had received it in another and better form in the Church. It helps but little to counter with the assertion that Joseph Smith and his friend, despite the downfall of the Church and the corruption of baptism among the so-called Christians, were nevertheless properly baptized, namely either by an angel or by an angel’s decree. For either the angel acted contrary to that which the Church’s founder ordained, when he appointed his Church to perform baptisms (Matt. 28), in which case it is most likely the same angel who said to Eve: “You shall not die, I know better and have better things in mind for you than him up there” (cf. Gen. 3:4–5). Or else the Lord, God forbid that we should even consider this thought, broke his promise and did not remain with the Church until the end of the world, and was therefore forced at some point in time to make up for this neglect by sending an angel to a treasure-hunter in America. But in that case, it would be idolatry to believe in such a Lord, who forgets to keep his word and then has to correct his own mistake. If, on the other hand, one assumes that Joseph Smith and his friend were not in fact properly baptized themselves—and it must, in any case, be the Mormons’ own claim that Smith was not baptized when he received the first of his purported visions—but that the gentlemen were made capable, in an extraordinary manner, of recognizing how the proper baptism, which they themselves had not received, should be performed and then of teaching it to the rest of us, vi then this interpretation of the

vi. It is well known that J. Smith once received a revelation that the baptismal ordinance should, from now on, contain the words: “having authority from Jesum Christum [sic], I baptize you etc.” But that only illustrates that his revelations cannot be from the Holy Spirit, who, as is known, on Pentecost and thereafter has always shown itself to be the master of languages, for it is not correct in either the language of God or men to say “from Jesum Christum,” or, as the Mormon preachers commonly say, “Jesum Christum has commanded, will punish, etc.” [footnote in original].
situation cannot pretend to be any more reliable than the one we discussed first. One of the very unique characteristics of the kingdom of God, which our Savior came to earth to establish, is that *no one can see it* unless he is born again, is born of water and of the Spirit, is incorporated into it by the bath of rebirth and renewal which is precisely what the baptism instituted by the Lord is (John 3:3–5; cf. Titus 3:4–5; Matt. 28:19). The meaning of this statement is naturally not that one should not be able to feel and, as it were, catch sight of the fact that there is a church on earth that takes upon it the name of the Lord, that claims to have certain practices and institutions from him, that acts and expresses itself in a certain way, and so forth. Even the worst enemies of the Lord and of his Church have known all of these things, and they have used this knowledge often enough to their own ends in attempts to disrupt his Church, if at all possible. On the contrary, the meaning of the Lord’s assertion of the unrecognizability of his kingdom for all those who have not been incorporated into it by the birth of water and the Spirit is unmistakably this, that the essence of the kingdom of God, the true nature of the source and development of its inner life, that the manner and circumstances of the Holy Spirit’s involvement with it—that all of this is hidden and unrecognizable for those who are outside the Church, such that one must have been personally incorporated into the Lord’s Church, have become a participant in the life of God and the Spirit which brings it about, before one can see it properly for oneself and gain true spiritual recognition of it and insight into it. In other words: Christianity is a new life, of which the natural man has no part and therefore no true comprehension either. It is namely completely impossible in truth to recognize that which one has not begun to the least degree to experience, to become a part of, to know. But, on the other hand, one can—as was the case, when the Lord walked on earth, with both Nicodemus, to whom he first explained the necessity of being born again, and many others, and as it has occurred within the Church ever since—become aware of, and be influenced by, the new life that we encounter in other people who have become Christian. One can hear testimony about the same presented so thoroughly and urgently that one decides for oneself to seek to take part in it through the appropriation of baptism and its

52. According to Kierkegaard’s footnote, the missionaries were using the incorrect declension of the name Jesus Christ in their baptismal ordinance, using the dative form Jesum Christum, when they should have been using Jesus Christus, the nominative. No revelation of Joseph Smith in English uses the phrase “having authority from Jesum Christum.” However, it is conceivable that the problem was either an error on the part of individual missionaries or the result of a mistranslation of Church documents from English into Danish.
conditions as they are offered in the Church. This is the way which Joseph Smith, by his own confession, would not or could not follow, since the Church, according to his account, did not exist when he and his friends were born and raised. If we remember the Lord’s insistence on the absolute necessity of the new birth by means of water and the Spirit in order to see the kingdom of God, he [Joseph Smith] has therefore been entirely incapable of seeing the kingdom of God from the very beginning: of truly recognizing its nature, its spirit, its life, its true members, its unchangeable institutions, etc. When he began to see angels, therefore, he was unable to judge whether they truly belonged to the kingdom of God as ministering spirits, sent forth for the sake of those who shall be the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14), or to the spirit army of wickedness that disguises itself as angels of light (Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 11:14). When he was guided in his buried-treasure hunting to find the mysterious plates, he was unable to determine whether or not their content was consonant with the nature of the kingdom of God. When he heard voices that slandered and mocked the Church on earth and its baptism, he was not able to judge according to the truth whether or not this was justified. In short, if one wishes to pass the mildest possible judgment on Joseph Smith, disregarding the fact that he, by all reliable accounts and all other characteristics, invented his angels, his plates, and his revelations himself, and assuming for a moment his own account of events to be true, he exposes himself by his own account, when compared with the Lord’s words to Nicodemus, as a person who, unbaptized and therefore not born again, could not see the kingdom of God but still audaciously allowed himself to listen to angels without knowing whether they came from heaven or from hell, to evaluate scriptures without knowing if they

53. Joseph Smith was, contrary to Kierkegaard’s accusation, very well aware of this distinction. Daniel Tyler gives us an account of a sermon the Prophet gave in which Joseph argued that the phrase “born again” found in John 3:3 does not refer to baptism or the gift of the Holy Ghost but to the operations of the Holy Ghost that must occur before one can even see the kingdom of God: “The birth here spoken of, the Prophet said, was not the gift of the Holy Ghost, which was promised after baptism, but was an illumination of the mind by the Spirit which attended the preaching of the gospel by the elders of the Church. . . . This was being born again to see the kingdom of God. They were not in it, but could see it from the outside, which they could not do until the Spirit of the Lord took the veil from before their eyes.” “Daniel Tyler,” in They Knew the Prophet, comp. Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 56. And the kingdom of God he described as “where there is a prophet, a priest, or a righteous man unto whom God gives His oracles.” Smith, Teachings of the Prophet, 272. What Kierkegaard meant by unchangeable institutions would have be an interesting question to pose.
originated in the kingdom of God or the devil’s archives, to judge baptism without having received it and the Church without having become a member of it. But all such dealings are, according to the Lord’s words to Nicodemus, the height of foolishness; and just as the Lord rejected his complacent assertion: “We know that thou art a teacher come from God” (John 3:2), thus must enlightened Christians always reject Joseph Smith’s smug claim: I know that it was an angel of truth, scriptures of truth, a renewal of the kingdom of God that came to me, although I was not baptized with that baptism which I now offer you—that is, as we must clarify, despite the fact that he himself stood outside the kingdom of God at that point in time and was therefore unqualified in a spiritual sense to see it or recognize its nature. In other words, which will perhaps make it easier to summarize the situation: a man, who himself admits that he began as a non-Christian, in that he himself asserts that Christianity had vanished before he came to earth, this is the man who, from the exalted position of outsider, takes it upon himself to lead the rest of us into true Christianity. This is as if a man were to offer his services as a voice teacher, and, by way of recommending himself, boasted that he, prior to conceiving this idea, had been as unmusical as anyone and stone deaf. In Joseph Smith the world has found a counterpart to that pedagogue of the last century who discovered a new method of child-rearing, of which he explicitly claimed that whoever was not raised by it would never become a functioning and reasonable person. And yet this wonderful inventor had not, as he himself repeatedly emphasized, been raised by this method. Smith’s claims are, however, much worse than such nonsense because the matter at stake is an upbringing and a life lived according to the instructions of Jesus Christ rather than those of Joseph Smith. Jesus Christ taught us once and for all that whosoever does not enter into his kingdom by baptism’s gate can neither see nor enter into it, and yet it is one who, by the Lord’s definition, is blind that presumes to lead the rest of us to the Lord and in by the gate that he himself, according to the words of the Lord, cannot even see, let alone open.

I have lingered at length on these two observations that we have just examined, because it is primarily in their light that one can and must see the baselessness of all this talk of the corruption of baptism, since the attempt to clarify the question by means of a host of individual investigations of, for example, the Greek word which is translated as “baptize,” the depth and volume of water vessels in the houses of rich and poor men in the East, or the age of children who are spoken of in the scriptures as Christian, etc., must necessarily involve much scholarly information that will hardly be comprehensible to the unschooled. But if one nevertheless desires to discuss the like, as our Mormon speakers did, despite their
proclaimed simplicity and unschooled brilliance, casting out scholarly postulates about such things which are literally Greek and Hebrew to them rather than sticking to or even just touching on their main views, then I will gladly take part. I am able to cite, here on the spot if it be required, around a dozen scriptural passages from the New Testament in which the Greek words translated as “baptism” and “baptize” are used in such a way that one can in no way imagine immersion, but only either a shower or even just a partial wetting with something. For, just to name a few examples, the apostles were certainly not “immersed” in the Spirit that descended over them on Pentecost and yet the Lord calls it being baptized by the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:2–4 and 1:5);54 the Pharisees were certainly not “completely immersed” whenever they washed their hands before meals, but it states in Luke 11:38 in the central text that they marveled that the Lord did not “baptize” himself (i.e., wet his hands, wash them) before dinner (cf. Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:3 from which one can see that nothing more than one’s hands were required to be washed); nor, indeed, was the Lord “completely immersed” in anything when he, in fulfillment of his own prophecy, was baptized with his blood in Gethsemane and on the cross (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50; cf. 22:44; John 19:34). At times, therefore, in the New Testament, “baptize” means altogether undeniably—as far as the formal side of the matter is concerned—only being moistened or showered. And when it seems from other passages, for example in Romans 6:4 as was cited this evening, that baptism in the early days of the Church was frequently performed by immersion, as the history of the Church also confirms,55 the unqualified use in this passage of the term “baptism” to describe both processes must be a clue to every reasonable analysis that the one baptism of which Paul speaks (Eph. 4:5) does not cease to be one and the same, whether more or less water is used, sprinkling or immersion, nor because someone else has decided that it should affect matters if the water is ice-cold or tepid, seawater or fresh, etc. I would also like to enter into a little discussion about whether the Church is correct in believing that the Lord’s

54. Kierkegaard’s argument here is tenuous at best, for he is arguing that the two verbs—baptizo in Acts 1:5 and pleroo in Acts 2:2–4—are synonymous, which would mean that when we are physically baptized, we should be “filled” with water.

55. This is strong evidence for baptism by immersion, as opposed to one citation (Luke 11:38) that shows the verb baptizo being used in a context that does not mean “immersion,” which could easily be explained via Greek semantics. The main problem with this entire argument is that the verb baptizo has both meanings, either “to immerse” or “to dip in water,” which renders a recourse to the “original Greek” fruitless in one’s attempts to “prove” that baptism must be administered a certain way.
treatment of the small children that were brought to him, and his words concerning them, contain the charge of baptizing them, or whether our Mormon teachers are correct in interpreting the same as meaning that they should not baptize children, but rather take them in their arms and bless them. As far as their imitation of the Lord’s works is concerned, everyone can see immediately that children are ill-served thereby. Even if it were not some conceited heretic or other who embraced them, even if it were not Joseph Smith with his metal plates but rather Moses with the stone tablets of the Law, or David, Elijah, or Peter who appeared to embrace and bless them, the children would always still suffer by comparison with those for whom the Lord did the same; for it is only from him that the power to heal their souls and bodies emanates (cf. Luke 5:17; 6:19; Matt. 14:36). And on the other side: if the Lord, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), does not reconsider nor take back his words—if he therefore instructed his followers once and for all to let the children come unto him, but yet removed his physical presence from them not long afterwards, then he must necessarily have intended that the children should be brought unto him there, where he has opened the gates of the kingdom of God once and for all, namely in baptism, which he commanded should be the requirement for being counted among those with whom he will be until the end of the world (Matt. 28:19–20). But if it were possible for a sincere heart to doubt this interpretation of the situation, then every shadow of doubt must disappear as soon as we observe that already the apostles, when they wrote to the congregations, expressly also address the children\footnote{It should be pointed out that in these verses neither Paul nor John gives any information as to the exact ages of the children in question, which suggests Kierkegaard’s unfamiliarity with the LDS doctrine of accountability at age eight. Interestingly enough, the term Paul uses here for “children” is different from the Greek for “infants,” nepioi, which could render these declarations entirely consistent with LDS doctrine. It should also be pointed out that nepios is actually an adjective and could very well be used, but again neither Paul nor John uses it thus, which indicates that the “children” could very well have been much older than infants. In fact, John’s term neaniskoi is actually translated “young men” in the KJV. Regardless of such considerations, the most clear scriptural foundation for why Latter-day Saints do not baptize infants is found in Moroni 8.} (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; 1 Jn. 2:13), that they therefore also include them among those addressed in the letters’ salutation to the “saints . . . and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1), “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ” (Col. 1:2), to those who have “an unction from the Holy One,” i.e., who have been “Christianized” (1 Jn. 2:20), much less when we take the time to consider the fact that Paul himself urges the children to do something “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1 (4); Col. 3:20). For this can
only be asked with bitter mockery of someone who is not already grafted into the Lord; and this grafting occurs, as the same apostle testifies, precisely through baptism (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27–28): by contrast, whatever a man does without being baptized, however excellent and praiseworthy—it cannot be done “in the Lord.” Furthermore, I would very much like to clarify that although the Lord, in the Gospel of Mark, sets faith before baptism: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16), in Matthew he places baptism ahead of teaching and the faith that grows from the same when he says: Make all people disciples by baptizing them . . . and by teaching them, etc. (Matt. 28:19–20). It has not, then, escaped the Lord’s notice but has been clearly announced by him in advance, that baptism and faith should surely be required of everyone who wants to belong to him, but that the order should be different: among the adults who were previously Jews or Gentiles faith is followed by baptism; among the children whom faithful parents desire to lead to him baptism comes first, then teaching and faith thereon.57 And while the passage in Matthew sounds different in our customary translations, so that the Lord seems to say: teach them, baptize them, and teach them—then I will explain with pleasure that it is an error in translation that originated in the older Latin translation, which many other translations in German, Danish, etc., follow, rather than carefully examining the language and preserving what is written in the original language. The truth of this cannot, of course, be made evident to anyone except those who can themselves read and translate the books of the New Testament as they are written in Greek. But if our Mormon congregation here cannot do that, it shows even more clearly how unreasonable it is for these people, who must believe blindly in the accuracy of the translation of the Bible’s content as it is found throughout Christianity, to claim that this same Christianity has corrupted baptism and doctrine and must therefore also be negligent in its translation of the scriptures. As I stated before, I will gladly discuss all this and more with anyone who desires to have these particular points clarified. But regarding my main concern, namely the validity of baptism, I must emphasize once more the things that have been exhaustively discussed previously and

57. Kierkegaard’s explanation of the baptism of infants as representing a promise made by the child’s parents to raise the child in the Christian faith is entirely consistent with the doctrinal views of the Danish Lutheran Church, but it is also one that he took very literally. In 1842, Kierkegaard very nearly lost his job by refusing to perform forcible baptisms of the children of Baptist parents as mandated by Danish law at the time, since he, along with Grundtvig, believed that the covenant of baptism was a private matter between the individual (in this case, the parents) and the Lord in which the state should have no part.
which everyone can understand and evaluate in all simplicity, without much profound learning. The first point is that if baptism has been corrupted, then the Church has been destroyed; if so, its founder, who promised to remain until the end of the world, is not the Son of God, and faith in him is falsehood and idolatry: therefore no one who believes that baptism is and has long been corrupted everywhere on earth can truly be, or sincerely and with heartfelt desire want to be, a Christian. The next point is that Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, has either received the proper baptism from the Church to whom the Lord entrusted it (Matt. 28:19–20); in which case he is lying and blasphemyng when he calls baptism corrupted and the Church destroyed; or else he has not received true baptism, in which case he is blind concerning the kingdom of God and the holy universal Church, its nature, and its institutions (John 3:3–5), so that he is a blind guide when he recommends to us the Mormon baptism, which certainly is a “burial” as far as that goes, insofar as both the person performing and the person receiving the baptism fall into the ditch (Luke 6:39).

If we now turn, in closing, to the third central claim that was presented to us this evening, namely regarding the Lord’s return to give judgment and the gathering of the faithful to him and salvation with him, there is in this doctrine a curious blend of truth and falsehood. Many of the things that have just been fervently proclaimed here are well-founded, but can only rarely be touched upon because of the weak state of the churches in this region, which require constant attention to the founding principles of Christianity. For example, the conviction that not just the faithful will be resurrected with transfigured bodies, but that the entire earth, which has been full of misery and corruption because of the sins of mankind, will also be cleansed and renewed to a state like unto the paradise that existed in the first days of humankind; that the wildness of animals and the barrenness of the fields will cease, likewise the confusion and viciousness in the hearts of men that contain the reason for them (Rom. 8:18–23; cf. Isa. 11:4–9; 65:20–25; and many more passages); and that, in this state of bliss, that which is written shall literally be fulfilled, namely that the meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Even that which has been declared here, that these things will take place in a millennial kingdom of God on the earth, an assertion which many of my listeners likely have heard for the first time on this occasion, is by no means unbiblical, although not heavily emphasized in scripture and, on those occasions, in relatively difficult constructions (Rev. 20:4–6; cf. 2 Pet. 3:8; and other such passages), as though the Spirit wanted to ensure that these imaginings would not be immediately seized upon and humanly misunderstood by new converts, but rather only gradually should dawn, as it were, on those who are advanced and strengthened in the faith. For my part, I would gladly speak much more often about
all of this in the Church than has been the case previously, since it is edifying to think about and to read about in the scriptures. At this point, however, the speaker who dwelt at length on this joined it to a double falsehood. In the first place, he would not hear of the notion that this state of bliss on the transfigured earth is yet another preparation for even greater happiness in the glorious heavens; he did not understand that the Church shall raise itself from this state on earth into the skies, just as the Lord ascended into heaven; he even spoke with contempt about such a hope as “empty and hollow and contradictory to the scriptures.” But in this he has the very testimony of the scriptures against him. In precisely the same passage that he himself cited, salvation on the glorified earth is explained as lasting not eternally but rather a thousand years, to be followed by the Day of Judgment and the state thereafter (Rev. 20:4–15; 21:1ff). Paul states explicitly that both the believers who died previously and took part in the first resurrection (and the Millennium, for such is the first resurrection called, Rev. 20:5–6), as well as the believers who still live in mortality will, finally, be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with the Lord forever (1 Thes. 4:16–17). And, by his own word, he will be there where they can behold the glory he possessed before the foundations of the world were laid (John 17:24). One of the final speaker’s misconceptions about this matter can be found herein, in that he does not or chooses not to know that the primary characteristics of the life of Christ, as named in the second article of faith, shall be repeated in his Church,

vii. Should someone suspect me of having felt myself forced to admit these things now only because of the Mormons’ insistence, he would perhaps change his mind upon discovering that I published a little poem already in 1840, which I had written many years previously in sorrow over a death, in which I rejoice in the same expectation (Nordisk Tidsskrift for christlige Theologi, vol. 1, p. 357) [footnote in original].

58. The actual Latter-day Saint position on this subject is somewhat more complicated than Kierkegaard (and perhaps the missionary) indicates. According to Latter-day Saints, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will inaugurate the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth (D&C 29:11). At the end of those thousand years, Satan will be loosed for a season, after which good will ultimately triumph and Satan will be eternally banished (Rev. 20:7, 10). After this banishment, those who receive celestial glory will dwell on this earth—albeit a renewed, perfected, and glorified earth, different from the current one in many respects (D&C 130:6–11).

59. It is unclear what second article of faith Kierkegaard refers to here. It does not seem to be a reference to the LDS articles of faith. The term “article of faith” or “declaration of faith” is very common in both Catholic and Protestant theological history, and this wording probably refers to the memorized confession of faith used in the Danish church at the time.
such that we shall not simply be resurrected with perfected bodies as he was, but also ascend into heaven with them, as he did and as has been pre-figured by Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:11). The second misconception, which is far more destructive, is found in the fact that he spoke as if the Millennium could and should come before the resurrection of the dead. Three hundred years ago a large group in Germany taught a similar doctrine, the Münzer and Münster Rebaptists, whose doings are also remarkably similar to those of the Mormons. For they also attempted, in direct consequence of the expectation of an earthly kingdom of God prior to the resurrection of the dead, e.g., a kingdom of God of this world (cf. John 18:36–37), to establish this kingdom as soon as possible. Therefore, like the Mormons in Utah, they established such a “Zion” in Westfalia; just as the Mormons summon people to Deseret, they called all those who wanted to avoid judgment when the Lord comes to gather to the city of Münster; as the Mormons do now, they armed groups for the defense and expansion of the kingdom who were occasionally successful and just as frequently defeated, as the Mormons are; they introduced, like the Mormons, polygamy, as it was called “after the example of Abraham and according to the teachings of the scriptures”; and they finished by being destroyed by the neighboring princes, without the Lord appearing in their day, which they promised each other would take place in the near future, just as the Mormons now, three hundred years later, promise and threaten. But this entire misconception is now much more apparent and tangible, as it were, since the only passage in the scriptures that explicitly mentions the Millennium also states clearly that it refers only to the faithful who are dead and resurrected (Rev. 20:4–6). The flesh and blood in us is naturally eager to bypass death in order to take part, immediately and as we are now, in the glorification of the body and nature and mastery over the earth. But that simply cannot be done as we would like it and because we would like

60. The German city of Münster, near the Dutch border, was the site of a disastrous attempt in 1534–36 by a group of Anabaptists to recreate idealized conditions of the early Christian church. After taking control of the city, which had been the scene of considerable contention between the Catholic bishop and Protestant reformers, the leaders of the Anabaptist group evicted all non-believers and enforced practices including the banning of all music and ornamentation, the sharing of all property in common, segregation of the sexes, polygamy, and unconditional obedience to a prophet-king in anticipation of the Millennium. The city was ultimately retaken by the bishop of Münster, with the help of German princes, and the Anabaptists were massacred and expelled. Similar events took place in the Dutch cities of Leyden and Amsterdam. J. M. Cramp, Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century, from www.reformedreader.org/history/cramp/s05cho08.htm.
it. Instead, it will happen in some way to the last generation to live on this earth, but only because the faithful within it will have passed through the great temptation such that they all, before having suffered physical death of the natural man, will be dead to sin and the world (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50–54; 2 Thes. 2:3–12; Luke 21:12–19; Rev. 3:10). For the law remains: like the master, so the man. And just as Peter tried in vain to prevent the Lord from allowing himself to be crucified (Matt. 16:21–23), driven, among other things, by the fear that if the Lord were to die on the cross, his disciples would also suffer the same fate, it is equally useless for us to dream of escaping, whether by a journey to Utah or even to the moon, the necessity of passing through death into life. It is not just directly contradictory to the testimony of the scriptures and therefore impossible to dream of such a thing, regardless of how desirable it may possibly seem to us in the moment, but such fantasies are highly destructive to the development of a Christian life, to the point, when they become completely assimilated and dominant, of making it impossible and replacing it with a kind of mortal fulfillment of the same expectations—in which individual leaders take the place of the not-yet-visibility-revealed Savior and a comfortable mortal life supplants the renewal of paradise—in the actually impending kingdom of God on the perfected earth. Where these fantasies reign, we always encounter the not just un-Christian but even anti-Christian figure, who is hostile to Christianity and perverts and corrupts its nature: a spiritual leader who is also, by virtue of his spiritual position, a powerful man of the world, a Pope such as there is in Rome or a President of the Kingdom of God such as exists in Deseret and Utah.61 In the exemplary kingdom of God on earth, namely among the people of Israel, and in every bourgeois community worthy of the name, the offices of prophets, priests, and kings, or whatever the equivalent positions are called in each place, are, as a rule, separate, divided among different people, such that the last two are never entrusted to the same person.

61. While it is true that combining spiritual and secular power often does result in abuse, Latter-day Saints have theological reasons for believing that this abuse is avoidable. Since the purpose of the Church is to build Zion, the ultimate goal of the Church is to transform all “secular” areas and institutions into thoroughly spiritual ones. Indeed, as the Doctrine and Covenants teaches, for Latter-day Saints there is no strong distinction between the spiritual and secular realms, as the Lord himself informs that He gives no “temporal” commandments even when instructing about things such as the economic structure, the proportions of buildings, and the selling of property (D&C 29:35). Obviously this transforming process is designed to be done under the authority of the priesthood, which can operate only “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41), hardly the kind of abuse Kierkegaard discusses.
By contrast, in the perfect kingdom of God, all three are united in the one true Anointed One, eternal prophet, priest, and king for the entire race of men, Jesus Christ. It is to be noted, however, that until he comes in a cloud to judge the world, he will not establish his kingship by worldly strength, for his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Therefore, in every circle in which the attempt is made to unite these offices in anyone other than him, even if the exercise of the same and the rule is as mild and gentle as possible, apostasy and tyranny are fundamentally present. This is perhaps most wildly and violently true when the emperor, king, or supreme worldly ruler also dictates the worship, faith, and doctrine of the Church, as in the Roman Empire, Russia, and Turkey. But the situation that is most insidious and best suited to seducing and deceiving the unenlightened arises when the prophet and priest, i.e. the man who speaks as the messenger of God and in whose society one seeks the remission of sins, is also the worldly leader, to whom it has perhaps been revealed that none can be saved who does not contribute to the fund with which he, by revelation, builds temples under his own control, or who sees by the Spirit who is to be condemned and carries out this judgment with steel and fire, as is often the case with the Pope in Rome and now the President of the Mormons. And in such spiritual-temporal kingdoms, one does not await the Lord’s Second Coming, since he literally will reveal himself openly and outwardly, and claim his dominion in which his followers will inherit and possess the earth. And there, people rush to possess it and will crave its enjoyments. There, even before the resurrection of the dead, a sham kingdom of Christ is established, which, however, shall also be of the world; there its members fight with worldly weapons in opposition to the word of the Lord (John 18:36). And there, they fulfill two other prophecies of the Lord concerning those who stray. First, that they will perish by the sword because they wield swords themselves (Matt. 26:52): that their simulated, earthly kingdoms of Christ will perish in blood and misery, and they will, in their destruction, take with them all of the temporal happiness of people who instead sought and waited elsewhere on earth. Moreover, if they will not be warned by this and return penitently to his kingdom that is not of this world but is, like him, homeless and defenseless, frequently mocked and despised in this world, to the holy universal Church, they will ultimately share the fate of the world, which will perish, while his word, and the Church he has founded thereupon, will exist forever.

viii. A contribution to the reasoning, which can only be hinted at here, behind the discussion of the perfect union of the three offices in Christ and, by contrast, their necessary separation among sinful men, can be found in the Continuation from Pedersborg, vol. 3, p. 43–132 [footnote in original].
And this must be enough for this evening, although I do want to explain in a few words how I regard my answer to these most recent pronouncements of false doctrine to us and among us. Considering what took place this evening, when the Mormon gentlemen held up the light for everyone who wanted to see their empty chatter and unfounded claims overturned in the arena they had chosen for themselves, I am far from declaring the intellect, or, as the gentlemen this evening often stated, reason, to be the proper measure by which everything that should be rightfully presented as divine truth for salvation should be apportioned and accommodated. I am, however, convinced of and hope to be able to demonstrate in all brevity the correctness of two not unimportant propositions, which stand in contrast (though naturally not in contradiction) to each other, such that each limits and more exactly determines the other, and which must be connected to each other if one desires to reach a correct judgment about the relationship between a divine revelation on one hand and human intellect and reason on the other. To wit, every supposed revelation—and this is the first of these propositions—which, as the Mormons have claimed this evening about their “Christianity,” is in complete agreement with and can be proved as a matter of course to agree with reason, which can, in other words, be made comprehensible and, as it were, transparent for the natural man and show itself to agree with his thought processes, cannot possibly be true and divine. For if God’s thoughts are not superior to our

62. Kierkegaard’s insistence on the emotional component of faith not only echoes his brother Søren’s rejection of the rationalism that pervaded the Danish People’s Church in the mid-nineteenth century, but also reflects his own religious upbringing by his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, who was a proponent of the pietistic Herrnhuter sect that emphasized a highly sentimental, sensual relationship to the suffering of Christ. Bruce H. Kirmmse. Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 33.


In stark contrast to this, Joseph Smith once said: “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may
thoughts, if his ways are not higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8), then we do not need him to reveal them to us; or, more precisely: a God, about whose revelations something like this can justifiably be said, is an idol. Moreover, because all of us are sinful, including those of us who are intellectual or rational, and all sorts of confusion and darkness have entered our minds and replaced the original light, it follows that the divine witness to the truth concerning God, us, and the relationship between the two, must necessarily, insofar as and as long as we are in this state, seem strange and foreign, even unreasonable and irrational, and thus it could in no way appear to be “in all points and parts in accordance with reason.” But let us now turn to the second proposition that I would like to discuss, which limits and qualifies the first, as follows. Every supposed revelation that cannot be recognized by the reason and intellect of the natural man—which is certainly, as we just saw, obscured and confused because of sin, although by no means completely incapacitated and destroyed, for if this were the case, human beings would no longer be human—as entirely deserving of our attention and trust above all other human doctrine and speech cannot be either true or divine. For if a revelation cannot be recognized as such before it is accepted by individuals, then it is entirely arbitrary whether someone accepts it or not; and this would be the case regardless of the fact that every true revelation, as a word from God, necessarily requires that those who hear it must accept it, and this makes it a great responsibility for them who do not accept it, just as we hear our Savior testify that everyone that is of the truth hears his voice (John 18:37), and that whoever does not believe did not desire to see or recognize the truth of the words that were offered him, and so he is already condemned (John 3:18–19; 9:41; cf. 16:8–9). If any part of these two claims, which I can only discuss briefly and suggest the reasons for, still seems unclear or inconclusive to my listeners, it will converse with him as one man converses with another.” Smith, Teachings of the Prophet, 345. While classical and contemporary theology seems to operate on the maxim “a God understood is a God dethroned,” the Latter-day Saints contend that God wants to be known, indeed, can be known: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). As President Spencer W. Kimball put it: “Man can know God. It is not only a privilege to know God, it is a necessity if man wishes to gain highest blessings. . . . As servants of the Lord, we proclaim to all the world that any man, every man may know of God, and participate in the great saving and exalting work of God.” Spencer W. Kimball, The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 3.

64. This argument finds its roots in Aristotle’s Metaphysics, where he defines man as a “rational animal,” meaning that rationality serves as man’s defining characteristic or that which sets him apart from the other animals.
surely become clearer and reveal itself in all of its unshakable certainty as soon as they realize that these claims are in no way my own invention, but that they are based on all of the Lord’s statements about the faithful appropriation of the divine word of truth that he preached among people. On the one hand, he speaks about it many times in declaring himself to be the only man who can recognize and understand the divine truth, such that men must believe him blindly and unconditionally, even if he speaks directly against the convictions of their own reason, if they do not desire to exclude themselves from taking part in the grace and truth he brings to them (Matt. 11:27; John 3:11–18; 8:24; 12:46–50; 14:6; and many other passages).

But, on the other hand, he claims just as frequently that there are sufficient reasons to give him this unqualified trust—reasonable justifications for believing his words instead of and in contradiction to our own intellect and reason—and that these reasons could be obvious to every naturally honest and reasonable person, whether the Lord derives them from the Baptist’s testimony or from his own miracles (John 5:31–36; 10:25; 15:24; cf. Matt. 21:23–27; 9:6–7), from prophecies about him (John 5:46–47), from his own conduct (John 7:18; 8:46), or from the coherence and credibility of his own speech and the unreasonableness of his enemies’ speech (John 8:13–14, 39–45; Matt. 12:24–29), etc. But if this is the case, then the way has been shown and the rule given for everyone who is called to testify of Christian truth, either against attacks and objections or against misrepresentations and distortions. Thus are we also certainly authorized, even called—just as I have endeavored on this occasion to do—to point out emphatically all of the confusing, self-contradictory, and ungodly things that brashly appear or slyly conceal themselves in every attack on our Christian faith and doctrine, as it exists in the holy universal Church, passed down from the Lord and his apostles; and to demonstrate clearly how this faith and doctrine shows itself, by means of many reasons that must be plain to

65. Early LDS leadership would have definitely rejected this assertion, for while they held, like Kierkegaard, that we should be obedient to God and that God had good reasons for commanding what he does, they never taught unconditional obedience. Rather, they taught exactly what Kierkegaard was arguing against, namely that one should use reason combined with revelation to discover the reasons behind God’s commands. Consider the following quotation: “We talk of obedience, but do we require any man or woman to ignorantly obey the counsels that are given? Do the first Presidency require it? No, never. What do they desire? That we may have our minds opened and our understandings enlarged, that we may comprehend all true principles for ourselves; then we will be easily governed thereby, we shall yield obedience with our eyes open, and it will be a pleasure for us to do so.” Joseph F. Smith, in Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 16:248, October 7, 1873; italics added.
every naturally honest and reasonable person, to be worthy of our attention and the most unconditional trust. But we must never dare to imagine that the matter is at an end thereby. This we must never forget to remind our listeners and ourselves, that we have, with all such demonstrations, only reached, as it were, the forecourt where it will be determined whether or not we will benefit from the Savior and his words. That is as far as we can proceed with all such reasons and proofs, and it is there that we must reach an eternal decision in that we both can and ought to decide to believe in him unconditionally and entrust ourselves to him, regardless of how murky, even incredible the things he asks us to believe may seem to our human intellect or how heavy and unbearable the things he requires of us may seem to our hearts. And therefore I cannot close this meeting without such a declaration.

I have raised arguments that testify to the authenticity of our Christianity, and I have seriously discussed and refuted that which has apparently been stated against it here, while I have had fun with some of the nonsense that could be found amidst the objections and was too unfounded to be treated seriously. But both the seriousness and the jest will only be of real and lasting benefit to us if we, in rejecting this new heresy that revives and redoubles old delusions by pointing out some of the good old arguments that testify of the one original faith and baptism that are preserved even today in the Lord’s Church, have felt ourselves challenged and strengthened in the desire to appropriate this faith and this baptism and thereby to actively merge with the true Church of the Lord, regardless of how much of its teachings seem either fanciful and strange, even unreasonable, to our natural intellect, or are completely opposite our natural will with all that follows it. If we do so, we will come further and further toward and into the one perfect, eternally decisive proof of the truth of our faith and the validity of our baptism, which cannot be proven or judged by human intellect and reason, but which the faithful have in themselves and for themselves, and which can precisely therefore not be touched, let alone shaken, by any victory that other, more refined and better-dressed heretics might possibly ever win over us or others of those who preach the

66. Since the early Mormon missionaries often traveled literally “without purse or scrip,” the likelihood that their clothes were shabby is high. Kierkegaard’s jibe also seems to support the widespread belief among religious historians that all Danish converts to Mormonism came from the poorest segments of Danish society. However, in fact, many early Danish converts were quite prosperous and used their funds to assist less financially well-off Saints to emigrate to Utah. Søren Christoffersen, who was likely one of the missionaries present, was a very well-to-do farmer who made a present of fifty dollars to President John Van Cott when
original, unchanged Christianity in all of its simplicity. Then we reach the place where the Lord calls all of those who have been attentive to his testimony by continuing to say to them, as to the Jews in days of old: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16-17); and by explaining to us that it is the will of his Father that we should believe in his Son (John 6:28-29), that is, in him who, according to the authority transmitted from above (Matt. 28:18), has made baptism and faith the gate and conditions of entrance into his kingdom (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:16). And this life experience of what happens to us and in us when we sincerely fulfill our baptismal covenants in a true conversion and a living faith, and when we, thus justified, appropriate the things that were assigned us by baptism; this sense of real peace that the Lord began to pour out into our hearts when he promised us the remission of our sins through baptism; these stirrings of something different and better, part of the Lord’s own mind and heart, that arise in us in consequence of the baptism whereby God the Father has given us rebirth as the brothers and sisters of the Lord; the presence of the Spirit in us with light and life, with reproof and comfort, with righteousness and peace and joy, for which reason he descends over and through which he is in those who are initiated into his temple through faith and baptism; all this is not alone the decisive proof of our Christianity, our faith, our baptism, our Church, but rather the acceptance, possession, and application of Christianity’s divine abundance, without which we would be just as poorly situated in time and eternity, whether we were otherwise able to silence all those who speak against it or if we were struck dumb by the first opposition. It is therefore that John states, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself . . . and this is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his son” (1 Jn. 5:10-12). But if we accept this testimony, then we will also—to touch on this once more in passing—gradually develop the harmony between our intellect and the teachings of the gospel with which the Mormon gentlemen began and which they immediately established as the measure of the correctness of the teachings of the gospel. Christianity is a rebirth, a renewal of our fallen nature to its original glory and therefore also of the intellect to the correct recognition of the truth (John 8:32; Col. 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:4). If we, therefore, by means of faith and the Church, live righteously and sincerely accept the word of God, the content of the same will necessarily reveal itself more and more as agreeing with,

he toured the Danish mission in September 1855. Annie Van Cott, “Van Cott History,” 89, Perry Special Collections.
and will gradually become as it were transparent for, the reborn reason in the community of believers, so that the “revealed secret” that is the testimony of Christ, which is the same for all of the faithful, can become the object of our gradually more clear and encompassing true understanding; yet even the entire Church here below will never reach absolute insight, but will long for and strive for the sight of it face to face.

Let us, therefore, in consequence of today’s debate, make an earnest attempt to undertake this lifelong trial of the veracity of our Christianity. If we do so, I know in my conscience that no false doctrine will ever be too powerful for us; nor will this meeting have been in vain and cause us regret here or hereafter.67

67. Although Kierkegaard may well have preferred the intellectual stimulation of clerical conferences to the mundane details of running a parish, as his critics asserted, his sincere Christian beliefs and concern for the spiritual well-being of his parishioners come across clearly in the final passages of this text. See Leif Grane, “Sørens Broer. Om Peter Christian Kierkegaard,” in Fra Egtvedpigen til Folketinget [Søren’s Brother. About Peter Christian Kierkegaard, in From the Egtved Girl to Parliament], ed. Poul Lindegård Hjorth, Erik Dal, and David Favrholdt (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1997), 638.